



# PCPS BRIEF

## **PCPS Brief**

### **Making Life Easier During Busy Season**

According to last year's PCPS Top Talent Study, the profession's most promising young people stay with a firm for many of the most obvious reasons, such as salary, benefits and career growth opportunities. But high on their wish lists are other priorities, including firm culture.

Busy season is a tough time of year for all firm members, but it provides a great opportunity to demonstrate that your firm really cares about its people — and that your practice is a great place to work. When you communicate that message about firm culture, it should have a strong impact on retention.

How can that be done? Taking steps to make the staff's life easier during busy season is a great start. It makes this challenging time more bearable and creates an important bond with valuable staff members. Here are some tips on how to do it.

***Allow flexibility in schedules.*** Some firms allow staff to create their own schedules, which makes it possible for them to attend to their personal lives as necessary and still get their work done, according to Tamera Loerzel of ConvergenceCoaching. In this situation, "it's not assumed that everyone will be there all the time," she says. Instead, staff members might choose to work late on some days and not on others, and to alter their schedules appropriately as the season progresses. "When you give people flexibility in setting up their own schedules, they feel they have more control over their lives," she notes.

According to [\*Helping Women Professionals Succeed\*](#), an analysis of the first AICPA Women's Summit, "organizations can develop effective programs when they focus on the strategic advantages" of flexible schedules. While these schedules aren't a right or entitlement, the paper notes, "companies should recognize that an employee's presence onsite does not necessarily equate to enhanced job performance." Whether firms are able to allow staff to work at home or to take control of setting their own hours, they will likely gain the advantage of staff members who appreciate this accommodation and come to work less distracted by outside concerns. The paper noted that flexible schedules "offer organizations numerous long- and short-term benefits, including recruiting advantages, greater productivity and diversity, as well as better retention at all levels and reduced office space needs. Intangible benefits include better morale, lower staff stress and more satisfied clients."

**Be kid friendly.** Loerzel also reports that some firms allow staff to bring their kids to work on weekends or at other times when there is not a great deal of client contact. This accommodation once again shows that the firm understands staff members' personal obligations and is willing to help make sure they're met.

**Enhance their free time.** Some merchants — dry cleaners or grocery stores, for example — may be willing to pick up or deliver items for staff. If firms investigate this possibility and put it into action, employees will be very grateful that they don't have to use their precious free time running errands, Loerzel notes. And, like the previous two suggestions, this step costs the firm no money.

**Indulge them.** Does your firm offer free chair massages to ease aching shoulder muscles during busy season? Those that offer this luxury — even occasionally — will undoubtedly be rewarded with staff gratitude.

**Focus on career growth.** The top talent said that professional opportunities and challenging work were among their chief priorities. As a result, don't allow busy season to be perceived as a time when people are swamped in a sea of work, but rather as a time when firm members have the chance to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities. Make the effort to train staff in order to expand their professional horizons, and consider which talented people can handle new challenges this year. Once again, there's no cash outlay involved, but firms may reap great retention benefits.

**Feed them.** Staff members may eat more than one dinner at work during busy season. Many firms will buy occasional meals for their people to show they appreciate the fact that working late has forced them to rely on takeout at their desks. At Vitale, Caturano & Company, dinners and Saturday lunches are free, according to a Journal of Accountancy article. "Three or four gourmet chefs from the Boston area come in to cook for our people," firm president Rich Caturano told the JofA. As the story explained, "dinners are served family-style Monday through Thursday at 6:30 p.m. On a tax-season Saturday, Caturano estimates almost a hundred people will be at work, in part because of this perk." To read the article, click [here](#).

## **A Range of Options**

There are many choices available to practitioners who want to make life easier for staff during the tough busy season months. Some are serious, while others are more fun, and many of them are free. All of them will aid in retention efforts and will improve morale. Which ones would work best at your firm?

## **Resources**

For more information about retention and staff expectations, check these publications:

- [Best Practices in Recruiting and Retaining Talented Staff](#), a white paper based on an AICPA survey.
- The PCPS "Top Talent" survey. For more information, go to the [PCPS Firm Practice Center](#).

- [Helping Women Professionals Succeed](#), a white paper based on the presentations at the first AICPA Women's Summit.