

CPA Profile

Deirdre Savage



Title:

Director of Financial Planning & Risk Management

Company:

Trinity College Dublin

Qualifications:

M.A., F.C.P.A., M.I.A.T.I.,

Why did you decide to start out on a career in accountancy?

I joined Trinity in 1983 with a career path in mind. An accounting qualification was crucial to advancement within an organisation where professional and academic standards are championed. My own view is that learning is lifelong and, in this environment, that's very much the lived experience. I am currently exploring a new qualification that will support my continued career development.

Why did you choose CPA Ireland as your qualification route?

Being unsure of my future in an Ireland that was struggling economically at the time, I recognised that CPA was an international qualification if travel for work became necessary. Fortunately, that need never arose. I was also conscious that as I was in full-time employment, the CPA route suited my schedule and allowed the flexibility to attend lectures and study at night.

Please provide a brief history your career.

Working in a renowned University, the ethos of ongoing learning and development has become deep rooted and has benefited my career path. I began my journey as a junior accounts clerk, progressing in time to the role of Projects Accounting Manager, with responsibility for the University's Research Portfolio. Following an opportunity to work on a strategic project within the University, I was appointed to the role of Director of Financial Planning & Risk Management in 2014, and since then, have also undertaken the role of Deputy Chief Financial Officer for a 12-month period.

How do you find your CPA qualification has helped you in your role?

A world-recognised qualification is a great platform, as are the membership benefits, which includes access to superb CPD opportunities and an extensive network of accountants across a broad spectrum of industries, services and sectors.

What has been your biggest career achievement?

A significant part of my role over the past 10 years has been the development of our working environment and our team, ensuring our skills meet the changing needs of the University (and other stakeholders) and that our business culture is responsive and customer-facing. I've led-out on significant organisational change within the University and the Financial Services Division respectively, where, since 2012, we have undergone a structural overhaul and implemented a state-of-art financial information system (ERP). During this challenging transition period, among other oversight duties, I ensured that our focus on our mission, vision and values was maintained.

For this reason, it was a career high point for me when we were announced as 'Irish Finance Team of the Year' at the Irish Accountancy Awards in April 2018. To receive an award that publicly recognises the high performing finance team we have become makes me immensely proud. The icing on the cake followed in September 2018, when we also won 'Finance Team of the Year' at the British Accountancy Awards, which surpassed all my expectations! We were ecstatic.

What or who inspires you most?

I think the "what" and the "who" are actually inter-related as personal integrity is the foundation of everything. I've met many people over the years from inspirational students and academics to business and political leaders along with some famous actors and popstars (Trinity is a pretty vibrant place!) but for me, our former President, Mary Robinson is the one that defines the term integrity. It was really meaningful to me that, as Chancellor of the University, she conferred me with my M.A. in 2010.

If you were advising someone just starting out with their CPA qualification, what tip would you give them that would make their journey smoother?

I would begin by saying that no journey is smooth! Working full-time and studying at night is a hard graft but it certainly helped shape my mind-set and attitude to life. As a junior accounts clerk beginning my studies, I knew that if I eventually wanted to 'fly the plane', I had to be the best at loading the bags first. I also believe your "mind-set" is the most important choice you can make. Having interviewed a significant number of candidates in my career, I can tell you that the right mind-set/attitude will often trump skill.

What traits do you admire most in others?

Truthfulness. It's the kernel of everything. Truth leads to trust and trust is the foundation of all successful relationships. I believe it's even more important in our current climate of non-evidence-based "information" and of course it works for audits too!