



CONDUCTING A CAREER SEARCH FOR A CAREER IN A CGA PUBLIC PRACTICE FIRM

An Accounting Career, Not a Job

When public practitioners fill staff positions for their CGA firm, they are interested in members and students who desire a career not a “job” in public practice. This is mainly due to the tremendous amount of time and cost associated with fully training an individual who has no prior public practice experience. The goal is for you to ultimately be able to work unsupervised but, it will take the better part of your first year before you are capable of doing this well.

What is public practice?

In industry a CGA uses their accounting skills in the context of the private or public company that employs them. For example, the CGA’s employer may manufacture products or provide services. The CGA deals only with the accounting cycle of their employer.

When the employer is a CGA public practice firm, its staff is employed to offer services to the public, including but not limited to, traditional services such as financial statement and tax return preparation and accounting, assurance and advisory services. The public practice firm’s staff deal with the accounting cycle and needs of each client and is independent of their client’s staff. Depending on the CGA firm, there may be other services provided to the public such as management consulting, auditing services, tax and estate planning and computer consulting. Niche areas may also be developed such as forensic accounting, business valuations and eldercare.

Public practice attracts those who enjoy the constant change of dealing with clients in a variety of industries and providing specific services to each. Success in public practice requires the use of a broad array of skills, knowledge and experience, gained both through the CGA program of studies and on-the-job experience. In addition to the expected mastery of technical skills, strong people and organizational skills are a must.

If this type of career interests you, then read on about how you can increase your chances of beginning your accounting career in a CGA public practice firm.

Become Familiar with CGA Firms

If you moved to a new city and needed to find a lawyer, doctor or dentist, how would you go about doing this? One of the quickest and most reliable methods is to ask family, friends or co-workers if they could recommend someone. It’s no different in seeking a career in a public practice firm. To find the CGA firms you may consider interviewing with, you must ask questions in the CGA community. Even when firms advertise positions, how will you know if this is a firm suited to your career goals? Because public practice firms are privately owned companies, they are not obligated to release company information. However, there are other means at your disposal that will provide you with valuable information.

To do a proper career search, you must invest time to learn from other CGAs and students, about the reputation, style and quality of specific firms. How to do this?

Use the Resources of your Association

- Attend CGA chapter events (both social and educational) and network with those attending. Public practitioners as well as those in industry attend these events. The more people you meet and inform that you are seeking a position in public practice, the more you increase the possibility of finding a position.
- Attend Public Practice Speed Interview Nights held in the spring and fall each year (currently only available in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley).
- Register for the [Per Diem Listing Service](#) if you already have Canadian public practice experience. Per diem work provides exposure to the public practice environment and may lead to permanent placement.
- Use the [Find a CGA Firm](#) directory to develop a list of firms you wish to target. This section lists all firms asking for referrals - not all CGA firms in B.C.
- Register with [CGAjobs.org](#). This is CGA-BC's career website for members and students. Post your resumé to the site, making clear your interest in public practice accounting.

Other Methods

- Learn about a CGA firm through their website. You may find valuable information about the firm's philosophy, style, size, niche areas and specifics about the owners. Find either through a general search on the Internet or use the [Find a CGA Firm](#) directory. If the firm is listed and has a website, a link will be provided.
- Do informational interviews with CGA practitioners (but not during tax season!).
- Have a business card printed with your name and contact information. Use whenever an appropriate opportunity for networking presents itself. Students, be aware of Rule R614 that forbids any CGA reference while having student status. Accounting student would be a more appropriate title.
- Prepare a brief statement that can be used in social settings, explaining what type of career you are developing and what you'd like the listener to do for you. For example:

"I am seeking a career in public practice with a firm that will give me experience with clients in a broad range of industries. Are you aware of any firms of this type looking for staff? If not, feel free to keep my card on hand in case you become aware of future opportunities."

If you wish to discuss your career possibilities in public practice, contact [Brigitte Ilk](#), CGA, in the Public Practice Division.

If you are considering a career in public practice, see [Register in Public Practice](#).