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It's hard to believe that I've been part of the accounting profession for nearly three decades! But here I am, approaching my 28th year. Apart from the shock of how fast time goes by, I'm also amazed at how far my firm has come and the changes in the profession as a whole. It's another milestone in my career, so it's as good a time as any to take a moment and reflect on things I've learned—as well as the things I wish someone had told me years ago.

As many of you know, I grew up in the accounting profession. My father ran his own small public accounting firm, which offered me a great deal of insight into how the profession operated at the time. I remember a manual process-driven environment, where payroll, tax returns, and financial statements were prepared and processed

using pencil and paper. I also recall my father working long hours, experiencing a

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door and spent long hours at the office, working as a technician.

A few years into a highly tedious and tiring routine, I knew that there must be a better way to do things...to *work differently*. I wanted to cut down on hours in the office, build a revenue stream that I could count throughout the year, and develop a productive and confident staff that I could count on to manage the day-to-day stuff. And that is exactly what I did. I transformed my practice into what I call a Next Generation Accounting Firm. I defined my business model, implemented advanced technologies, and took back control of workflow by setting expectations up front with clients. I was finally working the way I wanted to work. Here was where the real lesson was learned...

After transitioning my firm, I remember closing the office and driving home during busy season, only to see other local firms were still open with several cars in the parking lot. I would take my family to dinner or be returning from my kid's basketball game late at night and still see the lights on in these other firms. I HAD created the firm I'd dreamed of—more revenue, less work hours—yet I remember feeling that something was still wrong...that I was missing something because I wasn't in the office until midnight.

I'm sure that you are thinking this is crazy...that I should have been satisfied with my circumstances. And you're right, I should have been. What I finally realized was that even though I had accomplished building a next-generation firm and was *working differently*, I still wasn't *thinking differently*. That was the next change that needed to occur.

What does “thinking differently” mean? It means you don't have to do things the way they've always been done. It means building your practice around the life you want to lead and not killing yourself during tax season. It means working when and from where you want to work—using a laptop or mobile device. It means realizing

that building a Next Generation Accounting Firm means you are free from the role of

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For me, building a streamlined business is much more enjoyable than preparing tax returns. By thinking differently about how you build (or re-build) your next-generation practice, you can also accomplish the work/life balance you desire. For more insight, also read my feature article in this issue where I interview friend and mentor, Greg LaFollette. Greg provides some great advice for those who have been in the profession for years and those thinking about starting their own firms.

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