

CPA Profile

Sharon Gaffney



Title:

Director of Finance and Organisational Services

Company:

Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital

Qualifications:

FCPA, IATI

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

Maths and accountancy were always my passion and top subjects when in secondary school. Unfortunately, when doing my leaving cert, I just did not have the best day on the day of my accountancy exam and did not get the result I wanted. So, I initially went on to do a one-year business course. From this I got a position in Finance in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children. It was there that one of my colleagues told me not to give up on my dream and to pursue my accountancy qualification. I did and I have never looked back and will always remember that chat as it was really the start of my career.

Why did you choose CPA Ireland as your qualification route?

I went to a few open days in different colleges to see what route was best for me. I felt the CPA qualification allowed me to pursue my accountancy qualification in a very flexible way and they were also very welcoming. I worked full time and therefore I needed to be able to attend classes and give my very best while still working. It was also a worldwide recognised qualification and who knew at that age what the future held so I needed a strong qualification that I could go anywhere with.

Please provide a brief history of your career.

I started my career in the public sector in Our Lady's Hospital. I worked in a few areas within Finance which really helped shape my career path. As I grew more confident in my work and with the backing of my studies behind me, I left to work in the private sector, which I did for nearly 17 years before returning to the public sector.

Every position and different work environment was a learning curve and I gained incredible experience. I mainly worked in SMEs in the private sector which gives you the opportunity to be involved in many other projects and really understand the working of each company from top to bottom.

When I got the opportunity to go back into the public sector it was like I had never left. I was able to bring all that I learned in the private sector into my new position.

My current role as Director of finance and organisational services in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital is one of my most enjoyable roles. Working in a hospital is an ever-changing environment, obviously over the last year it has brought many new challenges. However, I have learned over the years that no matter what level you are at you need to work as part of a team. That is what I love the most about my current role, the team I have behind me and the efforts of everyone in the hospital, makes it run smoothly each day.

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

As CPA's we need to be able to adapt to different types of industries within our career and that is what the qualification provides you with. Confidence and adaptability. While studying CPA I found it had a broad range of subjects in what we were required to learn. These different aspects help in many ways, as an accountant's role is ever changing and not only about the numbers.

What has been your biggest career achievement?

While I have been so lucky to have several career achievements, what sticks in my mind is the day I was asked to take up the role as

Financial Controller of the company where I was working as an Assistant accountant. I was 6 months away from my final exams and becoming a fully qualified CPA, but the opportunity arose. The CEO said he had so much confidence in me and my abilities as an accountant that he wanted me to take on the challenge. I grabbed that opportunity with both hands, shaking may I add but I loved every minute of it. It was just a fantastic time and I learned so much about myself.

I realised how important it was to show people the confidence you have in them and their work, to let them know how well they are doing and to help them grow as strong individuals. We all had to start somewhere; we all need that encouragement. I will never forget that opportunity and I try every day to support my team to develop their skills and give them the right encouragement.

What or who inspires you most in business?

In 2020 the one person that stood out for me was Jacinda Ardern, Prime minister of New Zealand. In 2017 she was asked whether she felt a woman could have both a baby and a high-powered career. 3 years later I think we can all agree on the answer. Her sheer determination and her ability to unite New Zealand in dealing with the pandemic was admirable. Her slogan that was repeated so often "be strong, be kind" is something that we should all take on board. Her approach to her family and work life has brought her continued success in her role as a leader. It takes strength and courage to be an empathetic leader and she has proven that she has both.