

Versatile AAT –  
Pauline Wong

## Accounting talent in the hospitality industry



by the change. Since she lacked experience she was assigned simple tasks such as handling accounts receivables. So Pauline actively sought out training courses to enrich her job knowledge. Two years later, the job had become fairly mundane and she found her learning curve had flattened. An income auditing role became vacant, and Pauline moved over to this area.

Even though she was still in the same department, income auditing was very different from what her previous tasks. Her major duties were to audit the hotel's revenue daily which included revenue from the room charges, food & beverages, telephone calls and rental incomes, etc. Since computerized accounting had not yet been adopted, Pauline had to cross check all revenue details manually. She recalls: "The job was challenging as there was only two staff members in the team to provide strict, accurate and timely output. Income auditor was also responsible for all sorts of report comparison for budgets and forecasts."

Later in 2003, after seven years in Sheraton, Pauline further promoted to be an accounts payable supervisor, her current position up till now. She is responsible for the cash flow management, handling invoices, remittances, all kind of bank payments, balance sheet reconciliation, accruals and amortization. Following the implementation of a computerized system, the role of the AP team (and even the accounting department) has become less dominant, and the number of team members fell from three to one. Although Pauline

*Hospitality is one of Hong Kong's leading industries and has played a pivotal role in driving the city's economic development in recent years. The industry's expansion has been further fueled by growing numbers of arrivals from mainland China. Accounting and financial employees play an indispensable part of this massive driver of our economy. Pauline Wong, a recently-joined AAT member, who has worked for Sheraton Hotel Hong Kong for about fifteen years, tells us about her accounting career experience in this industry.*

by Aldric Chau

### First work experience

Pauline did not study accounting at secondary school. However, she was very interested in this subject because of her brilliant HKCEE results in mathematics and statistics, and her simple belief that accounting is needed in any business operation. Instead of immediately stepping into the accounting profession after graduating from form seven, Pauline joined a two-year trainee programme offered by Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers (Sheraton) where she was rotated to different departments in the group: these included catering, house-keeping, front desk and back office.

Soon after Pauline has joined the company, there was an opening for an accounting clerk in the finance department. Her human resources colleague contacted Pauline, who was well known for her strong numerical sense.

### A beginner to the accounting field

In this completely new environment, Pauline was initially overwhelmed

was the lucky person to stay on, this change became the overwhelming reason for her to sign up to a challenge without hesitation. She decided to pursue a professional qualification in 2008 and at the same time, with her colleagues in Sheraton, she took an accounting diploma course, both in order to expand her knowledge in the dynamic accounting industry. “At that time, my daughter was seven years old. She needed less time from me and so I decided to pick up my studies again during my spare time,” Pauline says. After two years of hard work, she attained her AAT qualification and returned to work with a wealth of new knowledge and ideas.

### Setting new challenges

“Studying for the AAT Exam sent me back to the classroom and to study groups. This was a challenge, especially since it was so long since I had left school,” Pauline says. However, the clearly-defined syllabus and flexible exam structure meant that she could adapt to her new work and study life. Difficult subjects such as Paper 6 “Fundamentals of Business Law” were quite a challenge for Pauline who had no relevant experience and was not particularly strong at writing essays.

Specifically, Pauline says that from Paper 5 “Principles of Taxation” she learnt how to calculate royalty tax, profit tax, and so on and to understand the rationale governing all the tax rates, which is essential knowledge for work. Instead of needing to take orders from supervisors, she now understands the rationale behind every action and thus can think a step ahead in solving problems at work.

The annual audit takes place after the year-end with on-site work performed by the internal and external auditors. Their work was once a mystery to Pauline. Now she is familiar with their work through her studies for Paper 8 “Principles of Auditing and Management Information Systems” and so can provide the required data with greater confidence. In addition, her knowledge from Paper 7 “Financial Accounting” gave Pauline an overview of the accounting standards backing up the statements of comprehensive income and financial position to make her realize how calculations should be done.

### Putting knowledge into action

All in all, knowledge from AAT has had a tremendous impact on Pauline’s career development. As an accounts

payable supervisor at the hotel, she finds the knowledge from her AAT studies provides substantial support to her work. The hotel is part of the Starwood hotel group, so she is tasked with identifying the various fee payments among internal parties under the group, and with resolving any payment disputes. Inter-company reconciliations and month-end fund transfers are among her other key tasks, and she has to work closely with different internal parties and with external suppliers.

Pauline has a job that is well sought-after and she enjoys the great benefits of being a hotel employee. However, all her success would not have been possible without her initiative for continuous learning and her investment of effort in her career. “You really need to make an effort and put aside the time to achieve your career goals,” Pauline says, as she encourages counterparts in accounting to consider attaining practical qualifications such as AAT.

### Support from study buddies

As for the study tips for AAT Exam, Pauline highlights the importance of attending examination techniques seminars organized by the HKIAAT where students can see how other speakers interpret the same issue and analyze exam questions differently. Another way of harnessing team efforts, according to Pauline, is to start a Facebook discussion forum where exam strategies and challenging questions can be exchanged and discussed.

With her daughter entering the secondary school, Pauline has no concrete plans for further study in the near future; instead she intends to accumulate more work experience in her current position to support the hotel group’s development.

T/D

### Pauline Wong’s study and career path

1995	Form 7 graduate
1996	Registered hotel career trainee at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers
1997-98	Accounts receivable clerk at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers
1999-2002	Income auditor at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers
2003-Present	Accounts payable supervisor at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Towers
2008-2010	Diploma in accounting studies (two-year part-time course) at the Hong Kong School of Commerce
2010-11	Completed eight papers in the AAT Examination (with exemptions from four papers)