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Done by: Tan Sher Min, NUS BBA Year 1

Carissa is currently an Audit Senior within the Global Financial Services Industry practice of Deloitte Singapore. Her main portfolio of clients includes leading investment and private banks, asset management and securities firms. Her country experience includes working with clients with Head Offices in France, Hong Kong, Japan and Malaysia. She is also currently pursuing the Singapore Chartered Accountant Qualification (SCAQ), a rigorous professional accountancy programme which aims to hone well-rounded professionals in both the technical knowledge and relevant practical competencies.

As an undergraduate student, she was placed on the Dean's List and was also awarded membership into Beta Gamma Sigma, a capstone international honour society, for her outstanding undergraduate academic performance. She is also the recipient of the Ernst & Young (EY) Corporate Finance Woman of the Year (Singapore Finalist). As an Accounting major, she took up internships at the Big 4, namely EY and KPMG, with lateral experiences across Tax, Advisory and Audit. During her time in NUS, Carissa also went for exchange at King's College London and Ivey Business School at Western University which allowed her to gain greater insights and experience an enriching university life.

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INTERVIEW

How would you describe a day of your work?

I started my career in Deloitte, I am currently a first-year Audit Senior, and this is my third year with the firm. I start my day in the morning with deep work. During this time, I block out all non-urgent notifications and focus on my key highlights for the day. I usually keep it to 3 highlights in a day and try not to arrange non-urgent meetings or calls in the morning.

My work involves applying critical thinking in risk assessments by performing deep dives into the clients' key controls and communicating deficiencies, and recommendations to the clients. This is personally my favourite part of my work as it is when I get to explore, work out the unknowns and see how I can add my own fresh perspectives to the status quo. I would look for help when needed but I like to challenge myself too.

Besides that, the end goal of my work is to ensure that the Financial Statements are presented in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standards (FRS).

One of the things I enjoy most about audit is that no two days are ever the same. As a client-centric role, I am usually on calls with the clients or my team. Having moved to a hybrid work arrangement with COVID-19 in the past two years, I personally believe that it is key to retain what I call "3D" communication such as calls and face-to-face time, with my team and clients by discussing ideas thoughtfully. This results in more time saved, richness in every exchange and in turn, more value added.

I make it a point to have frequent check-ins with my juniors as well to ask them how they are doing and if there are any roadblocks that we can work out together.

I have been very blessed with very nurturing bosses, supportive peers, and engagement team members since the start of my career at Deloitte. I am grateful to have met people who have inspired me in different ways, be it my bosses, colleagues, or batchmates whom I have met at Deloitte; and I hope that one day, I will be able to inspire others in the same way they have done so for me.

What are some programmes or tips you have for juniors hoping to follow such a career pathway?

More than technical skills, character is very important. People who are not as technically strong (at the start) but have good character usually thrive more than those who lack character. Because when you are honest, people will trust you - even if it means getting scolded for a mistake. If you take care of your character, your reputation will take care of itself. I have seen people who are more concerned about their reputation than character and it was easy for people to see through. So come in with a mindset to work hard, be honest and grow in your character and skills.

Another tip I have is to spend the first few months in your first job immersing yourself in your role and team. Starting a new job is a big change from school. Some people click with what they want to do right away, but most dabble. Personally, I was careful that I kept to changing only one variable at a time, which was adapting to my new role and team, before enrolling myself in the Singapore Chartered Accountant Qualification (SCAQ)s.

How would you describe a day of your work?

I feel that it is important not to blindly subscribe to "hustle culture". It is what it is – it is just a mindset. I personally believe that you should use it if it helps you but at the end of the day, it should serve you and not define or control you.

Another thing to note is to distinguish between being busy and being productive. When we were younger, we were taught that hard work is so important but increasingly, the older I get, I realised that it is not just hard work, but direction is also important - because you could be working hard in a completely irrelevant direction that is not going to help you in what you care about. The world's best chef is not going to become a better chef by learning how to code – it is just highly unlikely.

My advice is to be strategic about hustling – don't just hustle for the sake of hustling – be strategic about it because your time and energy are limited. Work and apply your efforts in a direction that matters.

Lastly, I think my biggest weakness in the past was not listening to my body and trying to push it even when what I really needed was rest, sometimes to the point of burn out. Given the tight deadlines in school, most of us are like frantic flywheels – but there needs to be some moderating influence. I have come to understand that recovery is just as important as hard work. Personally, I often take a step back and think about why I'm doing something. Seemingly counterintuitive, but rest and introspection allow space for us to think and be more creative.

What do you think recruiters are looking for?

There is a very strong intersection between technology and business today. It is before long that we see fundamental changes in the industry such as the blockchain technology. Rather than seeing these changes as a constraint, it is key to understand that a revolutionary technology is going to be dominant, and stay relevant. Especially with COVID-19, everything has become online, and I personally have seen how much more opportunities in terms of networks, communities, and resources there are that we can get involved in and learn from people worldwide. The best part is that it is often at no cost. My advice would be to delve deeper into the intersection between multiple domains instead of focusing on the contradicting aspects of them or seeing things in silo.

It is also important to know that opportunities are for those who are prepared, and they are present even in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. I think many of us feel that we lack opportunities, but we fail to grab them when they come by, or question ourselves if we can take on such opportunities. It would be useful to stay relevant and learn from our mistakes.

In today's context, it is an oxymoron to think that we are experts in anything because everything keeps changing and there is a constant firehose of information. But it helps to have your foot bearings and engage with it. It is an important skill in life to have the ability to self-teach and learn new things. Personally, I started my own journey

learning about web 3, in particular, the blockchain technology, Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) and cryptocurrencies, and taking a step further to also understand how it might intersect with the financial services industry that I am in such as the valuation of cryptocurrencies or how the first principles of audit assertions can be applied to digital asset transactions and balances. Be adaptive as recruiters today are looking for people who can see things in their intersections instead of an insular domain.

Are there any shifts in hiring or work trends?

In terms of work trends, with rapid innovation today, it is rare for one to have the same job doing the same work for the next 30-50 years. I believe that career paths are more dynamic today. Don't boggle yourself with the notion that you will just be one thing when you graduate. On the other hand, don't also get caught up in wanting to "do it all" and take on everything at the same time. What happens is that when you try to do everything at the same time, you end up doing none of them at all.

I believe that industries are less silo but more interconnected than ever before. This is where the business world is moving and naturally where the hiring trend will also move towards.

How would you advise the juniors on striking a balance between the theory/concepts they learn in class and practical experience they can apply in a work environment?

In school, there is this belief that you read the textbook and suddenly you think you know everything. You will never get very far if all you just do is read textbooks and think you understand them. My advice is to get your hands dirty sooner and gain as much practical exposure while in school. I come from the school of thought that we can learn one stroke from everybody and everything we do. Nothing goes wasted.

Which internship experience allowed you to grow and learn the most?

As an accounting major, I took my internships with two of the Big 4 accounting firms, namely, EY and KPMG, with lateral exposure across Tax, Advisory and Audit. My first internship will always hold a special place in my heart as I would forever be grateful to the team who took a chance on me and saw the potential in me. I learnt the most during this internship under the nurturing guidance of the manager and senior manager who were also the ones who interviewed me. They were direct, genuine, and candid in offering their insights and advice to me.

How was your campus life and how did it prepare you for your work now?

Besides representing NUS Business School in the Inter-Faculty Games and taking part in various case competitions, my biggest takeaway was taking the effort to talk to my professors and learning from their wealth of experience as many of them came in at the peak of their careers with a wealth of knowledge that cannot be learnt from the textbooks.

As one transitions to work, I believe that it is so important to have a mentor and be a mentor to others. Often, people are very willing to share, as long as you are specific enough in what you are asking for.

At Deloitte, I have personally gained from those above me who have helped me professionally and also encouraged me to do the same for my juniors. We did not take on more senior roles overnight. We all started off as a junior, and we grow and learn from the people that have led us. We learn from the people that we work with, and we learn from the people that we lead, and I think we all have a role to play. Under their guidance, it has honed me into a confident individual leading and contributing to discussions, pioneering new ways of approaching subject matters, and a critical thinker able to ask good questions that in turn challenge and offer fresh perspectives to my team and client.



In picture:
Chng Chee Kiong - Vice Dean, Undergraduate Studies Associate Professor (Educator Track) (left)
Carissa Tan (middle)
Julie Huan - Senior Lecturer, Strategy and Policy (right)