



### ***Making the Most of the Small Firm Advantage***

I have written before about the Small Firm Advantage, the competitive edge enjoyed by many practices in areas such as recruiting, retention and client service. At this year's Practitioners Forum in June, AICPA Board Chair Leslie Murphy gave a presentation on the PCPS initiative built around the Small Firm Advantage, which was created to help smaller firms maximize the many benefits they have to offer staff and clients. In Leslie's presentation, she cited several advantages that firms can point out to staff: Here's this year's list for all firms:

- *Earlier and more frequent client contact.* As Leslie noted, this issue is very important for many rising stars. When I travel around the country speaking to CPAs as part of my ongoing "listening tour," I frequently hear about the importance of client contact to talented young staff members. In fact, offering staff the chance to meet clients and learn more about their businesses—and your own—is a powerful retention tool. And small firms definitely can leverage their advantage here, because they can provide many chances to involve staff in the close client relationships that are typical in smaller practices.
- *Greater access to firm decision makers and the chance to affect the firm's future.* The informal atmosphere in many small firms makes it easier to involve staff in ad hoc or more directed discussions about where the practice stands and where it's headed. It's also a simpler task to solicit staff member suggestions in a small office and to describe how their ideas have been implemented.
- *Opportunities and career paths that can better meet individual needs and aspirations.* It's often easier for staff to forge their own futures in an environment that does not have rigid development paths in place. Small firms are in a great position to adapt to staff talents, interests and personal situations. In larger firms, staff instead often must adapt to the existing format or expectations.
- *The chance to take on greater responsibility at an earlier career stage.* In addition to gaining greater client contact, staff also have the opportunity to take on more responsibilities when they are ready for them than they might have in a larger firm.
- *The chance to progress at your own pace.* Once again, without layers of bureaucracy, it's more feasible for talented young people to move ahead on their own schedule.
- *Overall flexibility.* Small firms are in a great position to take steps such as pursuing new niches that complement staff talents or implementing schedule accommodations that adapt to their changing lives.
- *More chances to have fun.* As someone who worked in small firms for more than 30 years, I know about the great friendships and good times that small practices enjoy. Don't forget to mention them in your recruitment efforts.

Small practitioners can use this list as a starting point when recruiting promising new staff members or they can turn to it in considering what strengths to emphasize in their attempts to retain their top people.

#### ***More Resources Available***

I have written more about the Small Firm Advantage in a Journal of Accountancy article that can be found at <http://www.aicpa.org/pubs/jofa/jul2006/metzler.htm>. Many of our future initiatives and publications will highlight these small firm advantages to reinforce the idea for members. To find them, look for the Small Firm Advantage logo, which was developed to help members find related articles and other resources.



### ***Let Me Know Your Thoughts***

I would like to hear your comments and suggestions on how the AICPA can help enhance your professional life. Don't hesitate to contact me to share your ideas and opinions at [jmetzler@aicpa.org](mailto:jmetzler@aicpa.org).



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### **Did You Know?**

There is a host of free information available to practitioners relating to *Internal Control over Financial Reporting—Guidance for Smaller Public Companies*. This COSO publication offers information on understanding internal control in a small public company environment. The AICPA site contains an archived Webcast as well as an executive summary and FAQs. These free resources can be found at [http://www.aicpa.org/news/2006/Free\\_COSO\\_Webcast.htm](http://www.aicpa.org/news/2006/Free_COSO_Webcast.htm).

### **Small Firm Corner Index to Past Issues**

- Introduction to the *Small Firm Corner*
- The Technical Issues Committee (TIC)
- The PCPS Firm Practice Center
- A Front Row Seat at Every Table in the Institute
- Maintaining the Profession's Strong Reputation
- Upholding Our Core Values
- Planning for Transition
- Recruiting and Retention Tips
- Marketing Opportunities: An Exciting Time to Be a Small Practitioner
- Practical Marketing Steps
- Preparing for Disaster
- The Benefits of Flexibility
- The Small Firm Advantage in Staffing
- Tax Advocacy in Washington
- Addressing Policy Issues
- Retirement Planning Tips for Small Firms
- Ensuring Practice Continuation
- Encouraging Staff Talents
- Nurturing Future Leaders
- The Benefits of Specialization
- Smart Steps to Practice Development
- Firing Clients: A Practical Approach
- The CPA Exam: Promoting the Value
- A Case Study in Coping with Disaster—Part I
- A Case Study in Coping with Disaster—Part II
- Top Five Issues for Small Firms
- Understanding Your Top Talent
- Best Practices in Attracting and Retaining Top Talent: Part I
- Best Practices in Attracting and Retaining Top Talent: Part II

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