A winner’s story: Tax Mentor of the Year

Briefings



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Jane MacKay was winner of the ATT sponsored Tax Mentor of the Year award at the 2024 Tolley’s Taxation Awards.

Like many tax professionals, my career in tax wasn’t planned. When I left university, one of my friends was training to be an auditor with a big four firm and gave me their firm’s recruitment brochure. The section on tax was more appealing to me, so I decided to apply to be a tax trainee working in a corporate tax team.

At that stage, I didn’t expect to stay in tax beyond qualification. But my career has included a secondment to an in-house tax team, work overseas and time working on a range of tax areas. The reason I’ve stayed in tax so long is the many opportunities to learn new skills in different environments along the way.

I’ve had a range of formal and informal mentors in my career. Looking back, I’ve been very lucky with many of the people I worked with. There are a couple of

mentors from early in my career that particularly stand out. They were willing to invest their time with me. They explained the context and the tax technical issues in detail and why they mattered. They were demanding about the quality and presentation of my technical research and client work. They would also provide support and feedback. They insisted that I form a judgement and give advice, and if they didn't agree with my advice, they'd share their knowledge and experience by explaining why they'd come to a different conclusion.

I've adopted a similar approach of challenge and support to the people who now work with me. I enjoy seeing people I've mentored go on to become senior people in the tax field and it's been hugely rewarding to get the feedback from winning the award that this approach has had an impact on the careers of others working in tax.

As a mentor, I am acutely aware that career pathways for young tax professionals may be very different to those followed by today's tax leaders. The speed of change of technology in tax and how it will affect the tax profession is a hot topic now, and there's an expectation that Gen AI will very soon be able to produce a tax advisory report or tax computation more quickly and accurately than a human can.

However, most of the core skills that are required from a tax professional are the same now as when I started my career – having the ability to critically analyse complex data and information, and then to form a judgement and explain it well. Our clients are humans after all, and they'll still want human interaction with an adviser who is prepared to give advice on a tax technical matter in a way they can understand.