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like the bigger firms do, but that doesn't mean you're out of the race. Here are five ways you can beat out even the biggest competitors when hiring.

Paul McDonald • Sep. 16, 2014



Most small accounting firms do not have the financial resources to attract workers like the bigger firms do, but that doesn't mean you're out of the race. Here are five ways you can beat out even the biggest competitors when hiring.

1. Promote professional development

In a Robert Half [survey](#), more than one-quarter of workers said that besides salary,

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Because your firm has fewer workers, you may have the flexibility to come up with some attractive and personalized benefits for your staff. For example, many employees seek perks like flexible hours and telecommuting, all of which contribute to a healthy [work-life balance](#). Some small businesses allow workers to bring their well-behaved pets. You can also offer equity incentives, buy everyone drinks at 4 p.m. on Fridays or bring in a massage therapist to ease the stress during tax season.

Be creative – and don't forget to mention these benefits in your job postings and when networking and interviewing.

3. Talk big about being small

Sure, many large accounting firms have name recognition and attractive compensation packages, but there's plenty they can't offer. Here's a short list:

- **Access to a broader range of opportunities** – Your staff can try out new roles and take on diverse responsibilities. There is usually not that range of flexibility in a large firm. For example, accountants in small firms could develop their proficiency in tax, audit, business valuation and consulting, whereas many large firms want their workers to specialize in one area.
- **Open door to management** – Your employees can get more face time with firm leaders. Healthy [communication](#) is vital in the workplace, and having open channels between departments and within the office hierarchy helps boost productivity and morale.
- **Visibility and a voice** – In a large accounting firm, staff can feel like they're a cog in a big machine. In a small business, however, it's easier to be heard and make a difference. Because small firms' layers of management are often shallow or nonexistent, employees get a closer look at how business is done. Staff will clearly

see how their contributions benefit the firm, and all this valuable exposure and

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You can also tap the networking power of [recruiters](#) who specialize in accounting. Since they commonly have real-world accounting experience and know the industry inside and out, they have access to valuable connections, industry alliances and insider tips – not to mention job candidates with hard-to-find skills.

5. Go back to school

The fastest-growing generation in the workplace, the Millennials, will soon take over the workforce. You can attract younger members of this talent pool, in particular, by targeting students and recent grads. Don't wait until the end of the academic year to visit colleges that have solid accounting programs, though. Lay the groundwork early:

- Participate in campus job fairs.
- Establish relationships with accounting professors, career counselors and the alumni office.
- Set up meet-and-greet sessions.
- Present on accounting topics during classes or accounting-related activities on campus.
- Offer internships to talented students so you can test-drive their abilities and cultural fit before making a hire.

Small firms have plenty to offer in-demand accounting professionals. To beat big competitors when hiring an accountant, be sure to highlight the advantages of working in a more intimate environment. With a little thought and creativity, small businesses can level the playing field when battling for the best.

Paul McDonald is senior executive director with [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. Over the course of his 30-year career with the company, he has

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