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Women in Accounting

Head for the top!

Senior women CPAs share their thoughts on being leaders and managers



BY LIZ GOLD

Krista McMasters hasn't celebrated her new executive position at regional CPA and business advisory firm Clifton Gunderson just yet.

"I've been so busy I really haven't taken a whole lot of time to celebrate," she told *Accounting Today*. "I think I'll celebrate when the position is effective and I'm through this transition year."



Krista McMasters

McMasters, who was named the firm's chief executive-elect — the fourth in the firm's history and the first female to serve in that position among the country's top 25 public firms — officially succeeds Carl George in June 2009.

In other words, it's a big deal.

Since she was named in March, McMasters has spent her time visiting client service

centers and talking with senior managers and partners about the firm's strategic plan and her vision for the future.

"Our mission is going to stay the same," McMasters said, adding that her firm specifically plans to focus on succession planning to address aging partners and international alliances. "It's really, growth of our people, growth of our clients, all else follows. Cer-

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tainly people initiatives are in the forefront today."

People initiatives — not just women's initiatives — are growing increasingly important as work-life balance and career development issues pertain to both men and women. At Clifton Gunderson, for example, a new formal women's initiative has been rolled out in an effort to guide more female recruits into leadership positions.

"We have a lot of programs right now to help develop people in general, but we needed to really focus," McMasters said, pointing out that the initiative was on the drawing board before she became chief executive-elect. "The business case is really there. We believe it will benefit all employees, not just females."

According to Catalyst, a New York-based think tank that focuses on expanding opportunities for women in business, nearly 62 percent of all accountants and auditors are women. Women, according to the Catalyst report released this year, make up 19 percent of the partner population in firms, although they comprise 43 percent of all new hires.

LEARNING FROM LEADERS










In an effort to learn what makes women executives in accounting tick, *Accounting Today* posed a variety of questions to nine top-tier leaders about their management style and experience in a historically male-dominated profession (see box, left).

Not listening to one's instinct was named as one of the biggest mistakes that women make when they are first starting their career, and listening was listed as being their best management tip. Nearly all the interviewees have a workplace pet peeve (one is leaving dishes in the sink at the office) and all the women offered a pregnant pause when asked to describe

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All manner of management

Nine women leaders offer their advice on management and building a career

	Leadership style	Personal mantra	Biggest mistake women make when starting out	Best management tip	Best advice they've ever received
Lisa Cines Managing officer and president, Aronson & Co.	 Collaborating with individuals to move the firm forward and to move them forward.	"Never wear your feelings on your sleeve."	Not looking at their career as a life-long learning opportunity or a necessity.	Bring out the best in each of the individuals that work for you: "It's not one-size-fits-all."	Don't wear your feelings on your sleeve.
Lynne Doughtie National managing partner, U.S. advisory practice, KPMG LLP	 A combination of head, heart and gut.	"Einstein said his goal was 'not to become a man of success, but rather a man of value.'"	Giving up before they think through all the possibilities for a career in public accounting.	Be flexible with your career goals.	There are times where you need to take risks.
Lisa Knee Tax partner Berdon LLP	 By example: "I would never expect anything from [staff] that I wasn't willing to do myself."	"Be accountable."	Getting distracted: "Know your target and keep going."	Don't be afraid to roll up your sleeves and help out your team.	"Someone once told me I could not have it all and I wanted to prove them so wrong."
Michelle McDuffie Tax principal Haskell & White LLP	 Flexible and team-oriented, with high, yet realistic, expectations and goals.	"Cherish each moment and enjoy the journey."	Neglecting to plan ahead for life and career changes.	Being a good listener is essential.	When you no longer feel challenged, you have stopped growing.
Kimpa Moss Chief human resources officer, RSM McGladrey	 Direct: "I'm not conflict-avoidant."	"No drama."	Exhibiting traditional female traits: "Sitting back, not getting into the fray."	Don't avoid conflict — and don't be defensive.	Take a longer view of your career.
Karen Northup Founder and CEO Corefino	 Data-driven. "We make decisions based on data because I believe data tells the story."	"Work hard, play hard."	Not listening to their instincts.	Listen: "There's something you can learn from every interaction."	Believe in yourself.
Catherine M. Parente Partner-in-charge, Providence office, and PLC, consulting; exec committee, Carlin, Charron & Rosen	 Consensus building: "I try to get people to work together — and it's not always easy to do."	"I work hard and I play hard."	Gravitating exclusively to women's organizations and networking events.	Develop the ability to stay on top of things, to stay organized and in control.	Pick your battles.
Beth Salvati CEO HLB Gross Collins PC	 Laid back: "I delegate a lot. I definitely don't micromanage."	"Do your best and things will come your way, and always give back to the community."	Not being upfront and positive about their value to the company.	Model the behavior you expect from employees.	Don't take things personally: "In business, sometimes it's just business."
Billie Williamson Americas inclusiveness officer, Ernst & Young	 Listening: "I want to take input, but I'm not hesitant at all to make a decision."	"Treat other people the way I'd like to be treated."	Not building relationships in all aspects of business life: with clients, colleagues, bosses, etc.	Listen, and make sure people understand that you've heard them.	You need to make your friends before you need them.