

Intro:

Hello, and welcome to the CPA Australia Podcast; your weekly source for accounting education and career and leadership discussion.

Jackie Blondell:

You're never too young to start planning your career. While the best laid plans sometimes don't work out and they will change over time, having a career plan can help you focus on the skills you need to hone, the directions you would like to take and the decisions you might need to make. Today we focus on the career development of two different finance professionals. Kalpana Lal, FCPA is head of unit administration and finance for German international corporation, known as GIZ. She works at it's specific operations based in Suva, Fiji. Kalpana holds several board roles and she became chair of Vodafone Fiji earlier this year. Alex Lipa, CPA is financial planning and analysis manager with Catch, Wesfarmers' online marketplace. And as finance unit coordinator and economic and statistics e-learning advisor with Swinburne Online, he has a role developing the skills of the next generation of finance professionals. Welcome Kalpana and Alex.

Alex Lipa:

Thank you for having us.

Kalpana Lal:

Thank you, Jackie.

Jackie Blondell:

Lovely. Well, Kalpana, let's start with you. Tell us about your first job and how it contributed to planning your career. I believe you were tossing up your options when you were leaving school anyway.

Kalpana Lal:

Yes, I was Jackie. So I was tossing my options between doing law and doing accounting back in high school. So accounting got the better of me and I did a major in accounting. So my first job was that of an auditor with the office of the auditor general. So I vividly and fondly remember the days when I used to go out on field assignments, have interesting corridor chats and have constructive case discussions with my colleagues in addition to having entry and exit meetings with clients, placing focus on being solution-oriented with the overall objective of bringing about process improvements and accurate financial reporting.

Kalpana Lal:

So I tend to think that the skills that I acquired as an auditor has really set me up virtually for the career path that I wanted. It's dynamic and an ever evolving profession where you just get to learn so much, which gives you a solid bedrock enabling you to add value in the diverse roles. So contrary to the common myth that auditors and accountants are old fashioned number crunchers, the reality is that auditors help promote transparent financial reporting, which is crucial element of our highly integrated and global economy. So I tend to think that like any mission, there are rules of the road that we need to know before we are ready for the, if I may say, the big league. So gaining proficiency in finance and business processes as an auditor has prepared me well for senior managerial executive as well as board level positions.

Jackie Blondell:

Audit hones your investigative skills as well because it is a questioning role, even quite a junior level, I imagine.

Kalpana Lal:

Yes, naturally, because it prompts you to think, it compels you to think, and you tend to have an inquisitive mind. You look at things from different perspectives. And it's not just perhaps a particular area of business that you cast a focus on. You're looking at it from a holistic point of view. So that really gives you exposure across businesses. And that is something that I found really interesting and engaging.

Jackie Blondell:

Lovely. Thank you. Now, Alex, let's turn to you. Your career went quite a circuitous route, didn't it? Can we look at how you did arrive in finance as a career and how did you get your first finance job and how did it help set your career strategy?

Alex Lipa:

Yeah, thanks Jackie. Yeah, you're absolutely spot on. I don't think I knew where I was going to end up at any point in time until I actually ended up there. At the age of 18 finishing school, I think my main goal was to try and become a police officer of all jobs. And so my parents put their foot down, said, "Listen to me Alex, you're going to go get an education and then you're going to do what you want to do." So I went, got a bachelor of science, majoring in chemistry. And during that time, tried to fill my resume with police related experience, let's say. I did some time in the Army Reserve, tried to get experience doing subjects at school that would prepare me for that sort of a career, optional subjects in criminology.

Alex Lipa:

Unfortunately, when I finished university found out I had a vision issue with my eyes. So I was colorblind, unable to join, spent a long time looking deep within myself; what skills do I have? Where do I want to end up with my career? My then girlfriend now wife suggested, "Oh, why don't you look at postgraduate education?" It was a choice for me between continuing that science education and moving into something different. I ended up getting into a masters of commerce and my first lecture was one of economics, and just absolutely fell in love with it. It was the most interesting subject. I was absolutely fascinated by how humans behave and how markets work, how economies interact with each other. And that really set me off on a path of continually trying to study as much as possible even outside of the curriculum, just because I was so fascinated by it. And that led me down the path of finishing that masters of commerce and getting my first role as a graduate at Cole Supermarkets.

Jackie Blondell:

Did that start you thinking, this is the way I want to go, I want to do retail, commerce is my area, banking perhaps isn't an area I want to move into, which has a strong finance sector? How did that impress upon you that first role at Coles?

Alex Lipa:

Yeah. It's funny that you say that. When you're at university, sometimes you feel like... I'm sure many listeners will be able to sympathise. You often feel that there's either big four accounting firms or one of the banks and that's about it and everything else is everything else. And then you get out into the

workforce and you realise there are these huge industries, like supermarkets, FMCG, gas, energy, industrials that require very niche skill sets from their finance professionals. And once you insert yourself into these various industries, you find yourself being a really key player from a finance perspective.

Alex Lipa:

I think when I was at university, I had this misguided impression that if I didn't end up in a bank or in a major accounting firm, I would end up just processing journals and fixing up their MYOB, and you end up in a place like Coles and you're making decisions or you're helping people to make decisions or giving people the data and the advice they need to make decisions that you'll see on the shop floor the next day. You might tell your business partner that there's a certain trial that they're doing with a certain product that's not working out very well. And you go do your shopping on the weekend and you see that product gone and another one in its place. It's very empowering.

Jackie Blondell:

My God, I didn't realise you had so much power, Alex. That's crazy. Kalpana, you are a self acknowledged career planner. I know, because we've spoken before. Do you think it's ever too early or too late to start planning your career?

Kalpana Lal:

Well, I guess it depends on what sort of life experiences you've had and where you plan or where do you see yourself in time to come? And quite frankly my mother is my biggest motivator. She no longer is with us. However, she was not a career person. She was a homemaker, but she tried to place a very strong emphasis that my siblings and I have a good education, and that we pursue our dreams and we follow our heart and the sky's the limit. So I guess in Fiji, if I reflect Jackie, perhaps one of the limitations that we have is as far as advising career planning goes, when you join university also obviously they are sessions, orientation, where you would receive some level of guidance. But it takes quite a bit of soul searching where you really have to do a lot of research for yourself to understand where you want to go.

Kalpana Lal:

I guess each individual, they have got unique aspirations and it's important to really see that you end up in a career or a profession where you find some level of self-fulfilment. So for me, this was the case and I reflected quite a bit on what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be. So my view really is that the earlier you start planning your career, the sooner you can build a career you really want, and it helps you to realise your goals faster. So I suppose it's quite important to set both short-term and long-term goals and acquire or gain the training that you need to master new skills and abilities, which will in a way set you up for success because planning will undoubtedly... it will set you up for success, I believe. Yet sometimes this aspect is a quite overlooked component of our 8:00 to 5:00 job, because what we tend to do is we get so immersed or so caught up in our work that we tended not to cast an eye towards the future.

Kalpana Lal:

And this is naturally a mistake that even a lot of aspiring career professionals tend to make. So I believe that the earlier you plan, the earlier you're able to get a strong foothold in your career, and for whatever reasons. And this we see tends to happen quite a lot. I mean, even on the back of COVID, we see that

this is happening; digital transformation is accelerating, there are new industries which are coming in. So perhaps what we had prepared ourselves for may not be so relevant in this day and age or time to come, and we want to have a shift. So if we do need to have that shift, at least it gives us enough time without losing the odd of age or time not being on our side. So in a way, my mantra or my motto is that I believe career planning is quite crucial because if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. As simple as that.

Jackie Blondell:

Yes, and I think that's something really important to remember, because when you're in your very early twenties in your first job, you're living very much in the now. But as you also point out, the COVID experience has given us... we're stuck in stasis, but around us things outside are changing, so I think that's a really interesting point. Alex, what are your views?

Alex Lipa:

Yeah. Look, I echo a lot of Kalpana's views there. I think when I look at maybe some of my peers from a few years ago or some up and coming accountants I see coming through whatever company I'm in at the time, sometimes they have a laser like focus that can almost be a detriment to their planning. I think there's sometimes not enough flexibility in people's plans. I know I've seen people in accounting firms, for instance, who have spent 10, maybe 12 years there. And their motivation is to get to a certain point, let's say, director or partner, and they don't have that flexibility to be able to recognise opportunities when they present themselves.

Alex Lipa:

So I know I've spoken to friends or acquaintances who have said, "Geez, in my sixth year at whatever accounting firm they're at, this great company offered me a role and I turned them down and I really wish I hadn't because I would have been able to expand my experience. And if I had gotten out of that mindset of having to be a partner or having to be a director, and that's the only path available to me, I might actually be in a different and potentially better place now."

Jackie Blondell:

Sometimes in some of the big firms, you do live in an internal tube where they are directing you onwards and upwards because they want to keep their talent pool. So it's pretty hard to get that greater world into your career plans, if that's the situation you find yourself in. So I think that's a really good insight. Alex, how much of your career is down to planning and how much is happenstance? Can you give some examples?

Alex Lipa:

I think a lot of it is happenstance. I mean, I explained to you previously my story with various career choices, even before I got into the finance industry. Once I was in the finance industry, I even still had a little bit of that focus going, "Okay, now I'm in retail/FMCG. That's going to be me." And four years later, suddenly I was in the gas industry and I had to say, "Okay, it's no longer FMCG, it's no longer that daily grind of looking at the numbers. It's about long-term planning, it's about considering infrastructure projects that won't be online for another five years. How do we plan for that? How do we as finance professionals look beyond the weekly cycle of sales and profit, and be able to think long-term about capital investment." And so if I was closed off in my career to other opportunities outside of retail, I never would have gotten that experience. And then I brought that back into retail when I went back in,

and actually made myself more, or at least I like to think so, a more competitive team member when I rejoined.

Jackie Blondell:

That's a really interesting perspective, because as you told us earlier that you had discussions with someone at Coles and then over the weekend, you saw your discussions bear fruition, what was available on the shelves. And then before that, you're in a job where you're working on tremendous timelines into the future. Having different experiences can give you different perspectives, even though your core role may be for example, finance, but you get to see a bigger picture of how it works. Would that be the case?

Alex Lipa:

I 100% agree. When I was in the gas industry, I remember my manager at the time saying, "Let's take a step back from finance. Let's have a look at what other skills we can develop." And him pushing me to do things in the project management space, even in the tax space, which I had had no experience in up to that time. And he was really keen on developing my career and developing my skillset. And I think that touches on a point on which I know you haven't asked about, which is that your career planning can be really beneficially impacted by those around you, and especially your managers. If they take a keen interest in your career, they can really help you plan out and get some valuable skillsets.

Jackie Blondell:

Oh, I think that's amazing that you had a manager like that. I think that's a wonderful thing. We will talk about influences further down the track because I think that's an absolutely wonderful thing. Now Kalpana, I want to ask you if you've experienced happy career accidents, because I find your career quite interesting in the fact that you're in this major audit role focus, and then you moved to GIZ, which is an international sustainable agency. Can you talk about that move and whether there was any happy accident involved, or was it a career plan to take a complete shift?

Kalpana Lal:

Yeah. I guess my career trajectory is a bit of both, Jackie. On one hand, I would attribute it to a fair bit of planning. And on the other hand, perhaps partially it is down to happenstance. So I guess if I'm to reflect on how my career trajectory has fanned out, working in the field of accounting, financial planning and management can be attributed to an extent to planning. And perhaps this could be due to the fact as I often get feedback from my friends and my siblings is that I tend to be quite organised. I would ideally want to row up my ducks and I would know, this is the path or direction that I really would want to go down to. But of course with being mindful of the fact that there should be some degree of flexibility on accommodating certain things as I go along.

Kalpana Lal:

So I knew that I wanted to study accounting from the time that I was in high school. And from my standpoint, the skills that I acquired as an accountant or auditor are... and this is something that I see if I relate it to the governance roles, are quite versatile and transferable to any business, organisation or institution. I would say that much earlier in my career, I did receive offers to go into different fields and to work in other business areas, such as business analysis, marketing, product development, et cetera. However, I did try to remain steadfast with my intention to pursue a career in accounting and eventually

to reach an executive position, which I did. Now, the happenstance part was, and perhaps to touch Jackie on the fact that I started my career as an auditor and then I went into the not-for-profit sector.

Kalpana Lal:

So I guess come a time where you feel that you have enhanced your knowledge and you have equipped yourself with sufficient competence, experience and know-how, that you're ready for the next big thing. And I saw this in GIZ, the current organisation that I work for. So that career shift, I would say in terms of focus was quite different for me. But when I came in and I had a lot of appreciation for the processes that were set up and quite a bit I did myself. So it was an interesting challenge. And I grew with the organisation. This is perhaps one of those places where I stayed and I just grew with the organisation. So it was an interesting challenge and I'm glad that I took that plunge. So coming back to your point on governance, I guess Jackie governance was much of the happenstance for me.

Jackie Blondell:

Okay. Was it a big shift for you? Was it like a leap of faith as a planner to shift from audit to this different world? Was that a happy accident that ended up in a whole new career path blossoming?

Kalpana Lal:

Yeah. Actually I would call it a happy accident and an interesting one too. I actually thought that I had quite a bit of leverage or upper hand when I came from audit and I joined the GIZ in my role as an accountant at time. So I brought my experiences from my audit background and I related it to GIZ. So it really helped me to establish a strong foundation. And I looked at things from a very neutral perspective in the sense that, how can I bring about process improvements? How can we implement innovative systems, et cetera? With that said, GIZ has pretty much, I would say, progressive systems already in place. So it just helped me to be able to contribute and to enhance what we already had. So I would say that was a plus really.

Jackie Blondell:

Okay, lovely. Now, Alex, let's talk about which role has helped you spread your wings and develop your career in a new direction. You talked about having a great supervisor, a great boss who encouraged you to develop skills further than your primary skill set. So we can perhaps talk about it as a career role, but also maybe let's look at the influences of others in your career that have helped.

Alex Lipa:

Yeah. That's a great point. So that specific manager I talked about, Rod, he was fantastic. He wasn't actually in finance. He was an engineer by trade and worked in operations. And I was his finance business partner in the gas industry. He was very unique in his way of managing people. He was definitely incredibly hands-off when he needed to be, and was able to very quickly step in and say, "Okay, I can see you don't have the skillset to complete this. Let's step back, let's train, let's practise, whatever we need to do to get you where you need to be."

Alex Lipa:

I remember one particular, I've been in a role for a few months. I was doing mainly finance related things; analysis, reporting, modelling, and he called me into his office and he said, "Look, there's a couple of projects I want you to take on. They're not going to be finance related. One has to do with Kaizen production efficiencies. One has to do with some taxation credits that we think we're owed. And

another one has to do with the deployment of some IT software." And none of these had anything to do with finance, but he explained to me, he sat me down, he pulled up a whiteboard and he explained how my current skill set in finance was going to be able to be an asset to these projects. He goes, "You're good at modelling, you're very good at analysis, and you're able to think critically. So Kaizen production planning is right up your alley. It may not be a "finance skillset", but you can apply your finance skills to this and succeed very well."

Alex Lipa:

And I think the most interesting part of the way that he arranged or organised my career development was he said, "Okay. Here's these three projects. You have all the resources at your disposal that you'll need. Come see me in 12 months when they're done, if you don't need my help." And that really empowered me. It made me be able to say, "Okay. I'm going to do A, B and C in this project plan." I get to B and I say, "Oh, geez, I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm flailing a little bit." And I can just go back to him, and he helps me develop those skills I need to complete it. By the end of those 12 months when I had completed those projects, I felt like I'd learned more in that time than I had in some ways than I'd learned at school. It was absolutely fantastic.

Alex Lipa:

I think that everyone in this room would be able to appreciate the fact that every role makes you into the person you are today, and every role has played a part. If I look back at my time at Coles, the one thing that's great about such a large organisation like that is they systemize their career development. So they really give you a framework to work around. Whilst in a smaller company you probably have the freedom to do more, a larger company has that institutional knowledge to be able to say, "Hey, Alex, here's a three page document that says all the skill sets you need for your next promotion, and point 7, point 11 and point 14 are your opportunities, so let's focus on those."

Alex Lipa:

And you knock those off and then they say, "Okay, now you're in the candidate pool for your next career step." And there's various documents like this and you're able to really say, "I want to travel in X direction or Y direction. I want to go down the financial reporting path. No, I'm more interested in business partnering." And so you're able to get that benefit out of those larger companies, like a large retailer, such as Coles.

Jackie Blondell:

Okay. Lovely. Now, Kalpana, let's talk about what role helped you develop as a career professional because you are also a very active board director, so I'm just quite interested if the work at GIZ and it obviously is a large international operation with many training opportunities, is there any particular role that you took there that helped build your board career, that side of your career, or any particular manager that you worked with that also helped along the way?

Kalpana Lal:

Sure. Thanks, Jackie. I would be happy to talk about that. And then as Alex has shared, I definitely concur with Alex on that, that it's about our lifelong experiences and perhaps even from a very early stage in our career and progressing further up and perhaps to where we are today has shaped who we are. We have been lifelong learners and there have been experiences good or bad which have shaped who we are today. And I guess a fair bit of what we do tend to learn in life is out of our failures as opposed to our

success. And I think well, people tend to see failures as perhaps a no-go or something that is a taboo to talk about. But I tend to think that by sharing our failures, it makes us very humane and it enables us to also learn off us as well as learn off others.

Kalpana Lal:

Now, when I come to a perhaps yes, in a way I'm glad that I joined GIZ when I did, because probably to share a smaller story... So I joined GIZ in capacity as accountant. I was still quite green in my career back then. And as I progress with GIZ, GIZ as an organisation also grew rather rapidly here in Fiji and the Pacific to a point where we needed to have a position created for head of finance and administration. So what happens is traditionally we've had expatriates fill this role. And when this position came up, my project director at the time said that we need to get somebody out of perhaps Germany, or we need to get somebody out of perhaps Europe or Asia region.

Kalpana Lal:

So I reflected quite a bit and I thought to myself then that I'm quite prepared. I had just completed my CPA programme. And I guess my performance assessments were going great. And time and time again, I had proved myself. So at that time, I must say that it did take quite a bit of courage to muster that courage and to walk into my boss's office at that time, because probably fast forward now, it would be an easy conversation to have over coffee, but you get the jitters when you're still perhaps trying to come out from a cocoon into a butterfly and you really have to put in quite a lot of effort and courage in terms of making your point.

Kalpana Lal:

So I had a discussion with my boss and I said, "Herman, I have been in this position for quite some time. And obviously from the looks of my performance assessment, you've been quite happy with what I'm doing. So if you could perhaps identify to me, what is it that I'm not perhaps fulfilling which would enable me to meet the requirements of this head of finance and administration position." So he reflected, and we had a good conversation. And then I went home, I ran away in the sense that I thought I have that off my chest. Now, whatever happens, let's see. But I still thought that I was very well placed because of the professional development and because of other development measures that I had undertaken to prepare myself for that position, and I honestly did.

Kalpana Lal:

So the next day when I came, he came to me and he sat down. So I thought, let's see what it's going to be. And he said, "I had a discussion with our head office and they have agreed that they are going to give this position to you on a trial basis for six months." And then I silently said, yes. So from there on, there was a training plan that was laid out for me. I had to go to Germany for three months and I had to go undergo orientation programme. And my child was still quite small. He was six months old, so I had to stay away from him, which was a kind of... You feel [inaudible 00:31:06].

Jackie Blondell:

Particularly we have learnt that women often have to take that leap to ask to get the job. So well done. I mean, I think you've smashed a few glass ceilings in Fiji, have you not? Weren't you the first female accountant of the year?

Kalpana Lal:

Yes, Jackie. I'm humbled to say that I was. I was the first female to be awarded the Chartered Accountant of the Year in 2016.

Jackie Blondell:

You're also the only local executive and woman on the executive team for GIZ Pacific. Is that...

Kalpana Lal:

That's correct. Yes.

Jackie Blondell:

Well, it's a lesson in always having to ask and you did extremely well to do that.

Kalpana Lal:

Yeah, absolutely, Jackie. And I must say that when I went for that preparatory process to Germany, I was thrown pretty much in the deep end. I had to learn the German language, my day was full of activities, events and those three months really flew by fast. And I guess it also boils down to having to make certain sacrifices in life. I mean, I must say that at that point in time, my priority definitely was my child, but I guess we also perhaps have to recognise, and this is something that I'm cognizant of is that in our part of the world, the opportunities are quite limited. So sometimes when we withdraw from taking a leap, then we don't know when that opportunity will come again and fast forward now, I'm able to spend more quality time with my kids and to engage better with them. And I guess it also boils down to certain choices that we have to make in life at a certain point in time.

Kalpana Lal:

So I guess coming to the factor on spreading wings and being able to develop my career in a new direction, that was pretty much the stepping stone for me, that role with GIZ as the head of finance and administration advisor, where I acted in the executive management role, and I was a go-to person for our project and executive leads. And at the same time, it gave me tremendous exposure on project management strategy and governance matters as well. So when the board opportunity came up, I thought it's... and I was asked to be appointed on certain boards. I put my hand up because I thought I was pretty much prepared.

Jackie Blondell:

So that was that role that led board. So if you hadn't asked for the job in the first place, it would be very interesting to look at your board career now. So it's a very interesting circular experience.

Kalpana Lal:

Indeed.

Jackie Blondell:

Yeah. Along the way, you had touched on the fact that you did get lots of training. So can we talk about training and further education? How important is it? And we talk about lifelong learning to the point where it's such a cliché now, but can we actually give it a bite of reality and talk about its importance?

Kalpana Lal:

Yeah, absolutely. Jackie, I believe that getting that right trainings and further education has to a large extent enabled me to master new skills and abilities. And if I reflect really, it has helped me reach the goals in the sense of getting a foot in the door and in moving up the ladder. For example, when I attained the CPA qualification, including a number of other professional development measures, it paved the way for me at work as far as promotions are concerned. And I guess this is an aspect that also was quite crucial when I had the discussion with my boss on taking up that expatriate role right here in Fiji.

Kalpana Lal:

So I guess that upskilling is crucial for any professional, not just for me and perhaps Alex would also agree. It just keeps you on your toes and enables you to quickly come up with speed and respond to the ongoing and emerging issues which tends to affect our businesses organisations. And I made reference to the COVID situation and how the operating dynamics has really shifted. And I guess as executives, we're expected to be versatile or multi-skilled, and it really boils down to our ability to be able to add value.

Jackie Blondell:

Oh, absolutely. And Alex, I both don't know how you find the time for your jobs and your extracurricular and your other jobs. But you're also a professional educator. So you actually work with nascent finance students. So what are your thoughts on the relationship between further education and training and career development?

Alex Lipa:

I find myself obviously interacting with up-and-coming accountants, and not all of them plan to be accountants. Some of them are just upskilling in their current roles, some of them want to move in a bit of a different direction, for instance, financial planning. But those up-and-coming accountants, I do interact with, I do find myself offering advice, which I didn't think I would be offering when I was studying myself. So I find myself in one-on-one situations with students and them saying, "Oh, I'm really concerned that I don't understand this really specific concept in terms of financial markets or this formula doesn't make sense."

Alex Lipa:

And I always give them the same advice. I go, "Stand back. Think about the context of what you're learning. Your financial education is going to be lifelong. You aren't going to finish this degree or this diploma, and then never learn anything again. If you don't pick up everything now, you'll pick it up at some other point, if you need it." And that's the benefit of lifelong learning. I want to say, if you create this paradigm for yourself, where you have a three-year window to learn everything you're going to need for your career, you're going to be putting so much pressure on yourself that you're bound to set yourself up to fail. If you view your education as something that happens from the time you're five to the time you're 80 or 90, then you can actually approach your education holistically. And you can say, "Okay, this isn't that important now, but maybe it will be important later." And I think that that's something that I try to pass on to the students who come through my classes or through my groups or through my tutorials.

Jackie Blondell:

I mean, you're obviously a keen reader and keen student of economics. But yourself, do you find that constant training is something that you do or constant education?

Alex Lipa:

I think to the frustration of my wife, sometimes she says to me, "Geez. Alex, you can never sit still." I might sign up for a short course, let's say a CPI short course, or a Coursera or something like that. And once I finish that, I'll suddenly get an interest in... maybe that day I was business partnering with someone in the IT field, and they were telling me something about cybersecurity, and I'll go find a short course about that, or a book about that on Amazon, order it and just devour it. And it's that constant curiosity which enables me to keep my options open in my career, because I'm not steadfast locked into, okay, at the moment, I'm working in the online marketplace space, and I'm not locking myself into only learning about that.

Alex Lipa:

And sometimes in your current role, you'll be able to draw upon education that you've done previously. So I spent time learning about solar panels and renewables for a role I had in sustainability. And I'm able to bring that to my current role, even though FP&A has nothing to do with sustainability. I was able to advise them on projects that they want to do to instal solar panels on fulfilment centres.

Alex Lipa:

So it's really important to be able to continually draw upon a vast breadth of knowledge and you don't get that without continuous learning. And I think the most important thing about continuous learning is it doesn't always have to be formal. It doesn't have to be something that gives you a certificate at the end. Your continuous learning is through books, through YouTube, through Coursera. Even through the number of times I've asked engineers to come and have lunch with me to explain to me concepts of projects that we're working on. And everyone's always happy to help. Nobody ever doesn't want to talk about the job that they do, because that's why they do that job. And you can get so much knowledge from people like that.

Jackie Blondell:

That is true. I think bringing up the idea that lunch is a very educational experience is a very important point. So thank you for that, Alex. Alex, Kalpana also mentioned professional accreditation. Was that important in your career?

Alex Lipa:

Yeah. That was incredibly important in my career, for sure. At the end of the day, I don't even think CPA was ever a choice for me. It was just in my head, it was always just assumed. I think the CPA designation is important because apart from the technical skills you get and the commercial skills, you get people look to that to say, "This person is trustworthy. This person has gone through a rigorous selection process and a rigorous education process that included a lot of ethics training." And this CPA professional is able to be trusted. And their advice is rooted in a place of systematic adherence to the accounting frameworks, both in the letter and in spirit.

Jackie Blondell:

Yeah. I think that ends us on a very searching note, which is going to be very good for the future. A big thank you to Kalpana Lal and Alex Lipa for joining us today. Your insights into your careers and their development have been valuable. Thank you both.

Kalpana Lal:

Thank you, Jackie. And thank you, Alex.

Alex Lipa:

Thank you, Jackie and great speaking with you, Kalpana.

Outro:

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