

AUGUST 2008

PCPS Spotlight Ceremony: Best Practices at Work

At the first PCPS Firm Spotlight Ceremony, held at the AICPA Practitioners Symposium in Las Vegas in May, 10 firms were recognized for best practices in various areas of practice management. They included:

- For their human capital initiatives: Gary R. Brown, CPA LLC; Wilkins Miller, PC; Elliott Robinson & Company LLP; Aronson & Company; and Johnson Lambert & Co.
- For work/life balance initiatives: Heinfeld, Meech & Co., PC; KAWG&F, PA; and Withum Smith & Brown.
- For firm succession efforts: Cohen & Company, Ltd. and HLB Tautges Redpath Ltd.

How did these firms earn their recognition? In this month's Brief, we'll look at the firms recognized for their human capital initiatives, offering one practical tip from each. PCPS is also making it possible for our members to learn all about each firm's great ideas. Beginning this month, we'll start posting their stories on the [PCPS Firm Practice Center](#).

Best Practices in Human Capital

Staffing is one of the most challenging issues facing the profession, with firms struggling to attract, retain and make the best use of high-quality professionals. Here's a glimpse at some of the innovations that earned four firms recognition for their human capital initiatives in the PCPS Firm Spotlight Ceremony.

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Make the most of part-timers

Gary R. Brown CPA, LLC, of Georgetown, Texas, has found innovative ways to stretch precious staff resources. For example, in audits, the firm, which has three full-time and five part-time staff, uses part-time auditors to perform field work, avoiding the need for full-timers who would be idle some of the time. "Most of our audits take place from October through March, which means we can attract strong staff who normally work on audits during the summer," says Brown. They include a semi-retired audit senior, a former auditor with a tax practice who wants to keep current on audit skills and a retired governmental auditor who wants to supplement retirement income. On the tax side, the staff includes a retired CPA who wants to keep current on tax law but does not want to work year around, plus one or more homemakers seeking part-time work. They are required to do minimal overtime and can have flexible schedules as needed. The CPA works only from February 1 until April 15. For clerical work, the firm relies on homemakers and retired people who are seeking limited hours to supplement their incomes. The homemakers can balance work and family life, while retirees can play golf several times a week and work four to five hours every other day.

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Make a great first impression

At Elliott, Robinson & Company LLP, in Springfield, Missouri, potential recruits meet at least seven firm members before they are hired. The practice uses certain “touch points” to introduce recruits to the firm and its staff. For example, the recruit might first meet one of several staff members at campus events, career days and campus interviews. Once invited to an office interview, the recruit is greeted in a hospitality room, then interviewed by two partners. After the interviews are completed they are taken to lunch by two or three staff members. This introduction to a broad range of professionals gives recruits a sense of the different kinds of people and perspectives that make up the firm. Once a recruit is on board, the firm believes that a proper introduction improves the chances for retaining staff longer. As a result, the first month’s orientation activities are well planned long before the recruit comes on board. They begin with an orientation in December, which makes it possible to integrate them into the firm before busy season begins. The orientation includes a personal meeting with the managing partner and firm administrator, who offer their own insights into firm processes and priorities. To reinforce the sense of belonging and get the recruit off to a good start, each new hire arrives to find personalized business cards, memo pads and name tag waiting for them, along with a fully stocked desk and their phone and computer ready for immediate use.

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Offer firm members a stake in important processes

A process improvement project has helped inspire a sense of involvement at Wilkins Miller P.C., a 38-person local firm with offices in Mobile and Fairhope, Alabama. The firm set out to inspire firm members’ creativity, enhance processes and encourage continual improvement. During a tax season debriefing, firm members identified seven major processes: personal development, client relations, work scheduling, preparation process of entities, preparation process of individuals, administrative processes and billing. It was decided that all firm members at all levels would participate on two teams, each led by an elected team member and assigned a shareholder as a resource. The teams incorporated key concepts that had been discussed at various PCPS Medium Firm Network Groups meetings, such as prioritizing clients, scheduling and making every employee responsible for a specific area. According to the firm, team leaders are now shaping the firm’s future, with accountability meetings held once a month. “The process improvement project turned out to be phenomenally successful in improving our firm and is a win-win for all,” said shareholder Allen Carroll. “Through this process, we are developing future leaders, fostering and promoting teamwork and making sure everyone feels ownership in making the firm better.”

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Give firm members a share in the profits

Maryland, all staff, both part- and full-time, are eligible to participate in the firm’s Investor Discretionary Profit Sharing Program, a units-based program that makes it possible for them to share in the firm’s profits. Depending on their position in the firm, each person receives either 100, 200 or 300 units. The number is multiplied for each year of service up to six years. Every year, the board of directors assigns a value to each unit based on the firm’s profits and other variables. The participants then receive a payout on December 15. The program rewards all employees (not just professional staff) for longevity and loyalty. According to the firm, it has been a valuable tool for both recruiting and retention.

These strategies have worked for these firms, so they are worth trying if any seem suited to your practice. In our next issue, we’ll examine some of the work/life balance best practices recognized in the PCPS Firm Spotlight Ceremony.

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