

# Making the move to working online

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2020 was a year like no other in our lifetime, with the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the global economy. Despite the many challenges, women around the globe continued to show up, step up and lead.



*Tzippy Subotzky*

It is these types of women that global company Practice Ignition named in its Top 50 #WomeninAccounting for 2020 – a list that celebrates the amazing women who are driving advocacy, change and creating opportunities in the accounting and bookkeeping industry.

Whether they do so through education programmes, providing free resources to support small businesses, or creating community-led initiatives and seeking to raise up the next generation of leaders, these women are actively and passionately driving the accounting industry forward.

Tzippy Subotzky CA(SA), partner at Howard Joel and Company, a firm started by her father in 1996, runs a training office that employs trainee accountants and helps them to achieve all the competencies they need to qualify as CAs(SA).

She joined the firm in 2003 and became a partner after qualifying in 2005 because the type of work, type of clients and the lifestyle suited her.

"As a full-service accounting firm, we provide all the services that a business needs to run their back end, including general bookkeeping, monthly management accounts, outsourced payroll, financial statements compilations, independent reviews, auditing, tax compliance, tax advisory, tax planning, secretarial services, and more. We also specialise in dispute resolution with SARS objections and enjoy advising on tax efficiencies in business and on a global level."

The firm employs 17 people, three of whom are partners. In addition to four CAs(SA), two are trainee accountants, one is a tax technician, two have certificates in bookkeeping and one has a BCom in Human Resources and Industrial Psychology.

"The type of people we like to hire are people with a thirst for growth and lifelong learning," Subotzky says. "We have clients from all types of industries, with a specific focus on retail and manufacturing. We have recently created a signature solution for attorneys and other service-based industries."

She doesn't consider herself a 'born entrepreneur' but she believes it is important to have vision, good people skills, be open to learning and to change, and have good mentors. Most businesses, she says, thrive when the business owner has a mentor who they can learn from, vent to, and take advice from.

"Our practice came back to work after the hard lockdown," Subotzky says. "We have made it flexible so that if there is an issue, we can work from home. However, we find that in our environment we are most productive when we are working from the office and are together. We are making use of technology and encouraging clients to have virtual meetings instead of physical ones, as that is more efficient."

On challenges that they had to overcome during the pandemic, she says managing the change and expectations both from her office, as well as the firm's clients, was vital.

"Timelines shifted according to the lockdown levels," she says. "We have a lot of interaction with SARS, the Master's Office

and the Department of Labour, and they are much stricter with their employees, so we battled to quickly address demands which have arisen during this period. Many of our clients don't understand this and it has been quite challenging to educate them. There has also been the emotional impact on our staff. The pandemic has caused a lot of fear to arise which also needs to be managed, especially when it comes to false news."

But there have been some positives, too. In December 2019, the practice management system moved online and over the course of 2020, more data and information processes moved online too. "We were able to seamlessly move home when the hard lockdown hit. We also had a server crash at the end of 2020 and the work that was lost (due to a malfunction in the back-up system) was so much less than it would have been had we not gone online. This was great as we had been threatening to go digital for so many years and the lockdown pushed us there much quicker."

Being an accounting practice owner is the beginning of an exciting journey. "You have to be open to change and continue on the path of improving yourself all the time both in entrepreneurship and technically. What worked 10 years ago may not work today; by embracing change we can be better employers and service our clients better. Our goal is to help other businesses grow by allowing them to focus on what they are good at. This can only happen with open communication and better systems."

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