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Community and Meaningful Impact

A career in accounting brings opportunities to meet and work with a wide range of people and personalities, and a chance to thrive in a community of people who, at their core, do their job because they want to help others and make an impact.

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By Twyla Verhelst, CPA.

Preparing and filing your taxes are unavoidable tasks that it's safe to say most people don't enjoy. Tax time can be especially daunting for small business owners and the

self-employed, who must organize their financial information for the year and

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the accountants who assist their clients. In a typical season, accountants can work anywhere from 50-to-80 hours a week, not only providing strategic tax advice but helping set up each client for success throughout the year.

On top of the heavy workload and stress brought on each tax season, accountants have had a particularly tough few years. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic upended work life for most Americans, but accountants had to deal with a bundle of unique challenges. During the height of the pandemic in 2020, the U.S. government introduced tax relief plans to help ease financial burdens on households.

Accountants had to stay on top of an ever-changing list of new tax adjustments and rules and provide their clients with up-to-date and accurate information. Along with those new rules, the tax deadline was extended multiple times in 2020. The term “March-ternity” was created that year, as it felt like a tax season that began in March with no end in sight.

Three years later, things feel almost back to normal, but state and federal-level tax legislation continues to be a complicated maze that accountants continue to navigate. With all of this in mind, it's not a complete shock to read that more than 300,000 US accountants and auditors have left their jobs in the past two years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Bureau also notes a decline in students majoring in accounting and a decrease in graduates who will take the four-part examination to become a CPA.

Yet, despite the immense challenges over the last few years, and the grind that comes with tax season, there are reasons to love being an accountant and for young people to aspire to become one. The most compelling reason is the valuable and impactful relationships that accountants can build with clients and with other accounting professionals, and the incredible difference they can make in people's lives. This is something that's too often overlooked when people think about the accounting profession and may be the piece that's missing to attract fresh faces to the field.

When the economy gets rocky, accountants often play the role of a life raft for small

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helped keep up the morale and momentum that owners needed to soldier on through one of the most difficult times in recent history. Accountants helped save a significant number of businesses, careers, and livelihoods. That's something that should be celebrated and boasted about.

"Not going to lie, the last few years have been some of the most demanding of my working life," says Nayo Carter-Gray, EA, Founder + CEO of 1st Step Accounting LLC, which specializes in accounting for small businesses. "On the other hand, I think the challenges have strengthened me and my colleagues as accountants and given us a unique and strategic perspective on our clients' businesses. We know we can help people stabilize their businesses, pivot when necessary and get through pretty much anything, and that's really empowering to me."

Hearing positive, firsthand viewpoints like these will elevate the positive impact accountants have on people and help young people view the profession as one that has meaning and an important purpose. Still, the long hours and stress accountants experience, particularly during tax season, are a reality of the job that can't and shouldn't be glossed over. However, outsiders to the profession don't have a view of how supportive the accounting community is.

Accountants are a critical part of a village of support for not only clients but to each other. I've been helping to build a community of accounting partners at FreshBooks over the last few years and am constantly blown away by how fantastic accountants are at listening, empathizing, and supporting one another to be successful.

"People often imagine accountants to be introverts who prefer to work in solitude, but the reality is we crave connection and collaboration as much as anyone else," says Brian Streig, CPA and Tax Director at Calhoun, Thomson + Matza, LLP. "Most of us are active in professional associations and communities where we can learn from each other, lean on one another and have fun while making new, lifelong friends."

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