

Recipe for success: from management accountant to company secretary!

By Anne-Marie Clarke, Corporate Governance Consultant

If you are at a crossroads and wondering whether to stay on a career path with a foreseeable future or alternatively take the unknown route, then here's my story of taking the latter.

To be completely honest, when I was first approached for a company secretary role, I went to the library to look up what a company secretary actually did! Twelve years later on and it has been a much richer, more varied and interesting experience than that library book ever told me.

As a CIMA qualified management accountant, I'd focused on working in industry preferring the commercial aspects of accounting – looking forwards, rather than backwards – helping the commercial teams assess new products, competitors, and pricing strategies. I think this passion for enabling businesses to move forward and perform well, drew direct comparison to my life as a company secretary.

This move was a natural one! Did my accounting training help me? Yes. I'm analytical, I like to follow processes, I'm trained to work to deadlines, and I like to understand how my skills help a business to make decisions. I can understand the financial reports presented to the Boards, and what that means in terms of performance; analysing the levers they can use to affect changes. However, above all I enjoy working in a team to deliver the results we need.

Being able to recognise the impact of risk on the ability of a business to perform, especially financial risk, has made my transition particularly rewarding. After all, you can make profit, but without money in the bank to pay your employees and suppliers, your business won't survive. As such, it has been a privilege to work with Boards and their respective businesses to help them develop strategy, review performance, consider risks and support them by doing something that I love... corporate governance!

Now it has helped me with running my own consultancy business. The combination of sound financial and commercial acumen, and an enduring passion for corporate governance – well it's like having your cake and eating it. I get to prepare my own management accounts, manage my cashflow, prepare my board minutes, implement good governance and risk assessments, whilst at the same time, I support others to do the same.

If you asked me: is the accounting profession a good grounding for becoming a company secretary? I would say: absolutely! From whatever field of accounting you come from – if you have the analytical, detailed skills and process-mindset – you are more than half-way there. Then add a good pinch of good communication and interpersonal skills, mix generously and you'll have the recipe for a successful and rewarding career as a company secretary. Here's wishing you good luck on your career path!

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