



Don't Just Follow the Money

Management accounting can be a rewarding career to pursue—both professionally and financially. But those rewards can be fleeting if you aren't fulfilled by what you do.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” That advice applies doubly to your career choice. Almost all career management books will advise you to “do what you love” and to follow what interests you. If you're passionate about something, you'll do it well. But if you're pursuing a profession just because of how much money you'll make, chances are you're not going to find it very fulfilling. You probably won't be very successful at it either.

I'm a management accountant because I enjoy it. I enjoy working with numbers, turning information into actionable data, partnering with a dedicated team to help solve business problems, and providing top-notch decision support to enable organizations such as Edens & Avant and the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA®) run better. When the financial rewards have been plentiful, that's been an added bonus.

Being a management accountant does provide financial advantages—and being a certified member of the

profession generates them in even greater supply. That's been proven time and again by IMA's Annual Salary Survey, whose results appeared in the June 2009 issue.

This year's survey revealed once again that certified professionals—those holding a Certified Management Accountant (CMA®) designation—earn more than their noncertified peers: 24% more in salary and 31% more in total compensation (bonus, profit sharing, options, etc.). The survey also found that those who hold both the CMA and the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) designation generally earn more than those with only one certification (although differences vary by age category).

I'm among those joint CMA/CPA holders, and I must admit that I've derived benefits, professional and financial, from both designations. For one thing, although I currently use my CMA training more on a daily basis in my current position, holding both the CMA and CPA offers an effective one-two punch when others judge my qualifications.

On a more practical note, as a CMA working with financial information that must conform to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), I've always

found it helpful to know those rules that I learned as a CPA. That financial information needs to be right because, if it isn't, then the decisions based on that information won't be right, either.

Certifications aside, accounting has remained remarkably recession-proof. The survey found that, despite these tough economic times, accounting salaries have stayed relatively steady: Total average salary and average total compensation increased by 2.2% and 1.4%, respectively, in 2008 compared to 2007. In fact, 71% of those responding to the survey reported salary increases.

Also, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that, when considering both retiring baby boomers and the growth of the accounting profession, there will be a need for 500,000 more professional accountants in the United States between now and 2016.

So, what's the take-away here? Become a management accountant—and stay one—because you love it. At the same time, pat yourself on the back that you're in a profession that also just happens to offer some of the best financial rewards around.

As always, I welcome your comments at jbrausch@imanet.org. **SF**