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Salim Somani, CA, CPA

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Salim Somani is a giver and has definitely taken roads less travelled, literally, than most CAs. He started volunteering as a teen and now uses his financial skills worldwide to help those who don't have access to his kind of expertise.

"Being able to share my abilities with people who are less fortunate than me became a source of immense personal satisfaction," says the University of Toronto grad who received a Recognition Award for his volunteer work from the Ministry of Culture and Citizenship at age 18. "It was one of my primary objectives in selecting my career path."

That "career path," started at an east-end Toronto branch of the CIBC. As a highschool student, he was one of their youngest bank tellers. At university, he took Commerce and Economics, and was snapped up by PricewaterhouseCoopers through an on-campus recruitment program.

"It was at the Toronto offices of PwC that I learned about professional work ethics, professionally presenting yourself, professional training, and being a professional in all aspects — at work, and in your personal life and volunteer life," says Salim who came to Canada from Kenya as a young boy.

"My calling led me to work for a medium-size firm with exceptional standards," he says of his next career move. "I gained tremendous satisfaction there as we were directly involved in providing value-added advice to a wide variety of clients. And I got my CA designation."

Then, looking for more corporate experience, Salim went on to join the Toronto offices of Bimcor Inc., investment manager of the Bell Canada Pension Fund and Northern Telecom Pension Fund. Working with a team of engineers, asset managers, and property managers for a few years gave him the big-operation perspective he wanted, and he also earned his U.S. (CPA) designation.

Now, he runs his own Toronto-based business, Salim Z. Somani, Chartered Accountant, and follows his heart abroad to enhance the economic success of underprivileged individuals, businesses and organizations.

Volunteering in international development began many years ago when he went to Central Asia to give leadership and financial training to directors of a school in Tajikistan. It was owned and operated by Aga Khan Education Services, a non-profit agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) — the largest, private non-profit organization in the world with about 60,000 employees in 25 countries.

A couple of years later, he was asked back to the area to develop a microfinance operations manual designed to help alleviate poverty in rural areas of the developing world.

During the past decade, he has continued to offer his services to AKDN, working with the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance to support and establish the operation of programs, set up financial systems, perform external audits, and train internal auditors in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

He says the career path as a CA has provided excellent training for developing an ability to identify and solve problems, and train others.

"My education and training in Canada with people from various cultures and traditions has allowed me to develop a sense of understanding, tolerance and versatility. This lets me better assist and advise people in any walk of life," he says. His firm offers everything from auditing, tax planning, tax preparation, budget forecasting, consulting, and advising businesses to forensic and investigative services.

Salim was recently appointed as contact CA for the ICAO, and CFO of the Willowdale Provincial Liberal Association. He has received many certificates over the years for his volunteer leadership and teaching roles.

"CAs in Canada are a unique group of professionals in a country where there is tolerance, patience and understanding. The satisfaction of sharing knowledge internationally is bound to bring great personal gratification that surpasses providing services for remuneration."

~ Lorie Murdoch

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