



The Washington Post: New at the Top - Carl Adams

An accountant who yearned to do more finds his calling as a CFO

Monday, April 12, 2010

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/04/11/AR2010041102700.html>

Coming out of school, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my accounting degree, but I decided to join a public accounting firm.

It was such an interesting place to start my business career because, working on 20 companies in a year, I got exposed to a broad spectrum of businesses.

I observed that the really great leaders I worked for had a lot of focus, held people accountable and were very disciplined. I made certain to apply those lessons throughout my career.

As a public accountant, you look at the organization from the outside, but you're not really building and growing that business. After a number of years, I realized I wanted to be a part of an organization. At the time, telecommunications was booming in the Washington area, so I jumped in.

In the telecommunications industry, I saw the importance of investing in people and technology for a company's long-term success. A company can experience short-term success by trying to keep costs low on payroll or new computer systems, but that lack of investment will affect the long-term viability.

Eventually, I felt it would be a great opportunity to understand the role of regulators in our financial markets, so I went to work for the Securities and Exchange Commission.

I was familiar with many of the rules, but through training and oversight, I became an expert. It was an opportunity, at a very detailed level, to understand the SEC, how it viewed the rules and what role it played in our markets. I found I was very skilled analytically.

I decided I wanted to get back to being a part of a growth environment.

I returned to the private sector, initially in an accounting role but then in a finance role in which I was responsible for the organization's business model and revenue generation.

One company I worked for had a real estate component. It was the first time I had been exposed to this industry directly. At that time, we had an overzealous real estate market in Washington. I saw how constructing buildings in the right place with the right demographics could be a growth engine for a company, as long as it's done in a conservative and opportunistic approach.

In my role, I had a lot of responsibility for the treasury, mergers and acquisitions, and debt function. While I wasn't a chief financial officer, I was completing the duties of one, which set me up for the role I'm in now.

State funding for universities is declining, so I'm passionate about trying to figure out how private organizations can work hand-in-hand with a university to fulfill real estate needs. This focus on merging private industry with a public organization to meet those needs is a really great opportunity.

I am looking to grow our organization and open new opportunities with other universities.

-- Interview with Vanessa Mizell