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By Kelly Rohrs, CPA.

It's no surprise that four months of stressing out and working crazy hours can take a toll on your mental and physical health. Add to that a pandemic that caused what felt like a two-year busy season, and many public accountants are over it. They're either leaving the profession for good or launching their own firms. Public accounting has burnt them out.

After almost a decade of being in this profession, I'm here to say, "it doesn't have to be this way."

Yes, we can have public accounting and not have burnout. Here's how.

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showing us that they value health and life experiences more than money.

Why can't this same rule apply to a public accounting firm? Why not work a 5-day week? You don't *have* to spend 6 or 7 days at the office, or take appointments every day of the week. But it's up to you to set these boundaries to build the firm you want.

It's time to rethink what a public accounting firm looks like. Boutique firms are starting to change the mindset that you have to work your life away during tax season. Instead, these firms are:

- Providing advisory services throughout the year
- Reserving tax returns for their business clients
- Saying "no" to the wrong clients

By taking this approach, these firms avoid overloading their staff. When the workload grows – the firm consequently grows – they hire more staff, outsourced labor, or contract labor to handle the increased workload and navigate burnout.

No matter where you are with your practice or profession, there are steps you can take right now to help prevent burnout.

How to Prevent Burnout

Kick Self-Limiting Beliefs to the Curb

- *I can't afford to hire more staff*
- *I don't have the budget for these time-saving applications and tools*
- *If I do XYZ, I won't be able to sustain my practice*

Sound familiar? These -limiting beliefs are precisely that – SELF-limiting. You are the only thing standing between the life and firm you want.

Kick self-limiting beliefs to the curb. It is possible to have a balanced work/personal

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are times when employees need to be in the office or online if they're working remotely, but what if you gave them the freedom to get work done in between picking the kids up from school, making dinner and running errands? As long as the work gets done and is on time, what does it matter *when* it happens? Affording your team this type of flexibility can make a huge difference.

To provide flexibility and freedom, you'll need to take a leap of faith. You'll need to *trust* your team. Fortunately, there are practice management tools that allow you to keep an eye on projects and deadlines to ensure that everyone is doing their part. With tools such as these, employees don't have to feel like you're standing over their shoulder every minute of the day.

Flexibility also means encouraging your team to take a break. Take days off, book a vacation – enjoy life. While you're at it, remind yourself to do the same.

Encourage Feedback

Your team is your biggest asset in preventing burnout. Listen to their feedback. Cultivate a culture that makes your team feel comfortable voicing their honest opinions. Give your team the option of providing anonymous feedback as well, so they can share their ideas and recommendations for improvement without worry.

Encouraging and listening to feedback can help you improve systems and processes to save time and stress that contributes to burnout.

A recent [survey](#) by meQuilibrium found that between December 2020 and July 2021, 21% of respondents reported higher levels of burnout. Feedback can help you understand what employees need to feel rejuvenated and happy to step into work.

Boost Remote Worker Morale

Remote working offers the flexibility that people crave, but it's not without its faults.

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- Recognize achievements. Your team members want to feel valued and appreciated. Tell and show them that they are!

Consider the dynamics of your team, the values of your firm, and what matters most to your employees to find other ways to boost morale.

Ensure Partners are Walking the Walk

Partners and leaders should be setting examples for team members to follow by:

- Taking care of themselves
- Setting appropriate boundaries at work
- Enjoying life outside of the office

Create a culture that values mindfulness, mental health and self-care. Have partners and leaders check in with team members to see how they're doing. If they're being overworked, step in to make adjustments.

Prioritize your time and set boundaries with friends and family in your personal life. Only attend events and gatherings when they bring you joy and peace. Make it a priority to have time to relax and destress. Some ways you can do this outside of the office are:

- Prepare food in bulk and freeze meals
- Order things online to save time
- Hire a cleaning person

Your time is something you can never get back. Bringing balance to both your work and personal life can help you avoid burnout.

Hire When Necessary

One of the best ways to prevent burnout is to avoid overloading and overworking

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Set Boundaries with Clients

Make sure that your clients understand what's expected of them and your firm. For example, let clients know when information is due by, how to send it, and how to pay. Your firm should be clear on turnaround times, availability for meetings, appropriate ways to get in contact, and so forth. Educate your clients on the scope of the work so that they have a clear understanding of the complexities of your job.

When boundaries are clear, enforcing them is much easier. Not only will you and employees' lives become easier when boundaries are clear and enforced, but your clients' lives will too. This may also mean that you need to let go of clients who don't respect boundaries.

Final Thoughts

Times are changing. Burnout isn't something that has to come with the territory when working as a public accountant, but it's up to us to work with the community and be an example of the change within the industry. Firms must embrace change or risk being unsustainable. Taking steps to prevent burnout and making work/life balance a priority are two great ways to move in the right direction.

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Kelly Rohrs, CPA is the founder of [K. Rohrs, CPA, P.C.](#), where she provides key insights into the financial health of businesses and individuals. In coordination with her clients, she uses those insights to promote growth, ensure structural stability and provide clarity in all accounting and tax matters. To learn more about Kelly or the firm, visit her website [here](#).

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