

## HELPING HANDS

*Support member Richard Joseph talks about the vital service ICAEW provides to help members through their difficulties*

Ever had a problem regarding some aspect of your life as chartered accountant? Maybe to do with the practice, your partners, your employer, a client, an impending monitoring visit, or you just feel that things are getting a bit too much?

Phoning the ICAEW might seem a bit daunting; to whom would you talk to anyway? What you'd like is a chat with another kindred spirit, another chartered accountant who could understand the problem perhaps, but wouldn't go blabbing about it to the institute. Maybe not someone you know well, or who knows you, in case you might feel awkward about them knowing you have the problem. Anonymously, even, if you'd prefer.

Seems a bit farfetched? A bit too good to be true? Well, actually, this facility has been available to ICAEW members for over 17 years, but for some reason word hasn't got round the way it should have. We are called **SUPPORT MEMBERS** and we are group of around 80 chartered accountants around the country, who are officially recognised, backed and trained by the institute and, importantly, we are officially ***excused the requirement to report misconduct***. So while the majority of calls we do receive are actually nothing to do with misconduct, nevertheless when you are talking to a Support Member, there is *no chance whatsoever of anything you tell us getting any further than the person to whom you talk*. It's like talking to a priest in a confessional: absolutely, totally confidential.

A lot of us are past or present district society officers or committee members, who have been used to helping out fellow chartered accountants over the years, often in an unofficial capacity, and have a good understanding of institute procedures and politics. We also receive training and advice on how the institute's disciplinary proceedings work, so we can offer some thoughts on what might or might not be awaiting members who feel they might be in some sort of trouble. Strangely, a great many calls we get end up in us able to re-assure members that, actually, they are not in anything like the sort of trouble that they think they are. If the news is not so good, we can at least give a bit of advance warning of what to expect, and possibly recommend more formal sources of help and professional or legal advice.

The institute has put a lot of effort into alerting members about the **Support Member** facility, but still, many of the members I talk to in general conversation have never heard of us. The service is completely free to members, and totally confidential. Calls in the past have varied from members who simply want a second opinion on some professional matter (we may or may not be able to provide that, but we will know someone who can!) to members feeling genuinely 'at the end of their tether' for whatever reason, professional or personal. Again, we can't provide instant solutions to every problem, but it's amazing how much more manageable a problem can seem once you've talked it through thoroughly with a sympathetic listener.

If you feel you could use this service, you can find out about us on the ICAEW website, or phone the free central number **0800 917 3526** where you can find out the names and numbers of **Support Members** in your area, or specifically *not* in your area, if you'd prefer.

Don't suffer in silence - make the call. We're here to listen - and **SUPPORT** you.

**RICHARD JOSEPH FCA**  
**SUPPORT MEMBER NORTH LONDON**