A look into PwC’s Assurance practice

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Professionals in PwC’s US Assurance practice work closely with public and private companies to help solve complex business issues. Serving the public interest, they also support the capital markets system through reliable financial reporting.

PwC Assurance teams ask questions, test assumptions, and make sure companies are reporting information on which investors and others can rely. PwC Assurance professionals combine deep technical skills and sector experience to help our clients address the challenges of a rapidly changing environment and strengthen their businesses.

Speaking with *On Campus* newsletter, Ashley Saddock, an Experi­enced Associate in the Assurance practice, talked about her experi­ences—her path from college to a role with the firm—and the career flexibility and opportunities for learning, leadership, and advance­ment she has discovered working at PwC.

***Ashley Saddock***

**Assurance – Technology, Products, & Services**

**Market: Charlotte, NC**

**Joined PwC: September 2010**

**College: University of North Carolina–Charlotte**

***Finding flexibility***

After graduation, Ashley Saddock, an English Literature major from the University of North Carolina–Greensboro, stumbled upon her inter­est in the profession when she relocated to Michigan and accepted an accounting position with an insurance and risk management firm. “I initially took the job just to pay my bills while I looked for something else,” she said. “But after a very short time, I discovered I really liked ac­counting.” Over her tenure there, she developed a strong accounting foundation, eventually working her way into a position in financial statement reporting and as manager of regula­tory compliance. In her fourth year with the company, Ashley decided she wanted to take her professional career a step further and become a CPA, which meant going back to school. Having worked alongside auditors through three exter­nal audits as a client she decided, “I’m going to give auditing a go.”

Moving back to North Carolina, Ashley obtained a master’s degree in accounting at the Univer­sity of North Carolina–Charlotte and quickly decided she wanted to work for PwC. After an internship with PwC in 2009, she accepted a full-time position in the Assurance practice. “I requested to be placed in the Financial Services practice and specifically focus on insurance companies—which was a great match for my experience.”

For two years, Ashley audited clients within the insurance industry, at which point she deter­mined that she was at a good point in her career to branch away from the insurance industry to enhance both her accounting and audit skills in another industry. “Leveraging PwC’s internal mobility, I transferred out of Financial Services and into the Technology, Products and Services practice to gain valuable experience,” she ex­plained. Today, she works on public manufactur­ing and retail Assurance clients. Throughout her career at PwC, Ashley has appreciated the great degree of flexibility and the opportunities which have enabled her to further define her career path and diversify her professional experience.

Ashley not only found flexibility in her day-to-day work, but also the way in which her work is completed. She has been able to coordinate “work from home days” and flexibility with her work hours, while still meeting client demands, which has had a positive impact on her ability to balance work with her personal life. “Working from home or having the ability to work alterna­tive hours gives me the flexibility to be able to make a personal meeting, or a doctor’s appoint­ment, or a family event when needed. As long as client needs are met, I feel support from my teams for this flexibility. I’ve been able to coor­dinate my schedule with my teams to be sure I don’t have to sacrifice important personal events in my life for work. I can balance life and work without sacrificing one for the other. I work with amazing people and my teams are very understanding and supportive.”

***Becoming a CPA***

It’s critical to get your credential in order to grow your career at PwC. Ashley focused on completing all of her exams in the three months before she started working at the firm. “I’d sug­gest taking the CPA exam early—when you’re still in a study mode, after you have just gradu­ated, but you haven’t started working yet. Treat your CPA like a class and finish your last class,” she said. However, for those who wait to take the CPA until you join the firm, Ashley com­mented, “On my teams, we are always mindful of who is studying and when tests are scheduled, encouraging and helping those individuals to balance their workload with studying prior to the tests.”

***Leveraging GADM (Global Assurance Delivery Model )***

Engagement teams collaborate with GADM team members to manage and complete the various parts of a client engagement. This type of collaboration helps streamline certain audit activities. “We put together background briefs and instructions for GADM, and then they be­come just like another team member who helps to accomplish tasks and get the audit completed.” Using GADM allows first year associates and experienced associates the ability to better use the time they spend with our clients, often tak­ing a deeper dive into their business. It also affords them the opportunity to strengthen valuable project management and coaching skills, as they are often the team members who make decisions pertaining to how the work is completed, are the points of contact for the tasks, and typically perform the first level of review.

Working with GADM represents to Ashley yet another opportunity that she has used to grow her own way with PwC and to set her own course for her future with the firm. “I have al­ways volunteered to manage the GADM projects on my teams, because it is another opportunity for me to demonstrate my knowledge of audit­ing and accounting and to further develop man­agerial and leadership skills,” Ashley said. “As I see it, my ability to own and control the work I do and to become a leader within the firm can only be progressed—or limited—by my own ambition and drive. So, I’ve communicated what I’d like to do to my network so that people think of me when opportunities arise. Of course you can’t get everything you want, but each assignment I’ve had has taught me something new and valuable, and I’ve always managed to have the interactions to gain the project man­agement and leadership skills I’ve wanted and needed to reach my career goals. It’s all about keeping up constant communication with your teams and mentors: where do you want your career to go and what can you do today, next week, or next year to get there?”

***Opportunities for leadership***

In addition to the finding leadership opportuni­ties in audit fieldwork, Ashley has sought to widen her vision of leadership to include PwC at a national level and to her community. In the fall of 2011, Ashley accepted an invitation to serve on the Assurance Experience Council as the experienced associate representative for the Carolinas market. “I’ve been honored to repre­sent my peer group to national leadership. All the major players in the firm’s Assurance prac­tice are present at Assurance Experience Coun­cil meetings, seeking ideas and feedback on how to evolve the business,” Ashley said. Topics that have been addressed by the council include changes that will have an impact on the firm’s culture and how to keep people engaged, happy, and excited about the work they do and PwC. “All of the Assurance leaders are there and they want to get feedback from us,” she said. “They present their ideas to us for our feedback and often ask us to present our solutions to leader­ship. Then the roles are reversed and we have an opportunity to bring our ideas and sug­gestions to the national level. The goal is to gen­erate a two-way dialogue with leadership that is innovative and that will make PwC an even better place than it already is to work and grow your career. As a representative for the Caroli­nas, it’s a great opportunity to solicit comments from my market, and to then raise those thoughts to the people who can make a differ­ence. That all feels pretty good, knowing that PwC is interested in hearing our perspectives, and that our input is important to the firm.”

Outside of PwC, Ashley is an active board mem­ber and chair of the finance committee for Char­lotte Concerts, a local non-profit organization, where she joins her accounting knowledge with her love of classical music. “We bring music education into the Charlotte community with concerts and outreach programs. We also pur­chase dozens of musical instruments each year for community school children and sponsor elementary and high school orchestras and bands. Being part of the PwC community through work, both locally and nationally, is very enriching—but taking the skills I’ve gained from working at PwC and sharing them with the community, to directly impact people out­side of work is what brings the PwC experience full-circle.”

Learn more about PwC’s Assurance practice.