



A Partner in the Profession and in the Classroom

After a recent NYSSCPA Breakfast Briefing on non-CPA firm ownership, one of our student members in attendance approached me and introduced himself. His name was Michael. He was polished, articulate, and presented himself as an intelligent young man—I was impressed. If Michael in any way represents what we can expect from our future CPAs, the profession should be in good hands.

But how can we guarantee that our college accounting programs produce more Michaels? And how do we know that Michael is as prepared for today's world as he would have been if he graduated four years ago? Every semester, our accounting educators are giving their best in the classroom, but how can the NYSSCPA be a better partner to the profession, not only in our firms and businesses, but in our schools?

I have talked in previous columns about the power of a collective voice, and I have called for each member to take an active ownership role in this organization. I have said that while the Society is nearly 30,000 members strong, this strength means less if we fail to represent all segments of our membership. For my part in this renewed partnership, I have reached out to and continue to meet with the managing partners of New York's large- and medium-sized firms to not only remind them of the valuable professional development and leadership opportunities available to their employees at the Society, but also to ask them for their valuable perspective on what resources their CPAs are going to need from the Society in order to maintain a competitive edge in this constantly evolving regulatory and economic landscape. As a result of this outreach, we saw an increase in our membership numbers for the first time in five years. But these managing partners represent only one segment of our membership.

As I continued to establish a dialogue with our managing partners, it became clear that the accounting and business deans of New York's colleges and universities need to be

a part of this conversation. According to the State Education Department, there are nearly 70 colleges and universities in New York State that offer accredited accounting programs to their students. And that's only in New York. Accounting educators often forge their own relationships with area CPAs—schools establish internship programs, professors invite CPAs to speak to their classes, and many adjuncts maintain their own practices, which brings a real-world perspective to the classroom. But there also needs to be a dialogue at a higher level. The deans of each of these programs not only have unique and valuable perspectives on the

How can the NYSSCPA be a better partner to the profession, not only in our firms and businesses, but in our schools?

state of accounting education in New York, but, because a student's professional identity and value system is established in the college classroom, they also play a primary and powerful role in shaping the future of the profession by shaping the core accounting curriculum. While a firm's culture continues to shape a CPA's identity and values over time, an individual's foundation is constructed in the classroom.

Finding Role Models

The 2008 financial crisis and resulting recession have led to drastic changes in the financial and regulatory landscape that didn't exist four years ago. What undergraduate courses are needed to sensitize students to this still-changing landscape they will encounter as CPAs? More than 20 years ago, Gordon Gekko, the villainous corporate raider in Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street*, served as an inspiration to an entire generation of MBAs. After a decade of accounting and corporate scandals, who

do current accounting students point to as their inspiration? Should there be an enhanced focus, not only in theory, but in application, on professional ethics—not only in the classroom, but also on the CPA exam? During our Breakfast Briefing, panelists in favor of non-CPA firm ownership argued that today's CPA firm offers a menu of services outside attestation and taxation, not all of which can be performed by a CPA. Whether these individuals are owners or not, what broader implication does this have on the future of public practice?

The NYSSCPA has long held the position that CPA = CPA, meaning that the CPA credential is the only one an individual needs. But as the profession expands and develops niche practice areas, how specialized should the CPA license be? For example, CPAs are now being called upon by their clients to be IT specialists. Are students graduating today prepared for this? Or are they ahead of the curve? Another question to consider: How specialized should the CPA license become? What does it mean in practical terms for the CPA license to be a global credential? Where does the American system of accounting education stand compared to the education being offered in other countries? Our deans know the answers to a lot of these questions; managing partners do too, but what would change if both groups informed each other's answers?

More than 300 managing firm partners are NYSSCPA members, providing an opportunity for the NYSSCPA to foster a continued dialogue between those who are introducing future CPAs to the profession and those who practice it every day. Michael may be an exceptional student, but will he be well-enough prepared to be an exceptional CPA?

Please let me know your thoughts on this issue. □

Joanne S. Barry
 Publisher, The CPA Journal
 Executive Director, NYSSCPA
 jbarry@nysscpa.org

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.