

# ‘MY PRACTICE, MY RULES!’

**Gemma Denham was fed up with the restrictions of working in practice, but she loved working with clients. So, at just 27, she took the leap into self-employment**

Overall, Gemma Denham liked working in practice. The problem was the “stifling bureaucracy” she experienced at some firms.

“I felt very constrained in a previous role in practice,” she recalls. “There were a lot of little frustrations that began to chip away at me. For example, they were very strict on client meetings. You only had one hour with the client and, if you went over, you had to ask them to reschedule for another day. I didn’t like that at all. I felt it was stopping me from doing a good job.”

Denham worked at several accountancy practices in the south-west. She also did a

stint in industry, at an aviation company, where she worked for three years. But she knew she preferred working in practice, due to the variety of the work for a diverse mix of clients. So, to avoid the downsides of working in someone else’s practice, she thought she’d better set one up herself.

When Denham founded Devon-based practice GD Accountancy, she was determined to provide a more

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**Denham’s personal approach to her practice was highly commended at the AAT Professional Member Awards 2018** ↓

personal service to clients and not be bound by rules and policies. It was an exciting step, but not without its challenges – particularly due to Denham’s young age. People questioned whether she’d really be able to do what she’d said she would.

“I had to toughen up anyway really,” she explains. “Because of my age, some people didn’t really take me seriously. I’d left school at 16 and started training with AAT. I was AAT-qualified by the time I was 19, but it came with a price. I had to keep justifying myself to clients, and that was hard. In the end, I took a tough stance. I started saying: ‘Look, I know what I’m talking about here and you have to take my advice on board.’ They started listening to me after that.”

Three years later, GD Accountancy works with more than 100 small-business clients, including web developers, hairdressers and artists. Denham has now taken on an apprentice, is Xero-certified and offers a huge range of services for her clients, including tax, bookkeeping, financial accounts and payroll.

“It’s not always been easy,” Denham admits. “The hardest thing about running a business is taking on too much, especially when it’s in the infancy stage. You don’t want to let people down. But sometimes you just have to say no.”

Taking that tougher stance has helped Denham to manage her workload effectively, so she can spend more quality time with her family. She’s also very happy to be making her own rules.

“I like doing things my way,” she says. “I can give the service I want to give. I can do a good job for my clients – and that’s all I’ve ever wanted.”



*What was your defining moment?  
Email [contentteam@aat.org.uk](mailto:contentteam@aat.org.uk)*