

The unprofessionals

Elaine Clark deplores inappropriate behaviour in any form in the workplace and urges a rethink in attitudes



A great many emotions passed through me as I read, in December, about the various sackings of staff demonstrating inappropriate behaviour in the top flight accountancy firms; not least that of where professional behaviour has gone to in the profession.

Putting my personal feelings and opinions aside, what is very important from this awful news is that people are suffering at the hands of those who ought to know better. That is wrong and the profession, not least the accountancy bodies, ought to be stepping in and not only setting high moral standards but making sure they are followed.

Cultural change

Behaviours need to change and fast; starting at the very top, with the promotion across the board of cultural intolerance to inappropriate behaviour of any kind. As we know, culture changes take a while to filter through and while we will push for change, those who are suffering need help in the meantime.

Don't get me wrong; I am not condemning a little bit of banter in the workplace. We spend a lot of time there. So having a bit of a laugh and a joke should be OK. However there is a line between acceptable banter and inappropriate behaviour. The problem seems to be that, for some, knowing where the line is appears to be difficult. The line has moved over the years and some of the 'old school' accountants may have failed to keep up. Just because it may have been 'acceptable' (was it ever acceptable?) in the past doesn't make it right now. It is incumbent upon the accountancy profession as a whole to make sure that behaviours at all levels are aligned, and re-aligned where necessary, to what is acceptable.

What to do if you fall victim?

The first thing to remember is that it is not your fault. You didn't do anything



wrong to be the recipient of such behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour is a form of bullying and, like any other bully, the issue is with the perpetrator of the behaviour. Not with you.

Practical steps

That said, the fact is that inappropriate behaviour in the workplace is very hard to handle because of the perceived impact on your career. You'll likely feel that if you speak up the job that you've worked very hard for could be at risk.

There is practical advice on how to handle such behaviour on the websites of ACAS (go to <https://tinyurl.com/yd4evzkt>) and CABA (<https://tinyurl.com/ya3kfmrw>).

My tips for handling this would be:

- As soon as you experience inappropriate behaviour very calmly tell the person that you do not find what they have said or done to be appropriate, explain that it makes you feel uncomfortable and ask them to stop this in future.
- Keep a diary record of the behaviour. Record the time and date it occurred,

where it took place, what happened and what was said. Was it witnessed by anyone? How did the behaviour make you feel?

- If there is an internal process or helpline for such behaviour make sure you log your concerns and ask what will happen next.
- Find a buddy to share the occurrences with, not least to provide moral support during this trying time.

Call to action

If you see, witness or experience inappropriate behaviour in the accountancy profession, or anywhere else in life, call it out. Yes, it will be tough to do that, but much tougher still to let this go unchecked.

Inappropriate behaviour of whatever kind in the accountancy profession should not be tolerated. Let's make 2019 the year when it comes to an end! **PQ**

- Elaine Clark is Managing director of digital accountancy practice cheapaccounting.co.uk and a founder of Women in Accountancy – see <http://womeninaccountancy.com/>

Training Link
Quality assured distance learning



aat
Training Provider
AWARDS 2018
WINNER



TRUSTPILOT
★★★★★
EFQM
Committed to Excellence
2017

**Outstanding 1st
time pass rates**

Use voucher code **PQ10** for an additional
10% off any accredited AAT or ICB course

**YOUR
SUCCESS
IS OUR
SUCCESS**

ICB's 'Large Training Provider of the Year'
AAT's 'Pauline Sparkes' award winner