

ACCOUNTING

BEYOND THE NUMBERS



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PODCAST EPISODE #12: THE BEAUTY OF NUMBERS INTERVIEW WITH MARY McDEVITT, STAFF ACCOUNTANT TRANSCRIPT

Kae Wagner – Welcome to the podcast, “Accounting: We Go Beyond the Numbers” from Ross Buehler Falk, a CPA and Business Advisory Firm. I’m Kae Wagner, your host for this podcast series. You’ll receive great business advice here including accounting, tax tips and a whole lot more that will help you grow your business. Here we go...

Kae Wagner – It seems like just yesterday that I started my career, and I was so excited to get started and the whole world and my whole career was ahead of me. It was an exciting time and I was very enthusiastic about what I was doing. Today, we’re going to be talking with Mary McDevitt. Mary is a Staff Accountant with Ross Buehler Falk, RBF. And, I want to tell you, she is so full of enthusiasm and excitement because she, too, is starting her career and she’s just at the beginning of it. So, Mary, tell me what you’re doing and how are things going at RBF?

Mary McDevitt – Hi Kae. As you said, I’m new to Ross Buehler Falk & Company this year. I started in January of 2017 and things are going really great. As a Staff Accountant, in my first year, I do both attest and tax work. So some days I’m working on audits, reviews, compilations, other assignments, and then other days I’m working on C-Corp returns, S-Corp returns, partnerships and individual returns.

Kae Wagner – And which of those parts do you like best and why?

Mary McDevitt – I really find business tax returns and business attest work - I find it to be very rewarding - and it gives me a great sense of accounting and applying my knowledge. I just really love being able to help out clients and figure out solutions for their businesses. I can’t really say that I

dislike anything about my work. There are some things I enjoy more than others, but on the whole, I just love learning new things and getting my hand in whatever assignments I can right now.

Kae Wagner – I think you recently graduated with a post-grad degree, and tell me about that again.

Mary McDevitt – Yes sure. I am a recent graduate of Cabrini University's Master of Accounting Program. So, basically a Master of Accounting Program is a little bit different than a traditional MBA degree where the focus is a little bit more toward accounting, rather than general business concepts. The great part about a MAC degree, especially from Cabrini, is that the program is designed to help you take and pass all four sections of the CPA exam while you're studying for your degree. So that was a really great opportunity that I had where I could take the CPA exam while I was pursuing my graduate degree. Then I could graduate with all my exams passed and my 150 credit hours which then helps me to become licensed as a CPA in Pennsylvania.

Kae Wagner – So that sounds like a really efficient program.

Mary McDevitt – Yes, accountants love efficiency.

Kae Wagner – Yes they do. So after you graduated, then how did you find your way to RBF?

Mary McDevitt – I actually found my way to RBF before I graduated. I just graduated in May and I got hired at RBF in January. Basically I was living down near Philly. Cabrini University is in Radnor PA; it's right around King of Prussia. I was living down there, but I knew I was going to be heading home closer to Reading which is where I'm from originally. I just wanted to look for a good public accounting firm to start out in and hopefully build my career and my business relationships in that was a little bit closer to home and a little bit easier to commute to. So I went online as all young people do, guess, and I Googled "accounting firms" and RBF popped up as a nearby location. So when I went on the website, I found all the pictures really helpful in making my decision. Everyone looked so friendly. I really felt that I would be happy at a place that looked like they were really looking out for their clients. I really liked all the pictures showing the client relationships. It just seemed like such a clear, concise website and it says something about the people who work there. So I wrote a little note on the website blog. I called, I had an interview and right after that I was hired and I was just so excited.

Kae Wagner – So you had a job and you started soon after that, right? Like a month or so. And now you've been at RBF for, did you say seven months?

Mary McDevitt – I started in January. So it's October, almost November now. So right, it's coming up very quickly on a year.

Kae Wagner – Yeah, time flies doesn't it?

Mary McDevitt – When you're having fun, Kae.

Kae Wagner – That's so true. So you saw this culture, if you will, on the website and now that you've been there for a while, how would you describe what it's like to be there?

Mary McDevitt – Well, first and foremost, I think one of the most important things about RBF is that everyone is just so personal, personable, rather. You're always asked, you know, what your perception is of where you work, and when you think of accounting and really any business-type industry, you think of people in suits and in suit jackets and very serious and formal. And we are formal and professional and very, very serious about what we do in our work here and we take that very seriously. But there's also a sense of friendliness and relationship building that you really don't find everywhere. You really don't often find people who really care about the clients and their businesses sometimes like RBF does. So I think that really rings true with everyone here. Overall, my experience at RBF; it's been so wonderful. The people are friendly and we do all sorts of activities and events that really build the camaraderie of the firm. We recently had a bowling night where, after work, a group of us from the office went over to Dutch Lanes and we just bowled for two hours and chatted and had a great time. Sometimes, especially during tax season, we have little lunch n' learns or pizza parties. We get ice cream sometimes. We always celebrate people's birthdays every month. It really makes you feel like you're a person and you're valued here, which I just really appreciate.

Kae Wagner – I think you told me the other day that RBF seems to always have lots of food events.

Mary McDevitt – Yes. The "F" sometimes does actually stands for "food."

Kae Wagner – The "F" in RBF, right? When you were young, you realized early on that you liked math. Tell me the story about you and when you realized that you liked math and when you really considered pursuing that.

Mary McDevitt – Well, growing up in grade school I always just had a knack for math and numbers. I loved my math classes and I was a little strange in that I loved doing my math homework. When I got home that was the first homework I would pull out to do because I was just so excited about it. It's a little strange because no one else in my class felt the same way, so I was a little on my own there.

But then going through grade school, I knew I wanted math and things that came a little easier to me to be part of my trajectory of where I was going in life. Then when I was in high school, that's when I first got introduced to accounting. It was my sophomore year of high school. I had Accounting I and I had a wonderful professor that really, I think, helped shape my path of going into accounting just by the way she started out. I remember the very first class I had, I never really knew what accounting was. I knew my uncle was an accountant, but he never told me what he did. So I didn't know what it was, but I sat in class and I remember we pretended that the entire class was starting a lawn mowing company; a little lawn mowing business on the weekends, and some of the classmates played vendors and suppliers and played customers and some were the owners of the business. We actually got to see, right off the bat, just why accounting is so useful. How it's the language of the business and the things that you do and the rules that you follow and all the requirements. They mean something more than just, "Oh I have to do this because someone said so." It really puts it into perspective. I think that's so great for such a young age. I'm hoping to impart that to other students if I go back to my grade school or high school or college and I go back and I talk to people about accounting or the industry or where I work. I just love trying to focus on the big picture and

why it's important because that really gets you motivated and it helps you to understand why you're doing what you're doing.

Kae Wagner – It sounds like between the class that you had very early on and then the MAC degree that you got, that you really have a sense of accounting as a function to understand business; that it's not just math or numbers or x's and o's, but that accounting is a picture into the health or the welfare, if you will, of a business. Does that sound right?

Mary McDevitt – Yeah exactly. And I always love throwing in when I'm talking about accounting, when I'm talking to someone and they say to me, "Oh, you're working now, you're out of school, what do you do?" And I say "accounting" and the first thing they say to me is, "Oh you must be so good at numbers and math." And while that might be true, because if I just have a special knack for it, that might be the case, but I often try to explain to people that you don't need to be a math whiz or, you know, ace all of your accounting classes in college to be in accounting. You don't have to get discouraged if math might not be your strongest subject, because a lot of the times in my job, the most complicated math I'm doing is adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing. It's more about the concepts and the applicability of what you're doing. The numbers are just a way to transfer the information and communicate that in a comparable, easy-to-understand manner. But the information and the why and what you get out of the numbers is really what's important. And so I really try to stress that to people who might not know what accounting is. They just know it's numbers-based and sometimes you almost need to build an understanding of what it actually is and just why it's so important.

Kae Wagner – Right. And you were talking the other day about the theory and the rules and the standards behind the numbers. And that's a part of what you really love about your work: applying that.

Mary McDevitt – Exactly. It just makes so much sense and it's just so beautiful. It works and it's so comparable and relatable and it just makes me happy.

Kae Wagner – I think that's wonderful. I'm not sure that numbers would make me that happy, but I can see your enthusiasm coming through for sure. Talk to me a little about Ross Buehler Falk in terms of some of the benefits that you see in working there, some of the things that they do that are especially meaningful for you.

Mary McDevitt – I think one of the newest things that we have going on this year, and it's kind of the norm for me just because I came in so recently, is the flextime. There's no more core hours in the business, per se, as long as there's no deadlines or anything. We have this nice flextime policy where as long as we get our work done and we put in the necessary amount of time, we can come to the office if we want to start at 7:00 in the morning and leave at 3:00, we can. If we want to come in at 9:30 and leave at 6:00, we can. It's really nice because it allows you to have a nice work/life balance. It helps you regulate and everyone here, they're so understanding. If you have personal reasons where you want to work longer Monday through Thursday so you can get out a little earlier on Friday, which is something I really like to do; and as long as I have my work done, it's never a problem. So that's a really nice benefit of working at Ross Buehler Falk & Company. And since we utilize technology so much, we're able to work from home, we're able to work from client locations, just like we're in the office. So it doesn't hinder our performance and efficiency at all which is great.

Kae Wagner – When we were talking the other day, you mentioned the camaraderie. Some of your teammates that are all kind of in the same age group and that was something that you really enjoy. You want to talk about that a bit.

Mary McDevitt – Being a new Staff Accountant, I work in what's called the "team room." So I'm working very closely with four other accountants. We all are around the same age and we all just have the sense of we're maybe not exactly in the same point in our career as I'm just starting out and some people have been here for five or six years now. But it's very nice to work with people who are around your own age and it's nice to be able to relate to the people you're working with. It helps with communication and just getting jobs done. So it's always very special when you have good connections with the people that you're working with. I don't think there's ever been a day where I didn't want to come into the office to work the whole time I've been here, which is just really rewarding for me to say. I think it says something about Ross Buehler Falk & Company.

Kae Wagner – Yes, I think you're right. One last question for you, Mary. What advice would you give to someone who's just getting started in their career, who would be just out of college like you were about a year ago?

Mary McDevitt – That is a great question. I've actually been asked this a couple of times as I'm going through finishing my schooling and graduating and if I go back to some of my classes and people try to get a sense of like, what should I be doing? What did you do? So I think the advice I would give, number one, if you're just coming out of school and you want to go into the accounting profession, especially public accounting, I would say do the CPA exam right now before life happens. Before things get crazy and you have a family and you're married and you have a house and you have a dog and your car breaks down and your Internet goes out and you don't know why, and all those kinds of things. Doing the CPA exam is probably one of the harder things, or maybe the hardest thing. I think it's one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. But it's the most wonderful feeling when you finish, when you're done, you know that you're done. Once you pass those four sections of the CPA exam, you don't have to take them ever again.

So I think my first piece of advice for someone who's starting out would definitely be pursue the CPA exam, get your license and get that behind you so that when you're working full-time, then you have the opportunity to really embrace the opportunities that come after that instead of having to juggle so many things at once. Outside of that, I definitely am a believer that when you go on job interviews and you're looking to be hired by a company, you kind of have that sense of "I need them more than they need me" and you're very nervous about starting out and you want to impress people. I think that you also have to be not very critical, but you want to look at a company and say, "Am I a good fit for them? Are they a good fit for me? Do I fit in with the people? Do I see myself working here?" And that was one of the things I always tried to do when I was going on job interviews, would be, even when I was driving there, I would kind of put on the mindset of "This is just an ordinary day. I'm driving to work. And I walk into the work and how do I feel? Do people say hello to me? Do they ask me how I am? Is the office decorated for the holidays?" That was one thing I noticed about RBF. They had a Christmas tree in the conference room and we had a nice chat about how much - I just love Christmas - and I was so excited when I saw that Christmas tree

because I thought, these people here, you know, they get it. They're excited, too, about Christmas and they appreciate those little things. So those would be my biggest two pieces of advice is the CPA exam and definitely finding a place that fits you just as much as you fit them.

Kae Wagner – Well I am very, very glad that you found RBF because I think you are a perfect fit there, and I am so excited for you, Mary, for your future, for everything that you have lying ahead of you. And I really wish you well. I have so enjoyed talking with you and hopefully we'll see you sometime soon.

Mary McDevitt – Thank you, Kae. I enjoyed talking to you, too. And I had the best time. Thank you.

Kae Wagner – That's it for today folks. Visit rbfco.com for more information on Accounting that goes Beyond the Numbers. This is your host, Kae Wagner for Ross Buehler Falk. Our next episode is coming soon. Don't miss it.