

FEATURED EMPLOYER

Ted Ho

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In a professional industry such as accountancy, the factors which determine how the elite outperform their competitors include educational background, personal qualities and technical know-how. However, one of the first things to catch an employer's eye is often a professional qualification. Experienced accounting staff coach Ted Ho, director of a local CPA firm, tells us how a qualification is a must-have for accountants wanting to be part of the elite.

By Aldric Chau

Tell us about your company and its business nature.

Established in 2001, World Link CPA Limited is a medium size accounting firm, with around 100 staff members in Hong Kong and PRC. We provide auditing, taxation consultancy, business consultancy and accounting services.

What is your position in your company? What are your main roles in the company?

There are a number of directors in the company, with each of us playing a different role. We all have to take up external roles to liaise with clients while each of us also shoulders an internal management role. My internal role is a Staff Partner responsible for professional

development of staff. Specifically speaking, I am responsible for organising internal training and answering inquiries from staff regarding their career development planning in the company or the profession.

When did you first hear about the HKIAAT? What are general views on the AAT qualification?

I heard about the HKIAAT many years ago. On and off we have interviewed job applicants whose resumes are brightened with the professional AAT qualification. Generally speaking, I believe that attaining the AAT qualification gives students the basic accounting knowledge. For instance, by

completing the exams they grasp the basic concepts such as debit and credit, double entry, etc., which makes it much easier for them to work effectively with colleagues at the first place of employment. Not only does this build a good foundation in accounting, but it acts a very good tool for them to show to employers that they have a strong interest in the profession and that they are willing to go the extra mile in polishing their accounting skills.

How many members of staff at your company have AAT qualification?

Currently we have four members of staffs who have already attained the AAT qualification while three more are currently HKIAAT students, on

the road to completing the challenge. Among the four members with the AAT qualification, two of them are senior auditors, while the other two are auditors. And one of them has already furthered their study and been awarded the CPA qualification.

What are your thoughts on the syllabus of the AAT exam?

The AAT exam syllabus is a pretty comprehensive one, covering almost every area accounting personnel will have to be competent in. After passing the eight exams, AAT graduates become well-versed in accounting and auditing knowledge as well as some basic accounting and taxation standards.

How do you see the roles of staff with the AAT qualification and what are your expectations towards them?

At World Link, every new colleague, no matter whether they are university graduates or qualified AATs, will have to start from the beginning as an accounting trainee and they will all be assigned auditing and consulting jobs. Sometimes they have to go out and meet clients for the ongoing projects we handle. They have to pay special attention to these projects because we all expect a high quality service from them when they are meeting clients. We want to make sure that they impress clients with the professionalism. We expect them to perform even better than our clients' in-house accounting staff because we have to be the ones

they can trust. Therefore, we spend a great deal of resources on internal training. Also, before colleagues send out any documents to clients, we have them approved by senior supervisors beforehand to make sure that they are of the professional standard we expect.

How the accounting trainees further develop their career can be vastly different, depending on their job performance and how committed they are to their career. After around three years' experience as a trainee, they can be promoted to a senior position.

In the long run, good communication skills are indispensable for accounting trainees. When they take up more senior positions, there will be more chances for them to establish written communication with clients, lawyers and government officials.

What are your thoughts of the job performance of your staff who have an AAT qualification?

Staff with the AAT qualification are doing well in their positions and they give me greater confidence since they have all received the professional training via their strenuous examination preparation. With the qualification and a few years of experience accumulated, they will be groomed to be professional practitioners.

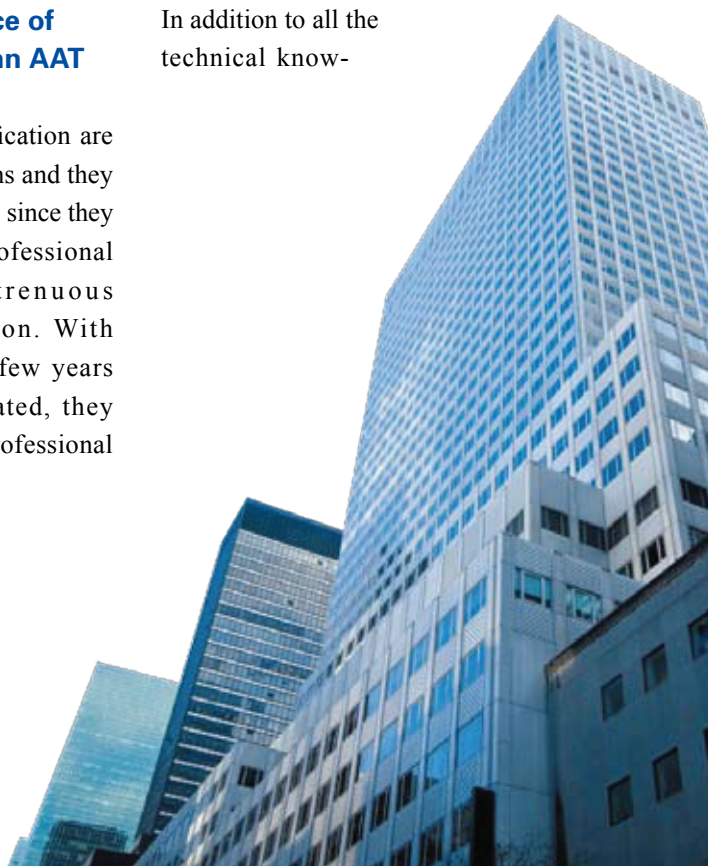
What kind of recruitment requirements do you have? What skills and attributes do you expect an accounting trainee to have?

Different positions require different traits. However, there is a generic set of skills and attributes we expect our accounting trainees to possess.

First, very simple book-keeping skills and knowledge of basic accounting concepts are essential items we expect.

Second, taxation knowledge is often neglected. This is indeed very practical knowledge that can distinguish you from your competitors. Also, considering the fact that taxation system and tax related laws are not that complicated in Hong Kong, it is highly advisable for accounting personnel to master taxation in order to make their profile more preferable to employers.

In addition to all the technical know-



how, soft skills are also must-have items for accountants determined to reach high in their career. After all, accounting is a people-oriented career that requires much more than individualised tasks. At World Link, we highly value job applicants who come with mature presentation and communication skills. Personal qualities such as an outgoing attitude to meet with clients and help them out with their problems, as well as self-confidence in meeting challenges, are what we always look for.

Staff have to have strong presentational skills because day by day they are working with complicated data which has to be translated into meaningful information for clients, many of whom may not have a technical background. Very often our staff have to analyse data and present figures to management for business decision making. In this process, how they filter the information, co-ordinate the data compilation and find an appropriate way of presenting the data in order not to confuse or

mislead the management is a skill they should strive for.

Can you tell us more about the internal staff training you provide?

In-house training is a focal concern in our company. It comes in two main forms: internal management training and technical training. In the technical part, we pass on new accounting standards, which have been changing fast in recent years. We make sure our staff are aware of these new standards when asked by clients or industry partners. When it comes to internal management training, we talk about more generic management skills and some internal workflows and standard procedures to make sure that every member of the team can work on a common standard and move forward together more effectively.

Do you think a professional qualification is important in the accountancy profession?

Certainly a professional qualification is very important for accounting personnel. Without a qualification, I

would say, their career development is quite limited. A qualification shows that someone is up to a widely-accepted standard in practicing and providing professional services. This is very different from an academic achievement in accountancy, which does not always imply you are qualified for the workplace.

Will you recommend your staff obtain the AAT qualification? How would you support them in this?

I already recommend that our staff obtain the AAT qualification, as this is beneficial for both their careers and their personal growth. In fact, we do strongly support our staff who wish to further their careers by providing study leave. I always recommend our staffs set a realistic goal for themselves: to achieve the pass grade and attain the qualification, instead of pushing for excellent exam results, which could put them under a great deal of pressure and affect their ultimate performance. **T/D**

