

Carrie Zellmer

Managing Director of Sales, The LaSalle Network

Carrie Zellmer may be only 28, but she's already completed her Master's degree in Accounting, worked as an auditor at Ernst & Young, and is now the managing director of sales at The LaSalle Network, a top job placement firm for professional financial talent based in Chicago. What's more, by serving as the co-chairperson of the Illinois CPA Society's Young Professionals Group, she's demonstrating ways in which CPAs can achieve and succeed in an increasingly challenging and competitive profession.

IN: What is the most challenging aspect of your job at The LaSalle Network?

CZ: A large part of my success is based on the decisions of other people. Taking a new position can be life-altering. There are so many factors that come into play when a job seeker takes a new job: money, family demands, benefits, commute time, opportunity, old bosses, new bosses, future growth, and the list goes on and on. Obviously, there is only so much we can do after we connect a candidate with a client; the rest is an extremely personal decision. I work through these challenges by having an honest approach with all parties I work with. I believe if you work hard and fair, the mishaps along with the fortunes will come and go. I also have lived my life by the creed of my grandmother, "Carrie, smile and the world smiles with you...frown and you frown alone."

IN: How does your CPA certification assist you as a recruiter?

CZ: My CPA gives validation to the clients and candidates that in addition to understanding recruiting, staffing and people, I know accounting. I understand what they do day to day and how that fits into a company's success. Hiring a new position is really an opportunity for a manager to execute his or her new or existing strategy. In accounting departments, that may be very technical; my CPA helps me understand those challenges. At the same time, research shows that only 15 percent of new hires fail due to technical incompetence; the other 85 percent is because of personality and fit. While my CPA is extremely valuable to my role, it also gives me the ability to view each position from every angle that creates a successful placement.

IN: What are the greatest challenges facing grads who want to enter the field?

CZ: The biggest challenge I see young graduates facing today is expectations. Whether it is their schools, professors or parents, many enter the workforce expecting to make a certain salary or to have a fun position right away. Unfortunately, employers may need soldiers that are not highly compensated. Most are short-staffed and do not have the resources to train and develop individuals without relevant work experience. Employers will pay a premium to a new hire who can contribute immediately.

IN: What's the best way for a young professional to get noticed?

CZ: Be upbeat. Don't ever let your attitude be the reason you didn't get a promotion or a job. When you don't have experience, have energy and a great attitude. The intangibles will buy you time until you are making true contributions. In addition to buying you time, your co-workers and boss will see you as a rising star. They will want to teach and mentor you; your success will quickly follow.

IN: What can a new grad in Chicago expect in the way of speed to hire, compensation, etc.?

CZ: My initial reaction to this question is, don't expect any true success in the profession unless you truly enjoy the field. Just because a profession is hot, doesn't mean that you are destined for a quick job with big bucks. In any case, when you do decide that accounting is for you, you are in luck. The market has definitely picked up for recent accounting graduates with both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree. I believe if a new graduate has some work experience during school and can interview well, he or she should have a position within 1 to 4 months of graduating. We have been placing individuals with Bachelor's degrees anywhere from the low \$30ks to \$40ks. Those positions range from accounts payable to staff accountant. As their credentials and education increases, the salaries and position responsibilities increase as well. □

Education:

Master's of Accounting, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2000

Bachelor's of Science in Accounting, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1999

Affiliations:

Illinois CPA Society, co-chair, Young Professionals Committee; member, Internal Audit Association (IAA); member, Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM)

Work History:

Ernst & Young, Enterprise Risk Services, Auditor; The LaSalle Network, Business Development Manager; The LaSalle Network, Managing Director of Sales



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