



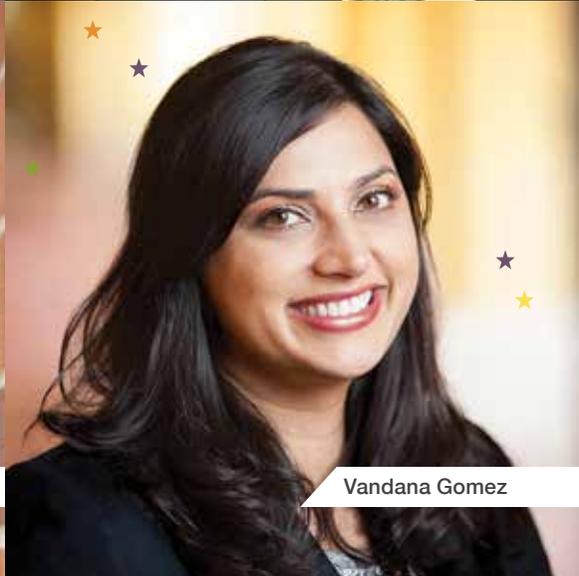
**Matt Andrus**



**Erick Bell**



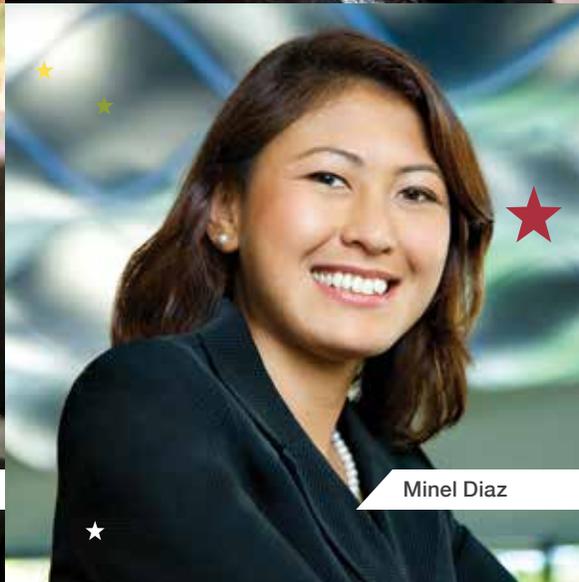
**Beth Mohr**



**Vandana Gomez**



**Rex Liu**



**Minel Diaz**



# Real-life CPAs

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## A Glimpse of Where the License Can Take You

No green visor, short-sleeved shirts and calculator punching here. These profiles of six, real-life CPAs will give you a peek into the varied and interesting doors the CPA license can open for you. And these jobs are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the possibilities out there for you when you become the most trusted adviser to businesses.

## ★ Scoring a Dream Job

**Matt Andrus:** Controller, Pac-12 Networks

**Favorite Sports Team:** Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. “But when you live in San Francisco for more than five years, you have to root for the Giants, too.”

**College:** Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo (class of 2003); University of San Francisco (class of 2009)

**Favorite Movie:** “A Few Good Men”

**Favorite Album:** August and Everything After, Counting Crows. “That was the first album I ever bought with my own money.”

**Favorite Part of the CPA Exam:** Passing. “Once you have your license, no one can take it away from you. And that’s a pretty good feeling.”

Growing up in a family of six kids and now working for the Pac-12, Matt Andrus has been steeped in sports most all his life. “I grew up in a family of sports fans,” he says, the youngest in the family. “I had amazingly supportive parents. I don’t think they ever missed a baseball or football game that I played in.”

So it’s really no surprise that Andrus wanted to be a professional baseball player when he was growing up in Paso Robles. “To this day, there’s always something special about playing a game of catch with your Dad and having that connection,” he says.

“I grew up in the country and there were plenty of jobs around,” he recalls about his beginning in employment. “My first paid job was working maintenance for the school district, which included a lot of different things, but mainly landscaping, painting, plumbing—you name it.”

He points out that this is no small task under a Paso Robles sun during the summertime. It motivated him to find a career indoors.

Andrus attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo (where he also met his wife) for his undergrad and got a degree in business administration with a concentration in public accounting and accounting information systems. He then moved north and attended the University of San Francisco, where he completed a graduate degree in sports management.

The No. 1 reason Andrus says he decided to become a CPA is opportunity. “There’s always going to be a demand for skilled people like CPAs to help guide businesses,” he says. “There really is a lot of job security, and flexibility to move to any industry you choose.”

As controller for the Pac-12 Networks, Andrus manages all the official business processes and oversees the internal financial reporting analysis. “There’s always something different going on here,” he says.

Andrus hesitantly admits he hasn’t adopted a Pac-12 team, and gives the more political answer of saying he is generally a Pac-12 fan. “If one of our teams is playing, I’m definitely rooting for them. But, having gone to Cal Poly, I don’t really have one particular Pac-12 team to root for,” he says.

The variety of his work, and the unexpected surprises, are what he enjoys about his job the most. “I really appreciate the fact that I get to work with all the different departments; I’m always getting a different perspective of the business,” he says. “We also get regular reminders of how special this place actually is, and how lucky I am to work in this industry.” To that point, he recalls a time when he ran into people filming Kobe Jones in a coat, tie and boxer shorts dribbling a soccer ball between the desks of his office. “The next day the promo was on the air and I was actually in the background of the shot working away.”

He is most likely to be found watching baseball, playing soccer or hiking in the Marin Headlands. His No. 1 hobby is traveling, most recently having visited New Zealand.

For those considering becoming a CPA, Andrus advises to not buy into the stereotypes that surround accountants. “The reality is the license gives you the opportunity to be a leader in whatever industry you choose,” he says. “If you approach it as an ongoing education, the doors will continue to open. There’s always more to learn. And, keep in mind, when you’re surrounded by smart, seasoned professionals, it’s a good idea to ask questions and soak up everything you can.”

## ★ The Truth is Out There

**Erick Bell:** Managing Director, Forensic Services, StoneTurn Group, LLP

**College:** Cal State Hayward (class of 1997)

**Most Likely to be Found:** “Not at home. But, if I had my druthers, I’d most likely be found on the basketball court, either coaching or playing.”

**Favorite Movie:** “Star Wars.” If he said anything else, “people would know I was being untruthful. I have amassed a small ‘Star Wars’ museum in my garage.”

From the beginning, Erick Bell always wanted to do something professionally that would satisfy his need to give back to society. “I wanted to be a teacher, author or some sort of businessman,” he says about his early aspirations. “It was all centered on being able to put myself in a position where I had enough—whether it was money, knowledge or time—that I could give it back.”

And with his exposure to the Accounting Career Awareness Program (ACAP) in high school, Bell figured out how he was going to achieve his professional goals.

“While I was participating in ACAP, I remember someone saying, ‘If you become an accountant, you will never have to worry about having a job.’ That resonated with me. It made sense to me,” says Bell. “Prior to participating in the program I didn’t know any accountants. The images I had in my head from TV was of people in short-sleeved shirts, ties and wearing glasses.

★ It turns out accountants are more complex than that. Once I learned more about the accounting industry in college, I realized becoming a CPA was the pinnacle of our profession—the ultimate distinction.”

★ And so he became a CPA, and today works as a managing director at StoneTurn Group, where he performs and supervises forensic investigations and counsels companies on the detection, investigation and remediation of fraud, financial irregularities and other misconduct. But he hasn’t forgotten to give back: He volunteers his time teaching for ACAP.

★ “When someone approached me to volunteer with the program, it seemed like the right thing to do, plus I strongly believe in the accounting profession,” he says. “I always had an interest in teaching. It’s important to give back: to where much is given, much is required. I also know it has helped me become a better practitioner because I am forced to stay current with what is going on in the profession—I’m forced to constantly relearn things so I can teach. It brings a level of critical thinking that comes with academia that enhances my skill set.”

Bell says he has the most interesting type of accounting job. “My work usually involves some type of alleged fraud or workplace controversy,” he explains. “On any given day, I’m learning about how one allowed greed to override their moral belief and got themselves into a situation that they believed there was no other way out but to engage in unethical behavior.”

★ Because of the nature of his work, Bell can’t really share stories from his workplace. “But I can tell you what I find most interesting is when I get to work on litigation matters, and get to work for what I call the ‘little guy’—someone who is being unfairly treated,” he says. “We’re able to use the

★ accounting literature as a weapon in their defense. I know I sound like a nerd, but those things are always very interesting to me, and very rewarding.”

Bell has learned many things in his professional career, but the one constant is that nothing remains the same. “Learning to be comfortable in the uncomfortable is the biggest lesson I have learned,” he says. “I spent most of my professional career in public accounting and the one thing that is constant here is change. I think that’s just a sign that you are growing—when you’re constantly challenging yourself like that.”

If you’re considering becoming a CPA, Bell says it has to be something that you are passionate about and interested in. “It’s a long road,” he points out. “If your heart isn’t in it, it’s not worth the journey. It’s going to require preparation and discipline. It’s been described to me as a river you have to cross—not a very deep river, but a long river. You have to know a little about a lot of information. At the end of the day, that’s what make CPAs trusted business advisers.”

## ★ Healthy Living

**Beth Mohr:** Controller, Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center

**College:** Union College, Lincoln, Neb. (class of 1991) ★

**First Job:** Mowing lawns

**Most Likely to be Found:** At Lake Tahoe

Beth Mohr became a CPA to pursue her desire to make a difference in health care. She wanted to enable health care professionals to focus on patient care, and provide them the resources they need to do their job effectively.

"I actually wanted to be a physician when I grew up, probably all the way up until I was in high school," she says. "Then I realized what I really wanted was a career that is challenging, rewarding and where I knew I was making a difference. I eventually realized I could achieve those goals by providing business support for health care."

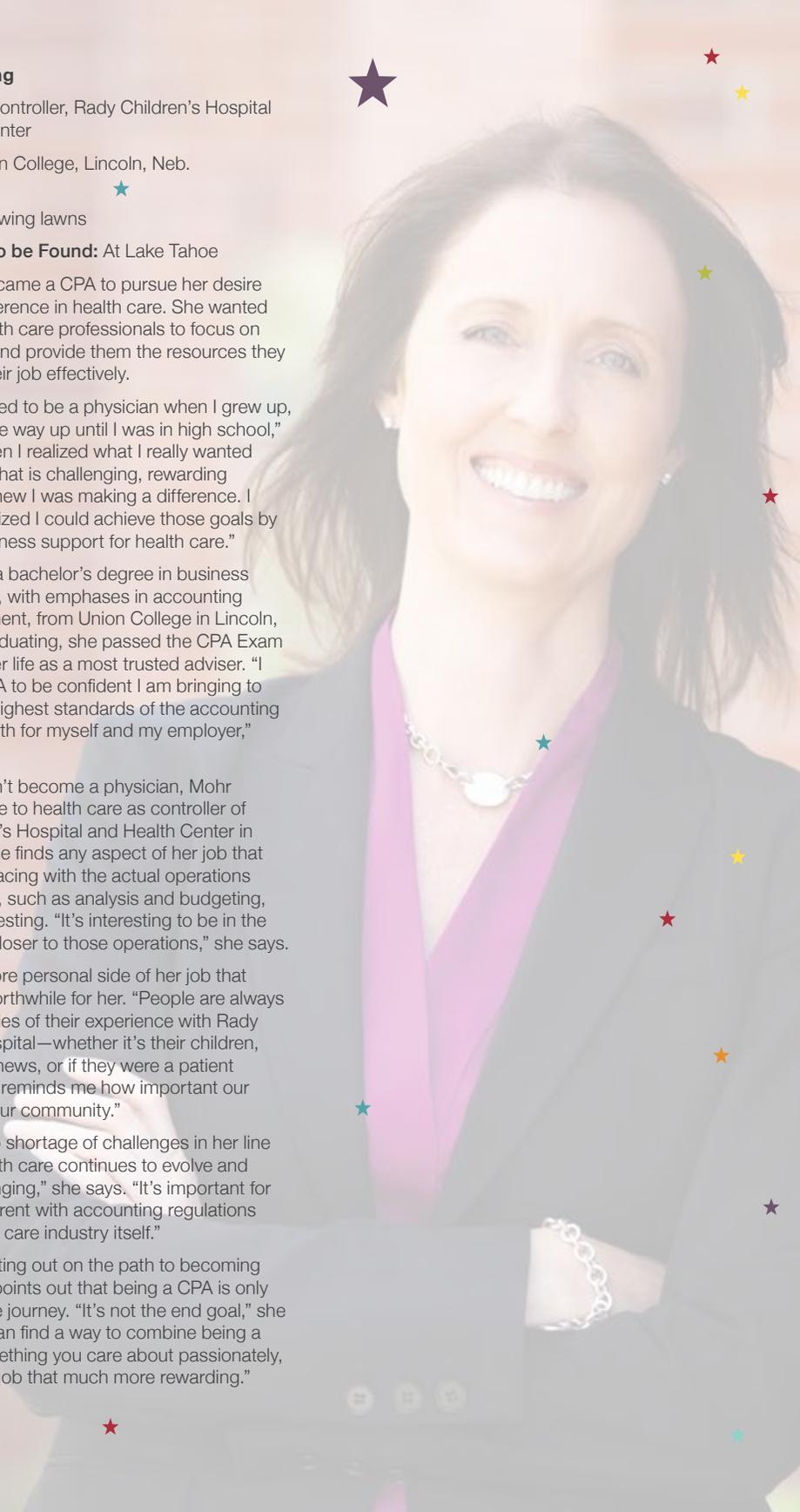
Mohr earned a bachelor's degree in business administration, with emphases in accounting and management, from Union College in Lincoln, Neb. After graduating, she passed the CPA Exam and started her life as a most trusted adviser. "I became a CPA to be confident I am bringing to the table the highest standards of the accounting profession, both for myself and my employer," she says.

While she didn't become a physician, Mohr is staying close to health care as controller of Rady Children's Hospital and Health Center in San Diego. She finds any aspect of her job that requires interfacing with the actual operations of the hospital, such as analysis and budgeting, the most interesting. "It's interesting to be in the hospital and closer to those operations," she says.

★ But it's the more personal side of her job that makes it all worthwhile for her. "People are always telling me stories of their experience with Rady Children's Hospital—whether it's their children, nieces or nephews, or if they were a patient themselves. It reminds me how important our mission is to our community." ★

And there's no shortage of challenges in her line of work. "Health care continues to evolve and remain challenging," she says. "It's important for me to stay current with accounting regulations and the health care industry itself."

For those starting out on the path to becoming a CPA, Mohr points out that being a CPA is only one part of the journey. "It's not the end goal," she says. "If you can find a way to combine being a CPA with something you care about passionately, it makes your job that much more rewarding." ★



★ **Working to Animate Dreams**

**Vandana Gomez:** Internal Audit Manager, DreamWorks

**First Job Aspiration:** Work for the U.N. as an interpreter.

★ **College:** UC Riverside (class of 1994)

**Most Likely to be Found:** Playing with her daughter.

**Favorite Book:** Pride and Prejudice.

**Favorite Thing About Her Job:** The people and the challenging projects.

Vandana Gomez is not much of a crier. Neither is her husband. But when both watched the DreamWorks movie “The Croods,” it brought out their soft side. “The movie focuses on a story of a father and daughter and, having a daughter myself, I have a special attachment to that film in particular. That movie really hit home.”

But Gomez cheered up when she saw her name in the credits, as internal audit manager at DreamWorks, the animation production company behind other movies, including “Shrek,” “Rise of the Guardians” and “How to Train Your Dragon.”

“I definitely didn’t expect that, but it is nice to be recognized in a small way as being part of the film making process,” she says.

Gomez graduated from UC Riverside and worked as a public accountant before moving to industry and taking her job at DreamWorks. Getting her CPA license was the boost she needed to continue along her professional path.

“I eventually reached a ceiling and realized the only way to get ahead was by getting a CPA license,” she says. ★

Although the name of her employer is recognizable in most households, the small-time feel of the place gives her the best of both worlds. “We’re a growing company, so I am exposed to things that you normally see in larger corporations.”

★ Gomez enjoys the company’s campus-like atmosphere. “I see Jeffrey Katzenberg wandering the campus every now and then, and coworkers from different departments every day. We feel connected and in the loop due to daily emails/ blogs from Katzenberg. We know the direction the company is going in. That is very rare in the corporate world.”

And the job does come with perks one would expect with a successful movie production

company (free movie screenings and daily free breakfast and lunch). “I get to interact with so many different types of creative people, and see how the creative process works. I get to see how the movies are made,” she says. “I also get to do some traveling for my audits. Last year I went to the Netherlands and the U.K.”

Gomez says her job has taught her to be flexible and open-minded, and to accept change. And, while it’s taken some hard work to get where she is, Gomez says it was worth it. She encourages those starting in accounting or pursuing their CPA license to hang in there. “Don’t give up. Stick with it. It’s tough, but if you practice, practice, practice, you will get it.” ★





## The Reluctant CPA

★ **Rex Liu:** Controller, Tesla Motors

★ **College:** University of Toronto (class of 1995)

★ **First Job:** Office assistant for the Canadian Hemophilia Society

★ **Most Likely to be Found:** Cooking, traveling, wine tasting or checking out new restaurants.

It took Rex Liu some time to realize he wanted to become a CPA. In fact, it was something he particularly avoided for a time. He wanted to be a lab scientist more than anything else, and spent most of his academic career pursuing that idea.

“Becoming a CPA wasn’t ever an explicit goal that I had,” he says. “A lot of what I did early in my educational career was to make sure I never got into accounting. My dad is an accountant, and there was a time that I didn’t appreciate what doors having an accounting background could open for you.”

★ Liu Graduated from University of Toronto with a bachelor’s degree in immunology. He then applied to both Cornell and Columbia to get into their doctorate programs. He got into both, and was ready to attend Columbia to pursue a cell biology doctorate.

“The summer before I started I decided to take a weekend visit with some of the post-docs and other students,” he says. “It really made me think about what it meant to be in the scientific world.

And, although I love science and still do, financial stability and security was still important to me, so I turned down the offer.”

★ A secondary interest he had at the time was in biotech, but realized he had no business background and needed to figure out how to get into that world. “This is where my dad and his circle of friends were helpful, as they pointed out that the University of Toronto had a great MBA program that granted enough credits to take the chartered accountancy exams. So I did that, and interned with Ernst and Young at the time. I learned a lot, made some great connections and they also covered a portion of my MBA program.”

★ Part of the deal with the internship program was paying back the relationship by working for EY after the program, which he did and found he liked it. After his third busy season there he started thinking about leaving, and looked to transfer to another city. He happened to land a transfer to EY in the Bay Area—the leading office in the life sciences and biotech space, making it a perfect fit for him.

★ Today Liu is the controller at Tesla Motors, which designs and manufactures electric vehicles, including the Roadster and Model S. “It’s great being part of this overall team, and watching our CEO, Elon Musk, execute his vision. It’s also been amazing watching the Model S evolve from development prototypes into high performance cars ultimately delivered to very excited customers.”

★ But it’s the people he works with that intrigue him the most, as well as the mindset of his colleagues.

“It’s very motivational working with such smart, driven people. We work a lot, and have a lot of seemingly impossible goals, but we’re always able to get there,” he says.

★ Even though Tesla is all over the news these days, and has received many accolades, the company takes nothing for granted. Each employee knows the importance of continuous improvement and having great attention to detail.

★ “Tesla is not a big, behemoth organization where you are focused on just one thing,” explains Liu. “All folks at all levels are very much hands-on with the day-to-day operations of the company.”

★ Liu encourages those starting out in accounting or pursuing a CPA license to really know what it is they want to get out of it. “For me, it wasn’t about achieving a title or having the designation after my name. Becoming a CPA was more about the skill set I acquired, understanding accounting principles and analyzing, interpreting and digesting information,” he says. “It’s also about being able to build relationships with people and offering professional and practical advice.”

★ **When the Light Went On** ★

**Minel Diaz:** Internal Audit, Electrical Power Research Institute, Inc.

**College:** Loyola Marymount University (class of 1996)

**Most Likely to be Found:** Running the trails of Northern California.

**Favorite Book:** Born to Run

Minel Diaz didn't last long at her first job. "I grew up in the Philippines, and my first job was working for a burger franchise called Burger Machine. My dad's friend owned it, and it was a new franchise. I lasted three days," she laughs.

But her first aspiration was to be an athlete. That, too, was unfortunately not meant to be. "My mom didn't allow me to do any of the sports I was interested in because I was very petite and frail," she says. "She thought if I played any sports I might break my bones."

So, in the end, Diaz decided to follow in her family's footsteps when choosing a profession. "My grandfather was a CPA in the Philippines, working for the government," she says. "My dad is now a retired CPA, but he also spent his career working in accounting in various countries around the world." So, when she got to college, it just made sense for her to become a CPA when she was trying to decide what to study.

Today Diaz manages a small internal audit shop for the Electric Power Research Institute, Inc., which conducts research, development and demonstration relating to the generation, delivery and use of electricity for the benefit of the public. It's an independent, nonprofit organization that brings together scientists and engineers—as well as experts from academia and the industry—to help address challenges in electricity.

"I work closely with the executive team, which I didn't think would happen in our company of about 800 employees," she says. "It was a bit intimidating at first, but they're very friendly and all have their different styles of conducting business. It's interesting that, even at their senior level, some are still quite introverted, which makes it easier for me to relate to them."

Diaz has been a CalCPA member for years and is a graduate of the CalCPA Leadership Institute. She says both play an integral part in her career. "It helped me progress in my career, and I have met so many people who are mentors to me, she says. "When I participated in CalCPA's Leadership Institute I honed my leadership skills and learned that it's really important to protect your credibility. If you lose your credibility, you lose the trust of whomever you are working with. Take care of your credibility—it's very valuable."

Mentorship, and how to incorporate what you learn from mentors, is a big part of the advice she has to pass on.

"Listen and learn from your mentors along the way," she says. "But instead of copying what those successful professionals are doing, take what you learn and make it your own. If you succeed, you know you did it your way instead of copying someone else."