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Amy Vetter • Sep. 20, 2017



In 2017, female accounting professionals still lack the support they need in the workplace in order to advance their careers. Last year, I wrote a column on the topic of females only being represented in [19% of accounting firm](#) leadership positions, and explored some of the ways we can move the needle on this imbalance. This year's

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For accounting firm leaders, consider implementing some of the following strategies in order to increase diversity within your ranks.

Flexibility

Flexible work arrangements enable both men and women to make time for the demands of their personal lives, such as time with family, while still actively engaging in their careers. Any parent knows how difficult it can be to balance spending quality time with family with a heavy workload. In my accounting practice, I employed several mothers who worked part time. Additionally, my employees enjoyed flexibility in not only hours, but location. Many of the people who worked for me lived in all parts of the country. Leveraging cloud technology, I was able to create a flexible working environment, where employees were able to login remotely, check out work and even participate in meetings, all while giving me oversight of what was being worked on.

Frazier & Deeter, one of the accounting firms participating in the MOVE project, introduced a flexible policy for women 20 years ago, which they have found to be very successful. From the outset, they desired to be a firm that invests in its people and felt that offering flexible schedules was important to retaining women. Its program has been successful, with female presence in its partner team well ahead of the industry norm.

Think outside the box when it comes to job titles

For a long time, accounting firms have had their staff follow the traditional associate-manager-partner track. But in some instances, this can create a skills gap where women may think they are underqualified when looking to move up the career ladder or, when they do get there, they might feel as if they've been thrown in the deep end. Introducing innovative roles, where people can learn the skills to

bridge the gap, is a strategy that has been implemented by Accounting MOVE

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Often, many of the traditional team bonding activities organized such as golf do not appeal to everyone. It's important to ensure that there is a team excursion to include everyone, whether this be by rotating activities on a regular basis or otherwise, so everyone feels involved, supported and empowered. At my practice, I held spa days where women could use the opportunity to network and work through ways to help each other on any of the things they were struggling with in the workplace. This way, women were able to take advantage of these activities just like men do on the golf course.

Create supportive networks

Many of the firms in the MOVE project have created groups specifically to foster talent and encourage women to have long careers at their firms. CohnReznick introduced WomenCAN, a collaborative advocacy network for women. It focuses on leadership courses, access to mentors and roundtable discussions with firm partners. Moss Adams initiated Forum W, which focuses on four main objectives that they believe are pivotal to success at their firm. As part of the program they listen to women's career goals and experiences, establish solid relationships, connect women to successful people in the industry and provide increased opportunities for leadership roles.

We've still got a long way to go until we can achieve true diversity in accounting firms. As more organizations implement some of these strategies, they'll be able to empower women and ensure their greater longevity within their businesses.

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