

# YOU CAN GO YOUR OWN WAY

Edited by **J.K. Radomski**  
Photos by **Ruslan Sarkisian**

While some accountants dream about attaining new heights, others are actively taking charge of their careers and embracing new challenges every day. These six accounting professionals have done just that and have turned their first jobs out of school into prosperous careers. Here you'll meet a tax manager, a campus recruiter, a business owner, a manager and senior manager, and a partner of a national firm who discuss their early starts, their daily challenges, and the steps they've taken to go their own way.

## KARINE BENZACAR

CMA, MBA — Managing Director  
*Knowledge Plus*

### MY JOURNEY

I studied at McGill University where I completed my undergraduate degree in business in 1991.

My first jobs out of school were at Kraft Foods and Avon Canada in Montreal, where I worked as a financial analyst. It was during this time that I learned about the CMA designation. A number of my colleagues were pursuing it, and I thought I could benefit from having this designation, too. I earned my CMA designation in 1997. It has opened up many doors for me, and brought me opportunities I wouldn't have had without it.

Right after earning the designation, I moved to Toronto. I worked in the Royal Bank's costing and profitability area, was recruited by Scotia Capital to head up a costing area, and then worked as a senior project manager for the Bank of Montreal.

In 2002, I had my first child and decided to leave the corporate world to have a bit more flexibility in my work schedule. I began doing some freelance consulting and corporate training, and slowly built up a business that became Knowledge Plus.

### WHERE I AM TODAY

My company specializes in financial training and consulting. Today, my business has grown and I now have other people working for me to handle the volume.

We demystify financial concepts for professionals who aren't accountants, and train specialists on complex, technical subject matters.

The consulting side of the business works on various projects that are financial or strategic in nature. One such project was set in the banking world, where we looked at the prof-



***"I earned my CMA designation in 1997. It has opened up many doors for me, and brought me opportunities I wouldn't have had without it."***

itability of their various products and how they are marketed. Another project we have just started is studying small and mid-sized businesses in Canada and throughout the world, and exploring their ability to have access to financing, whether it's from banks, private equity, or other types of investors.

*(continued next page)*

# YOU CAN GO YOUR OWN WAY

Running your own business offers you a lot of flexibility. I can go to the gym in the afternoon when it's less busy, but I will also work on a Saturday to get something done. I have more control over my schedule than when I was working in industry.

It also affords me the time to give back to the people and organizations that have helped me throughout my career. I lend my expertise to the Society of Management Accounting, and moderate their Strategic Leadership Program.

It's a lot of fun. Aside from discussing the more technical facets of accounting, and going over such things as teamwork and the soft skills that will help future accountants in the real world, I also talk about the many career opportunities that are open to CMAs. I help future CMAs formulate their career paths, and act as a mentor that they can bounce ideas off of.

I have also taught at the University of Toronto, Ryerson University and Concordia University. Teaching in your spare time, and giving back, is not just rewarding but is a great way to stay up to date and keep your skills sharp.

If you plan on becoming an entrepreneur you not only have to have drive and ambition, but you also have to be self-motivated and capable of working on your own. You have to be able to wear many hats. In my case, although I now have experts helping me out, I have become a salesperson, run marketing, manage IT, and run the company's day-to-day administration.

## WHAT'S NEXT

I might go back into the corporate world but not right now. A few years ago, I was offered a very senior position with one of the major banks, but I turned it down. I prefer what I have now.

Despite the economic downturn we are busier than ever. My goal is to see Knowledge Plus expand, continue to build our consulting and corporate training business, and add the right mix of people to better service our clients.

If you can make it through some of the initial hurdles and are willing to take some risks, being your own boss can be very rewarding. **CIA**

---