ACCOUNTING--NOT FOR MEN ONLY

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

By

Rebecca J. Radford

Thesis Director

John C McCabe

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
May 1980
ACCOUNTING--NOT FOR MEN ONLY

INTRODUCTION

If you were asked to describe an accountant, would your description begin with "male?" Several years ago, this was generally the case. But not so much any more. Accountants do not have to be male. The objective of this paper is to examine the roles women have had in accounting and to see what may lie in store for women accountants in the future. In the process, this paper will look at possible prejudices women face as they attempt to break into what has traditionally been a male-dominated field. The objectives are accomplished through results of library research and a questionnaire administered to selected women in the east-central area of Indiana. The hypothesis of this paper is to show that women accountants are no longer the exception they once were.

LIBRARY RESEARCH

For years, a woman who was in business would simply fulfill a secretary's role. She would type, take dictation, and send out letters for her superiors. But she was not one of those superiors. She was not a man. Now women do seem to be breaking into the ranks of the accounting profession.

Virtually all the large firms report they are hiring a much larger percentage of women from college campuses than they did five years ago. For example, a spokesman at Arthur Young & Company says that the percentage of women recruited at that firm has grown to about 30
percent, compared to only 10 percent back in 1972.¹

This rapid growth for women can be attributed in part to the growth of the actual number of all students in accounting. In the spring of 1978 the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants reported "the number of people holding bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting has more than doubled in the last six years."² This national fact is certainly supported by statistics from Ball State University. As Table A indicates, total accounting majors have increased significantly since 1968.³

Also, it seems that women welcome the new challenges that cannot be found on typewriter keys or in clerical files. Three professors from the University of Cincinnati in Ohio conducted a study in 1974. Their findings included 367 responses from a nationwide questionnaire sent to approximately 1,100 women certified public accountants.

Women, like their male associates, enjoy the mental stimulation that accompanies diverse and evolving problems in accounting. They also cherish the psycho-social rewards of feeling helpful, especially on the personal accountant-client level. She is motivated by self-esteem, a feeling of worthwhile accomplishment and the opportunity for personal growth and development.⁴

So, the ice has been broken. But, of course, women are starting at the bottom. And the climb up looks as if it will be a slow one.

¹Deborah Rankin, "Women Accountants are Scarcely Adding Up," Business and Society Review, No. 25, Spring 1978, p. 60.
²Ibid.
³Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, Accounting Department Statistics.
Although the largest national accounting firms—known as the Big Eight—have hundreds of male partners, not one firm has even ten female partners. The most progressive in terms of top management is Touche Ross & Company, whose six female partners include the firm's controller. While women constitute less than one percent of the partners at Touche Ross, this percentage is nonetheless twice as high as the two next progressive firms. One big firm, Ernst & Ernst, does not have a single woman partner. When asked why the firm has not seen fit to elevate one female to that position, a spokesman said it was "waiting for the right one to come along."

The picture is no brighter at the upper reaches of the A.I.C.P.A. itself. There are no women on the organization's eighteen-man board of directors, only one woman on its influential auditing standards executive committee, and two on its 20-member governing council.

The accounting firms offer various reasons for the relative scarcity of women at the top. The most common explanation is that it typically takes an average of 12 years for a person to rise from lowly staff accountant to full partner, and most women were not entering the profession back in 1965.5

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY STATISTICS

At Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, the statistics for male and female accounting majors have changed dramatically. They do indeed support the idea that women in accounting are no longer an exception. Their numbers are growing. In the academic year 1968 only 11.6% of the declared accounting majors were women. In 1969 the figure was up to 12.6% but back down to 11.7% the next year. However, in 1971 things began to change. That year 14.2% were women. From then on the numbers kept going up and up. The figure rose from 20% in 1972 all the way to 26.2% in 1974. And by this time it was nowhere near its peak. When 1975 rolled around, 30.9% of the declared accounting majors were women. That figure kept rising, to 34.7% in

5Rankin, pp. 59, 60.
1976 all the way to 37.4% in 1977. These figures are illustrated in Table B.6.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Those statistics are not just meaningless numbers, either. The women behind those numbers give vocal support to the increasing role of females in accounting. At an October 4 meeting of the Anderson chapter of the American Society of Women Accountants, questionnaires dealing with this research topic were distributed. The same questionnaires were given to a Marion chapter as well.

The American Society of Women Accountants is a professional society that hopes to assist in the establishment of accountancy as one of the foremost professions. Its members must have a high degree of personal integrity as the first criterion of membership, as well as education and technical training and experience in accounting. Moral and ethical standards are also emphasized with this group. So, with these attributes, the people involved in the questionnaire were well qualified to speak out on the issue of women in accounting.

One purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain a brief history of the accounting work of each respondent. These questions were about education, accounting jobs, and responsibilities. Then other questions concerned the respondent's own feelings about responsibilities, earnings, and client treatment as compared to a man; discrimination; any change in the number of women in accounting;

---

6Ball State University, Accounting Department Statistics.

remarks concerning the future for women accountants; and advice to women beginning in the field.

Approximately 40 questionnaires were distributed and 13 were returned for a response rate of 32.5%. The results obtained from this very limited survey are by no means representative or taken from a statistically valid sample. Therefore, no generalizations are possible from this survey. However, the respondents had a great deal of variety in their education, preparation, and background.

Vital Statistics

Of the thirteen respondents, one had her master's degree, five received bachelor's degrees from a college or university, four had taken various classes after high school, and three had no formal training after high school.

The average age of the eleven women who responded to their age and marital status was 42.6. The low was 24, the high was 64, and the median was 47. Six women were single and the other five were married.

Their companies ranged from local accounting firms for nine women, to a credit bureau, a bank, and industrial firms, where two of the women worked.

Each woman included bookkeeping as a responsibility. Several prepared tax returns, financial statements, and worked on payroll. Some mentioned auditing, estate planning, and accounts receivable supervision.

Attitudes

All thirteen respondents felt their responsibilities were comparable to men at the same position when there were men for comparison.
Times have changed. One woman admitted that in the late 1950s she would have responded negatively.

One person reported annual gross earnings of over $30,001 and three women's were between $20,001 and $25,000. Three reported between $15,001 and $20,000; five between $10,000 and $15,000; and one below $10,000.

Nine felt their earnings were comparable to men at the same level, while two were unsure. One said no, and the comparison was not applicable to another respondent. One person felt her earnings were "better than some of the men at my same level."

To the question, "Do you feel promotion possibilities are the same for you as for a man in your position?," eight responded yes, three said no, while the question was not applicable to two. One woman who responded no said, "Most men in my position would be younger and accounting major college graduates. My accounting jobs started when I was 37 years old. I do not expect promotion to a higher level." Other quotes indicated that ability had more influence than sex. "Technical skills and willingness to work long, hard hours are the greatest factors in advancement." "Promotion is based upon abilities and proven performance, not whether female or male."

The majority—10—responding did not feel discriminated against because they were a woman in accounting. Of the three who said yes one mentioned that her experience has been over the past 45 years. For one person, it was much easier to work with a member of the same sex. "Clients are very quick to accept me on a professional level. Sometimes it is easier for me to get along with women-client-bookkeepers than it is for the partner. They tend to trust me more than
they would a man." Another found herself battling old attitudes more than battling sexes. "Occasionally I've felt I've had to work harder to prove myself. However, I don't think it was because of the men's attitudes, but rather my own. I grew up in the time when women did not have careers so, therefore, I have had to change my feelings." One woman reported discrimination in the pay of men and women on her first accounting job.

Do clients treat women the same as men? Nine said yes to this, two no, one not always, and one not applicable. Comments ranged from "There are some clients that do not feel I can make judgments and decisions as well as a man could" to "Customer contacts have been very favorable" to "Some treat me even better."

Eight respondents had seen a change in the current number of women in accounting as compared to one year ago. And eleven said they had seen a difference from as far back as five years ago.

So, on the whole, most of those surveyed do not see the sexual discrimination women have long suffered as being a problem in the field of accounting. Instead, they see a bright future. Comments ranged from "good, very good, very bright, much better, and extremely favorable" to "excellent." It seems that those in the field are no longer labeled as "men" or "women." They are simply labeled as "accountants," regardless of sex.

"Most barriers have been broken and most men CPAs respect the ability women have," one of those surveyed said. "We still have a problem combining career-marriage-children, but, with few exceptions, most firms recognize that women CPAs are just as competent and ambitious as men," was the reply of another.
The new attitude for women in accounting will continue to develop in future years, according to another surveyed, if women take the right attitude with them into the office. "The future is good as long as the right attitude is taken," the response read. "Women should consider themselves part of the profession—accountants, not women accountants."

Another of those surveyed, however, was not quite so optimistic. She said, "The future looks better, but not as bright as for men."

But, several words of advice were given by those surveyed to help insure the best possible future for women in accounting. To one of those surveyed, being professional on the job could easily overcome the problem of being a woman accountant. "Do not think of yourself as a woman in accounting, but as a professional accountant who is qualified to perform in a mature and professional matter," the woman said. "Public accounting firms want professional accountants." Be they men or women.

But, while it is important to be professional, it is equally important to be yourself, according to two others who responded to the questionnaire. They stressed the importance of not being afraid of being "a woman" on the job. "Always be ladylike and feminine," one response read. "Don't try to act like a man. This means speaking, writing, and behaving properly, always being professional, but being yourself." Be assertive, but remain a lady," another emphasized. "Be as professional as possible," a third added. "Be a lady, yet don't take any put-downs."

CONCLUSION

Library research does support the hypothesis that women are
beginning to find a place in accounting. The percentage of women accounting majors at Ball State University has been increasing. They enjoy the stimulation of a new and challenging field, and they are beginning to meet that challenge. It really is only the beginning for women accountants, as questionnaire responses were positive and optimistic. They revealed the attitudes of some women accountants concerning responsibilities, earnings, promotion possibilities, and discrimination. The day will come when clients will walk into an accounting office and not see a man or a woman sitting there. They will just see an accountant.
TABLE A

NUMBER OF DECLARED ACCOUNTING MAJORS FOR SELECTED YEARS AT BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Accounting Majors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>2,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>3,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3,143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graphical representation of the data above.
Percentage of Women Accounting Majors for Selected Years at Ball State University.
NOTE: Several questions could be answered with just a yes or no. The responses will be tabulated and used in my paper. However, space is provided for comments you might have. Selected responses may be quoted in the paper. Thank you for your help by completing this questionnaire.

1. Relate your educational background after high school.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Years Attended/Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. What accounting jobs have you had? Start with your first job.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Relate the responsibilities you had on each job.
   
   | a.      |          |
   | b.      |          |
   | c.      |          |

4. Do you feel your responsibilities were/are comparable to men at the same position?
   
   | a.      |          |
   | b.      |          |
   | c.      |          |
5. Check the box of your current annual gross earnings.

☐ $10,000 - $15,000  ☐ $25,001 - $30,000
☐ $15,001 - $20,000  ☐ Over $30,001
☐ $20,001 - $25,000

6. Do you think your earnings are comparable to men at the same level?

7. Do you feel promotion possibilities are the same for you as for a man in your position?

8. Have you ever had any problems or felt discriminated against because you were a woman in accounting?

9. Do you feel clients treat you the same as they would a man?
10. Have you seen a change in the number of women in your field as compared to 1 year ago? 5 years ago?

11. How do you think the future looks for women accountants?

12. What advice would you give to a woman beginning in accounting?

13. Any other comments? Age _____ Marital Status _________
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, Accounting Department Statistics.


Poniewaz, Sharon L., "Well on the Road to Filling the CPA Ranks," Wisconsin CPA, December 1977, p. 16.

Preface, Anderson Chapter, American Society of Women Accountants.

Questionnaire results.

Rankin, Deborah, "Women Accountants are Scarcely Adding Up," Business and Society Review, No. 25, Spring 1978, p. 60.