

THE SWITCH

From auditing to dentistry

When Katie Koullas left high school, she leapt into the corporate world.

"I got an exclusive [accounting] traineeship with one of the big firms," the former auditor and tax consultant says. "I jumped straight into work and learnt quick-smart how to operate in a professional environment. By 20, I was where most 25-year-olds were."

Her workdays were manageable but Koullas found completing her bachelor of business on top of a full-time job a challenge.

"It was an awesome opportunity but full-on at a young age," she says. "I loved the people but not long hours sitting in front of a computer. Once I added in my university schedule, I was doing 10- or 12-hour days."

After moving companies a couple of times, Koullas settled into a six-year stint at Ernst & Young.

"I worked as a business and tax consultant, mostly in-house, completing tax returns for business people," she says. "I got exposure to professional customer service and to people who needed work done at a high standard. [But] what I relished was the face-to-face time consulting with clients, helping people solve problems."

Koullas found herself craving more contact with people. By harnessing marketing skills learnt in her business degree, she got a taste of what switching would be like.

"I got closer to the people roles I wanted by transferring internally to marketing," she says. Eventually she realised the industry wasn't right for her.

"I wasn't making people super excited, not like now," she says. "Especially in auditing – no-one likes the auditors."

Two years ago, Koullas switched to the cosmetic dental industry.

"I knew people in the field and they thought it would suit my personality," she says. As a smile consultant with Albert Square Dental in Melbourne, Koullas found a job she loves. She does cosmetic dentistry consultations for clients embarrassed about their smile, manages the other five "smile angels" who support clients before the dentists work their magic and helps with marketing the business.

"It means I get to use my strategic skills, too," she says.

Koullas loves the people contact of her new work environment.

"Most of my day involves helping people work out what they want from their smile," she says.

"Because I'm passionate about it, I'm more successful. Being in the business [world], I dealt with a cross-section of people and that's helped me a lot."

Of course, there was much to learn. "I had to learn all about the dental industry, cutting-edge techniques and all the dental lingo," she says.

She remains passionate about her new field. "I find it a really exciting industry to be in," she says. "It's not just about getting your teeth cleaned – dentistry can help people get more confidence. You can get clear braces that are removable and invisible; they are the same price as traditional ones but you can't see them."

The enthusiasm has also paid off in her pay packet.

"I work less hours for more pay," she says. "I think you sometimes need to think smarter about your career; you don't need to work long hours if you're passionate."

SUE WHITE



THEN

NOW

SALARY About \$40,000-\$60,000 as a mid-level tax consultant. Marketing roles paid about \$70,000.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "The job was designed for people who want to work long hours five days and sometimes take work home. I didn't have children at the time but while work had a strong policy about work-life balance, it really depended on your manager to uphold it."
HOURS Fifty.



SALARY Six figures.
WORK-LIFE BALANCE

"Amazing. I have two children under three and can schedule my appointments at a time that suits my day, between 10am and 3pm. Business people see me on their lunch break."

HOURS Thirty.

MISS Long lunches! Accountants do that quite a lot.

CHALLENGES Staying ahead of the competition and looking out for the latest technology that can help our patients get the smile they want. My job is to keep my finger on the pulse.

LINK

albertsquare.com.au

All smiles ... Katie Koullas (left, in her accountant days) has no regrets about getting her teeth into a different role (above). Photo: Rodger Cummins

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