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growing client base and revenue stream. But how can CPAs break the cycle? The key is to change your client's perception of you from taskmaster to a trusted client ...

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Ever seen the movie *Groundhog Day*? It's exactly what I think of when describing tax season for accountants. The first quarter of the new year always brings a huge influx of businesses that need tax help, but by April they are gone – not to return until the panic sets in again the same time the following year. It's a predictable cycle that just goes on and on... and on.

Large, successful accounting firms are typically immune to this; they have a regular, growing client base and revenue stream. But how can CPAs break the cycle? The key is to change your client's perception of you from taskmaster to a trusted client partner. How? Consider putting in place these three key initiatives to transform once-a-year project clients into full-year contracts with a monthly retainer.

Have a regular advising process with deliverables.

Planning is key – there are a lot of ways to be an adviser to your clients, so you must be strategic in establishing your process as it may be the most helpful step for both parties.

For your clients, identifying a business process, or a recognizable series of what happens each year come tax season, that works for both of you allows them to better understand next steps, and provides a clear picture of deliverables they can expect to see throughout your working relationship. It will also add a sense of flow to your established clients' portfolios, making your work with them throughout subsequent months more seamless and useful. Another advantage to putting a business process

in place that once proven successful, it can be used as a blueprint for all new clientele

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Of course, there are some great tools out there to help make this easier than ever. Prepping for scenarios that address common cash flow management challenges using business planning tools like [LivePlan](#), for example, allows you to do easy trend analysis and forecast outcomes that actually mean something to your client. It's like having a unique translating tool that bridges the complicated things CPAs understand to the metrics that matter to clients. Having the ability to analyze scenarios will establish a true value add for your clients.

Forecast client goals and the steps to get there.

Setting goals may seem to be outside a CPA's traditional list of responsibilities, but becoming involved in your client's goals is one of the best ways to gain their trust. A major pain point for CPAs trying to gain long-term clients is the unfamiliarity with their clients' businesses, but you're never going to be able to build a strong financial forecast unless you know their goals.

Truly understanding what your client's business is all about – even going as far to learn more about your client's history and what drives them each day – forces you through the process of thinking “what is the essence of my clients' business,” and will give you a clearer picture of how you can assist and contribute to their success over the long-term.

Use real-time tools to offer dynamic features clients need (and also want!) every day.

Once you determine the more holistic services you want to offer, don't go it alone; find the tools to support and automate that process for you. This ensures much more scalability for a small practice or one-man show.

If you want to succeed as a valued partner to your clients, your profit is in maximizing the margin – and you need tools to support that objective. The minute

you think about the work of advising as unique to each client, then you're back to the

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far greater. Instead of catering to a large influx at the beginning of the year, your clients will have a longstanding relationship with you – so it isn't always just a mad dash to the deadline. The best part? Having clients that trust you and your input to help further the success of their business. When there is a reliable relationship both ways between a CPA and its client, it sets each up for prosperity in years to come.

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Sabrina Parsons is CEO of [Palo Alto Software](#), developer of the best-selling business management software, [LivePlan](#). Palo Alto Software develops software and tools specifically targeted for entrepreneurs, small-business owners, as well as CPAs, accountants, and book keepers who trust LivePlan to manage their own business financials. Sabrina assumed the CEO role in May 2007 and is responsible for Palo Alto's business planning, fiscal and strategic goals and all of the company's traditional marketing. She is a graduate of Princeton University.

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Firm Management

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