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## Technology Changes

Randy Johnston • Nov. 03, 2021



*From the November 2021 Issue.*

Technology changes constantly. We must make decisions about what works for our clients, our firms, and ourselves. Additionally, we must make the effort and take the time to update our skills on products we use regularly and on solutions that we should consider for our practices. This education is beyond our mandatory continuing professional education (CPE) training.

While forty hours of CPE is the minimum requirement, that is the hardly the education required to maintain competency in the profession. But you already know

that even if you may have extensive knowledge in a specialty area, it is challenging to





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Depth of knowledge is undoubtedly a benefit for compliance and consulting. The breadth of knowledge is a benefit for Advisory work. Lack of knowledge for using technology is a time-waster. Expansive knowledge of technology can help your firm and your clients. While many accountants have an excellent working knowledge of compliance, this excellence can be offset by clumsy or ineffective delivery of results. So how do you address these issues? By developing a continuous learning attitude.

Consider the curriculum that you and each team member should follow to expand their skills and document that in a [learning matrix](#) or [ladder](#). While using productivity software properly sounds mundane, you'd be appalled at how much effort is wasted running software like email, word processing, spreadsheets, or presentation software.

Consider the skills you require in a variety of areas and build a long-term learning plan. The Conscious Competence Learning Matrix looks like this:

Conscious Competence Learning Matrix	Competence	Incompetence
Conscious	 3. We know we know (aware and clumsy)	 2. We know we don't know (requires education and practice)
Unconscious	 4. We don't know we know (Instinctive)	 1. We don't know what we don't know (blissfully ignorant)

How do you stay up? Reading trade publications, attending events, and listening to podcasts are a great start. Our weekly podcast, [The Technology Lab](#), provides background on a variety of products. You can search for podcasts related to your favorite topics. Still, [CPEToday](#) regularly has fresh content, as do a variety of pundits on tax, audit, CAS, QuickBooks, Xero, Zoho, and Advisory services. We have provided

CPE via our [K2 courses for](#) over 35 years in almost 20 categories. You can produce

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If your skills are in compliance, and you are comfortable that things won't change during your career, then you are all set! However, if you see a different future, you can begin charting a new path now and building your skillset. For example, many professionals have chosen Client Accounting Services (CAS) while others have chosen Advisory or both.

## **We are All Advisers, Aren't We?**

There remains a lot of confusion in the accounting profession about Advisory. Few firms are clear about what Advisory is and how they can deliver advisory services successfully and scale the delivery to ensure great client service and a great return on investment for the firm. But this is not the same as not "doing advisory."

You have probably read online about some accountants claiming that they are not typical accountants. They're smashing it, changing the world, and "doing advisory." Really folks? Well, I've got news for you – every accountant I have ever met is advising clients. But often, they don't recognize that they are doing so, and therefore they don't always charge for it. When a client calls or emails you with a question, and you answer that question, you are advising them. And you probably do this a lot, don't you?

What would you do if I were to knock on your door and tell you that I was setting up in business and would like you to be my accountant? First, you'd probably ask me lots of questions about me and my new business. Then you'd advise me whether it should be formed as a sole proprietor, partnership, an LLC, a Sub S-Corp, or C-Corp.

Once that decision was made, we'd talk about all the regulatory requirements, and then we'd move on to the year-end, compliance documentation requirements, and so on. And you'd want to know what my plans are. Where will it operate, what are my sales and profit aspirations, and will I employ people? And all this time, you are

advising me. And then there would be my personal affairs and how these interact

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often not recognized and rarely charged for appropriately.

The choice is yours – you can carry on the way you are. Or if you can begin to build more structure into how you deliver advisory services, which can provide your clients with proactive help and advice and generate more fees for you. There is no right and wrong – it is up to you.

Part of the confusion about Advisory is that few firms are clear about what it is. A good starting point is to put ourselves in our clients' shoes. What are they looking for, and what does it mean to them? Well, you don't walk up to a client and say, "do you want some advisory services?" Advisory is intrinsic to us as advisers, not something you overtly sell

Here is a great definition of Advisory – simple but powerful. Advisory for clients is about helping them do better. Each individual client's own definition of "doing better" is personal to them. Advisory is helping them do better. It's that simple.

To do better might mean build a bigger and more profitable business. Alternatively, to do better might be to maintain the current level of business performance but not work as many hours. Finally, to do better might be to build a fund to put down a deposit on a house, education for their children, or a combination of all these and many others.

So Advisory starts with the clients' dreams, goals, aspirations – their vision – in other words, what "do better" means to them. Once you have helped a client be really clear about this, you can begin to help them plan to achieve their vision. These are your primary advisory services. And don't forget you are helping them with their personal aspirations as well as their business goals – personal and business.

The planning process will help the client and you identify which areas of their personal affairs and business require focus and attention and, therefore, the services

they need from you and others. The services beyond planning that you then choose

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## **In Summary, If You Choose Advisory As Your Continuous Education**

Ignore the background noise and confusion about Advisory

- Take what the “I’m not your typical accountant” group are saying with a grain of salt
- Accountants are all “doing advisory,” but they have a choice
- Follow the ad hoc, unstructured, reactive, and often unrecognized path OR

Begin to build structure and process and be more proactive and create real value for your clients and yourself

- Help clients do better
- Help clients be very clear about what is important to them
- Help clients improve their personal positions and their businesses
- Help then put their personal and business plans together

The planning process will reveal what services the client needs

- You decide which services you want to provide
- You can refer others to provide the services you don't want to provide
- Use the Primary/Secondary/Tertiary Model
- The client's plans will be the focus for the client relationship and create a central relevance for how you deliver recognizable value

And finally, just as you have delivery platforms for your compliance services, you need a delivery platform for your advisory services to give you consistency and quality control and the ability to leverage and scale – and make your life easier while impressing the client.

# What Should Your Client Experience be With Your Continuous Education?

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