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PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

The Team Player

A Productivity in Practice Feature

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At 31, Steven Harris, CPA, shares many of the attributes of his generation, especially music and a great appreciation for business, personal and entertainment technology. But there is definitely something old-school about him, and this is most visible in his dedication to his employer, his family and his community.

Unlike many young professionals who anticipate and even desire several employment changes during their careers, Steven plans on staying right where he is for the foreseeable future. Since an internship during his senior year in 1998 at the University of Missouri's St. Louis campus, he has been on the staff of RubinBrown LLP (www.RubinBrown.com), a 350-person accounting, assurance and business consulting firm with locations in St. Louis and Kansas City. It is the 55th largest practice in the United States. Steven is an audit manager, overseeing several corporate clients from the firm's St. Louis headquarters, which has more CPAs than any other firm in the city.

RubinBrown serves a large and diverse primarily corporate client base through industry-specific divisions that offer full service to businesses in industries such as automotive, contractors, home builders, hospitality, nonprofit, real

estate, manufacturing, media, financial services, professional services and public sector entities. Its core areas of practice include assurance services, tax consulting, benefits management, IT consulting, corporate finance and forensic accounting.

Although the firm uses an industry-oriented approach to its client services groups, Steven notes that he is more of a generalist, working with several of the teams to provide audit and taxation services.

“It’s a great opportunity to be able to work with a diverse group of clients because it gives me a greater range of experience in many industry groups on both the audit and tax side,” he said.

“And this group-oriented approach, which includes audit, tax, consulting and other services into each division, helps build teams that work as one to meet all of the needs of our clients. And that’s a key point because it takes the ‘mine’ out of the client service equation. These are OUR clients, not mine, yours or theirs.”

Professional Snapshot		
	<p>Steven Harris, CPA</p> <p>Audit Manager</p> <p>RubinBrown LLP</p> <p>www.RubinBrown.com</p> <p>St. Louis, MO</p> <p>Productivity</p> <p>Score: 440</p>	

During his 10 years at RubinBrown, Steven has seen many of the major technological trends in the accounting profession first-hand, from the old binders that were in place a decade ago to the movement toward digital audit workpapers and increased remote work capabilities that allow for flexibility and instant access to client data while increasing the need for controls over their information. He notes that these advances, including the anywhere wireless card for his laptop and his BlackBerry, have made audit work much more efficient since teams can access all of their data, email and other information when at client locations. As evidence of its effective use of technology, RubinBrown earned a 440 on *The CPA Technology Advisor’s Productivity Survey*, a

free technology assessment tool for accounting firms

(www.CPATechAdvisor.com/productivity).

“These technologies really had a major effect on how we do our jobs and also let us be much more responsive to our clients,” Steven noted.

As a part of all accounting internships, RubinBrown has all newcomers work with their technology groups for a few weeks. This experience, plus Steven’s personal interest in technology, further helps him professionally and when traveling to visit his fiancé Arica in Detroit. The two will be married in August and will then honeymoon in the Bahamas.

Even before he chose accounting as a degree, he had an eye on technology.

“I knew that computer systems and mobile technologies would be a major part of any career choice I made. I had even thought of computer engineering as a potential career and took some courses, but found that the accounting profession

was much more enjoyable because of interaction with people. I really fell in love with client service.” Accounting was probably his destiny, having seen the importance of good bookkeeping at his father’s contracting business while he was growing up.

The same technologies that make Steven more effective at work and while traveling on business (he spends about 50 percent of his time at client locations) also enable him to contribute more of his time to the several professional, community and faith-based organizations he supports. Steven is currently president of the National Association of Black Accountants’ (NABA) St. Louis chapter, a market captain for the United Way and is involved with Insight St. Louis, which helps promote the dynamic career opportunities that exist in the city to students at historically black colleges and universities. The group also provides annual guided tours and networking opportunities.

“St. Louis is a wonderful city. There are a lot of professional opportunities in the area, and we showcase the city to these students. In New York or Chicago, even when you’re successful, you can still get lost in the big pond, but in St. Louis you have the opportunity to be a bigger star.”

Another community-oriented organization that Steven has a close connection to is INROADS, which provides career development and training to help place talented minority youth in career-focused business internships. It is through INROADS that Steven obtained his internship with RubinBrown to begin his career

in public accounting. He is also on several of the accounting practice's internal committees and is involved in identifying and recruiting new team members.

He was recently recognized as the 2009 Rising Star by the National Association of Black Accountants and has won numerous other awards. "I just wish my dad was still around to help me celebrate these victories; I know he would be so proud."

Steven credits much of his professional development and success to RubinBrown partner Steve W. Hays, Sr., CPA. "Steve has been a great leader similar to a good head coach, leading our teams to excel and reach championship levels of client service. He's also phenomenal at developing a good mix of friendship and professional relationship, supporting team members in every step of life, because he has sincere passion in making sure you succeed and do your best in all of your endeavors."

When time and technology allow, Steven spends as much time as possible with his daughter Khloe, and with Arica and her son Omar. Arica is also an accountant and serves as the president of NABA's Detroit chapter. Originally from St. Louis, Steven has plenty of other family in the area, including his mother, whom he says gave him his outlook on work/life balance.

"She was always there for us, and since she worked early in the day she was able to spend time with me when I got out of school. She definitely taught us that family was the most important thing, but that you also need to take pride in your work." His father was also a strong influence, one that continues in Steven's life through his quote, "Success starts with a solid foundation."

Steven also pals around with his nephews Gerald (19) and Andrew (16), playing video games, basketball and hanging out. "I have the ultimate guy place right now, with cool video games, sports on TV and other things, so it's pretty easy to get them to come over, and I can usually use my toys to get them to help with my yard work."

He is actively involved with the athletic ministry at his church, the Shalom Church City of Peace. The Baptist congregation of about 7,000 is large enough to sponsor its own internal softball leagues, where Steven serves as both a coach and as second base/shortstop. He helps the ministry with financial

management

for its various groups, including health and wellness, and the financial literacy programs. Steven also plays on RubinBrown's softball team.

While some who achieve so much success at an early age can succumb to ego, Steven has managed to stay firmly grounded to the principles that helped him attain that success. He constantly defers praise and helps refocus the spotlight on the effort of the whole team, whether it's a professional accounting engagement or a softball game.

As for his professional team at RubinBrown, Steven says his dedication to them is more than camaraderie, he sees the firm as his professional home — one in which he plans on staying. "I'm a lifer with RubinBrown.

I see a lot of opportunities within the firm, and I see it growing. I hope to continue as a part of its team and perhaps a partner at some point, to help shape the evolution of the practice."

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