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that balance. Of course not.

**Jim Boomer** • Sep. 09, 2019



For some professionals, simply hearing the term “robotic process automation” conjures images of the humans in your office being replaced by cyborgs. Combine that imagery with headlines predicting the “rise of the robo-accountant,” and it’s not surprising that many accounting professionals fear automation.

As much as some practitioners would prefer to ignore robotic process automation (RPA), it’s quickly becoming inevitable. To remain relevant over the next five to ten years, you don’t have to make friends with cyborgs, but you do need to understand the opportunity that RPA brings and begin leveraging it in your firm. Fearing the inevitable will only lead to inadequate preparation. Here’s why you shouldn’t fear automation.

## **There will still be jobs**

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from automation freeing up much of the routine, time-consuming work, allowing them to focus on higher-value services.

### **Harness what makes you human**

The tasks being automated aren't what clients value. Does anyone truly believe that clients appreciate that your staff manually enters every number into a tax return or trial balance? Of course not. They expect their tax returns and financial statements to be accurate, yes. But they value the advice and guidance you provide that helps them remain in compliance and improve profitability.

As I mentioned in a previous column, we've gone past the era of the hand (the industrial revolution), and are nearing the end of the era of the head (digital revolution). What comes next is the era of the heart where relationships, creativity and bedside manner takes precedence. These are areas that can't be automated and the skills that clients value most.

### **Automation improves processes**

Automation often focuses on larger processes where many people perform a variety of tasks. Prior to automation, we often see that despite claims that firms have a "standard process," in reality, each partner has their own process for how the work gets done.

Automation reinforces standardization because you cannot automate inconsistent processes. To automate it, you must decide on a standard and formalize the steps required. This builds consistency and quality into your process and creates further efficiencies.

### **It's not just about compliance**

In the accounting profession, we tend to focus on how automation will impact

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customers and convert them into customers. In both cases, I'm guessing it's the latter,

I hope firms will let go of their fear of automation, and recognize automation as an opportunity to focus on higher-value work, upskill employees for different roles and spread out the workload for less demanding busy seasons. This may be optimistic in some cases, but rather than fearing robo-accountants and longing for a comfortable, never-changing environment, we need to take control of our future by letting RPA take over some of our current work.

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