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The Spirit Of Accounting

That's where the spirit of accounting comes into play. For though they are known for their analytical skills and their brusque adherence to standards, accountants are also the steadfast core of charities and non-profits.

Dave McClure • Aug. 07, 2009

Of all of the professions in this world, few donate as much time to charities and non-profits as accountants. They serve on boards of directors, as treasurers, and as volunteers. They are highly sought after because of their familiarity with standards, with audit procedures, and with internal controls necessary to make non-profits strong and effective in their pursuit of their missions.

I know this, even though I must confess I am not a CPA. For all of the years I have spent in and around the accounting profession, I am a geek, not a green-shade guy. Nonetheless, I spend an amazing amount of time working with causes of every kind and description. And everywhere I turn there are accountants in service.

That is how I know that the year ahead will demand all of the attention, and all of the caring and giving, that this industry has to offer. Here's why:

Times are tough, and will get tougher. Budgets will be smaller, even as the need becomes ever greater. Non-profits of every kind will see the requests for help grow even as they struggle to meet their basic financial obligations. There is no real end in sight to the current recession until far into 2010, and that will make things increasingly stressful.

Fraud will be an issue. Sadly, human nature is not always as noble as it should be. That means that a small minority of people, both paid and volunteer, will seek to

take advantage to gain something for themselves. When jobs are tight and money is tighter, fraud and theft increase.

Fraud begets more fraud. Even worse, once it becomes easy to take a little, the number of people taking will grow. Whether it is a few dollars from the collection plate or massive fraud on a grand scale, the environment that encourages the taking will expand.

Standing against this, to protect the integrity and the purpose of charitable non-profits, are the legions of accountants who serve. Part of their services is standard accounting skill — the reconciliations, the audits, the reports and the internal controls. But equally important is the ability to bring to bear the technical knowledge in which accountants have always had a leading role.

When money gets tight, it becomes essential that non-profits implement technology plans that can eke ever-greater results from ever-dwindling resources. And this means that the real value of an accountant to a non-profit is the dual service of financial controls and technological restructuring.

There are few non-profits that have decent technology. Most have inadequate member and donor databases, under-powered computers and obsolete software. Bringing these technical resources up to snuff is the task for a keen mind and a wizard's wand.

That's where the spirit of accounting comes into play. For though they are known for their analytical skills and their brusque adherence to standards, accountants are also the steadfast core of charities and non-profits. They provide the spirit, the soul and the heart that fuels America's efforts to care for those who cannot care for themselves alone.

That's an important role in the fabric of America, and one that receives little attention. But from foundations to food banks, from fraternal lodges to the fight against the ravages of disease, it is accountants who stand on the front lines.

And this world would be a poorer place without them.

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