

Transcript Accountlandia Podcast #7

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Good morning. It's May 30th. Welcome to the 7th episode of the Accountlandia Podcast where we talk with members of the Portland Accounting Community about experiences, resources, and advice for students and alumni at Portland Community College and beyond.

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My name is Cynthia Killingsworth. I'm an instructor at Portland Community College and the founder of Accountlandia.

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Thank you to everyone for the contributions to the first year of our Accountlandia podcast by your listening being a guest and giving me so much encouragement. This is the first episode that will be just me by myself. The reason for this is that we have recorded 6 podcasts this year. We've had two accounting.

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Events at Portland Community College, the first one.

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Was where a small panel of local accountants met with our students to give advice and answer questions, and the 2nd event, our accounting faculty met with a large panel of local accountants to get feedback on what they are seeing with recent hires. So the purpose of this podcast is to share some key thoughts from all this information and feedback.

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Of how to be the most successful in your future accounting career.

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And I'd like to start out with just the category of professional skills and starting with the most basic area.

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Preparing for your interviews. So we're getting a lot of feedback from the employers about making sure that applicants are able to put their best foot forward, their best space forward in those interviews. So I would recommend going to our account Landia website.

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And going to the career planning tab, which if you go to the upper left hand corner, there'll be a contents menu and you can find the career planning tab. It'll start off. That page will start off with information about the PCC career services.

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And all the information they provide and resources they provide, but most importantly, how to contact our business program, career specialist Amy Bossman and I refer to her as our MVP most valuable person because all of the invaluable work she does with our students.

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There is also a do-it-yourself guide through the PCC Career Center that kind of ties everything together and how you go about this process.

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On the account Landia site, you'll see a lot of additional information starting off with internships, how you can get college credit for doing an internship up to 12 credits at Portland Community College, how to research accounting career options.

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And realizing it's not just CPA certification and public accounting, there's a lot of other possibilities.

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Also, job posting sites like LinkedIn and indeed and how you can set up automated searches for jobs through them.

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And a favorite of mine, how to do networking specific to accounting and the idea of informational interviews, and I'll talk about that later and most importantly to me, I think is how to prepare for your interview. And this is what we were hearing from employers. Some feedback, make sure you're practicing. No one likes to do those.

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Mock interviews. But they are so valuable and you can read about doing an interview, but it's actually sitting down and doing them. That gives you the practice and poise that you need to be successful.

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And allow people to to meet the true you, so also related to that, what to where you'll find an article specific to accounting and the type of jobs you're applying for. Suggestions of what to wear. I'm a big fan of goodwill. There's a lot of really great.

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Clothing in places like goodwill, professional clothing, so it's attainable and affordable to all of us. Encourage making some investment in.

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That and the page ends with thank you emails, the importance of those some examples, and also information on salary negotiation that can often be perplexing to many people. So do take a look at that information.

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Also, there's additional pages if you go back up to the table content, you'll see their subpages under career planning and they go into more specifics like Cash, Oregon, how to become an enrolled agent, the Oregon Society CPA's and so on. So please spend some.

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Time checking out all these resources. All right, let's drill a little deeper. And one student commented that Angie Rayborn, who attended our networking event, who is a former PCC student who owns her own bookkeeping practice.

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Was particularly inspiring as she shared how a small bookkeeping firm can be so successful through its exceptional service.

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And that this quality service will attract clients without any need for extensive advertising. And that was really inspiring to our student that attended the event. And I think that that's a really

great segue of what I'm going to talk about because it talks about how critical when you're in a service.

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Industry, like accounting in the face that you put forward in the quality work you do, you cannot make up for that with paid advertising. It's that word of mouth and referrals that make.

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An accounting firm, bookkeeping firm successful and the employees within it. So how can you contribute to this and what are accounting employers looking for from you? So some of the things that we heard where the concepts around workflow management so being of it to use and.

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Actively manage scheduling tools, thing things like your calendar zoom, making sure when you get meeting invites, you're accepting them.

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And making sure you don't have conflicts so you're already seeing that in college and you can practice with that. I really encourage people to do that. We use Google Calendar here and you can schedule your zoom meetings to flow through to your Google Calendar. You're getting meeting invites from your instructors.

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Make sure you're accepting that that's really an important part of the process.

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And I encourage you to start dropping your life into that calendar, so important assignments, class sessions that you need to set up. Setting those up in your calendar, getting good at that. If you have another job, you can set your working hours into that and and actively getting.

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Is to managing a calendar. We're hearing employers say that a lot of people are not as good as they should be with this technology and the skills around that. We live in a texting world that's very convenient. It's very easy. But unfortunately the professional world relies on.

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E-mail as a primary communication tool, so getting used to checking and responding to e-mail, making sure that you're using the highest level of professionalism in your communications, not texting format really, really important to be doing that these emails and a professional.

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World.

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Could end up being shown in court if there's ever an issue in a failed audit in accounting or things like that. So you wanna put your best face forward to in all your communications, making sure that they're professional practice at in college practice that in our communications.

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I think that that's really important.

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So kind of an overall idea of taking ownership in your employer success. If you're working for an accounting or bookkeeping firm, sometimes your bonuses are even based on that, so you really

have a vested interest in that and making sure that you're helping them provide the best quality services and look best.

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To their clients that is so important and is primary critical to this success of everyone involved.

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Related to that issue came up of job hopping and employers we're talking about. When you look at different resumes and you see someone that's moving frequently from job to job, that's going to happen sometimes and unavoidable. We shouldn't stay somewhere that we don't feel like it's a good fit for us.

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But when you see a habit of that and a lot of that happening quickly on resumes, that's really problematic to employers. So think about what it would be like to look at your resume and.

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That kind of what we call job hopping and manage that, making sure that you're not getting that pattern. Another thing that we heard about folks specific to public accounting is if you're hired as a CPA candidate at a public accounting firm, the expectation.

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Is that you're going to get on your CPA exam, prep study for it, get it taken. Get it passed. Get it out of the way. And there's been a trend lately for that not happening to some recent hires not getting around to their see CPA exam.

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It is challenging, I've done it. I remember it. I was a full time worker when I was doing it, had a stressful job and but I just kept on thinking that the longer I waited, the less I was gonna remember and the more I was going to have to relearn to be successful. So I wanted to get it out of the way and there was no better thing.

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And finding out I had passed the exam and knowing that I would never have to take that again in my life. So if you're on that track, it's hard. I appreciate that.

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But get it done. Get it done early. It it will really pay off for you. And I think the employers are right on that. It's not good for anyone to hold off on that.

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All right. Shifting over to technical skills.

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I think the most important thing that we were hearing from employers is understanding that in accounting we use a variety and a rapidly evolving mix of technology. It's just a way of life. And so embracing that, not getting frustrated by it, just understanding there's a learning curve for it. All we have to be patient.

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Change is the.

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Given in any high technology field, so the good news related to that is the employers were all saying that they really look for advanced Excel or spreadsheet skills, including skills like pivot tables and at Portland Community College in our accounting program BA216 data.

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Analytics with Excel and Tableau as a required course and it's covering that materials so that is great. You're congratulate yourself on this great preparation you you have and.

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Maybe think about looking a little bit further. There's different options for professional certification for a lot of software, so including Excel, Tableau, Ultrix, but also QuickBooks. There's professional certification that is really great to put on your resume. Payroll even has.

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Different options for certification that can be really powerful when applying for a payroll position. So take a look at those for income tax if you're interested in income tax. We have. I teach the BA 298 credit income tax preparation course.

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And it prepares you to take the state tax preparers exam. But I also encourage people to look at volunteering for cash. Oregon, which is our local Portland area organization for income, income tax volunteers for low income or senior.

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Seniors and this past year we had three PCC students, one former PCC student that were in the first paid cohort for Cash, Oregon.

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So they were interns with Cache Oregon and got paid a stipend for that podcast. Number six involves 2 accounting students, Rex Dominguez and Naomie Reed, who talked about their experiences with this 1st pay cohort. So take a take a look at that and a thing that we were hearing from students that they were.

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Asking employers is what do you do about a lack of experience? If you're applying for a job and it's asking for all this experience and you're just finishing up at Portland community.

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College what do?

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You do well. One thing that we really encourage and employers encourage is apply for the position anyway. If it's at all reasonable.

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That you think you could do that work is apply apply for it anyway and some things that you can do to overcome.

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That lack of stated experience they're requiring for is highlight specialized course coursework that you've taken through Portland Community College, like Excel, QuickBooks payroll tax preparation.

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The software you used all those things may be a big surprise to employers, people that are going through a university may not have had those kind of technology courses that we offer at a Community College. So make sure that you're highlighting that specialized coursework in your resume, in your interviews, in your cover letter.

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However, you can also discuss any financial record keeping responsibilities. You've had it non bookkeeping jobs.

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A lot of times that can be really insightful. I know I talked to a lot of people, lot of students that worked at Fred Meyer that talked about their meetings, where they shared financial reports, shared and discussed financial reports, and they learned a lot just through that process. Also discuss your demonstrated.

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Reliability, responsibility, flexibility and quick learning abilities through your resume. Cover letter and interview. These are all really highly valued and accounting, and the more you can shine light on them, the more you can make yourself stand out.

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And finally, they always say that people like to be asked about themselves. That is true for an employer too, so make sure that you receive research an employer in advance, go to their website, look for their news and ask questions. That is really a great way to show your curiosity.

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Your interest in learning and you're vested in the application.

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Process all right. Also find ways to add to your knowledge and connections. So one of my favorites is networking and specific to that is the idea of informational interviews. This is really common and a lot of people, employers really embrace that and are willing to do this.

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So find an accountant, ask an employer, a family member, a friend who they know in accounting. You can also look at the Oregon Board of Accountancy or the Oregon Society of CPA Sites, and they have a find a CPA tool.

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And reach out to them and say, hey, I'm an A student at Portland Community College, and I'm doing some career research. I want to find out more about what you do. And would you mind sitting down with me? We can do it through zoom. We can meet for coffee or something like that. And the power of those is you not only learn from those people, you add them to your network.

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And it's amazing what can happen with those. My first teaching job came out of a networking and informational interview.

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Did with an accounting instructor the previous year.

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And then she went on maternity leave and recommended me based on that informational interview. So you just never know.

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In podcast #1 Tasneem discusses all the networking she's done at PSU that led to scholarships she wasn't even aware of multiple internships and ultimately really great job offers. Also recommend we mentioned this earlier doing internships.

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And finally, consider volunteering for a community organization, a nonprofit.

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To help with.

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Bookkeeping and other financial matters and circling back apply anyway. It doesn't hurt and it just gives you practice too. So one student reflected from our networking event.

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I was encouraged to start putting myself out there, even if it's just for a few hours a week as a volunteer, especially when starting with 0 experience that says it all, just get started.

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The next topic I want to talk about employers we're discussing is remote work issues and it's in all the news these days, the post COVID challenge ages of being able to continue to work remote and the great news is accounting has a great pre COVID mystery with remote work.

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Many accountants had some ability to work remotely, and some more experienced accountants were already 100% remote. This was.

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This is long standing and accounting. We've done it well. We've done it extensively.

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But that being said, patience is needed as a new employee in accounting, new accounting employees have a steep learning curve with both technology and learning the culture of your new workplace and direct contact with other humans is the best way to build that knowledge and those relationships.

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The other thing that we were hearing this is kind of sad remote workers are not getting more the more complex assignments where they can develop their skills and consequently may not be advancing in their careers as much as other employees. So something to keep in mind.

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Another area I want to discuss is feedback, so we often think is feedback as your annual performance evaluation. Yeah, that's one form of. But what I want to discuss and what employers were talking about was the idea of feedback on your work product.

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Each time you turn in something getting feedback. This is necessary in accounting anything that's really detail oriented like that and has high stakes like a tax return or an audit that could lead to legal issues down the road. If it isn't done correctly.

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Is going to be heavily reviewed before it's finalized, so you do the work, you turn it into your manager and they or someone else with a lot of skills will review that, give you review notes, give it back to you, discuss it with you, answer your questions, and you may have had questions for them when you were turning it into answering those questions.

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And then you go back and you learn from those review notes and you improve the work product and then you turn it in.

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And hopefully get it finalized. This is the reality of detail oriented work. It's done in engineering, professional writing, marketing. Any area like that, we just need to have a second set of eyes on our work. So it's really important to embrace that, not to be defensive about it or.

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Feel insecure that you don't know everything. You aren't expected to. We all make mistakes. We're all learning, especially when we're starting out. It's how you embrace it and how you improve yourself.

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Through it and how you acknowledge the work that other people are doing to help you, that makes the difference. Just having a positive attitude about that. So employers were talking about that, that can be a big difference in new hires is how they handle feedback and that will make a big difference in how successful you can be. I think that applies to everything in life.

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It here's how you can improve in this area. As a student, you have a lot of opportunity to get feedback at Portland Community College and to ask questions, make sure to be asking those questions of your instructors when you're stuck. Don't waste time. Reach out. Get help so that you can move forward.

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And do it on the right track. Questions are usually really welcomed. Also, when you're given feedback on your assignments, ask follow up questions. Thank your instructors.

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That really shows that you're embracing that feedback. Don't ignore it. Read it. It's kind of hard when you spend time with all that feedback and it never gets opened in D2L so so get in that habit of reading that feedback. Also instructors allow.

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What we call formative assignments, where you can turn in your work, get your feedback, and use that to improve your work, improve your understanding, improve your grade, and turn it in. So that's like the workplace. So practice with now, take that opportunity to do that. I think that's really important.

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All right, now let's focus on some specific areas of accounting. We have been talking about public accounting, but let me talk just a little bit more about that in podcast #3, Caleb, a former PCC student, talks about his highly successful road from PC through PSU to a top accounting firm.

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And what he did along the way. So I think a really inspiring story with a lot of great ideas.

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At our meeting with the accounting employers, we had a really honest conversation that kind of the elephant in the room conversation by a former public accounting firm employee who left public accounting. And I think everyone acknowledges that public accounting is really a great place.

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To learn and develop as an accountant and get that experience working with clients, whether you decide to ultimately stay in public accounting or not, it's a great place to learn, but we have to acknowledge that there are issues with work life balance. It's getting better.

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More acknowledgement that people have life outside of work and those needs of that may vary, and some firms are better than others, but there's still work to be done. It can also be a challenging environment to 1st generation students to feel comfortable with the culture and public accounting.

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The industry is really having to come to terms that it has a lot of work to do in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion.

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I think that the accounting industry is showing a lot of commitment to this, but recognizing it takes a lot of hard work. So there's still work to do. Some firms are better than others. Also, licensing requirements are changing right now. It requires a fifth year of college to become licensed.

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As a CPA and that's a barrier to a lot of people economically and again, the work life balance.

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So the industry is looking at other alternatives to that to make the pathways more flexible and open to greater variety of people. So we'll see what happens with that. Lots of discussion about raising pay for entry level positions. We'll see what happens with that as it becomes harder to find new hires. That is generally what will happen.

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So we will see.

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I think the best advice is to find a firm that fits your priorities and work life balance and making sure that you have honest conversations in the interview to see if this is the right firm. I know I had a really dear friend who had one child and was expecting another while she was interviewing with firms.

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She was really honest about her priorities to her family and that she was going to be having a second child and she found that some firms.

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We're not embracing that as well as others. When she was interviewing and by being honest, she was really able to find the good fit for her and ultimately affirmed that was supportive and walk the talk for supporting work life balance. Also, if you're not sure about public accounting, good news there.

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Our other options, let's talk about a few of those. So one is bookkeeping.

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Often you don't need a four year degree or a CPA license to work as a bookkeeper. You can work for another business internally as their bookkeeper, or you can have your own bookkeeping practice working with multiple clients. Angie Rayburn I mentioned before that

participant in our networking event who worked in public accounting and then started her own bookkeeping.

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Practice. She talked extensively. How rewarding her work has been. It was really inspiring to our students. They gave a lot of feedback about that. She also discusses the many back and forth referrals between her bookkeeping firm and the CPA firms that she has relationships with. So you're not working for a CPA firm anymore, but you still are.

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Pretty connected to that index.

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History.

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She and other guests talk about the value of the technical accounting courses at PCC like Payroll, QuickBooks and income Tax Prep. Excel talked about. That's really special because you often don't get that intensely technical training at universities like you do at a College of PC and podcast #5.

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Aaron Solanki off the CEO of Susan Matlock Jones and Associates, discusses how she leads a bookkeeping practice, highly successful bookkeeping practice in Portland who only works with nonprofit organization.

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She talks about the invaluable role of bookkeeping, practice fits between a client and their CPA, so this is especially true for smaller organizations who can't afford to have internal bookkeepers or accountants, and that's where the bookkeeping firm will come in. Both Aaron and Angie.

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Stress the value of work life balance and the careers they have chosen for themselves, and I think that was inspiring to a lot of students to hear.

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And I'm going to end talking about governmental and nonprofit accounting.

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So in general, and I had some experience working for the IRS and found this to be true, it's a slower pace, lower pay than public accounting, but better benefits, more job stability and definitely more work life balance. A CPA license isn't necessarily required.

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It wasn't required for the IRS job that I had, but often, whether you're at a local like city of Portland or you're the IRS, what other whatever level of government you're at, there's definitely a lot of bureaucracy.

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See, we always hear that and the political layers can be a little challenging to navigate, so.

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Finding a mentor can be important to help to navigate that, to learn that people have to decide if this suits them.

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It's not for everyone, but it's for a lot of people and just seeing if that's that's your personality and that's where you would be.

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I worked for the IRS. I love this agency. They were a great employer and I only laughed because I moved to a rural area recently. Teresa Langford had two revenue agents as speakers for her accounting club at Portland Community College. They were very enthusiastic about working the working conditions there at the training.

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Credible training and support at the IRS, so they echo echoed what my experience had been years ago and that it currently exists did explore about the local and nonprofit employers for internship opportunities.

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So Multnomah County has the college to.

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Summer internship program and often non traditional students express interest in government and nonprofit work, but they sometimes struggle in finding positions because they're not shared on LinkedIn, or indeed sometimes in understanding their complex application process.

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Can be a little confusing.

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So there is a government accounting page in account landia under the career section. I mentioned those subpages.

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In podcast number two, former PCC student Lisa Vaughn discusses his internship with the Multnomah College, the county, and how it led to full time employment with the county and how excited he is to be working for Multnomah County.

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Also on podcast #4, Tammy Sanders discusses how she transitioned from another career into public accounting, and then she ended up going to work for our PC Foundation, which is a nonprofit and has finally found her home in governmental accounting with the Portland Community College accounting team.

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Well, I think that sums up our.

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2324 academic year for account LANDIA and I hope everyone finds all the information and guidance shared this year helpful and inspiring. Please reach out to me with.

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Questions.

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I'll be offline for the first half of the summer, but I'll be returning with a lot of fresh ideas and refueled energy for our.

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Next.

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Have a great summer everyone.