

CPA Profile

Orna Stokes



Title:
Consultant – Business Process
Review Project

Company:
Irish Prison Service

Qualifications:
CPA, IOB

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

After school, I took "the good job in the bank". At that time I didn't even know what an accountant did. I was lucky enough to be assigned to the Bank's "Chief Accountants" Department, where I quickly realised I liked accounting, and encouraged by my supportive boss, I started my studies.

Why did you choose CPA Ireland as your qualification route?

Having completed an Institute of Banking (IOB) qualification, I decided to progress forward with an accounting qualification. CPA classes were delivered by the college where I had studied for IOB. I liked the college and the tutors, so I chose to study accounting with them. CPA's modular exam process attracted me, as it fitted in with busy work schedules. As a busy 20-something with a good social life, I loved that there were no exams in December or January!

Please briefly describe your career.

My career has been dominated by my time in the Financial Services Sector. I have worked in a broad range of activities, across two banks, with very different cultures and styles. My work has covered traditional banking roles in Business and Commercial Banking; Corporate Finance; and typical enterprise finance roles such as Financial and Management Accounting, Risk and Control and Strategy and Corporate Finance.

In more recent years, I became involved in Project Management, Proposition Development and Marketing and Communications.

A particularly memorable role for me was as the Bank's representative on the Department of Finance "Access to Credit" Working Group and regional Jobs Task Force in 2010/12. This involved working with a range of stakeholders from the business and banking communities in conjunction with members of the Department of Finance, to help get business moving again after the turmoil we all experienced in 2008.

I also loved my role as Head of Franchising for Ulster Bank and working with early stage businesses as they set up across the country. As Senior Manager Business Propositions, I had the great experience of developing training and supports for not for profit organisations across Ireland. When I moved on from Financial Services a couple of years ago, I wanted to use my skills and expertise in a different area, so I am currently consulting in the Irish Prison Service.

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

Qualifying as an accountant opened many doors to me. By becoming involved in CPA at Leinster Society, Committee and then Council level, I have built a network of contacts and colleagues, who have been invaluable to me throughout my business life. I can safely say I wouldn't have the role I have now without CPA!

What or who inspires you most in business?

I've been very lucky to meet many inspirational people in my time in business, not all of them are high profile people. I am particularly inspired by the entrepreneurs who start small indigenous businesses and not-for-profit organisations. I get great pride from seeing the names of businesses I encountered at their early stages, who are now Irish household names.

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

Study with a "Buddy" – find someone you can meet (in person or online) for study sessions. A good study buddy will push you to keep going, as you will them.

Liaise with the Institute as we are very lucky to have a committed executive team here in Ireland, and they are always willing to help! It's one of CPA's key differentiators! Build your network of CPA friends and mentors by becoming involved in regional society events and introducing yourself! CPAs are a very supportive group of people. The power of CPA is in its members and how they help each other.

How do you unwind?

I'm a music "anorak", I love a breadth of musical styles from Bluegrass & Trad, to Classical & Opera, with a bit of Rock thrown in! A good gig or concert can really recharge my batteries!

I also love to walk – the rest of The Camino is on my "To Do" list...