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When you look your firm in the mirror, what do you see? We all know people who have themselves convinced that the way things *should be* is the way they really *are*.

Some of them, we've discovered, are partners at CPA firms. Here are some common answers to questions we've posed that illustrate my point:

> **Does your firm have a succession plan?**

Typical partner response: Of course we do!

Is mentoring of staff a factor in your firm's partner compensation system?

Typical partner response: Yes. It may not be easy to see or measurable, but it's there. Our partners couldn't manage large client bases unless we were good mentors of our staff.

My take: A saying I have heard recently from several MP's of Top 100 firms: "You get what you measure." A strong mentoring program isn't created simply by doing other things and assuming there is a positive spillover effect on staff. Mentoring should be measured. Partners should be able to state, by name, partners or staff that have advanced in the firm under their tutelage. Each partner who has mentoring responsibilities should have a mentoring goal.

What are you doing to increase profitability?

Typical partner response: We're cutting staff and overhead expenses. Naturally!

My take: CPA firms never have been and never will be lavish spenders. Firms that go on cost-cutting "witch hunts" are refusing to face reality: that he biggest causes of disappointing profits are the partners' lack of practice development, unproductive personnel and low billing rates.

Why do you keep firing your marketing directors?

Typical partner response: They didn't bring in any business!

My take: First, marketing directors shouldn't be hired to personally bring in business. That's the job of the partners, managers and business development directors. Second, a strong underlying reason for firms' dismal track record for marketing director tenure (19 month average) is failing to treat them as integral members of the

ineffective. If a goal is not in writing and immeasurable, it doesn't really exist. The "no" response will be cited by firms who believe that goal-setting is a bunch of hogwash. "We tried it a few years ago and it went nowhere." The reason it went nowhere is because there was no accountability for achieving the goals and the firm and its partners didn't understand how to write proper goals.

If any of these questions – and answers – sound familiar, maybe it's time to reflect on how your firm can objectively assess what needs to change. Our monograph CPA Firm Management & Governance can help set you on that course. And be sure to check our previous post on 'How Partners Delude Themselves.'

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