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Amy Vetter • Sep. 08, 2016



While the accounting workforce is **comprised of more women than men**, this number does not carry over when it comes to the amount of women in practice leadership positions.

In a [recent column](#), I explored how we can attract female talent. But once we've

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How firms can help females progress

By not laying the groundwork for women to progress, firms can miss out on a unique pool of talent for leadership positions. In order to avoid the risk of losing valuable female employees, accounting firms should consider where to make priority investments to change that trajectory.

When women first get hired out of college, some are not quite ready to start a family. At a time when women generally don't have as many commitments in their personal lives, their typical billable hour requirement could average 50 to 60 hours during busy season.

As women start moving through their firm and maturing in their personal life, some may find that these hours are not conducive to a family. There can be little opportunity for them to remain on a career path. Additionally, the structure of the firm itself may not favor flexible work schedules or contractor opportunities.

Leveraging cloud technology in an accounting practice is one way to create an environment for women that enables them to continue to progress on their career path. Planning the right back-end infrastructure that enables the use of remote technology and sharing of data will allow the firm to move from the billable hour to project-based work. Cloud-based technology, both in the accounting and collaboration space, not only allows women and men to work remotely; it also allows more flexibility when it comes to client communications and sharing of data so work can be completed anytime and anywhere.

Many firms attempt this shift to drive more women into the firm by creating a quota – meaning, the percentage of women they want to achieve overall for the practice. I personally feel from experience and discussions with many female accountants,

simply changing the firm's diversity quota doesn't solve the issue. In fact, it may do

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boundaries are not respected by other co-workers, so they are not working more hours than intended, or being paid for.

For women that want to become contractors and work on a per diem basis, becoming specialized in a niche allows them to move between clients with ease. Doing so also offers a unique skillset to accounting firms that want to offer these services, while ensuring their career path marketability within a firm. Staying knowledgeable when it comes to industries that are firm-specific is very important. Even though a woman's spare time may be different depending on the stage in their career, they should always stay educated on the latest trends and technologies in that specialization to remain relevant in the profession.

Being a part of a professional organization that empowers women in the industry – like the [American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants](#) – is another great way to stay connected and network with peers. Even if they can't make it to physical meetings, they can find groups online to participate in remotely. This way they are still part of the profession and can contribute as an expert.

Women add so much to the culture of a firm. They bring unique traits to the table that complement men. By putting a set of practices in place, firms can ensure that more females will rise to the top and subsequently avoid the risk of them leaving to forge their own path.

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