



CASE STUDY: Gita Patel

FINANCIAL CONTROLLER



1. Did you always want to do this job?

No, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I enjoyed working with numbers and computers so I took a combined degree in accounts & computing. As part of my degree I worked for a charity called Society For The Blind which I found really motivating and made me realise I wanted to work in the charity sector. I really enjoy working for Practical Action and have now been here almost 20 years!

2. What subjects did you study at school?

At school I studied the sciences, maths, English and French at 'O' level. I then went onto college to study a BTEC National Diploma in Sciences (Biomedical) followed by a combined degree in accounts and computing. Once I started work I completed my accountancy qualification (ACCA).

3. Did the subjects you studied prove useful to the job you are doing now? Are there any subjects you wish you had studied?

The sciences and French were not really that useful but maths, English, accounts and computing ... yes. I do wish I had gone on to do an MBA in business studies. I also wish I had studied psychology, just because I find it really interesting.

4. Do you have any specific role models that influenced you?

My parents had a huge influence in my earlier years as they were extremely hard working and I have a huge amount of respect for them. My husband, family, close friends and work colleagues inspire me in lots of different ways, offering guidance, advice and support.

5. Have you faced any particular obstacles because you are a woman?

Not that I can think of, I have been fortunate in achieving many things in life that I set out to do.

6. What advice would you give to someone who wants to be an accountant?

It's important to work in an area that really interests you. The three main areas are

- ✓ private (working for a standard company e.g one that makes something it can sell for a profit)
- ✓ public (working for the government); and
- ✓ charity

I really like charity work because I find it more rewarding.

If you complete a degree first then it's worth doing your accountancy qualifications soon after graduating as it becomes difficult if you leave a long gap. Also, having any experience of working will really help you get a job, so think about doing some voluntary work.

7. How do you see your work affecting the world and peoples' lives?

Practical Action is a charity that uses technology to help some of the poorest people in the world improve their lives. Even though I am not working directly with the



Qualifications

O levels: Science, maths, English, French

BTEC: National diploma in Sciences

Degree: Accounts and computing



poor my job is important in making sure as much money as possible goes to the people who need it. Go to www.practicalaction.org.uk to find out more about the work Practical Action does.

8. What are your main responsibilities?

In a company the finance team looks after everything to do with the money. It is about dealing with how money comes in, where it goes when it gets there and making sure payments and expenditure are made in the correct way (including paying the staff!).

As the financial controller I manage the finance team and ensure everything runs smoothly.

9. Can you describe a typical day?

Every day is different but on a typical day in the office I would spend some time doing the following:

- ✓ Managing and supporting my team. I have nine staff in total. We have regular team meetings as well as informal chats throughout the day to discuss how work is going
- ✓ Preparing financial reports for staff, directors and our trustees
- ✓ Reviewing and seeing how finance can work in different ways that would save the company time and/or money
- ✓ Contacting staff in other departments and in

our country offices to find out what is going on around the organisation

10. What is the most exciting thing you have done so far?

Personally I find my visits to other countries where I get the chance to talk to the people Practical Action helps really exciting. My last trip was to Nepal. I spoke to one 12 year old boy (through an interpreter of course!) who was about to get on a tulin. A tulin is like a zip wire but you sit in a cage to go across a river and pull yourself along. He was on his way to school and told me that before Practical Action had built the tulin it had taken him an hour to walk there, but now it took only 5-10 minutes so he wasn't as tired when he arrived.

11. Have you had the chance to travel in your job?

Yes, a lot! I consider myself to be very fortunate. I have visited all seven of the countries we work in – Peru, Sri-Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Sudan. I enjoy visiting the projects which gives me a real insight into the impact Practical Action makes on the lives of people and local communities.

12. When you are not at work what do you like doing?

I enjoy relaxing activities such as walking, listening to music, going to the cinema etc. but most of all I like spending time with my family and friends and visiting interesting places.



Find out more about the people who work for Practical Action by visiting our website

www.practicalaction.org/education/careers

