



Employer
in the
spotlight

Steve T. W. Lee & Co.

Steve Lee

Lofty ideals built on strong foundation
A prominent qualification in eyes of employers

While employees strive to get the technical know-how they need, enthusiasm for the tasks at hand is just as important. Steve Lee, a lecturer and a practising CPA, thinks that having a passion for work can help clear all obstacles in a career. "With my profound interest in accountancy, working round the clock has brought me great satisfaction," says this ambitious business owner.

By Aldric Chau

Steve T. W. Lee & Co has been established for six years, and the firm mainly offers audit and taxation services to enterprises in Hong Kong. Lee plays a key supervisory role in the company, monitoring the quality of work submitted by audit colleagues and ensuring client satisfaction. After work, Lee lectures on a diploma course in accountancy as well as other accounting courses at HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education. "Meeting students is always inspiring as they bring me new ideas for the profession," Lee says.

Communication valued

Asked what he thinks is his company's unique culture, Lee says that the company focuses heavily on staff communication. He believes that team work is the key to success and therefore the distance between senior and junior members is kept minimal. "Senior colleagues normally act more like mentors, grooming less experienced staff members," Lee says. He thinks that harmony in the workplace is essential for good productivity.

After work and back in classroom, Lee is equally keen to exchange thoughts with his students, who are mostly preparing for AAT examinations.

Regularly meeting students sitting for AAT examinations, plus working with colleagues who are AAT qualified, Lee knows that the AAT qualification is a valuable asset for accounting students and their employers.

He says the AAT qualification is first and foremost well-recognized. "Having a qualification does not only strengthen someone's profile in the eyes of their employer, but it also significantly enhances their confidence." Lee suggests that accounting students need a recognized qualification to concretely position themselves in the competitive job market. The qualification acts a testament to what they have achieved and helps them have the confidence they need for the road ahead.

Lee notes that AAT is particularly welcome by local CPA firms. Practically speaking local firms may not be able to afford a large team of certified public accountants. Therefore AATs, who can play the important supportive

role perfectly, act as the left and right hands of accountants, and are constantly in huge demand.

"The AAT qualification is highly valued by employers because of its quality," Lee reiterates. His company employs four staff members with the AAT qualification while more are planning to take this challenge. Lee is glad to give two thumbs up to the work performance of those who have taken or who are taking the AAT exams. He says they are distinguished from people who have only taken other basic accounting training by their familiarity with a comprehensive range of subjects including accounting, auditing and taxation. "Although they may not have much work experience in these areas, their foundation knowledge makes it a lot easier for us to assign tasks to them without needing to give too much training beforehand."

In addition to technical knowhow, Lee is also happy with his AAT-qualified staffs' transferrable skills. Since colleagues in the audit team are often required to liaise with clients, sound communication skills are critical. "I always have great confidence in my colleagues with the AAT qualification handling audit tasks since they demonstrate impressive communication skills through e-mail or other forms of communication," Lee says, adding that the business communication knowledge covered in the AAT examination works well in grooming his colleagues' communication skills.

As an employer who has interviewed countless job applicants and trained young accountants, Lee has a clear vision of what kind of people are needed in the profession. To begin with,

having a qualification matters a lot. “Having a qualification does not mean you are superior to others, but it does imply how committed you are to your job,” Lee explains. He appreciates colleagues who go the extra mile and study outside office hours. Such enthusiasm is indeed rule number one that Lee has in mind while conducting any interview. This experienced employer dislikes people who treat an accounting job as a “lifesaver” to get them through a bad economic environment and who he thinks will leave the company when the market is up again. The earnestness of AATs, in conjunction with their potential, is what has made Lee employ one after another of them over the years.

A rosy picture for AAT and the industry

What about the career paths for AATs at different business organisations? Lee is happy to reveal that although AAT can be seen an intermediate professional qualification, it takes a young accountant a good way to the top. “The qualification is increasingly recognized among a wide group of employers and professional bodies,” he says, adding that the qualification gives employers confidence. If people who are not sure whether accounting is the way they should go, the AAT qualification serves as a golden opportunity for them to get a feel for the profession before immersing themselves in it.

Gaining one or two qualifications may never be enough in this knowledge-based economy. Lee points out that lifelong learning is not only a trend but an obligation for those who are to succeed in this highly competitive world. Attaining an AAT qualification serves as a starting point and can lead people into

different directions. “Accounting is more than calculating – it is the DNA of every business and accounting knowledge is essential in determining how sustainably a business could grow.”

When it comes to the future of the accounting industry, Lee sees a rosy picture despite the economic conditions. With closer ties between Hong Kong’s and China’s economy, there are good opportunities for accounting professional across the border. “Accounting helps management makes well-informed and sound decisions based on financial figures. Accounting is, therefore, non-replaceable – every business relies on it to grow healthily. Therefore, I am optimistic that there will be a continuous surge in demand for accounting services all over the fast-growing Greater China region.” A solid qualification and burning enthusiasm, such as Lee possesses, are what it takes to make the most of these opportunities. **T/D**