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**Gail Perry** • Mar. 23, 2018



The term “thought leader” has been around since the late 1800s, which makes me really happy because I was afraid it was something that was made up in the past couple of decades, like “paradigm shift” and “think outside the box.”

According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, a thought leader is an expert on a particular subject, whose ideas and opinions influence other people, especially in

business. The *Oxford Living Dictionary* defines thought leader as one whose views on

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leaders, and the name seems to have stuck, even though the total number has crept up to 30).

The group that forms the Accounting Thought Leader Symposium is made up of members from all walks of the accounting profession. They take time out of their busy schedule to join forces once a year, reignite their passion, and consider their influential roles in moving the profession forward. Their goals are to touch base with one another, learn about the latest innovations, assess their roles in the profession, debate issues that are impacting accountants and their profession, learn from each other – it's like taking a big drink of accounting soul juice for two and a half days.

In addition, many members of the accounting technology group, seek out the opinions of these leaders as they make their own plans for the future. They discuss their direction as well as plans for improvement and innovation. They look for guidance and they look for the fresh outlooks that people who have seen the changes in the profession for years, in some cases decades, can provide.

I've had the honor of facilitating this meeting for five years, and each year people ask me about the meetings, the members, and how to join. The meetings are roundtable discussions, topics are chosen in advance, and goals are open-ended. Some of the members have been in the group since inception. As members leave the profession or choose to leave the group, new seats open up (we are capped at 30 members), and there is a nomination process and voting for new members to join the group.

If you've been in the profession for a while, you've probably heard of all or most of the members of the symposium. They are the speakers, the writers, the leaders, the educators, the visionaries, the ones people turn to when they want to hear the voices of knowledge and experience. They are the keynote speakers. They are the people who wield influence in our profession. And none of them call themselves thought leaders – that's a term that those who learn from them use when describing them.

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