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From the Dec. 2006 Issue

When it comes to his small business owner clients, Christian Brim speaks their language. Not only because, like most CPAs, he is also a small business owner, but because small business is more or less in his blood.

Several generations of his family have been small business owners, including his father, who ran an oilfield services company. In fact, oil may also be in Christian's blood, with his father, grandfather and several other relatives working in and around the field. Christian had other ambitions, however, and struck out on a different path.

Productivity Score: 385
Principal, Fiducial-OK Oklahoma City, Oklahoma www.fiducialok.com

His first thought was engineering or applied mathematics, but after entering the University of Oklahoma, he changed his major and eventually graduated with a degree in accounting. Then, after passing the CPA exam, it was off to the professional world where Christian worked in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa offices of Deloitte & Touche. After three years there, he just didn't see the large firm environment as a good fit, so he struck out on his own. In addition to his CPA credentials, Christian is also a Certified Management Accountant (CMA).

At about the same time, one of the largest global non-U.S. firms was looking

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the success they have had is because of the team approach they have in their practice and not solely because of himself. "Everyone here is an expert at what they do, so everything we have accomplished is because of the efforts of our whole team," he said, "not because of one individual."

Although the practice is a franchise of an international firm with backend support and processing centers, Christian and his staff manage and perform all of the services for their clients with none of the data leaving their control. And instead of using the company's proprietary software, Fiducial-Oklahoma has implemented a single integrated accounting suite that includes secure client access portals and remote, "virtual office" capabilities. This technology has simplified the interaction between the firm's primary office in Oklahoma City and its additional location in Tulsa, which is run by Christian's younger brother and partner, Nathan Brim. The methods and technologies the firm has implemented earned the practice a Productivity Score of 385, which is well above the national average and exceptional when compared to the firm's regional peers. More on the free Productivity Survey is available at www.cpatechadvisor.com/productivity.

Fiducial-Oklahoma's core clients and those they actively prospect, are generally businesses with around 10 employees and revenues in excess of \$1,000,000, similar to his practice. But even with that in common, he says that it is sometimes difficult to get those entrepreneurs to understand the importance of strategic planning and effective capital management. Additionally, getting them to adapt more effective business processes can be a challenge. "As a business advisor, of course you want to see your client succeed, just as a parent wants his children to succeed," Christian says. "And if we lose a client because they have outgrown us, well, that is as much a sign of our success as it is of theirs."

Of course, getting them to adapt can be a big part of whether a business lasts.

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In addition to offering planning and consulting, the practice also provides traditional write-up, bookkeeping and tax compliance services, as well as full payroll processing and QuickBooks consulting. They have been very successful at bundling their services, resulting in very few single-service clients. "We want it all or nothing," Christian said, regarding potential client work.

As much as Christian loves his practice and being a small business owner, he doesn't let it govern him, either in what aspects of client work he performs or the hours he keeps at work. "There are a lot of things in accounting that I don't like," he said. "That's why I don't really think of myself as an accountant." Fortunately, he says, the parts of accounting he doesn't like to do are the same things that his brother and wife Stacey are very good at. Stacey, who has a background in human resources and business administration, has recently joined the firm.

One of the more commendable attributes that Christian possesses is his ability to leave work behind at the office, something not many entrepreneurs, whether accountants or other small business owners, are often able to do so easily. Sure, he once used his country club membership as a place to take clients and prospects on the weekends, but he discontinued the membership because now the hours after 5 p.m. during the workweek as well as the weekend are family time, not client time.

The time is now mostly spent on soccer games, basketball, school functions and the many other activities that Christian and Stacey's three children, ages six to 12, are involved in. Aside from spending as much time as he can with his wife and kids, he has a few other interests that keep him occupied.

Of course, being an alumnus of the University of Oklahoma, he is a big fan of Sooner football and basketball. Also, a resurgent interest in his Native

Choctaw heritage has driven him to start learning the language. He and his family

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They also have recently been to Taos, New Mexico, and he and Stacey traveled more extensively prior to becoming parents. They hope to take their children to Europe “when they get a little older and can appreciate it.”

At only 36, retirement should be a far away thought, and while perhaps the word retirement is, a mid-life change of career is something he sees himself enjoying. “I’d really like to coach high school football and teach, maybe history or physical science.” Ordinarily, this would seem a big change for an accountant, but remember, Christian doesn’t consider himself one anyway. □

Technology

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