

Doing Good in the World: Every Gift Matters

BY NATALIE ROONEY



Growing up on the Jersey Shore, Hillary Morgridge says giving back is just what her family did. Whether it was serving lunch at a local soup kitchen with her mom, or cleaning up the beach where they lived, Morgridge's philosophy has always been: "You should help take care of the area you love."

The concept was instilled in Morgridge at a young age. "Also, being one of six girls in a family, you learn that things are better when they're shared," she laughs. "It was just natural."

When it came time for Morgridge to head to college, personality tests suggested she pursue nursing, but the 2009 recession led her to consider accounting instead, "...because what could be more steady?"

**"Our community
stepped up and got
stronger."**

In 2012, during her senior year, Hurricane Sandy slammed into the East Coast. Morgridge and her family found themselves on the receiving end of help and support from the community and nonprofit organizations after their home was flooded with four feet of water. "Going through the hurricane and seeing all of these organizations that came in to help was a big influence," she says. "Our community stepped up and got stronger."

HEADING WEST

After Morgridge graduated from Monmouth University, she loaded up her car and headed west. "I didn't want to work in New York City. I wanted a more manageable city," she says. Denver was appealing. She was amazed by the mountains and had memories of visiting family in Colorado. "I could wrap my head around Denver. You can get out of town to ski or hike for the day. It's just so much more livable." Plus, she wanted to find a place where she could continue to give back. "That was a connector for me."

After arriving in Denver, she gave herself two weeks to find a job. Fortunately, she only needed about two hours; she was hired on the spot by Mile High United Way. After a year, CFO Leslie Hannon and Senior Vice President Charlie Wright encouraged Morgridge to pursue her CPA and move into the public accounting realm to expand her career possibilities. “I told myself public accounting would be like earning my stripes,” Morgridge reflects. “I’d spend two or three years in public and then go back to nonprofits because that’s what makes me happy.”

That was six years ago. Morgridge has been with Eide Bailly LLP for the past five years and is looking forward to earning her CPA designation later this year. She works solely with nonprofits. “I get to help them with all of their tax questions and use my knowledge of nonprofits. It’s the best of both worlds and why I have stayed in public accounting and remained interested.”

Many of the smaller clients Morgridge works with are nonprofits which have a founder or executive director who is passionate about what the organization does but is so busy working on programming that they don’t realize they need to file a 990 or pursue grants. Or maybe they’re being audited and don’t have the financial background to know how to prepare.

“I love being the person they call when they have an exciting opportunity, but they don’t know what to do,” Morgridge says. “My background allows me to say, ‘Great! Let’s make that happen!’ And this is all in my own community, so that’s very motivating. What the clients

“I love being the person they call when they have an exciting opportunity, but they don’t know what to do. My background allows me to say, ‘Great! Let’s make that happen!’”

do is such a push for me, too. Whether they’re working with kids who have cancer or are helping Holocaust survivors who are living below the poverty line, the goal is to make people’s lives easier. Those are huge motivators for me.”

Apparently, people who make it their life’s work to give back are drawn to other people who give back. Morgridge’s husband, John, whom she met through mutual friends, is a board member and helps manage the endowments of the Morgridge Family Foundation, which was founded by his parents. Since 2008, their Foundation has granted more than \$117 million and impacted all 50 states. “We knew when we met that we had that mutual connection of giving back,” Morgridge says.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Morgridge encourages CPAs to use their skills to help others by simply reaching out to nonprofits that align with their passions. “Just going to a nonprofit, saying you’re an accountant, and asking how you can help is huge,” she says.

She is currently volunteering her time with Impact 100 Metro Denver, a new organization that is 100 percent volunteer run. She is doing the bookkeeping, creating the budget, and doing the financial statements. “I’m doing the nuts and bolts for this organization,” she says. “If an accounting student or a retired CPA sees an organization whose mission they relate to would offer to help, it would be appreciated. Every organization I’ve approached like that has said yes.”

In fact, Morgridge says her husband would be happy if she started saying no. In addition to serving as treasurer for Impact 100, she works with several boards – all in addition to her public accounting day job. “I’m a sucker,” she laughs. “Last year, Rocky Mountain Children’s Health came to me. It promotes healthy kids across Colorado’s public schools. How could I say no?”

Morgridge emphasizes that a background in nonprofit accounting isn’t necessary to help organizations in need. “You can help with bookkeeping, even if you’re not a CPA, or simply help out at events. There are so many ways you can support a small nonprofit.”

MEANT TO BE

Morgridge’s mother-in-law, Carrie, wrote the book, *Every Gift Matters*, and Morgridge says she’s a huge believer in that concept, whether that gift is time, money, or expertise. “Every little gift matters to our community,” she says. “Even if you don’t have money to give, your expertise is a gift.”

Ultimately, Morgridge says Denver is where she’s meant to be, and she’s doing what she was meant to do, even if it’s not the nursing career those early aptitude tests predicted.

“Late at night in tax season, when I’m working hard on a tax return for an organization that provides cold caps to help kids to try to keep their hair while going through chemo, I realize those kids have a lot bigger things to deal with than I do. I crave that human connection and being a CPA and working in public accounting means there are still so many ways to make that happen.” ▲