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While the economy is uncertain, client needs are expanding, and it's not time to pump the brakes on investing in your future.

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All indicators suggest the accounting industry is poised for another year of growth.

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One of my first lessons in marketing was that every business issue is a communications opportunity. As accountants navigate through continued growth, new technology and evolving client demands, there's a clear opportunity to change the narrative and promote the future of the profession, the enhanced value you create and the people who will lead it forward.

Here are three key opportunities to share and promote positive change in the year ahead.

Focus on Employer Brand

According to the AICPA's latest report, the number of students graduating from accounting programs and sitting for the CPA exam have declined slightly since highs in the mid-2010s. While the COVID-19 pandemic no doubt holds some responsibility for declines in the past few years, the concern over the "pipeline problem" – and particularly attracting multicultural talent into the profession – is significant.

At DCPA, [Jennifer Lee Wilson](#) of ConvergenceCoaching asked an important question: "Is your firm a destination workplace?" Having the "right to win" talent starts with aligning your roles with the values of your workforce, including purposeful work and flexibility. But then you need to make sure your prospective talent understands and is educated on their opportunity.

Our clients at BILL have written that the accounting industry needs a [rebrand](#), and I agree. Too many people still think of accounting as a numbers-only, static, commoditized business, and that the path is public accounting or bust.

We know the truth – that whether you're joining a large public accounting firm, a smaller shop, or in industry, accounting builds brilliant careers and versatile professionals. But prospective employees are reading about busy season burnout on Glassdoor pages when we want them reading about innovation in CAS services, how

technology is improving professionals' quality of life and opportunities for more

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One of the best soundbites of DCPA came from [Ron Baker](#) of VeraSage Institute: “the billable hour is dead; we just haven’t had the funeral.” I have also had to track time in 15-minute increments for my entire career and will happily dance on that grave. But the shift is less about admin and more about focusing on and communicating value.

It’s the beginning of shifting client communications to focus on outcomes vs. inputs. [Dixie McCurley](#) of Cherry Bekaert noted that accountants are often mired in process and methodology when what clients really care about are “results and their pocketbook.” Both leaders are right that clients don’t care about how the sausage is made, they care about the speed of month close, the insights in their business and not having to worry about compliance.

Your impact isn’t in the report, it’s in how you enable clients to be better informed stewards of their business. It’s in how you help them sleep better at night. It’s about trust. [Barry Melancon](#), President and CEO of CPA.com, said “the purpose of the profession has to be sold,” and I agree. In a time where trust is in decline in major institutions – from government to media to business – accountants have held on to what has become sacred – stakeholder trust. I have always thought accountants were the unsung heroes of our financial markets, but it’s bigger than that. Business doesn’t happen without accountants to back it up.

The value accountants bring to business and the market is only increasing. Emerging issues from crypto to ESG reporting to predictive analytics have the potential to elevate accountants even further, and to further change the narrative around the profession.

How to do it: Start by taking a fresh look at your positioning or mission statement – does it sell you short? Is it updated to reflect expanded capabilities? Is it differentiated from your local or national competitors? From there, look at your middle and bottom

of the funnel assets. Case studies, testimonials and even client deliverables build

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retention, but firms also need to imagine and plan for this next generation of leaders.

The oldest Millennial will be 42 next year, and both Millennials and Gen Z will soon (if they are not already) be the majority of your workforce and client base.

Put another way, this next generation is about to be your most visible and vocal brand ambassadors.

As you think about building the next generation of leaders, they need more than soft skills, coaching and experience managing the business. You're likely already succession planning for key firm or client leadership roles, but are you considering succession planning for your thought leaders?

Industry and technical expertise will always be a differentiator for firms, but it doesn't happen by accident. It requires intention, or you risk expertise walking out of your firm. There's also no substitute for days on skis. These professionals need years – not months – of preparation, learning and training, and there's no time like the present to begin.

How to do it: Required CPE hours are a great start, but not sufficient. Bring the next generation to industry conferences, encourage them to develop presentation skills in internal trainings and webinars, offer social media and business development coaching, and encourage blog or article opportunities. Create resource libraries with access to industry publications, research reports and more so professionals can build expertise over time and be ready when it's their time to shine.

There's never been a better time to tell the world about the potential of the profession and the exceptional people thriving in it. As we turn the page on a new

year, start your new story and help the industry shine. Keri Toomey is an SVP and

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