



Employer in the spotlight

James Kong

Observations from an experienced insider

How do employers view professional qualifications? What do they actually look for in prospective employees? James Kong, partner at James T. W. Kong & Co. CPAs and past Vice President of the HKIAAT, gives us a glimpse of the employer's perspective and shares with us some of the criteria he considers when hiring accounting personnel, through talking about Kathy Chow, an auditor at his firm.

Nurturing every staff member

James T. W. Kong & Co. CPAs is a typical local CPA firm like other small to medium-sized firms here in Hong Kong. With a staff of around 30, the firm offers a full range of services from auditing to tax and management advice to various clients.

Kathy Chow first joined the firm as an accountant in 2007. "I decided to hire her since I felt she had a pro-active attitude," says Kong. Very soon he found his observation to be correct. He says Kathy is very willing to talk with colleagues and superiors about problems, as well as to express her own opinion. This explicit willingness to ask

and learn, according to Kong, is an uncommon yet highly valuable trait among accounting personnel.

Kathy's positive attitude extends to her daily work. In Kong's opinion, she analyzes a situation and then applies the relevant knowledge she has gained from her studies for the AAT Examination. "Her application of technical knowledge is never a rigid process," says Kong appreciatively. She shows no hesitation in taking the initiative to handle work that is within her capacity. According to Kong, Kathy is a careful person. She completes her work with flying colours, and this also gains her a lot of credit from her supervisor. "As she is still young, and needs to be exposed to different aspects of accounting in order to grow, we decided switch her work from accounting to auditing in 2010," says Kong.

The importance of professional qualifications

Kong emphasizes the importance of attaining professional qualifications. "For accounting personnel, it is important to keep abreast of the ever-changing accounting standards and procedures. Therefore, we must undertake continuing

education to stay competitive and excel within the profession,” says Kong.

In particular, Kong finds that the AAT qualification is very helpful. “The AAT graduates whom we have hired have proved to be of very high quality.” According to Kong, AAT graduates like Kathy have a better grasp at applying technical knowledge at work, and are comfortable with any work ranging from general accounting responsibilities to more specific auditing tasks. For instance, Kong finds Kathy very adept in picking up new technical knowledge swiftly, and this means that she is therefore capable of dealing with more advanced tasks where there may be a more theoretical component such as auditing involved. She is also able to adapt herself to changing circumstances in practical situations in a timely manner. This good track record has inspired Kong’s confidence in the ability of AAT graduates in general.

Furthermore, Kong believes the AAT qualification’s emphasis on practical situations and real-life scenarios is a huge advantage for aspiring accounting personnel. It not only teaches them flexibility, which is crucial in dealing with day-to-day operations, but can also be very helpful for those who wish to further pursue qualifications through the Professional Bridging Examination (PBE) and the Qualification Programme (QP) offered by the Hong Kong Institute of CPAs.

Advice to a new generation of accounting personnel

While having a professional qualification is an important objective criterion for gauging job applicants’ abilities, Kong also pays specific attention to a potential employee’s interests. “Embarking on a career in accounting, or any

other profession for that matter, is no small decision,” he says. It is therefore important for a candidate not to be easily bored with the work involved and to have a real interest in the field.

More specifically, Kong says he looks at the exam results from different subjects to determine in which area of accounting a candidate’s interests truly lie. “It goes without saying that in most cases, under ordinary circumstances, a student fares better in any particular subject that he or she has a true interest in it,” he says. He also warns against focusing too much on monetary rewards at such an early stage, as the goal of this early stage of a career should be learning.



Identifying that interest and securing a suitable job, however, is only the first step. Kong reiterates his emphasis on the importance of continuing education for all accounting personnel. “The starting point is of course crucial, as it helps build up a foundation that can sustain further development,” says Kong. But beyond that, it is also paramount

that an accounting professional be able to carry on his learning and studies through further qualifications.

Kong also encourages accounting personnel to take up part-time teaching positions after qualifying. “If time allows, accounting professionals should really try to teach in a part-time capacity in the field of their choice. This is highly beneficial not only to an entire new generation of students, but also to the professional himself,” Kong suggests. And for Kathy, Kong has high regard on her. He believes she has the potential to become a partner of the firm once she has acquired the CPA qualification and gained sufficient experience. **T/D**