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Amy Vetter • Feb. 15, 2017



Women in accounting have come a long way. Christine Ross, the first female CPA in the U.S., received her certification in 1899 — but only after an 18-month delay by state regents because of her gender. While today we're sitting at around a 50-50 split of females in accounting, we're still only seeing about 19 percent of CPA firm leadership positions represented by women. While there are more women entering the profession than ever before, they're not finding the same level of ease when trying to progress to leadership positions.

Last year, I spoke extensively about how to create a supportive network with and for women — presenting on the topic at both Accountex and the AICPA Women’s Global

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Know Your Firm's Purpose

Knowing your firm's purpose or "why" will prove invaluable when it comes to establishing a culture that is conducive to diverse leadership. Purpose and culture are inseparable in the modern workplace. Offer training early on to female staff that aligns with your firm's sales processes and business development. This way you'll provide them with the skills necessary, those beyond accounting, in order to be successful in the firm. Many accountants don't realize that having these skills is a bonus when pursuing leadership positions. Training can involve shadowing a mentor, partner or boss on sales calls to learn what the process is like or even attending outside sales and business development training. By offering these programs you're giving leaders the skills they need to thrive.

My purpose was, and still is, to help small businesses succeed — a desire that developed from growing up around small business owners. This set me on the path to where I am today. I constantly realign myself with this purpose, ensuring the work I do is fulfilling and makes a difference. People that have a clear understanding of why they do what they do feel a strong sense of contentment with their work. If the women in your firm on a leadership path are clear about their purpose and it aligns with the firm's, they will be able to set goals and achieve success in their job — benefiting the firm as a result.

Advisor Skillset

Leveraging cloud technology in your firm also opens up a world of offerings for your clients. Using cloud accounting software, you can create actionable reports and forecasting with the click of a button — saving time and enabling you to offer more proactive, higher-level advisory services to your clients. By doing so, you become the connected advisor — with the ability to offer services such as strategic planning,

cashflow management, budgeting, process improvement, financial statement

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resources include [Coursera](#) -which offers online courses from universities worldwide – the [MACPA learning center](#) and courses from the [Business Learning Institute](#). It's simply a matter of finding the right fit.

Encourage Remote and Flexible Work Opportunities

Part of establishing a culture that encourages diverse leadership is building a foundation that enables staff to work on a flexible schedule as well as remotely. Unfortunately, parenthood can become a roadblock for career progression because traditional firm work schedules aren't always conducive to raising a child — but that doesn't have to be the case. Cloud technology gives staff the opportunity to work from anywhere, at anytime and should be leveraged to encourage a successful leadership path — rather than a delayed one.

The cloud doesn't require an office, instead you can utilize practice management tools that help manage workflow so staff know what work needs to be done, when the deadlines are and then jump in and check out work. [G Suite](#) offers collaborative cloud tools including video conferencing software, Hangouts, so staff can attend meetings remotely and Docs for collaborative writing and editing. Today, there's nothing stopping work-life integration.

In the future, as practices transform and continue to adopt more cloud technology, women will hopefully keep gaining ground and hold more leadership roles in the workplace. For accounting firms, it's a matter of creating a collaborative environment where women can not only lead but thrive at work and at home.

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