

Simply desserts

The rapid expansion of food retailer Hui Lau Shan has called for QP-trained expertise.



About the employer

Name: Dr. William Chen
Job title: Group chief financial officer, general manager
(Hong Kong)
Hui Lau Shan Food Manufacturing Co., Ltd.

About the QP student

Name: Shirley So
Job title: Senior accounts clerk,
Hui Lau Shan Food Manufacturing Co., Ltd.

Quality qualification

It has been a sweet journey for Hui Lau Shan Food Manufacturing. Starting in the 1960s as a single shop selling herbal tea in Yuen Long, the privately owned company has since transformed into a dessert shop and grown to encompass 250 outlets; 45 of them in Hong Kong and Macau, 22 in Malaysia and the rest in China. All of them are still selling desserts these days with an emphasis on healthier options based on fruit, particularly mango.



The company's growth in recent years has been rapid, particularly in China. When chief financial officer William Chen joined the company five years ago, it only had about 75 outlets, just 20 of them in China. That kind of growth has resulted in a corresponding scaling up of its accounting operations, which are now divided into four teams along geographical lines. Hong Kong, which is also head office, employs a team of twelve staff, with twelve others responsible for Southern China from the Shenzhen office, another five covering Eastern China from Shanghai and three more in Kuala Lumpur. "I'm lucky. The team in Hong Kong is pretty stable, and there's not much challenge in terms of recruitment. In China it's more of a challenge," says Chen.

Chen, who works closely with his financial controller – like him, an Institute member – is not only the company's CFO. He is also general manager of its Hong Kong business, his first operational role in a career that has seen him work in senior accounting positions for a wide range of food and beverage-related companies, including KFC, Lee Kum Kee and San Miguel.

As soon as Chen joined the company, he started to agitate for it to sign up as a QP authorized employer – for a number of reasons. "When I joined the company I purposely went for QP," he says. "First of all I am a fellow Institute member, and I have been a facilitator for QP before, so I know what it is all about. I have no doubts about the quality of the QP and its training programme and I know its commitment to grooming top-rated professional accountants. Particularly if you are going into financial accounting, it is definitely a good programme. Also Hui Lau Shan employs QP students, and signing up as an authorized employer means that it is easier for us to train our staff through QP."

Commitment to learning

Shirley So is a QP student and a senior accounts clerk at the company, who has worked her way up in the accounting business. After graduating from secondary school and trying other work she joined Hui Lau Shan as a junior accounts clerk in 2006.

"I studied accounting discipline during my senior secondary education," she says. "After I graduated I tried a non-accounting job for a while but found it was not suitable for me. Since I had some foundation accounting knowledge before, I was interested in looking for an accounting-related job as a new start. I knew no matter how big or small a company is, it needs accounting professionals. I was attracted to the career because it is so professional and rewarding, and provides good job security."

Since then, in addition to her job, she has been busy furthering her professional development. First she took the Accredited Accounting Technician examinations, becoming a qualified AAT in 2013. She subsequently passed the Institute's Professional Bridging Examination, and then registered as a QP student



in 2015. She is now pursuing the CPA qualification. Her current role for Hui Lau Shan includes cash management and looking after the profit and loss of individual Hui Lau Shan outlets in Hong Kong and Macau.

“QP was a natural choice for me after I completed the Professional Bridging Examination, which is tailor-made to prepare AATs for QP training,” she says. “QP is internationally recognized, and the best-known and most preferred qualification among Hong Kong employers.”

So far she has sat modules A and B, covering financial reporting and corporate financing. “I have found that QP training is interactive and practical,” she says. “During the module B workshops we were required to work as a team to discuss case questions and propose possible solutions. The workshop training enhanced my knowledge of cost accounting, which helped me to understand more about my company's business operations, and helped my daily work. I treasure the role-play exercises we did at the workshops; they allowed me to practise my presentation and communication skills, and learn technical concepts in an interactive way.”

So adds that the biggest challenge for prospective accountants is to balance their work and studies. She advises QP students to schedule their own study time table at least three months before the examination and be disciplined. Knowledge on how to prioritize study and work at different point of time is also important. “A set of well-indexed study notes is also helpful. Time management is crucial during the examination: with the pressure of time constraints, you need to allocate your time tactically when you are answering questions.”

Interview and reporting by Richard Lord