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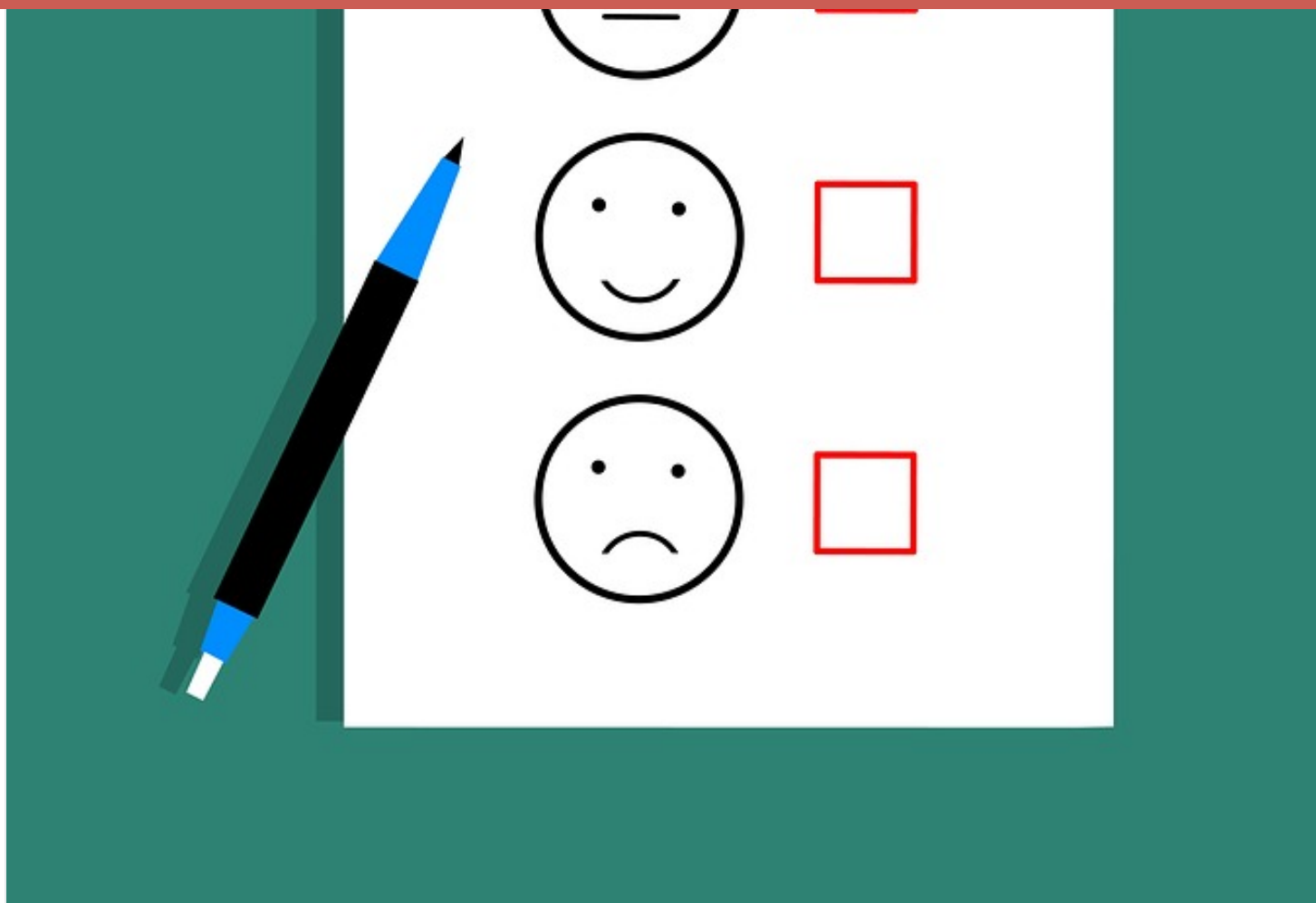
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Aug. 22, 2021

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By Ernie Villany, CPA.

Finding the perfect client is impossible, because the perfect client does not exist. Having been in the accounting field and tax profession for 30+ years, I've learned to end my pursuit of chasing clients who deliver their tax documents ahead of time, whose financial statements aren't indecipherable Excel sheets, crumpled receipts, giant image files, and pristine, organized, and appropriately named files. Rather than wasting valuable time, and losing sleep over finding the nonexistent perfect client, I choose to focus on finding the *right* client for my firm and my capable staff.

Learn to Focus on the Right Ones Instead

The right client doesn't have to be an expert in Excel, doesn't have to turn in their

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sized client may start with a particular geographic area, a favorable size, or an industry where you're well-versed and familiar. Considerations such as these should already be baked into your onboarding process. To explore this topic in more detail, it's time to evaluate the big picture concepts for you and your firm—and how to draw in the right prospects.

Figuring out your “Why”

A majority of my perspective on seeking the right fit in a client changed after reading Simon Sinek's “[Start With Why](#)”. This book is about finding inspiration at work and is recommended reading for anyone struggling to define the right fit for their own clientele. Many of the takeaways appear in the preceding sections.

Unless we as CPAs choose to begin with the “Why” of what we do, we'll forever chase the latest adaptations of “What” we do and “How” we do it. This can trigger a downward spiral of clients hastily acquired through fear, price manipulation, kitschy value propositions, short-term tactical decisions, and giving our time away for free. Without breaking this cycle, we'll spend our careers searching for clients, instead of them searching for us.

When we can engage clients based on Why, instead of What, client fit will almost always transcend price. The result? You'll grow a client base far beyond the transactional and find yourselves in relationships immersed with loyalty and trust. This new approach is capable of giving us the confidence to be selective, rejecting ill-fitting prospects and avoiding transactional, short-term engagements.

Red Flags

So, how do you weed out clients who will never be an ideal fit? A good place to start is common red flags. Use this list as a guide when onboarding new clients.

Remember, your skills are valuable, so you should be picky with whom you choose to

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- Clients who lack boundaries and don't champion work/life balance. As CPAs, we're all too familiar with overtime and odd hours; however, we're seeing a shift, empowering us to set proper boundaries with our clients
- Clients who perceive us as robots or automatons
- Clients who neither understand nor believe in the value of proper book and record keeping
- Clients who don't express mutual respect
- Clients who think taxes and accounting are "easy"

Maintaining Long-lasting Relationships

Whether it's bookkeeping, complex tax matters, or financial statement audits, long-lasting relationships are the type we prefer and the reason we engineer/define/create client relationships that "fit". When we start with Why, we understand what a great client fit looks like long before the relationship begins. If we begin with the How or What, we miss opportunities to work with clients that share the same goals and values. Starting with the Why increases our odds that we'll find client relationships that fit from the very beginning.

To build and maintain long-lasting relationships, we should begin with the Why while also considering the How. With every great business, the Why and How are partners intertwined in a shared success. The How is what we do to inspire our staff to show up every day. When we provide ourselves and our staff with continual training, powerful tools, process-driven management decisions, and balanced lives, we create empowered employees who deliver what we do and why we do it. As Simon Sinek explains in his book, *"We don't want them to come to work to build a wall,*

we want them to build a cathedral”. Foster a gathering place, built on shared beliefs and

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effective. Tax preparation quality goes up. Risk comes down. Speed increases, and profit margins go up. These are the building blocks of a long-term relationship with the right client. When it comes together, we rise up to deliver a high-value service to empowered, satisfied, and long-term clients. Because this approach is a far cry from the frustrated How and What-driven clients who obsess over negotiating fees, dictating our actions, and the commoditization of our relationship.

Endnotes

As CPAs, we must be mindful of why we chose to become CPAs. We must look back and reflect on the upbringing, education, experiences, and events that created our own sense of Why. What was it about those things that helped form our original purpose and beliefs as a professional? The result will be the clarity we need to articulate the How and What we do. Because of this, we'll likely find ourselves surrounded by clients who work with us, not because of price or convenience, or even value, but because they feel like they belong with us.

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[Ernie Villany, CPA](#) is the founder and president of [Boulder Valley CPA \(BVCPA\)](#), a Colorado-based CPA/advisory firm representing clientele in 30 states. Ernie has over 20 years of experience in public accounting, helping small to medium-size businesses around the world plan and manage their financial growth, while mitigating tax liabilities.

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