

## Safeguarding the Dignity of the Chartered Accountancy Profession



The Chartered Accountancy profession has always been a symbol of trust, discipline, and responsibility. For decades, CAs have been viewed as custodians of financial truth, acting with precision, independence, and integrity. However, disturbing trends among sections of the younger generation of professionals are now threatening this legacy. Practices such as soliciting work, undercutting fees, certifying false information, selling signatures, and turning professional offices into marketing showrooms are slowly eroding both the dignity of the profession and the respect it commands in society.

### The Rise of Solicitation and Dependence on Intermediaries

It is increasingly seen that many young Chartered Accountants have developed a practice of approaching advocates, tax practitioners, or other agencies in search of work. In doing so, they reduce themselves from independent professionals to dependent intermediaries. Solicitation, in any form, is a direct violation of professional ethics. It is not only against ICAI's guidelines but also against the very spirit of professional independence.

A CA is a complete professional. There is no need to "beg" for assignments from others. True growth comes from building one's own client circle, earning their trust, and establishing credibility in the market. Depending on intermediaries is a weak foundation – it may fetch work in the short term, but it destroys professional dignity in the long run.



### The Dangerous Trend of Undercutting Fees

Another concerning practice is the compromise on professional fees. Young CAs, desperate for work, often agree to perform assignments at very low charges, simply to secure engagements. Intermediaries exploit this weakness, bargaining heavily and gossiping in public circles that "this CA works cheap." Such a reputation not only lowers the respect commanded by the individual but also devalues the profession as a whole.

Professional fees must reflect the knowledge, responsibility, and accountability of a Chartered Accountant. Undercutting only leads to a vicious cycle of low-value work and low respect. Young professionals must remember: never compromise on fees. If you stand firm on your value, clients will respect you; if you bend, you will always be treated as needy.

### The "Signature for Sale" Culture in Audit Season

As the Income Tax Audit season progresses, many young CAs engage in disturbing conversations such as, "How many signatures are available with you?" Instead of focusing on detailed scrutiny of records, annexures, and compliance, the audit process is reduced to a transactional sale of signatures for a few thousand rupees. This trend is dangerous. The very purpose of a tax audit is to ensure accuracy, detect discrepancies, and uphold the transparency of financial statements. When signatures are sold without proper examination, the credibility of the audit collapses. Such shortcuts may bring temporary money, but they permanently damage the CA's professional reputation and invite legal consequences.

## The Problem with “Commission-Agent” Mindset

A Chartered Accountant must never work as a commission agent. Unfortunately, many young professionals accept assignments from advocates and intermediaries, working for their clients at throwaway prices. The danger here is twofold: first, you remain forever dependent on others; second, the clients you serve under someone else’s umbrella will not remain yours. Next year, they will move wherever the intermediary sends them.

Building your own client base is difficult and time-consuming — but it is the only solid and sustainable path. Work should be for your regular clients, with whom you build long-term trust, rather than temporary clients who disappear after one season. The tax audit season should not be seen merely as a “revenue generation month” by working on borrowed clients. Instead, it should be used as an opportunity to deliver quality professional services to your own clientele.

Collaborating with advocates is not inherently wrong; in fact, multidisciplinary partnerships can be beneficial. But such associations must be based on clear standards of fees, professional respect, and complete scrutiny of assignments. Reducing oneself to a back-office signing authority destroys independence and credibility.



## A Practical Example: The Cost of Compromise

Consider the case of a young Chartered Accountant, freshly qualified and eager to establish himself in practice. During his first tax audit season, he struggled to find direct clients. An advocate in his city approached him with an offer — “You sign on my clients’ audit reports. I will pay you ₹1,500 per audit. No need to worry about records or annexures, everything is taken care of.”

Tempted by quick money and pressured by financial needs, the CA agreed. Within a month, he signed nearly 40 reports, earning ₹60,000. At first, it seemed like easy success. But soon, issues surfaced.

One of the audited clients received a tax scrutiny notice. The financial statements were full of mismatches and unsupported claims. The tax officer summoned the CA, holding him responsible as the statutory auditor. When he tried to explain that “the papers were given by the advocate,” the officer bluntly replied, “Your signature is here, not the advocate’s. You are accountable.”

The CA faced not only professional embarrassment but also disciplinary action under ICAI guidelines. His reputation suffered in the local professional circle, and clients hesitated to approach him directly. The short-term income had cost him long-term credibility.

This example highlights a bitter truth: selling signatures or working as a commission agent may look profitable today, but it puts your entire career and dignity at stake tomorrow. Independence, patience, and principled practice are the only ways to build a lasting foundation.



## Misuse of Professional Identity: Signboards and Marketing Gimmicks



The ICAI has prescribed clear guidelines for CA office signboards to maintain uniformity and dignity. Yet, the new generation often turns their boards into colorful, flashy advertisements resembling marketing company hoardings. While modernization and a fresh outlook are welcome, the basics of the profession should never be compromised. A signboard should symbolize dignity, not publicity. Professional identity must be subtle, serious, and respectful, not a tool for loud marketing.

## The Human Cost of Ethical Compromise

It must be remembered that professional ethics are not merely rules written in ICAI's Code of Conduct — they are the foundation of respect in society. When a CA forges a signature, certifies false information, or works as a dependent intermediary, he not only violates professional ethics but also degrades himself as a human being. Clients and society at large begin to take Chartered Accountants lightly, believing them to be willing participants in malpractice. Once this perception takes hold, the moral authority of the profession is permanently weakened.

The Way Forward for Young Professionals

The solution lies in returning to basics:

- Do not solicit work — let your competence and credibility bring clients to you.
- Never undercut fees — your knowledge and signature carry immense responsibility. Value them.
- Do not sell signatures — every certificate and audit report must be backed by complete scrutiny.
- Do not work as a commission agent — build your independent practice, even if it takes time.
- Maintain professional identity — dignity in signboards, offices, and public dealings is essential.



The Chartered Accountancy profession is not just a livelihood — it is a responsibility. Each CA carries the weight of public trust and national financial credibility. Shortcuts, compromises, and solicitation may seem tempting in the early years, but they erode the foundation of your career.

Young CAs must rise above these weaknesses. Be patient, be principled, and be professional. It may take years to build a reputation, but once established, it is unshakable. The dignity of the profession is in your hands. Safeguard it — because when you protect the profession, you protect your own future.



### CA Karan Goel

Karan Goel & Associates, Chartered Accountants, Kaithal

Contact: +91-7206659099  
Email: goelk05@gmail.com

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