

Practice Talk: Fleur Holden from Sayer Vincent



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Each week, AccountingWEB speaks with an accountant in practice about their daily routines and life outside the profession. This week we're joined by Fleur Holden who was recently made a partner at the charity accountants Sayer Vincent.

While Holden has passed plenty of significant milestones on her ascension to partner, starting with her training at Grant Thornton in 1997, a key decision was to focus completely on the charity sector.

Speaking with Holden, it's clear Sayer Vincent focuses a great deal on client advisory skills and it is this aspect of her day-to-day life that she enjoys most about her job - going out and meeting clients.

Client education is a particularly fruitful strategy for Sayer Vincent and one which helped the firm [earn shortlisted recognition](#) at the Accounting Excellence awards in 2017.

It's something Holden has hands-on experience of, as she runs several of Sayer Vincent's training seminars, including trustee and board training.

Based in Birmingham, Holden's new role will see her continue this support for small and large charity clients, in addition to helping charities meet new and existing reporting requirements.

What's the first thing you do when you start your working day?

I actually like working early in the morning. I prefer to tackle something quite difficult or complex early because I feel that's when I am at my best. I like the sense of thinking that you get to 9am and you've already achieved something. I tend to leave emails until later in the day

Emails have taken hold over the profession, especially outside 'traditional hours' - is that something you're guilty of?

Yes, it's a problem and I think it's a problem for professional services in general. But I think the years of traditional office hours are changing.

I spend a lot of my time on the move, so I deal with email when it suits my day and that can be anytime. I don't tend to use my out of office anymore because I am very rarely in an office so it doesn't seem right to put an out of office on. The only time I do that is when I am on holiday. And then, you only check a little bit to preserve holiday time with family.

As a partner, you need to make sure things are ticking along and there aren't any emergencies to deal with. But generally, the world is a changing place and people need to work when it's convenient for them. It's a way of building your work life around your personal life. So if you need to take time out during the day to deal with a family issue or attend an appointment, you can catch up on that time later.

What do you do to escape the world of tax and accounts?

In a way I still use my skills and experience as an accountant: I am a trustee of a local charity supporting victims of domestic abuse. I think it's important to

still use your skills and experience when you can. In terms of proper downtime, I have two teenage boys who keep me very busy at weekends, driving them to various sporting matches. I enjoy spending time with my family. I have a dog, so I like getting fresh air and walking my dog.

Since you qualified what's been the biggest change you've noticed in the profession?

Because I am audit focused, I think it's the transition from being more of a traditional accountant and auditor into a business advisory role. The expectations from clients are ever-growing in terms of the services we provide and the value for money they're looking for from an audit, such as the additional training, support and expertise you're going bring to that audit relationship and getting down into the detail of what an organisation does - eg where the high areas of risk are, looking for where there might be operational deficits due to shortfalls in funding and how the organisation is managing and mitigating that particular risk. Technology is partly responsible for driving that change. There is more and more information available to us to review, manipulate and look at.

Can you remember your first calculator?

You know, I can't. I do have a big buttoned calculator that I like. Understanding numbers is key but the reason why I enjoy my job is that I love going out to clients and finding out about their organisations and what they do and how I can make them more effective. I do a lot of training: governance training, finance training, trustee responsibilities. I like to provide a constructive challenge to my clients and keep them up-to-date on technical issues and emerging issues.