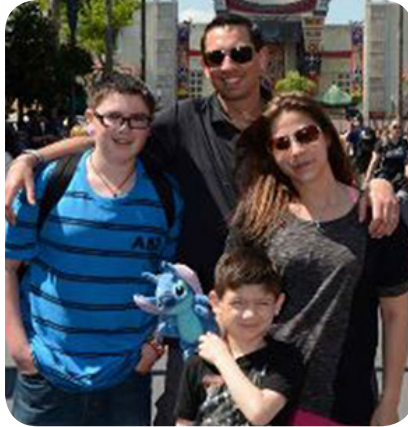


Jennifer Watkins

Women Leaders in Accounting



Meet Jennifer

My husband and I have two boys; Ethan is 14 and Jaxson is 6. We also have two Chow-Chows that are a big part of the family. I am a Sunday school teacher, nursery director, and vacation bible school volunteer at our church.

I enjoy spending time by the lake or bonfire during Michigan summers, although my favorite time of year is the fall. As a family we love going to the orchard and celebrating Halloween. I am on the board of directors of Zonta Club of Flint, which allows me to be around great women who have common interests. I have a passion for helping children, especially if they are special needs or low-income.

Tell us about your career with Yeo & Yeo.

Accounting as a career came naturally to me. I always enjoyed math, so I chose the accounting path and never veered. I knew it was a hard field, but enjoyed doing something that was difficult and did not come easy to most. Also, I knew that with a degree in accounting I would have great career opportunities.

At the beginning of my career I interviewed with both private companies and public accounting firms, and it came down to two public accounting firms. I weighed my options with both firms and decided on Yeo & Yeo for several reasons, although the starting salary was less. For me it was not all about the salary. I urge candidates interviewing now to really look at all the firms have to offer. Yeo & Yeo offered quicker advancement that would affect my salary down the road, and a great benefit package. Also, what really appealed to me was the overall culture and environment. There was a sense of family and community that I got from the interview process that I did not see in my other interviews. Yeo & Yeo seemed, and is, big enough to give me the advantages of a large firm (training, expertise, etc.), but right-sized to care about the actual individual.

I have been with the firm about 10 years and have advanced to Audit Senior Manager and leader of the firm's Education Team. I love that the firm gives back to the community and encourages you to as well. I also appreciate the flexibility with my job which has been necessary for me to continue in my career.

2015 Best Firm

MOVE
PROJECT

“Find a mentor

YOU TRUST

and speak up if

YOU ARE HAVING

a problem or

ROADBLOCK.”

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Jennifer, describe a time where Yeo & Yeo's work-life flexibility positively impacted you.

For a period of about six months, I was the caregiver for my grandmother, who was diagnosed with cancer. During that entire time, Yeo & Yeo had my back. Before this, I had a hard time missing work or delegating; however, when she got ill it was a necessity, and the firm and my principals stood by me. They let me know that I had people to step in for me and help me when I needed it. I was able to have a great deal of flexibility with my schedule and work around her medical appointments. I was also able to communicate with my principals about what I needed to still be productive and complete necessary tasks and goals.

How does Yeo & Yeo encourage the advancement of your career and how do you develop future leaders?

I start the process with all my staff as soon as they walk in the door. I share what has worked for me and what the company can do to help them soar in their career, and I show them by example. For example, if employees are new parents, they may be concerned about hours and overtime. They see me leaving at 3:30 to get to my son's soccer game and not apologizing for it. They also see me working harder the day before so I am able to go to that game. I also think it is important as women that we do not apologize for the flexibility we have earned.

As women leaders, it is our job to show the staff how to be flexible the right way and not hide it. In the past, women have hid the fact they were not working late or leaving earlier for family functions so that others would not think less of them. All employees' needs are different, and as a firm we need to accommodate those needs. As a leader, I take pride in being an example of this.

Best Advice Ever Received?

To be a great leader you must celebrate all your successes with your team and raise them up; however, you must bear all the fails.

What challenges have you faced as a woman in accounting and how have you overcome them?

Boards of directors and clients look to men for the answer. Luckily, I have always been fairly outgoing and I have worked hard to know the facts. Once I became confident in my ability as a CPA and an expert in a specific field or for a specific client, it was a lot easier to speak up to those specific boards and clients and prove to them I was a trusted advisor. Once I proved that, the fact that I was a woman became a nonissue.

As women we need to stand together and make it known that, yes, we are working a flexible schedule and, yes, our family is important. We have earned it and are working hard. You can do it all! You can provide exceptional client service, work overtime when it is necessary, and take off time when you need to.

What advice do you have for women new to the accounting profession?

Find a mentor you trust and speak up if you are having a problem or a roadblock. Also, work hard and find a niche you enjoy. Lead by example, always be responsible and accountable and, when you become a leader, remember the lessons you have learned on your way up and use those to be the best leader you can be.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

To be a great leader you must celebrate all your successes with your team and raise them up; however, you must bear all the fails.

Yeo & Yeo is among 10 firms named to the 2015 Accounting MOVE Project Best Public Accounting Firms for Women list, conducted by Wilson Taylor, www.wilson-taylorassoc.com. Follow Yeo & Yeo on LinkedIn and Facebook as we profile women leaders within our firm through September.

