ATT sponsored Tax Mentor of the Year Award

Briefings

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Congratulations to Clare Cromwell, Partner at Saffery, who won Tax Mentor of the Year at this year's Tolley's Tax Awards. Clare shares her valuable insights in mentoring to inspire tax professionals.

I am a Partner at Saffery LLP based in London, and work in international private client tax. My career in tax was not planned and, having studied languages at university, I had intended to work abroad. However, when I returned from a year in France, I interviewed with the accountancy firms doing the milk round at my university. As a result, I started a training contract to be a chartered accountant with a mid-tier firm in the audit department. On passing my exams, I was seconded to the tax department, doing a mixture of corporate and personal tax, which I really enjoyed, and my career in tax over the next 30-plus years began.

Mentoring has been a natural extension of my role rather than a conscious decision to become a mentor. Much of my role involves working with teams, and my motivation is to use my experience and technical knowledge to help others grow into confident tax advisers.

I personally benefited from both formal and informal mentors throughout my career. The best mentors I have worked with have combined technical expertise and experience with support and honest feedback. Working with them was often a challenge, but also fun.

I would therefore like to think my mentoring style is supportive but challenging. I try to help people understand the ‘why’ behind the advice, to develop their own judgement, and to communicate conclusions clearly to clients. It is very rewarding to see people I have supported develop into successful senior tax advisers and, very often, partners.

The impact of mentoring is often cumulative rather than tied to a single moment, and it comes through repeated conversations, working together as a team and learning from each other.

People choosing a career in tax have to cope with increasingly complex legislation and regulatory requirements, as well as the rapid growth in the use of technology, particularly AI. I prepare mentees by emphasising skills that remain valuable despite change, namely technical curiosity, critical analysis, careful judgement, professional scepticism and clear communication.

The most rewarding part of being a mentor has been seeing the impact on colleagues and watching them develop and go on to become mentors themselves.

My advice to new tax advisers starting a career in tax would be to build the technical foundations properly, stay curious and learn to explain complex points clearly. Technical knowledge is essential, but experience, judgement and communication are what turn knowledge into good advice, and those qualities cannot necessarily be replicated by AI.