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**FIRM MANAGEMENT**

# How Accounting Firm Managers Can Help Their Teams Work Happy

Happiness at work is more important than many managers realize. Content employees tend to be more passionate about company goals, which means stronger performance, a higher retention rate, and fewer resources spent on hiring and training.

Paul McDonald • Apr. 11, 2017



Chances are, your firm's accounting staff appreciate their jobs and may even like them, but they don't really love them.

That's what some of your fellow accountants reported when surveyed for [It's Time We All Work Happy: The Secrets of the Happiest Companies and Employees](#) from Robert Half and well-being expert [Nic Marks](#), CEO and founder of [Happiness Works](#). Accountants indicated they are not as satisfied in their jobs as many other professionals — ranking fifth (out of eight professions) for happiness and seventh for the level of interest in their work.

Happiness at work is more important than many managers realize. Content employees tend to be more passionate about company goals, which means stronger performance, a higher [retention](#) rate, and fewer resources spent on hiring and training.

About two-thirds of staff who identify as working happy say they put in extra effort at the office. Additionally, happy employees are statistically healthier individuals, which means fewer sick days and greater productivity. Happiness is bottom-line affecting.

## What makes accountants happy?

The study [finds](#) that feeling appreciated is the most important factor in whether accounting professionals are happy in their jobs. Being treated with fairness and respect ranked second, and feeling a sense of accomplishment from their work was third.

As a manager in public accounting, one of your jobs is to enhance your team's engagement, empowerment and [motivation](#) — all of which boosts the bottom line. Read on for tips for helping your employees be happier in their jobs.

## Encourage independent thinking.

Micromanaging kills motivation and is the death knell of happiness at work. [Be a better boss](#) by encouraging employees to make decisions, solve problems and take risks.

Your role is to offer support, advice and guidance. Allow your staff to do the job they were hired to do. Empowering them is also a good managerial move because you are helping them [prepare for future leadership roles](#) in finance.

## Show your appreciation.

Never underestimate the power of recognizing a job well done. With frequent travel and finicky clients, public accountants sometimes do a thankless job. Here are a few ways to acknowledge your staff:

- If your firm does not yet have a peer-to-peer recognition program, this year is a good time to start one. The prizes don't have to be big. To make it effective, make sure senior management personally thanks each nominee and winner.
- Tax season is long and grueling, so [celebrate](#) after it's over with a party, bonus, outing and well-deserved time off.
- When you catch employees doing great work, acknowledge their efforts in a public email or meeting. Be detailed in how they went above and beyond, and explain how their action had a positive effect on the department or firm.

## Promote a balanced lifestyle.

Accounting firms have a reputation for demanding long hours, which could contribute to why accountants rank themselves low on the work happy scale. But even though the job is grueling during peak seasons, it shouldn't be that way all the time. Help your employees find work-life balance by encouraging long vacations, bringing in interim help when necessary and having senior management "walk the talk" by setting a good example.

## Hire with the right fit in mind.

Your public accounting firm has a unique corporate culture, and every job candidate you consider when hiring has his or her own traits. Before employees can work happy, they have to feel they are a good fit for the company and the role.

This requires you to ask [interview questions](#) that go beyond tax knowledge and Excel proficiency; be sure to prioritize soft skills and personality in your hiring process. Also, have your team spend time with short-listed candidates. When potential new hires have an accurate picture of the job, they're less likely to become disillusioned, bored or unhappy at work.

## Check in often.

An accountant who's happy during the first week may not feel that way after his or her first [tax season](#). Touch base with your staff regularly. Find out if they still feel challenged by the role and whether you need to tweak their assignments or job

duties. Remember, employees' career goals are likely to evolve over time, and being responsive to those changes helps them work happy.

Happiness at work is a key to your accounting firm's success. By tweaking the way you [hire](#) and manage employees, you can help ensure your accountants work happy — now and into the future.

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