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model many CPA firms still use to run their firms and manage staff. Einstein's definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results.

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Since the dawn of the accounting firm, retaining staff has bedeviled partners. High turnover limits growth and hinders succession planning. Turnover has numerous

causes. Some are out of our control— (i.e., staff find they are not cut out for a public

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1. **Make the work more challenging.** Make the job so interesting they won't want to leave. Use technology, outsourcing and hiring non-accountants to reduce the boredom, tedium and repetitiveness. Engage them. Give them more challenging opportunities earlier in their career. Get partners to stop hogging billable hours doing work they can delegate to staff. Get them into consulting.
2. **Get serious about training and mentoring.** A lot of firms *say* staff is just as important as clients, but few walk the talk. Staff leave when they stop learning and advancing. Adopt a university-style approach to training and leadership development. And here's the real throwback to the old CPA firm model: Partner performance and compensation must have a significant factor for helping staff advance under their tutelage and being great bosses – the #1 reason staff leave is the relationship with the boss.
3. **Transparency.** The old CPA firm model concealed the operations of the firm from the staff, almost never seeking their opinions on important firm issues. This alienates staff. Tell staff how much partners earn (not by name). Show them the money! Most staff don't have a clue how high partners' incomes are, and today's young people are greatly motivated by compensation. Also, teach your staff how the firm operates and how it makes money. Staff are much more engaged and committed when they see how their efforts contribute to firm profit.
4. **Flexibility.** Stop treating staff like plebes instead of the professionals they are. Today's staff want more flexibility on the job. Jennifer Wilson terms this "work anywhere, anytime." A companion with this is a new-age benefit termed "unlimited PTO" (paid time off): As long as staff hit their productivity targets, do excellent work on time and most importantly, thrill clients with world-class service, there are no limits to vacations and holidays and personal time off.
5. **Shorten the path to partner.** At most firms, it takes 15-20 years to make equity partner. When the best and the brightest see how long it takes to rise to the top they get turned off. This goes hand-in-hand with training, mentoring and

leadership development. If partners take their roles seriously about advancing

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1. **Use of technology.** Firms are getting better at it, but still have a long way to go.

They should be quicker to adopt advances like the cloud, continuous auditing and data analytics. Staff expect automated research and content that can be easily communicated to clients.

8. **Franchising processes.** Firms must end that time-honored practice of granting partners the inalienable right to do their work whenever and however they please, each creating their own work procedures. This is not only highly inefficient, but a great frustration to staff, who have to learn every partner's idiosyncrasies.
9. **Better performance feedback.** Continuous feedback beats annual reviews hands down. Both supervisors and staff hate traditional annual reviews, which are usually highly ineffective. Augment annual reviews with more ongoing feedback.
10. **Have a strategy and vision.** This is one of the most surprising results we find on surveys of what staff want. Traditionalists question why the staff should be concerned with the firm's strategy and vision; they feel that's none of the staff's business. Wrong. It IS their business because they want to work for an organization that is going places rather than stuck in neutral.

Marc Rosenberg is a nationally known consultant, author and speaker on CPA firm management, strategy and partner issues. President of his own Chicago-based consulting firm, [The Rosenberg Associates](#), he is founder of the most authoritative annual survey of mid-sized CPA firm performance statistics in the country, The Rosenberg Survey. He has consulted with hundreds of firms throughout his 20+ year consulting career. He shares his expertise regularly on [The Marc Rosenberg Blog](#).

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