

Andrea Garcia--Breaking the Gender Barrier to Accounting Success

Mary Marshall

The sun-drenched skies, sculpted rock formations and Saguaro cactus of the high desert are part of the landscape that Andrea Garcia calls home. Garcia, a native of Phoenix, Arizona, is proud of her Hispanic heritage and feels fortunate to be able to crossover the language barrier from English to Spanish and collaborate in two languages as a bilingual accountant.

"So many people within the Hispanic community appreciate someone who can speak Spanish in everyday business interactions," said Garcia. "Especially when it comes to tax accounting. It truly makes everyone feel comfortable and at home when you can convey the message in their own language."

Garcia, an entrepreneur and founder of her own accounting firm AG Tax and Accounting as well as an accountant with Nahrwold Associates in Phoenix, received a wealth of opportunity that opened many doors for her as a Hispanic woman in a male dominated profession like accounting.

"I landed a part-time administrative job with Nahrwold Associates, a small accounting firm, while still in college," Reminisced Garcia. 27. "The owner, Allen Nahrwold, noted my interest in business and finance. He became my mentor in the field of tax accounting. Many employees were part-time college students, such as me, who left the firm and moved on to other jobs. I ultimately stayed and learned the accounting business from the ground up. I have never found that being a woman or Hispanic has been an issue-- if anything it has been an asset since I speak Spanish as well as English. That is an area where many young Hispanic women could find themselves in a career, and truly excel rapidly by being able to speak both languages."

Now into several months of being a business owner Garcia has discovered the freedom of creating her own business identity while remaining a Nahrwold employee.

"This is the best of both worlds," said Garcia, "being able to work for myself and Nahrwold. I am building a great network based off referrals and additional business contacts provided by Nahrwold. It is amazing how the clients and referrals come when people discover you are starting a new business."

When contemplating college following high school graduation, Garcia's exemplary grades led to a wealth of scholarship opportunities including several that she received from the Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance, an educational and professional association for women in the field of finance and accounting, headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky. Garcia has since completed a master's degree in accounting and plans to complete the two phases of the CPA exam by the end of the year.

"The AFWA scholarships were so beneficial to my college success," said Garcia. "The whole organization has been a wonderful education and networking experience. I joined our local AFWA chapter (East Mesa and Phoenix Chapters) shortly after finishing college. Now I am the president of East Mesa and enjoying every minute of it. It is a great way to network, make friends in your profession, create revenue streams, and get involved in the community. I have also served for several years on the national AFWA Board of Directors and that has been aa wonderful experience."

Garcia's advice to young women interested in pursuing a profession as an accountant or in the field of finance includes becoming an intern for valuable experience and finding a mentor to guide you down the career path of choice. She also believes that it is important to join a professional organization while still attending college, like the AFWA, that offers a student membership and scholarship opportunities.

"Working as an intern in a position is a wonderful chance to discover if accounting or finance is the career path you want to follow," said Garcia. "It is even more beneficial to find a mentor to help you learn the ropes and give you advice along the way, help develop skills, and create your business acumen. It is also important to join a professional organization, like the AFWA, to develop soft skills, networking, and leadership skills. Women are underrepresented in the field of finance and accounting. There are so many opportunities available it just takes making yourself aware, willing to step out of your comfort zone and into a role where you can learn, lead, excel and grow in your business and interpersonal skills."