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Taija Sparkman • Nov. 13, 2015



There are two roads to becoming a “Firm of the Future” – adaption by choice and adaption by obligation. Earlier this year, Intuit announced it would host a contest to identify firms taking the first road. Several months later and Two Roads, a small tax and bookkeeping firm from Knoxville, Tenn., has been named the winner.

The concept for the “Firm of the Future” contest was birthed about a year ago through conversations with Intuit customers and accountants.

“As we talked to our customers and other professionals about where the industry was

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applicants, 20 finalists were selected and submitted videos to the contest's website. From those 20 videos, Intuit selected its final winner – Two Roads.

“The videos showed some of the most energetic, creative, forward-thinking people you're ever going to meet and it was hard picking just one winner. What really made Two Roads stand out was how focused they were on becoming a trusted advisor for their small business clients,” said McGinnis. “In watching their video, it became clear that they embody the same principles and values that Intuit has stood for from day one.”

Two Roads frame who they are as a firm to their clients – everything they do is focused on helping their clients become better. Getting into the cloud for the cloud's sake is “ridiculous.” The firm was started in April 2011 when Chad Ridner and his business partner saw a need for small business bookkeeping and tax services. Before it was a “Firm of the Future,” Two Roads operated along the same traditional methods as most accountant firms – clients drop their files off and pick them up after Ridner and his team were done with entry and filing. About six months in, they soon discovered there was a more efficient way and started the transformation.

“We had some friends in the IT profession that offered to host QuickBooks Desktop on a secure server. That was really the genesis of it all. If we could host our accounting software, what else could we host on the server?” said Ridner.

Today, Two Roads is 100 percent in the Cloud. Most of their clients use QuickBooks Online and only two clients operate QuickBooks Desktop on the hosted Cloud server.

“We loved being a part of the QuickBooks environment. With the improvements to QuickBooks Online, we were able to move everyone to the Cloud. I like to think we've made a lot of progress and are very competitive,” said Ridner.

Once Ridner saw the benefits of operating in the Cloud, he quickly moved his firm

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“The beauty of the Cloud is that it allows our team to have the flexibility needed to create work-life balance. And, that's huge! We believe that if we take care of our team members, they'll take care of our partners because we created a work environment where they just love what they do,” said Ridner.

Another important benefit of the Cloud for Two Roads is the efficiency they have achieved by digitally exchanging files with clients and no longer printing checks. In addition to operating in the Cloud, Ridner believes accountants can really leverage their efficiency and value with a fixed rate model. Clients know the payment is going to be the same every month, so they are going to focus on the value of your services as a whole and not each task.

“Most clients feel like they are being nicked and dimed. If you have a client wondering, ‘Should I just Google this or call my accountant?’ you have a problem. They don't think you're worth that phone call,” said Ridner.

Ridner believes the key to becoming a trusted advisor is to recognize your clients' proactive touchpoints and use them to consult with your clients on how they could proactively improve their business. Instead of working with clients after the fact, accountants should focus on providing useful and relevant information throughout the year that allows business owners to take action in the present for the future, as opposed to for the past.

“People can often view their accountant or bookkeeper as a transactional relationship – someone you engage from time to time, but not really a trusted advisor. We wanted to change that, so we started calling our clients partners, and worked to change their view of us from someone whose phone calls they returned to someone they wanted to actively include in their business' success,” said Ridner. “We're a part of our partners' stories but we're not THE story. Our partners are passionate about what they do and we want to participate in that. We want to help

them be more successful because it's important to us that we help them become

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change is constant and embrace it.

"In general, nobody wants to change if they don't have to. If things have worked this way, then why change them? However, changing technology allows us to serve our clients better and make their lives easier. It's been hard to get people to accept that change is here to stay and they should embrace it," said Ridner.

So how does a firm start to become a Firm of the Future? Start by simply having the conversation. Ask your staff what their biggest concerns and fears are. You'll be surprised how often the issues is not that they're afraid of the technology; they just don't understand it, so get your staff used to the new technology.

"It's important to remember that technology is a means to help but it's not the answer. At the end of the day, what I want – what we all want – is to serve our clients better. At the end of the day, we are here to help small businesses. But, if we can use these tools, this technology, to help them succeed or survive, then we should," said Ridner.

Firms should also take advantage of conferences like QuickBooks Connect, which provides an opportunity to network with people who have already made the journey and can offer tips and best practices, added Ridner.

While Ridner is humbled to be a part of Intuit's "Firm of the Future" initiative, he is also understandably ecstatic to be named the winner of the contest.

"When I found out we won, I went to the party store and bought a lei, then went home. I stood outside with the lei on until my wife looked up at me and said, 'You got to be kidding me?!' Then, we both started screaming," said Ridner.

As part of the contest, Ridner won a trip to Hawaii and he can't wait to celebrate with his wife. As an added bonus for Ridner, his wife was in the audience the day the

announcement was made, which just happens to be their wedding anniversary. They

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