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dollar study on the topic. They wanted to know how women viewed their organization, and what steps were needed to overcome that perception in the hiring process.

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## What the CIA Can Teach your Firm About Recruiting More Women

Whether it's in books or movies, the CIA has a certain reputation for intrigue and danger. Humorously, the [CIA's FAQ section on their website](#) includes answers to

questions such as, “Who is a spy? Are there secret agents like James Bond with secret

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taking these lessons from the CIA into the next hiring season can result in significant strategic advantages for your firm.

Below are selected perceptions of how women, not yet affiliated with the CIA, viewed the agency. We think you will find the parallels between the CIA and how the public generally view CPAs, uncanny.

## Advantages

- The CIA is a prestigious place to work.
- The opportunity to travel is appealing to some.

## Disadvantages

- Fear that the job will be intrusive on an employee's family life.
- Perception that you must make a lifetime commitment to the agency.
- Need to relocate to Washington, D.C.
- Lengthy hiring process.
- Perception that the culture is still very male-dominated and is comprised of white men in suits who are very reserved, but intelligent.

With these perceptions in mind, the CIA enumerated detailed numerous steps and suggestions on how to optimize the hiring process of women. Due to the parallels in perception, CPA firms can likewise take advantage of the CIA's suggestions to increase their odds of hiring women.

## Refine and Enhance Your Recruiting Location

In the study segment known as, “Overview of the Target,” the CIA noted that women first look online at sites such as Monster.com, Career Builder, LinkedIn, and

Facebook for employment opportunities. Likewise, younger women in college often

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While the CIA needs to cast a wide net for potential recruits, your firm can refine its search to more accounting specific websites. Once such website is [AccountingFly](#). Not only can you hire remote workers and bookkeepers, but more specific qualifications can also be requested. You also have the option to request permanent placements. With an advertised one million active candidates and two hundred thousand passive candidates, you can easily, and economically, leverage the internet to massively expand your presence.

## Determine Who to Send

The CIA recommended that they send female recruiters to speak with female prospects. This may seem trivial, but according to the 2004 medical study, *What men and women value at work: Implications for workplace health*, “[M]en underestimate and are generally unaware of women’s work-related values.” Given the standard perceptions of the CIA and CPA firms as being male dominated, this can be another ground level advantage for your firm. They noted that female employees make women, “more comfortable and confident” when considering a job at their agency.

If you have an outgoing female partner, it only makes sense to leverage their internal successes at your firm with external successes in the job market. Also, if any of your staff are recent female graduates from the area you’re marketing to, considering asking them for referrals to any acquaintances in the accounting major. Better yet, take them to career fairs to help with the process.

You can also consider using your entire existing workforce as a referral recruitment tool. Accenture is a professional services company that proactively offers bonuses to employees for referral hires. Not only did their referral program become their number one source of candidates, but it also saved them EUR

600,000 in 3 months and resulted in a 30% higher response rate when compared to

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there; including the Big 4 recruiting machine.

But all is not lost. Their study also mentioned several intangible benefits that were cited as being very important to women. These included a flexible work schedule, work/life balance, a job located close to their home, and a collaborative and supportive environment.

Meredith York, an economist at Meredith College, added clarity to these differing preferences. Per York, most women will remain the primary parent within the household and remain responsible for most household tasks. With this understanding, the value women place on even intangible benefits makes perfect sense.

However, don't assume that your firm's advantage merely stops at recruiting new staff members. The Women's Initiatives Executive Committee CPA Gender Survey of 2015, had a surprising insight into how effective a flexible work schedule can be to retain talented women on the path to becoming a partner.

As shown below, the preponderance of women of *all* firm sizes used a flexible work arrangement before becoming a partner.

The CIA also advertises alternative work schedules and hours, but, "as office needs permit." They have also assembled Agency Resource Groups (ARGs) that range from a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee (DHHAC) to the Directorate of Analysis Women's Council (DAWC). Additionally, they sponsor a child care facility with subsidies, a Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program (SLRAP), and

continued education programs throughout an employee's career. They also have potentially the coolest, and busiest, Starbucks on the planet. The baristas are required to pass extensive background checks, are escorted to and from their jobsite, and are forbidden from writing customer names on cups for reasons of security.



Never underestimate how seemingly minor amenities can give your firm a

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arrangements. This successful hire prompted the firm to plan further office renovations to include: a female specific break room with a fully stocked lounge, Wi-Fi, comfortable furniture, and a more spacious nursing room.

Leo Moretti stated, "I have daughters of my own in the workforce, as do most of my fellow partners. We treat our staff like we would want our own family treated in the workplace. It's just common sense these days."

Rarely would we argue that suggestions from a government agency fall in the category of, "common sense." Yet in this case, what's good the CIA is good for CPAs. Using the million-dollar recommendations listed above can ultimately help accomplish two very important tasks. You can simultaneously hire more staff and ensure the future growth and viability of your firm in an increasing competitive market place.

## Partner Action Items

- **Refine your Location:** Look back at where your firm has successfully generated leads in the past and revisit the relationships your firm has at those locations. If your firm lacks relationships at local colleges and/or with career counselors, specific internet sites can greatly assist your firm with casting a wider net.
- **Determine who to send:** Investigate your firm for qualified females who can sing the praises of your business while speaking with female candidates. Also, investigate your internal referral program to determine if this would be a good fit for your firm or can be expanded or refined.
- **Know your selling points:** No firm is exactly like another. Determine what it is that sets your firm apart. A focus group comprised of staff may be particularly useful for this task.

- **Advise your clients:** As a trusted advisor to your clients, they seek your help on all

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