

PAYBACK

Elizabeth Law
CPA



Elizabeth Law is pushing for more opportunities for women accountants, and is also a driving force behind the We Care mental health sessions being run in Hong Kong.

A caring bottom line

The Association of Women Accountants in Hong Kong (AWAHK) was created in 2006 to advance the development and welfare of female accountants, and create an opportunity for networking. It provides scholarships to young women interested in studying accountancy and helps arrange professional education and training programs. It also works to strengthen relationships between accountants and other industry professionals.

AWAHK is one of the organisations that has rallied to the call from the Association of Christian Accountants in Hong Kong (HKACA), CPA Australia and the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants to host the We Care initiative. The first series of stress management workshops began in July.

"Many accountants are under a lot of pressure these days, so we as accountants felt we should do something. We are looking to make it a long-term project," says Law.

Pay it forward

Working on community service projects while also holding down a day job has been part of life for Elizabeth Law since her university days, writes Troy Douglas.

Elizabeth Law FCPA first understood the power of not-for-profit ventures during her university days in Montreal, Canada, where she saw communities that were crying out for help.

"At university, we applied for funding to set up social service centres in Chinatown, helping families who have never left ... we also saw a lot of children who needed help," says Law, who was studying for her Bachelor of Commerce at McGill University at the time.

It was just the beginning for Law, who went on to balance working in her father's well-established accounting firm with being involved in several community service projects.

In the 1980s, Law returned to her native Hong Kong where she is now the director of Law & Partners CPA Limited and proprietor of her father's public accounting firm, Stephen Law & Company.

Over the years she saw the difficulty female accountants had in being recognised as having equal

skills and capabilities as their male counterparts. In response, in 2006 she founded the Association of Women Accountants in Hong Kong.

"When I started, less than 5 per cent [of accountants] were women. Right now in Hong Kong, according to statistics, it's about half," she says. "A woman accountant has to try very hard to be recognised as having equal quality to men. Very often a woman accountant is under severe pressure. Then they go home and they are still a mother, wife or daughter – it's difficult for men to understand."

Through her role as deputy chairman of the Association of Christian Accountants in Hong Kong, Law has also turned her attention to the increasing work pressure on accountants there and the impact that pressure is having on their mental health.

With several reports of accountants committing suicide, Law concluded that the warning signs were being

missed. So she has organised for several local accounting bodies to run stress management sessions, called We Care, to teach people how to cope in Hong Kong's increasingly competitive market.

"I want to help my fellow accountants because I know a lot of friends who are suffering in their work and also their personal life," she says. "A friend of mine who was an accountant, he jumped off the roof. Before that, he was a really happy-go-lucky guy."

"It dawned on me that he called three or four of us a few days before. We only answered what he asked us, we never asked 'How are you?' Maybe one or two more minutes might have made a difference."

Law says she will continue to highlight the issue and thinks it is heading in the right direction.

"We need to encourage more work-life balance, and I think people these days are getting more concerned about this," she says. ■



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www.awahk.hk/en and
www.hkaca.org.hk