

My Many Hats

By Cynthia Kopesky, CMA, CPA



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My path to a career in business has been varied but enriched by my involvement in IMA®. After attending college for two years, I had the chance to become a flight attendant for American Airlines. Since my father was a pilot, I put my college education on hold to travel the world. I didn't realize my degree would be on hold for 20 years. Aside from seeing the world, this opportunity taught me how to effectively communicate with and relate to many different types of people.

After 13 years of service, I resigned to focus on my family, which included my husband and three children. We opted to homeschool our children with the goal of instilling the love of learning and the tools for them to be self-sufficient.

At one point our family moved to Kenya for two years and lived among the Maasai people as part of a field practicum for my husband's master's degrees. From there, we moved to Istanbul, Turkey, then to the United Arab Emirates. In addition to homeschooling our children, I took care of some of the bookkeeping aspects of the regional humanitarian organization of which we were a part. The six years our family spent overseas taught us invaluable life lessons, and my worldview was broadened considerably.

We returned to the United States in 2005, and I decided to finish my degree. I attended the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh in 2006, choosing to major in accounting because of my fascination with numbers and business. Some of the most

difficult courses I encountered were Dr. Stephen Makar's cost accounting courses, which challenge students to achieve their highest potential as he encourages them to acquire the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) designation.

A partner at the accounting firm where I interned also encouraged me to sit for the CMA even though my goal was to work in the public sector. I completed the exam during college, which led me to become involved with IMA's Winnebagoland Chapter.

I started the CPA (Certified Public Accountant) exam prior to graduating in 2008, finishing that summer as I began my career at Wipfli LLP as an auditor. There I applied the lessons I learned from my overseas experience: Learn all you can where you are, embrace change, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. I now work at Briess Malt & Ingredients Co. as a finance manager. I wear many different hats in my new role, but process improvement is perhaps my favorite.

I remain involved in the Winnebagoland Chapter, serving as president in 2012-2013. The chapter provides great networking and learning opportunities to its members. It also provides many ways to actively engage its members, expand professional skills, brainstorm various solutions to everyday situations, and develop lifelong friendships.

The path I chose to a career in business wasn't traditional, but I appreciate the variety I've had along the way as a mom, teacher, student, and professional. **SF**