






Making questions count

The work of accountants and auditors is all about investigating and questioning. So if asking good questions is a skill, then like all skills, it can be constantly practised and improved.

The classes and workshops of the CPA qualification programme are designed to help students develop a critical way of thinking. People often refrain from asking questions for fear of looking ignorant in front of peers. Overcoming this fear isn't easy. If you are building up the courage to raise a question, it's worth reminding yourself of a few points.

-  First, workshop facilitators want and expect honest feedback on the material they are presenting.
-  Second, consider that other students may have the same question, but be too shy to voice it. If they aren't thinking of the same question, it just proves you are an original thinker!
-  Third, it's important to ask a question immediately. Waiting until after the class is over means that other students may not benefit from the answer, which may include an interesting discussion. Students do themselves no good by carrying on without understanding an important point.

If your teacher or classmate has made what seems like a mistake, raise the issue as a question, rather than a statement. That way you can work it out together, with minimal embarrassment on either side. Great discussions can be started with a "what if" question. Historians favour these questions because they help them develop a more complete understanding of a situation. Try the same in a workshop and see where the discussion leads.

As a student, it's your right to ask questions and the best way to master the art of questioning is simply asking questions. In this way, a student becomes a self-motivated learner. In today's job market, that's a skill that takes you a long way.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a light-colored wooden chess piece, possibly a king or queen, over a dark wooden chessboard. The background is blurred, showing other chess pieces and a person's hand.

Coming
>>up

- ▶ Watch out for our careers and education supplement in the April issue of *A Plus*.

With insights on the job market and profiles of the best business schools, you'll have everything you need to know to make the next move in your career.

For further information contact Jennifer Ho on 2836 8939.

▶ Dates and programmes**4 March 2006**

Seminar on investment properties, hotel properties and impairments assets

7 March (continuing until May)

Exam assistance course for module A

8 March 2006

Seminar on career planning and resumé advice

Announcement of examination results for modules B & D (September 2005 intake)

22 March (continuing until May)

Exam assistance course for module C

25 March 2006

Workshop on accounting and financial due diligence

Examination assistance seminar on financial reporting

26 March 2006

Examination assistance seminar on auditing and information management

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Leader of the gang

Congratulations. You just got a new job and you're managing staff for the first time. That means you'll have even more people scrutinising your performance. Here are some simple tips to make sure you rise to the task.



- 1. Prepare for change.** Switching from being a team member to being a team leader means new responsibilities – and extra stress. Prepare family members for a period when you may be much more focused on your job.
- 2. Research the role.** In the interview phase, people take the time to learn about a company. Now is the time to learn about the history of the position you will occupy and your new subordinates. Ask about your predecessor and why he or she left. There may be valuable clues as to what's expected of you and how to get the most from your team.
- 3. Get to know people, quickly.** Meet your new team first as a group, then individually. When you meet team members individually, use similar sets of questions in order to have a more structured response set for

later comparison. Listen carefully, especially to critics – they may have important insights about your organisation. Michael Watkins of the Harvard Business School suggests asking a question like, “If you were me, what would you focus on?” The answers you receive may help shape your priorities in the coming months.

4. Work on external connections.

Introduce yourself to clients and suppliers wherever necessary, and make a point of getting to know them. You may discover hidden opportunities for useful change as you talk to them.

5. Establish parameters with your new boss. Getting too close to your boss may be unwise. Instead, set out how you will communicate with one another and how close your relationship will be.

6. Remember to lead. This may sound obvious, but the temptation of many team leaders is to be hands-on right away. This is to miss the point of being an effective leader. Professor Anne Donnellon, author of *Team Talk*, advises new leaders to manage processes, not product. To her, a leader needs to focus on the team’s

“Avoid repeating anecdotes like, ‘At my old company, we did this.’”

agenda and information flows, not details. Don’t forget to delegate.

7. Follow up on commitments.

The worst thing you can do is to ignore promises made to your team, so be careful what you promise at the start of your tenure.

8. Look beyond first impressions. You may judge people incorrectly first time out, so don’t start building alliances or making commitments prematurely.

9. Trust your instincts. You got the job for a reason, so if there’s a problem that needs fixing, fix it. Avoid repeating anecdotes like, “At my old company, we did this.” Involve yourself where necessary and make sure to make plenty of notes for



later review. This will help you deal with future crises and understand your team better.

Be aware that other team members may have hoped to get the job that you now hold. If that is the case, acknowledge the fact. Express the hope that you will be able to work together and achieve the company’s goals. Find a common cause and use that as the healing factor for any rifts in the team.

▶▶▶ People on the move



Tony Lo has been promoted to assurance partner at Grant Thornton and will direct many of the company's largest audit and transaction support assignments.



Andrew J. Hunter has been appointed CFO of Cheung Kong (Holdings) Limited, having moved from a previous position as finance director with Hong Kong Electric Limited.



KCS, the former corporate services divisions of KPMG and Grant Thornton, has announced the promotion of **Lydia Tye** to associate director and head of Payroll Outsourcing Services.