

3-1-2005

Career Rebound

Michael D. Akers

Marquette University, michael.akers@marquette.edu

Career REBOUND

A journey from coaching to accounting by MICHAEL D. AKERS, CPA, PH.D.

My memories of preparing for and taking the CPA Exam are intertwined with my academic preparation and career path. I attended a small liberal arts institution (formerly Baptist College at Charleston, now Charleston Southern University) in South Carolina. I was awarded a combination academic and basketball scholarship.

Since I had enjoyed accounting in high school, I decided to continue my studies in that area. The CPA Exam and a career in accounting were not considerations. Rather, I was preparing to coach basketball and teach accounting at the high school level. If coaching did not work out, I would use the accounting degree to obtain a position in business.

While Baptist College had some accounting courses in the curriculum, the college offered a degree in business but not in accounting. Therefore, I pursued an undergraduate degree in business administration with an emphasis in accounting.

Accordingly, the number of accounting and business law courses that I could take was limited. For example, there was only one tax course in the curriculum. The following courses were not offered: accounting theory, advanced accounting (consolidations) and governmental/nonprofit.

The opportunity to coach came sooner than I expected. During the summer prior to my senior year of college, I accepted the position of assistant coach and assumed the primary duties of recruiting and scouting. Needless to say, I did not use a lot of intermediate accounting during that year. Near the end of that year the head coach decided to leave coaching and, while I explored both coaching and graduate school opportunities, I decided to return to graduate school to earn my MBA.

While completing my MBA degree I also taught beginning accounting as part of a graduate assistantship. From teaching the introductory accounting course I found that I liked accounting more than I thought I would. For the first time I finally understood accounting. I decided to pursue a career in public accounting and accepted an offer to start with Arthur Andersen & Co. in May 1980.

Next came the CPA Exam. I knew that I needed an intensive review course over a prolonged period of time. A review course was not offered in Louisville, so I drove to Cincinnati every week for six months prior to the May 1980 exam. Except for teaching responsibilities at the University of Louisville, my primary focus was on studying for the exam. In addition to the review material, I worked through every exam from the previous 10 years.

In 1980 the exam was 2½ days long. It began on Wednesday afternoon with part one of the practice section. To avoid driving across town each day, I checked into the hotel where the exam



was held.

The auditing section was given Thursday morning, followed by part 2 of practice. I will never forget the groans Thursday afternoon as the long yellow sheets were distributed for the consolidation problem—a problem that I completed incorrectly, as the financial statements never balanced. Friday morning was business law, followed by theory in the afternoon.

As I left the exam, I thought that the only part I had passed was theory—a discouraging thought because Kentucky statutes required completion of two parts. I was so convinced that I had not passed the exam that I started studying for the November exam before I received the results. I was quite surprised and relieved to learn that I had passed all four parts. My time and effort had paid off. ● ● ●

MICHAEL D. AKERS, CPA, PH.D. is a professor and accounting department chairperson at Marquette University in Milwaukee.