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Looking back on the past year of education, successes and firm growth, accounting firm members of BKR International reflected and voted on their best of the best management traits to support practice management and the industry. Here five qualities they chose to ring in the new year.

1. Agility

Agile leaders of independent accounting firms accept constant change and can roll with challenges. They are open to new ideas and can leverage different generations in their firms to come up with fresh ideas, processes and technologies. But they balance innovation with the context of proven practice management and client service principles. Some partners may stay on as “of counsel” to support the transition of new leadership, for example, so they can mentor a young partner for a larger management role.

What agility looks like:

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A close synonym of honesty, sincerity is goodness of intention. When employees or clients believe that leadership is putting forth the best effort to look out for them, they will be open to change and the efforts required for success. Sincere leaders are not looking for just personal gain, but for the opportunities that raise all boats.

What sincerity looks like:

- Providing for and investing in the development of talent to enhance their careers.
- Asking questions to understand client goals and setting up a plan to meet them.
- Exploring new business opportunities that fit the firm and the prospect.

3. Discernment

Clients are looking for advisors who can steer them in the right direction based on their experience and knowledge. Due to the constant overload of information available, accounting firm leaders need the ability to cut through what isn't important and deliver clarity. Discernment is the quality that helps leaders identify fact from fiction and confidently recommend a strategy.

What discernment looks like:

- Analyzing industry outlooks and recommending a course of action or firm service.
- Avoiding marketing hype about the latest IT tool or solution for the firm.
- Gathering facts and tempering emotions within an employee or client conflict.

4. Timing

Sometimes an idea is great, but it's too early to pull the trigger. Sometimes, the idea comes too late to fully leverage it. The speed of information and events makes

planning plus strategy the critical foundation to properly time firm decisions. The

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Communicating regularly on emerging technologies, competitors or regulations that will change how the industry operates.

5. Gratitude

Everyone is busy, often too busy to take time to appreciate accomplishments. Gratitude reminds leaders to appreciate their achievements, and also recognize the successes of their employees, clients and family members. Leaders with a trait of gratitude create opportunities to celebrate and reflect on the good stuff. Bonus: employees and clients who feel valued are more engaged and loyal.

What gratitude looks like:

- Handwritten thank you notes
- A quick meeting with an employee to say, “Wow, you rocked that assignment and let me tell you why.”
- Gestures of appreciation such as catered lunch, community volunteering or nominating someone for an award

“There are many other wonderful traits that accounting firm leaders possess, but these five, working together, result in trusted leaders who accomplish important things and appreciate the people who help them,” says Maureen Schwartz, executive director of BKR International. “We wish these leaders, and emerging leaders like them, great success and support in 2018.”

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