

INTERVIEW WITH KLEOPATRA KALOGEROPOULOU, ILP, BDO in Greece

WHO IS KLEOPATRA?

"I am currently the International Liaison Partner (ILP) and the ethics and independence leader at BDO in Greece. I'm a certified public accountant and sit on the supervisory board of the Certified Public Accountants. I'm the first woman to have occupied that position in the 60-year history of the institution. I'm also qualified under the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

I studied business management, followed by my first master's degree in financial management and control in the UK and a second master's degree in international risk management in Paris, where I later worked for three years. I'm also the proud mother of two little girls aged six and nine.

Our firm joined BDO in 2015, but I've worked in this sector for more than 15 years. The firm was originally my father's practice, so I've grown up within the business."



HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Well, I think that at some point in time we all encounter bias in our lives. My first experience was while living abroad, as a foreign person in a different country.

Often, when I told people I was Greek, I would immediately receive comments like 'Oh, you people are so lazy!' or 'Oh, Greeks are never punctual!'. It was very frustrating having to deal with stereotyping of this nature.

Later, I experienced relationship bias when I returned to Greece and started working in my father's practice. I was very quickly judged as 'the daughter of the boss' – which was not how I wanted to be considered. As an audit junior, I was desperate for my managers to treat me in the same way as everyone else and teach me how to do the work correctly.

At first, they would be quite reluctant to talk to me as a subordinate, simply because they thought they would get into trouble with the boss. On the contrary, the boss never wanted me to be favoured. It took quite some time to overcome this.

The most challenging form of bias however came from much older, male clients when I started undersigning as an engagement partner. They demonstrated strong bias, from an age perspective and also due to my gender. In meetings, I could sense disbelief in what I was explaining to them and they were reluctant to make the adjustments I was suggesting, especially if there were changes in the accounting standards. They would often call the previous auditor to confirm that what was I was saying was correct."

#BreakTheBias

"To fight bias it is essential to have in your mind what you want and to make it very clear to others that you intend to pursue it."

KLEOPATRA KALOGEROPOULOU, continued

HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"Don't be afraid to claim your right to a better position or a higher salary. The difference between the pay of women compared to men, particularly from manager level upward, can be considerable. Male employees tend to be much more assertive about what they want and most

of the time they eventually get it. I think many employers are more receptive to the demands of men for fear of losing them, whereas it is not expected that a female employee will actually resign and look for something else."

WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"We are extremely proud to say that we almost have a 50/50 split of male and female colleagues in our firm – and not only in the junior levels of our profession, but also as Partners.

To some extent, this is the legacy of my father, who from the very beginning worked with female partners. He only cared about having the right people to do the work, not whether they were male or female. This has served to show the rest of the organisation what is possible, and it's become part of our culture. Now, when the CVs come in, we look at the qualifications and the experience of the applicant, not whether they are male or female.

Training is really important in helping women to navigate challenges in the workplace. For example, the global BDO New Partners Leadership Programme or the Next Generation Leaders Programme. Learning soft skills like communication – e.g. how to express yourself to different stakeholders – is essential to overcoming bias. The programme is also a great way to build a global network of contacts, each with great ideas and energy, and delegates can use the experience to drive positive change and empower others in the organisation."

