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club. A few mornings each week, our team would meet at the boat and train for several hours to ensure each team member set his paddle into the water simultaneously ...

Andrea Parness • Aug. 18, 2017

Years ago, I trained and raced a six "man" outrigger canoe as a member of a local club. A few mornings each week, our team would meet at the boat and train for several hours to ensure each team member set his paddle into the water simultaneously, producing a consistent stroke rate and length. Over the course of the

summer, our team participated in ten 40-mile races on the East Coast. I quickly

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#1 Networking to solve to problems

I am a member of several accounting/business groups and volunteer at a few in some capacity. Like many of my colleagues, I feel the relationships I have formed as a result of my membership provide countless benefits. For example, I now have many accountant and attorney friends who I can turn to if (ahem, when) I run into a tricky situation. Any one of them will give my situation their full attention or refer me to another expert – an answer to my question is always just a phone call away.

#2 Ease of obtaining continuing education

These days, new compliance issues and tax law changes seem to happen more and more frequently. The local chapter of my accounting group holds two chapter meetings every month, and the Education committees meet and schedule knowledgeable speakers at critical times of the year. If I miss important sessions at our annual event, I can still get the information I need from recordings provided by the event coordinators. Without these resources, it would be impossible to stay up to date with all the changes and information I need to know. My work on an advisory council enables me to remain current with technology and has introduced me to a new group of technology professionals and progressive accountants from across the county.

#3 Influence tax laws

Several of my professional groups send delegates to meet with, and present policy changes to, representatives of the Internal Revenue Service and respective state tax authorities. In addition, they take an annual trip to Capitol Hill with a list of recommendations compiled from issues we as practicing tax professionals encounter with our small business clients. Recent changes regarding the PTIN system were a result of one such meeting. Rather than simply reacting to each new law or

legislative change, my membership gives me the opportunity to affect these changes

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many in our profession had similar experiences, we were able to see the majority of issues were not limited to any individual firm and we shared ideas on how to improve the situation for the future. Several of the most effective practices I adopted this last tax season were direct recommendations I gained from attending meetings of my accountant mentoring group. We instituted a more proactive approach to obtaining client documents and fee collection which resulted in a better experience for myself, my staff, and my clients. I shared this experience with my peers during our April and May meetings in hopes that other members could benefit from this approach as well.

#5 Best use of software/efficiency

The accounting profession has seen immense changes as a result of technology. Never before have there been so many options for programs and related apps. Only by attending technology conferences over the last five years could someone like me (a practicing CPA for over 25 years) feel empowered to convert a traditional accounting firm to one that is tech-forward. At these meetings, I interact with vendors one-on-one to learn how their software can run both my business and my clients' businesses more efficiently. Many software providers set up online support groups so users can connect and see how other firms are handling similar issues. I recently collaborated with another CPA in my local professional group to give a presentation titled "Office Automation," where we compared notes on the software we were using in our respective offices and introduced other software options that we had researched, but were not yet using. We even picked up tips from the seminar participants on software they were using.

BONUS BENEFITS from active membership in professional groups

The bonus benefits of being an active member of one or several of your professional groups:

- Shape the future of the accounting profession by creating focus groups and

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Andrea Parness, CPA, owner of A. Parness Company, a small CPA firm based in Belle Harbor, Queens, NY, has been in public accounting for over 30 years. Prior to starting her own firm in 1985, she was a partner in a small CPA firm located in Great Neck, NY and worked as an internal auditor and financial analyst for a Fortune 500 company. She is a member of the National Conference of CPA Practitioners (NCCPAP) Nassau-Suffolk Chapter, the AICPA and the New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants (NYSSCPAS). She currently serves on the Long Island Tax Symposium Executive Committee. She also services as the Executive Vice President of the NassauSuffolk Chapter of NCCPAP and is a board member of the Education Foundation of the National Conference of CPA Practitioners (NCCPAP). Andrea is also a member of the Intuit ProConnect Tax Council.

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