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*Chasing Stately*

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Frank Stitely takes his tax practice seriously. As one of two partners at Stitely & Karstetter, a CPA firm based in Chantilly, Virginia outside of Washington DC, he has his eye on the future as he looks for ways to attract younger clients and utilize the skills of his younger staff.

New technology, and specifically a change from Lacerte® tax software to CCH Axcess™, has produced opportunities to maximize the usage of his staff and improve the bottom line. “We work very hard on workflow management – it’s a big deal for us. It’s literally how we make our money. We’re doing twice as much revenue with probably four to five fewer employees than we had back in the early 2000s,” said Stitely.

The firm used Lacerte® software for tax preparation since about 2000, but found the

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process was we would scan documents up front, but it took a higher level person to figure out what you wanted to pull in to the tax return and what you didn't," Stitely explained. "For example, you were pulling in Schedule D transactions whether you wanted to or not. If you had 400 Schedule D transactions and you would have rather entered them in a summary, it was too late – there wasn't a process to validate the data entry before it went in.

"It's actually a new way of thinking about how we enter data into a return. We don't have to keypunch everything. [CCH Axcess™ and CCH® Autoflow] allows us to push tasks down to the lowest level of staff who is competent to do it. And we can save our expensive, experienced preparers to work on Schedules C, D, E, things like that – instead of typing in W-2s and 1099s." When data comes in from a client, admin submits everything to the Autoflow process, and then entry-level staff members can validate the data. "Five years ago the entry-level staff would have been entering W-2s, 1099s, 1098s, it would have hindered our ability to get them working on other tasks – there wouldn't have been time for it. Now we're teaching new entry-level people how to do tax return preparation – they're productive and billable almost from day one."

More effective use of staff goes hand in hand with improved relationships with clients, especially the younger IT-focused client base Stitely & Karstetter is now able to serve. "Cloud is a magic word," said Stitely. "Our project management is a cloud-based product, clients see it every day, we post files, comments, they can post comments, they can see their invoices, pay online. If you want to deal with younger clients you've got to have something that's a good portal. The young clients don't want to come in for meetings. They might be working at 2 a.m. and they want to respond then."

Stitely & Karstetter understands the advantages of allowing staff to work remotely,

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Even before additional office space that he had acquired years ago when the assumption of expansion was on the minds of the partners, but before the concept of remote workers had taken hold. "We thought someday we would need to move into it, but found out we never did," said Stitely.

"We have a workflow that makes sense," said Stitely. "Axxcess™ is a great tax return engine." Stitely seems particularly pleased with the fact that he can onboard new staff members right out of college and get their working on real tax returns instead of data entry. "If you want to turn off Millennials, just have them sit in a back room and type W-2s all day."

Technology

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