

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

It's late January, which, for many accounting professionals (particularly those in public practice), means you're ramping up for the busiest time of the year — 1040 season. Although not all firms focus equally on individual tax compliance services, there are few who are immune to this annual uptick in workload, since even those with primarily business clients find themselves faced with returns for those business' principals, partners and other shareholders. And these returns can grow increasingly complex with multiple inter-related entities and pass-through K-1s.

But busy season is just one example of the crunch that many tax and accounting professionals feel throughout the year, with workloads that seem to continue to increase. While this may sound like a “ka-ching” as far as firm revenues, the price of that growth can sometimes be measured in decreasing time spent with family, friends and non-work past-times. Or perhaps just a decrease in the quality of time spent on those activities, as the professional may be intermittently drawn away from social events by the chirp or buzz of a mobile device.

There is no doubt that continuing developments in technology have dramatically increased productivity for professionals in many fields. But as mobile devices, remote access capabilities, SaaS-based programs and other phenomena have enabled workers to have anytime/anywhere connectivity and instant responsiveness to their work and client needs, professionals must learn to manage this new productivity empowerment or else pay the price of increased stress.

Although often stereotyped as stodgy and skeptical, the accounting profession has actually been on the forefront of adapting to less clock-focused work environments. This has likely come as a result of two factors: an increasing adoption of value-based billing that focuses on the value of a service or work product rather than the time

spent producing it; and the dramatically different expectations of Generation Y and

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

although the staff must still endure that crunch time, professionals and their families know that they will be able to truly unwind after the project. Some of the firms even allow staff to take extended time off to spend time with family, while others provide sabbaticals of three to six months. These benefits likely figure into a recent student ranking of the top 50 corporate employers, in which the Big 4 firms topped the list ([www.universumglobal.com/top50](http://www.universumglobal.com/top50)).

Make no mistake, the firms are still in the business of making money, but they've adapted their approach in recruitment and retention of the best talent. In previous decades, the strategy was generally focused on higher salaries and paths to partnership. But younger professionals now want part of their benefits to be the preservation of their personal time. Happier, less-stressed employees are more likely to be more productive and more devoted to their employers.

Smaller practices and sole practitioners face the same challenges, sometimes to a greater extent because they don't have the built-in redundancies of larger firms. "When you're the boss, you've got to set your priorities, but it can be hard when you know that the success of the practice depends ultimately on how you handle that decision," says Jody L. Padar, CPA.CITP, CEO and principal of the eight-person, Chicago-based NewVision CPA Group ([www.NewVisionCPAGroup.com](http://www.NewVisionCPAGroup.com)). "People choose their own priorities, especially when they are their own boss, and if you can't make those decisions it will be detrimental to the business.

"We don't live in an eight to five world anymore, and our profession certainly isn't that either," she notes. "And technology has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing in that you can work anywhere, but a curse because you can be disrupted anywhere, anytime. If you allow it."

The strategy she's adopted is quite simple, although increasingly difficult in the minds of many professionals: She actually turns her mobile phone off at times. "If it's

family time like evenings or Sundays, there probably isn't an emergency email that

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

when she will not, because if you don't decide one way or the other, then you're giving up control over that decision.

These limits and personal rules are a good way to get through the routine workflow of most of the year, but when tax season comes around she acknowledges that the added workload changes her responsibilities to her work, clients and family. During the non-busy season, she says she puts in about 45 to 50 hours per week, but this increases to around 60 hours per week in the office or with clients by the time March and April arrive.

With the increased demand on her time, she says she relies more heavily on her husband, Christopher, to take on more when it comes to running the household and managing their children's activities. "It's really important to have a true partner at home who can take charge of the family and cook dinner so that we can still have a meal together," says Jody. While her husband also has a professional career, he is able to free up a little more time during the busy season months, which helps take up some of the slack. And importantly, while they see this as an increase of demand on both of them, they know that it is temporary, and that things will be back to normal after April 15 (April 18 this year). She also has extended family in the area who are available to help during the busy season. "You just can't do it without a support system."

Another professional accountant who has achieved a successful balance between work and personal life is Colleen Black, principal of Colleen Black and Company, PC, ([www.CBlackTax.com](http://www.CBlackTax.com)) a four-person practice in Billings, Montana. As she has developed and grown her firm, she focused on promoting healthy lifestyles among her staff, including providing gym memberships for employees and their families. They also competed as a team in Shape Up Montana, a wellness event that promotes exercise and weight loss.

She was recognized in November 2010 by the American Society of Women

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

there are ways to unwind, at least a bit. Here are a few tips shared by some professional accountants and healthcare professionals to help relieve general work-related stresses, as well as some to help you survive busy season.

### **Tips:**

- **Turn off your mobile phone sometimes.** That's why there's an off button.
- **Go to a movie.** When you watch a movie at home, there are still multiple distractions, but the theater experience is encompassing and generally absorbs all of your attention.
- **Spend time with family and friends.** Even if you have to put them in Outlook or your scheduling program, make sure you share some quality time ... for your sake as well as theirs.
- **Social dinner.** During the crunch of early April, one firm has a family dinner night once a week at the practice. This allows for extended interaction between families and coworkers, as well as de-stressing from the workload.
- **Exercise.** It's easy to get off your regular routine during busy season's extended hours, but if you can keep it going, it will help reduce stress and make you feel better. The same is true for the other important elements of your life that reduce stress, such as your faith groups, community involvement and other activities.
- **Sleep and eat right.** Sleeping patterns get out of whack, but you know you function better after a good night's rest. The same is true with your diet: Pizza is okay occasionally, but the pizza joint probably shouldn't be #1 on your speed dial.
- **Remember, it'll be over soon.** April 15 (18<sup>th</sup>) is going to come, and when it does, your work life will be back to the normal level of hectic and crazy. And perhaps a

vacation? Yes. Book it now and circle that date on your calendar. Change your

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

CPA Practice Advisor is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors.

© 2024 Firmworks, LLC. All rights reserved