More than just numbers

KPMG scholar Kathy Lim deals with people, not only figures, in her accountancy career

By LIM YANN LING

KPMG scholar Kathy Lim, 23, is grateful to be part of a supportive corporate culture.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) graduate in accounting and law has only joined the company’s transfer pricing unit last April, but she already feels like she has been part of the family for a long time.

“Even before I graduated, I was attending KPMG’s corporate events, talking to people in the various areas of specialisation and interning at the firm.

“Being part of all this helped me to confront the myths about the profession and to make an informed decision when it comes to specialising,” she says.

Coming from a family of cousins and aunts who studied accounting, the double-mathematics student from Hwa Chong Junior College sealed her decision to pursue the subject after completing an internship at the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS) after her A levels.

“Knowing that I wanted to do accountancy was one thing, but accountancy offers a broad field of possibilities.

“Starting out, it can be hard to find a focus — to decide which company to work for and in what area of specialisation. Being a scholar made all the difference to those first steps into the real world,” she says.

“I didn’t aim to become a scholar,” says the former school netball player.

But with an unexpected showing of As in her A levels, she decided to check out the various scholarships available.

“I wanted a company that has the resources and is willing to spend them on nurturing scholars. KPMG struck me as having a comprehensive career path mapped out for those awarded with its scholarship, which did not require ‘S’ papers, so I applied,” she says.

Ms Lim found that being a scholar helped to shape her accountancy dreams into reality.

“I had a network already in place, and there was just a lot less hassle to deal with,” she says.

Attracted to taxation since her IRAS experience, Ms Lim initially had doubts about her choice. She says:

“Tax is not as popular as audit. People tell me things like, ‘Once you do taxes, it’s for life.’ But then I thought, if it’s something I find interesting, why not?”

Starting out at the organisation, she found that being a scholar gave her an advantage.

“I felt I was given more challenging engagements and had greater exposure than I otherwise would have.

Although the company has added expectations of you as a scholar, you become more keenly aware of what you want out of your career and what you expect of the company as well,” she says.

Today, when time permits, she continues to play for her alumni netball club.

She credits SMU’s lesson structure for her seamless transition from classroom to working life.

“We had teaching seminars instead of normal lectures. Making presentations and speaking out in class were all part of the grading system.

“These mimic the reality of the workplace, where things are project-based and require you to take the initiative.”

Despite the impression that accountancy means looking at numbers, Ms Lim, an associate in transfer pricing, spends most of her working hours writing reports and meeting clients.

She says: “The nature of transfer pricing is a great degree of global cooperation. We interact a lot with KPMG’s offices in other cities through teleconferences to advise multinational corporations on different transfer pricing issues.

“I enjoy such international exposure. It’s not so much about numbers, but that suits me just fine.

“I have to work late sometimes, but the company is generous with acknowledging improvement and good work. Besides, I find my job interesting, that’s what counts.”

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For those contemplating a scholarship in accountancy, she says: “Try to find what interests you within the field. Being a scholar means managing expectations.

“These might change as you grow with the company, but persevere till the end and you will find it a worthwhile and fulfilling challenge.”

PHOTOS: JAMIE KOH