



Employer in the spotlight

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Title: Proprietor

Company: ARA & Associates, CPA

Develop your AAT accounting qualification

The accounting profession plays an indispensable role in Hong Kong's economy and its significance has never been more apparent than in today's difficult environment. Ms Annie Cheung, employer of AAT graduates, talks about the importance of having a professional qualification to help develop a career in accounting.

Tell us about your company and its core business.

ARA & Associates is a local firm established in 1992 (formerly K.Y. Cheung & Co, Certified Public Accountants). As client demand diversifies, we offer services in accounting, auditing, taxation, business consultancy, and trade and dispute support. We serve various SME clients from Hong Kong, China and overseas and non-profit organisations.

What are your main roles in the company?

As the company's proprietor, I have to monitor our daily operations and the quality and standard of our work. I also have to ensure that our firm complies with all statutory, regulatory and professional requirements.

What recruitment requirements do you have for the accounting staff? What skills and attributes do you expect your staff to have?

The AAT qualification is practically a requirement for new recruits. We ask candidates that are at least AAT students so that we can be sure they are equipped with the basic accounting knowledge. We look for enthusiastic candidates who are willing to work diligently. The fact they are studying for or have already attained the AAT qualification shows that candidates are already equipped with a good foundation about the professional requirements. Oral and written communication skills are also of essence. If a candidate enjoys working with people and possesses problem-solving skills, they can always do well in a CPA firm.

How many HKIAAT graduates are currently working in your organization? What are the opportunities for them?

We have employed several AAT graduates over the years. Currently we have Kay, who started his career with us in 2008. His first tasks mainly involved accounting and book-keeping. With the auditing know-how he gained from studying for the AAT examinations and his accumulated accounting experience, he is now working on auditing and assurance engagements under supervision. We had employed another AAT top student, Karmen, who is now pursuing her career in a public



organization after working with us for three years.

Fresh HKIAAT graduates should be aware that their knowledge and skills form the backbone of their professional development. We encourage AAT graduates to consider taking on-the-job training to climb further up the career ladder, so as to be better equipped to take up senior positions in future.

What comments do you have on the performance of your staff who have attained an AAT qualification? Do you see any difference in their work post-qualification?

AAT graduates are good at dealing with the mechanics of accounting work, probably because of the practical approach of the AAT examination. AAT graduates also impress me with their diligence and motivation. Since AAT graduates have to plan their study and career path well, they are more pro-active in taking up projects and handling clients' requests. AAT graduates also tend to be fast learners. For instance, Kay joined us only around a year ago as a fresh AAT graduate, he is now being assigned auditing tasks and have some direct liaison with clients under supervision.

What are your general views on the HKIAAT and the AAT qualification?

The HKIAAT is a local accounting body that provides unique training opportunities for entry to mid-level accounting personnel. It offers bright opportunities for those interested in obtaining a solid foundation in accounting, tax, law and other business knowledge. I think AATs are particularly welcomed by medium-sized and small CPA firms as well as SMEs where support from mid-level accounting personnel is most needed.

Do you think it is important for your staff to attain a professional qualification?

The tough business environment brings opportunities and good prospect for those who are well prepared. Attaining a professional qualification in accounting is a critical step in getting prepared for future business changes and challenges. A qualification like AAT serves as a systematic way of attaining the necessary knowledge, skills and values.

What advice would you give people who wish to work in the accounting field during the economic downturn?

Firstly, stay competitive. The best way of doing this is by having a professional qualification. Secondly, add value to your employer through sound technical input and enhanced efficacy. Also you may consider taking a flexible training programme that suits your needs. I believe that the AAT qualification is a dynamic training programme that is perfect for those interested in accounting and who are ready for challenges down the road.