Work overload? The talk you should have with your manager

Stand out!
What you need to know about developing your personal brand and marketing your services

BEYOND ETHICS 101
A whistleblower tells his story

HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?
How to nail your next interview, ask for the promotion you deserve and get along with difficult coworkers
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An Inconvenient Truth
Inside the world of a whistleblower

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Smart solutions for career dilemmas
The definition of career success is changing, according to new research. And for many professionals, it has more to do with flextime than dollar signs. In an online survey of 4,100 professionals in the United States and abroad conducted last fall by the management consulting company Accenture, 56 percent of respondents said that having a good work-life balance was their top criterion for defining success, surpassing money (cited by 46 percent), recognition (42 percent) and autonomy (42 percent). What’s more, 52 percent said they’ve turned down a job because they were concerned about its impact on their home lives. But finding that balance is still a work in progress. Though just 40 percent of respondents consider themselves to be workaholics, 75 percent said they had worked frequently or occasionally during paid time off, checking email, catching up on work or participating in conference calls.
According to a study by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), the number of U.S. companies awarding raises to their entire internal audit staff increased from 60 percent in 2011 to 64 percent in 2012. As part of its annual Internal Audit Compensation Study, released earlier this year, the IIA analyzed salary data from 311 organizations in the United States and Canada that employ more than 1,800 internal auditors. The study found that the number of raises for auditors outpaced nonauditors. What's more, internal auditors specializing in IT, fraud and forensic, or environmental, health, and safety audits are earning higher salaries than those who perform financial and operational audits or engagements pertaining to compliance and regulatory activities. The IIA said the data suggest that organizations appreciate how critical a role internal auditors play in helping boards, audit committees and executive management navigate today’s increasing governance, risk, compliance and control challenges.

Happy at work?

How good are you at creating opportunities for yourself at the office? For a clearer view, visit www.earningserendipity.com. Its workplace “serendipity” quiz helps professionals measure how adept they are at taking charge of their careers.

The non-accounting skills that may get you hired.

Technical know-how may not be enough to land a CPA his or her dream job. In a recent poll conducted by Accountemps, a specialized staffing service for accounting, finance and bookkeeping professionals, 2,100 CFOs were asked which qualifications beyond traditional accounting skills they look for in job candidates. The majority, 33 percent, said they value general business knowledge, while IT expertise came in second, at 25 percent. Fourteen percent named communication skills and 13 percent each cited leadership and customer service abilities. According to Accountemps Chair Max Messmer, “Employers seek individuals who have the business acumen necessary to see the big picture and understand how a strong accounting function influences the success of the entire organization.”

Happy at work?

How good are you at creating opportunities for yourself at the office? For a clearer view, visit www.earningserendipity.com. Its workplace “serendipity” quiz helps professionals measure how adept they are at taking charge of their careers.
Where the recruiters go

In a recent survey, the recruitment software manufacturer Bullhorn Inc., asked 1,848 staffing professionals about their strategies for finding quality job candidates on social media sites. While 98.2 percent of respondents said that they did, in fact, use social media as a recruiting tool in 2012—up from 94 percent in 2011—some sites drew their attention more than others. Here’s how it breaks down:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site</th>
<th>Percentage who used the site as a recruiting tool in 2012</th>
<th>Percentage who were able to place candidates they found using the site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>

**Social media users:**

How well do you wield the power of the pound sign? You might already be accustomed to checking accounting-related hashtags—keywords or phrases preceded by the symbol # that categorize posts—on Twitter to see what colleagues are discussing or to identify resources. (If you’re not, see below left for a list of hashtags that every licensed and aspiring CPA should be familiar with). But it’s also important to know how to create and use hashtags for branding and advertising, whether you’re a financial professional looking to promote your services, or a student trying to launch a campus event.

In fact, having a smart hashtag strategy may become even more important, now that more social media platforms have followed Twitter’s lead: LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest have all started to support hashtags, and this spring, Facebook announced that it, too, would soon be rolling out the symbol. As Forbes recently noted, “The hashtag is about to take off and the terms should be easy to spell and to remember. They should also have a natural connection to whatever it is you’re trying to promote.”

**Quick Tip!** Before you tweet or post work-related updates, check your firm’s social media policy to make sure your online moves are company-approved.

Be original. Once you develop a new hashtag, the next step is to see if the phrase is already in use (you can do this using the search function of the social media platform, or analytical websites). There are a few good reasons why—for one, you want to be sure that others aren’t already using the tag in ways you might not want to be associated with. Besides, as Alisa Meredith, co-owner of the social media marketing agency Scalable Social Media, notes, “hijacking” another person or company’s event-specific hashtag to promote your own is frowned upon (though it’s fine to post under general hashtags related to the profession, like #CPA).

**10 Twitter hashtags worth following:**

#accounting #audit #CFO #CPA #cpaexam #finance #firsttaxpros #smallbiz #tax (or #taxes)

**Follow the “three Cs.”**

Trying to draw attention to your accounting blog or a firm fund-raiser? According to the social media analytics service Hashtag.org, hashtags should always be **catchy, concise and clear**. That means the terms should be easy to spell and to remember. They should also have a natural connection to whatever it is you’re trying to promote.
Best (and worst) advice ever?

Find a mentor

Join a committee

Network

Blend in

Study study study!!!!

Four CPAs on the most helpful tips they’ve heard—and the ones they chose to ignore. By Nicole Saunders
What’s the best career advice you’ve received?
“Step outside of your comfort zone.” I learned this early on in my career and saw that it’s absolutely critical in order to grow. If you happen to be slightly shy, you’re not alone—people who are brand new to the profession may be intimidated or uncomfortable when it comes to networking, attending events, interacting with clients and performing tasks they’ve never done before. But stepping out of your comfort zone early and continually will bring you tremendous experiences that you’ll benefit from. I continue to push myself to do this and maintain a “bring it on” mentality. For example, I spoke at our chapter’s Student Night for the first time last October, and I was glad I did it.

What’s the worst career advice you’ve received?
“Just be yourself.” I can understand where the sentiment is coming from, but I believe there’s a missing second half to the sentence. “Just be yourself—but be open-minded and accepting of change,” is what I think the full sentence should say. Starting off in your career with a “just be yourself” attitude can be a bad thing because, at times, you might be wrong and need to learn from your mistakes. It might also make you adverse to getting constructive criticism or feedback that you’ll need to hear in order to develop into a successful CPA and rise through the ranks.

What’s the one thing they didn’t tell you about the profession in college?
We didn’t learn how to sell our firms’ services and market ourselves as CPAs. This came with experience and a few good training programs that my firm provided. If someone asks you what you do for a living, the typical response is “I’m a CPA.” Sure, but think about it—what do you do? I’ve learned how to answer that question in a much more in-depth and intriguing way. Marketing our firms and ourselves as CPAs is critical to growth and longevity in this industry—the earlier you become aware of this, the more prosperous your career will be.

What would you tell people who are preparing for the CPA exam?
With my first exam, audit, I left my study materials in my car when I sat in the waiting room of the testing center. My attitude at that stage is you either have it or you don’t—you’re at the point of no return. There was a medical student, who was also taking a test that day, in the waiting room with me. When the door opened and his name was called, he was still frantically flipping through his study book and shouted, “HOLD ON PLEASE, JUST ONE MORE MINUTE!” You don’t want to be that guy. My best advice is to give your test prep your absolute focus. Put in all the time that you can and dedicate yourself—it’s all worth it in the end.

What’s the best career advice you’ve received?
I was told to start taking the CPA exam right away after college. At first, I figured that I had two years to pass it, but I soon realized that if I waited, the increased job and life responsibilities would make it difficult to find the time to study.

What’s the one thing they didn’t tell you about the profession in college?
I’m not sure there is just one thing! Besides giving you a base knowledge of accounting vocabulary, I don’t think college courses really provide guidance on what the public accounting profession is all about. I came out of college thinking that I wanted to go into the tax department because I enjoyed my tax class and disliked my auditing class. But after working through seven busy seasons in the audit department and dabbling in the tax department, I found that I have much more passion for the audit side. I never would have known this without real-world work experience.

What have you learned about networking that you didn’t know before?
I think the most important thing about networking is that it can happen anywhere, not just at networking events. Don’t be afraid to strike up a conversation with someone in an elevator, on a plane or at the grocery store. You never know who the person standing next to you is, or what that person does for a living. The stranger in front of you could be your future client, employer or employee.

What memories do you have of taking the CPA exam and what would you tell people who are preparing for it?
When I began preparing for it, I was living at home with my parents and I explained that I wouldn’t be able to help out around the house while I was studying. My father told me that if I passed all four parts on the first try, he would take me on a trip to anywhere I wanted to go. That was motivation enough for me. After I passed the third one, my father said, “You’re really going to make me take you on a trip, aren’t you?” When I passed the fourth one, we went to Discovery Cove in Orlando to swim with the dolphins. For those currently looking to take the exam, realize that your life may be put on hold for a while. During the six months I was taking the exam sections, I barely saw my friends and family, and I broke up with my now-husband (it all worked out in the end). I even remember studying on Christmas Eve for a couple of hours. I’m not saying you should cut off all contact with the outside world, but it’s very likely that you’ll have to miss attending Friday night happy hours.
What's the best career advice you've received?
To remember that everyone makes mistakes, even the people you look up to and admire. It’s humbling to think that the most successful people, however perfect they seem, make mistakes and learn from them (which might explain why they’re so successful). This has been good advice for me because sometimes I put too much pressure on myself to be perfect, which I know is unreasonable. It also reminds me to focus on the positive—what you’re learning from a difficult experience—rather than getting wrapped up in having made the actual mistake itself.

What's the worst career advice you've received?
That you can’t smile, laugh and have a good time, and still be considered a professional. In the past, I’ve tried so hard to fit the mold of what everyone else thinks is professional, that I’ve lost myself in the mix. Of course, there is a time to be serious and a time to have fun, but you can be a professional and still be yourself.

What's the one thing they didn’t tell you about the profession in college?
That not every situation you encounter will be as clear-cut as it is in a textbook. There are times when you’ll need to exercise professional judgment and rely on your experience and the counsel of your mentors.

What have you learned about networking that you didn’t know before?
Connections last longer than you might think. A few people have reached out to me just recently, though I first met them months or years ago. I thought they’d forgotten about me, but when they needed an accountant, they looked me up.

Results from our (unscientific) survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintaining a work–life balance:</th>
<th>Most popular CPA exam study method:</th>
<th>The fix that gets them through the day:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half of the respondents said they scheduled “date nights” with their significant other, and Hermus suggested that CPAs set time aside for themselves: “My advice for those struggling with their work–life balance would be to set dates or times to do the nonwork activities they want to get done—put them on the calendar, if need be.”</td>
<td>It was a toss-up between formal review, personal study and a mix of the two. Gardner said that taking a review course &quot;is the reason I passed.&quot; Hermus, however said he chose to use self-study materials. &quot;I set dedicated days and time blocks each week leading up to the exam, to get the necessary study time in,&quot; he said. &quot;I also made my own flash cards.&quot;</td>
<td>No surprise here—most respondents named caffeine. “I like to grab a Mountain Dew around 2 p.m. to keep me going for another five hours,” Wright says. &quot;Sometimes, I just need that midafternoon caffeine boost.&quot;</td>
</tr>
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PRACTICAL ADVICE TO ACHIEVE CAREER GOALS, BIG AND SMALL

By Pei-Cen Lin, CPA, SPHR

HOW TO: Showcase leadership skills

In a word, volunteer! One way to hone and demonstrate your leadership skills is to volunteer for special assignments, project teams, task forces or committees. Participate in professional organizations, such as the NYSSCPA, and take on leadership roles at the committee and chapter level. You should also consider taking on leadership roles in a nonprofessional setting, such as a community group.

A leader has self-understanding; seeks every opportunity for improvement; is proactive, forward thinking and flexible; possesses good interpersonal and relationship skills; is a solid communicator; empowers and develops others; and thinks strategically about business. Look for daily opportunities at your workplace or in your personal life to develop and display these competencies. And most importantly, communicate your efforts to your colleagues and managers.

HOW TO: Build your personal brand

When you think of a “brand,” you probably picture a product—say your favorite cereal or the kind of car you drive—but these days the word increasingly refers to, well, you. Personal branding in the professional world, is, simply put, the art of marketing yourself. You are the product. You are the brand. You are your own company called “Me.” And in order to do it well, you must first determine your brand identity. What makes you stand out? What are your greatest strengths? Once you have established who you are and what you do that is of value to others, you can start selling that “you.”

It’s never too late to discover, create and market your personal brand. In fact, you probably have one already—you send messages about your personal brand with the things you do and the things you don’t do. If you don’t like the brand you’ve created, modify it. It’s a constant work in progress, just as you are.

A few easy steps you can take to assert your brand:

1. Demonstrate your expertise in a particular area by taking advantage of opportunities to speak publicly or submit articles. The good news is you can assemble a portfolio of public speaking engagements and writing clips through the NYSSCPA. Join a Society committee, volunteer to lead a session or panel discussion at a conference or chapter event, and write articles for Society publications such as The CPA Journal or the Tax Stringer. Moreover, ask the Society’s Media Relations department how you can partner with them for any press opportunities that may arise.

2. Make sure your website and social media accounts play up your professional strengths. Social media has made it easier for us to put our brands out there, with online profiles, blogs and videos. In fact, given the technological age we live in, you may already have a brand circulating in cyberspace with or without your knowledge. So, be deliberate in creating your online presence. For instance, make sure your Twitter bio reflects the work you’re currently doing, and that your LinkedIn headline plays up your qualifications.

3. Communicate what you can contribute. Come up with a 15- to 20-second pitch that will tell colleagues or clients what it is you do and what makes you special. And don’t be shy about using it.
If you started this paragraph hoping to find advice about PowerPoint, you're out of luck. Your audience, and not your slide deck, is the most important element of any presentation, and you'll win big at public speaking if you can find ways to more fully incorporate them or demonstrate that you're eager to connect.

This starts with something as basic as maintaining eye contact. In fact, you may even want to consider memorizing your content, so there'll be no need to take your eyes off of the audience to consult your notes. It also means that you should avoid turning your back to the audience at any point during the presentation. If you're using a flipchart, do your writing in advance, or ask a volunteer in the room to assist you. (At the very least, you'll be engaging that volunteer through his or her active participation.) Other tips:

1. Avoid simply reading your slides to the audience. (They can do that themselves—and a lot faster, too! Plus, once they're done reading, their thoughts will drift off elsewhere, and you're almost guaranteed to have lost them.) If you're able to, build in opportunities for interactivity. Ask for feedback; for example, you might say something like “raise your hands if you've encountered something similar with a client.”

2. Personalize your presentation by telling a story, preferably one that your audience can relate to, and invite them to briefly share their own experiences. This gives them a personal stake in your speech. When your audience is participating and communicating with you, it’s a sure sign that you have their attention and engagement.

3. Finally, remember that a presentation doesn’t just boil down to what you say, but how you say it. The opposite of a dry monotone that sends an audience to sleep is what we call “vocal variety,” or varying the pitch, tone, volume and rate of your speaking voice. This could mean emphasizing key words or adding in pauses to get a point across. Moreover, be sure to speak with energy and conviction. If you are passionate about your subject and your presentation, it’ll work in your favor.
**Network online**

Social media connects you with colleagues who may have real-time information, referrals or recommendations that can benefit you professionally. And if you want to make a career move, it can keep you up on the latest job postings or help you to market yourself. (For example, you can showcase acquired knowledge and give a sense of the kind of activities you engage in just by tweeting about an NYSSCPA workshop you attended.)

But reaping the benefits of social media requires conscious effort, as well as time. Do you often tweet or post updates about developments within the profession and resources that have proven useful, or do you stay silent? Do you add to hashtags about the profession or ignore them? To build credibility and establish yourself, it’s important that you frequently communicate with your professional network. Moreover, social media is a give and take, which means it is just as, if not more, important to share valuable information. Doing so will only help you to position yourself as an expert and encourage your online followers to further engage you.

**Some practical ways to incorporate social media in your networking plan:**

1. **Use it to search for and identify contacts with whom to network.** You can also get information about a possible contact by checking his or her profile or determine an informal point of reference by seeing whom you know in common. Though LinkedIn is more popular among CPAs, Twitter can be quite useful in engaging an online entity, be it a person or a company. Unlike LinkedIn, which only allows you to connect with people you have some level of familiarity with, Twitter allows you to “follow” people you don’t know but aspire to be like, such as local industry leaders, as well as organizations you want to learn more about. You can then follow their followers if you’d like. If you need help in figuring out whom to follow, check hashtags relevant to the CPA world and check out the credentials of the account holders who turn up in the results. From there, you should pay attention to their online dialogue—for instance, what topics about the profession seem to interest them?—and see how you can chime in.

2. **Remember, online networking does not replace face-to-face networking.** If your initial contact with a colleague is via social media, make an effort to meet with the person, if geographically feasible, in order to build on that relationship. At the very least, have a phone conversation. Video conferencing is also an option for meeting a person “live.”

3. **Fill in the blanks.** When you send a LinkedIn invitation to connect with someone new, it helps to reference the association you have in common (“We both know so-and-so”) or where you know the person from (“I met you at the NYSSCPA event”).

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**A better way to organize data**

By JOEL LANZ, CPA/ CITP, CFF, CISA, CISSP, CFE

**Q: Excel or Access: Which one should I use?**

For many practitioners, the answer has more to do with their familiarity with the applications rather than the features themselves. Most readers are well acquainted with Excel. Its strong analytical capabilities, as well as its flexibility to adjust analysis and columns as the user deems appropriate with minimal programming knowledge, make it a very popular application in the profession. New versions of the software have significantly increased the analytical capabilities and presentation of financial analysis including the use of pivot tables, statistical techniques and graphing/charting tools. Although Excel can handle both numeric and alphanumeric data, its core purpose is financial analysis, and there are limits on the size of the spreadsheet that can be used.

Excel’s major shortcoming is that as the spreadsheet becomes more complex and is modified by the user, the opportunity for errors increases dramatically. Access is a more sophisticated application that is better suited to managing information. Its features facilitate the connection to external databases while storing large amounts of text, and can also provide a report of all actions taken on the database, including the types of queries that were run. It requires a more disciplined approach as the various relationships within the database need to be defined during the database design process, and provides less flexibility for modification than Excel.

Utilities within both software applications provide for the ability to exchange data. For those unfamiliar with Access, the decision of which program to use will typically depend upon how many of the user’s objectives can be achieved using Excel. For those familiar with both tools, Excel is more likely to be used for financial analysis, while Access would be used for more complex and larger data analysis efforts.

**Q: I have trouble accurately tracking my time. Can you recommend an alternative to paper?**

There is no one right way to track time—it boils down to what works best for an individual. I recently identified a solution that works very well for me in my status as a sole practitioner (read: it’s cheap, it’s effective and I like it). Since I usually work with Outlook open on my computer, I rediscovered a neglected tool in the application called “Journal.” I take the predefined entry form, which can be customized and assign a “category” for each client. I use the “subject” to describe the actual work performed. I then use the “company” to identify the specific project or phase of the project. The “duration” allows me to record time. Using the “File-Options-Advanced-Export” command, I save the data file to Excel (or Access if you choose). Then, in Excel, I adjust dates and assign billing rates that are exported to a billing program or used to prepare a manual invoice. The beauty of this is that because I’m already in Outlook, I’m able to quickly enter the information. This may not be right for everyone, but the time involved in tracking my hours has decreased dramatically since I started doing it.

Joel Lanz, CPA/CITP, CFF, CISA, CISSP, CFE, is an adjunct professor at SUNY College at Old Westbury. He is a member of the NYSSCPA’s Technology Assurance and Banking committees, and The CPA Journal Editorial Board. Mr. Lanz can be reached at jlanz@joellanzcpa.com.
If you became hyperaware of clocks and calendars the moment you started thinking seriously about the CPA exam, you’re not alone. For a test that’s often described as a marathon and not a sprint, getting the best results often means figuring out how to pace yourself. Below are some tips to help you start off and stay on track. For more advice and information about the test, visit the CPA exam website, www.cpa-exam.org.

...three months to a year before the test:

HIT THE BOOKS. As a general rule of thumb, the AICPA recommends about 400 hours of study time to prepare for the exam, or “about 100 hours per section,” said Scott Moore, the AICPA’s Director of Student and Professional Pathways. (The AICPA, in partnership with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy [NASBA], develops, administers and scores the test.) The word “general” is key, he added, because much will depend on both the section and the test taker’s knowledge base. For example, if you’re currently working in audit, you probably won’t have to put as much effort into studying for that section as you would for others. The AICPA doesn’t suggest a specific time frame for the hours in which test takers might cram, since that boils down to individual preferences and circumstances—for instance, a recent grad may be able to plunge into full-time study, while a professional who’s also juggling a family might need to space out his or her efforts. Moreover, the AICPA doesn’t endorse any one review method or course, though it does suggest that test takers ask faculty members or colleagues for recommendations.
…a month or more before the test:

1. SCHEDULE YOUR FIRST SECTION at www.prometric.com/cpa. The AICPA recommends that you sign up for your first section 45 days in advance of your preferred date, for reasons both practical (you’ll have a better shot at getting your requested date) and psychological (it gives you a hard target to shoot for). “From a psychological perspective, you want to make sure [you] have a real goal set,” Moore explained. Testing windows fall within the first two months of each calendar quarter, and the AICPA suggests that candidates consider asking for a spot in the first month, if possible, to cut down on any last-minute changes or unexpected events that may come at the end of a testing window. Another helpful scheduling tip: Consider scheduling your test for a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Not only will it increase your odds of getting your requested date, but the testing center may also be less hectic at that time.

2. TAKE THE TUTORIAL AND SAMPLE TEST (several times, if needed) at www.cpa-exam.org. “It won’t necessarily help you in terms of content, but it well help you to become familiar with the interface, so that you won’t be caught off guard,” Moore said.

3. READ AND DOWNLOAD The Uniform CPA Examination Candidate Bulletin: Information for Applicants—the official handbook for the CPA exam—which is available on the NASBA website at http://nasba.org/exams/exam-resources.

…30 mins before the test:

1. DITCH YOUR COFFEE AND BAGEL. No food or beverages are allowed in the test center, so be sure to have a solid breakfast at home.

2. GRAB YOUR TWO FORMS OF ID AND YOUR NOTICE TO SCHEDULE (you won’t be able to take the test without them), and get to the test center a half-hour early. The AICPA suggests that you have your Exam Section ID (it’s provided on your “Notice to Schedule”) out once you’re at your workstation.

…during the test:

1. KEEP AN EYE ON THE CLOCK. Remember, there’s a difference between examination testing time (the time allotted for the examination section) and your appointment time (the extra 30 minutes that’s allotted for entering the launch code, reading the intro screens and taking the exam survey). You won’t be able to tack on any of your appointment time to testing.

2. SPEAK UP. If you experience any equipment issues, report them right away. Don’t try to troubleshoot the problem yourself.

…after the test:

1. HOLD ON TO YOUR CONFIRMATION OF ATTENDANCE FORM—it lists contact information that may come in handy. Fax or snail mail concerns about test questions to the AICPA within four days of taking the test (be sure to provide your mailing address and your examination section ID number). For any other problems, contact NASBA within five days of taking the exam at candidatecare@nasba.org.

For more info about the test, visit—
• www.nasba.org for information about the exam application process,
• www.aicpa.org/cpa-exam for information about the content or scoring of the exam, and
• www.prometric.com/cpa for information about scheduling the exam.

Is there an ideal time to take the test?

SOONER IS REALLY BETTER, according to Scott Moore, the AICPA’s Director of Student and Professional Pathways. Take the test soon after graduating from college. Not only are you likely to have more time to devote to studying—you may be able to better recall what you’ve learned from a wide variety of accounting courses. “Whereas once you start working, you tend to specialize in one area,” Moore added. “Your skills may get rusty—for example, you wouldn’t be thinking about international tax law unless you had to.” Plus, you’ll still have a strong set of study skills that will come in handy.
The CPA exam is challenging and requires a focused and disciplined approach to properly prepare and ultimately pass the exam.

For more than 35 years, Yaeger CPA Review has been successful in preparing candidates to pass the exam.

As a leader in self-study, Yaeger’s proven method of “teaching” the concepts has helped thousands of candidates not only pass the exam, but become better prepared to work as a CPA.

**Get To It:**
The CPA exam is an academic exercise so it is a good idea to take the exam as soon as you can after fulfilling the education requirements. As a teaching program, Yaeger does not rely on memorization and mnemonics. This provides an advantage in becoming a CPA by reinforcing the education one has attained.

**Have a Plan:**
Once the requirements are met, a solid plan needs to be developed to allow sufficient time and effort to adequately prepare for the exam. With Yaeger’s interactive portal, students automatically get a study planner that continuously works to ensure exam preparation is kept on track.

**Study, Study, Study:**
The minimum passing score on the CPA exam is 75. Once a candidate’s plan is in place and a review program is underway, it is important to keep up with the course material. Students should allow plenty of time to work the recommended practice questions given by the instructors. Yaeger instructors explain concepts. They cover multiple choice questions and simulations to reinforce the concepts. The practice software includes thousands of questions and simulations. The Instructor Hotline is available to further assist students. Students also have an opportunity to ask questions or seek advice through Yaeger’s Message Board.

“We not only teach students WHAT to do, and HOW to do it, but also, WHY to do it.”

**Time Management is Critical:**
It is essential to develop excellent time management skills both during the review program and on test day. Yaeger CPA Review includes over 130 hours of video instruction between all 4 parts of the exam. On average, students will devote 4 hours of study time for every hour of video. In other words, approximately 500 hours of preparation time. Yaeger coaches its students to work towards answering each practice multiple choice questions in about 90 seconds and each practice simulation in 12-15 minutes. By doing so, students mimic typical time allotments needed for these types of questions during the actual exam.

**Can Do Attitude:**
With the right frame of mind, a review course like Yaeger, and support system of family and friends, the CPA exam is within a candidate’s reach! A dedicated approach whereby students follow Yaeger’s program will ensure optimum success.

**The Yaeger Commitment:**
Yaeger CPA Review has always been committed to their students’ success. Year after year, Yaeger provides the most up-to-date material to “teach” the concepts, cutting edge technology to provide an exceptional user experience and unmatched student support to ensure complete satisfaction.

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“Keep cool, listen to the question and respond to the best of your ability.”

According to Mark Ulrich, a member of the Academic Advancement and Higher Education Committee, being active in various accounting and finance-oriented clubs and activities can also go a long way in helping to establish professional contacts, as these organizations often bring in speakers and host networking events with established professionals. For example, the NYSSCPA offers a student membership, at a discounted rate of $20 per year, that connects students with nearly 29,000 Society members through chapter and committee events and online networking.

College students, if you’re wondering when’s the right time to start thinking about the job world, take note: veteran CPAs say it’s never too early to start preparing—especially since most companies do their recruiting right on campus.

Your game plan should hinge on creating personal connections with professional contacts long before you’re ready to start working.

In other words, network—talk about career opportunities with your college instructors, friends of friends, and even your parents’ friends, said Stanley A. Stempler, a member of the NYSSCPA’s Human Resources Committee and recruiter for an executive search firm. “There are a lot of ways to network, and the student should try every means possible.”

Generally speaking, Stempler said, freshman and sophomore years should be spent studying and getting the best grades possible, but sometime between sophomore and junior years, students should look at joining accounting organizations and associations, as well as work to get into the accounting honors society, which can lead to many networking opportunities with firms that come to visit. The earliest job hunt should begin around the spring of junior year, as students will probably start interviewing at firms later in the fall, he added.

IMPRESSING FIRMS

What firms are looking for in their recruits—not just out of college but in general—is that the candidate has good communication skills, both written and oral, said Frank Fusaro, a member of the NYSSCPA’s Human Resources Committee and the CEO of a CPA recruitment firm. Since giving presentations is a big part of a CPA’s job, he recommended taking public speaking courses as well as seeking out other ways to improve writing skills, preferably early in one’s college career. “The more experience you get, the better you get at it,” Fusaro said. “And writing skills are critical.”

Good communication skills also provide the ability to handle stressful situations, said Arthur J. Radin, a member of the Large and Medium Sized Firms Practice Management Committee. One of his go-to interview questions is to ask an applicant to name a Financial Accounting Standards Board pronouncement, as well as the pronouncements that preceded it, though responses sometimes include frantic stuttering.

“It’s not an attempt to see if they know anything—it’s to see if they break down and cry,” Radin revealed. “The main thing they should do is keep their cool, listen to the question and respond to the best of their ability.” Fusaro made a similar point, saying that when a candidate is asked a question during a job interview, it’s for two reasons: “The lesser is for the answer. The greater is to hear you communicate and articulate.”

Other moves that will score you points? Firms are looking for signs that the candidate has a strong work ethic, Fusaro added. Paying all or part of one’s own tuition, working over the summer or taking internships are things that potential employers notice. “The more professional the work experience, the better,” he said, “but even if you’re just waiting tables, it shows that you have a work ethic.”

Operations: Get Hired

Seasoned NYSSCPA members share strategies for getting a foot in the door

By Chris Gaetano

Oops! Avoiding interview errors

Last January, CareerBuilder.com released the results of its annual survey about interview gaffes, in which it polled more than 2,600 hiring managers and 3,900 workers nationwide. Responses ranged from the outrageous (one job candidate denied that he had a cell phone with him, though it could be heard ringing in his briefcase) to the obviously inappropriate (another job candidate hugged the president of the company). However, the top mistakes job seekers make tend to be more banal, though no less fatal: showing a lack of preparation, having improper etiquette and failing to establish rapport. Fortunately, these errors are easy to avoid:

Preparation. Research the company, review both the job description and your résumé, and practice responses to commonly asked questions long before you walk through the interviewer’s office door. Prepare questions for the interviewer, too (this will show that you’ve done your homework).

Proper Etiquette. Get to your interview on time and greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and steady eye contact. Make sure you know his or her name. Send a thank-you note soon afterward that reiterates your interest or highlights your qualifications.

Establish Rapport. Avoid being rigid, fidgety and wordy. Keep the tone professional, but try to treat the interview as what it is: a conversation. — Pei-Cen Lin
I didn’t get a promotion I think I deserved. What should my next step be?

**Short answer:** Communicate

**Long answer:** Have a talk with your manager and find out why you were passed over for promotion. What were his or her expectations? What can you do differently to better meet the criteria for the position you seek? Communication is key, so ask your manager to be candid with you. Then, schedule a time to revisit promotion talks. For instance, if a promotion can’t be instituted now, ask if a midyear promotion is possible. But be sure to come to the conversation prepared—that means bringing along supporting documentations of accomplishments, contributions and instances in which you’ve met role competencies, in order to demonstrate that you’re able to take on additional responsibilities.

If there are areas in which you must improve in order to advance, work with your manager to create a mutually agreed-upon individual development plan that outlines your goals for meeting the requirements for promotion. As you work toward meeting the goals you’ve established, ensure that your manager and his or her manager recognize that you’re working toward a promotion. Monitor your progress frequently with them to ensure that you’re on track.

If the prospect of getting that promotion with your current employer doesn’t align with your career plans, you may need to explore other opportunities. No matter what your decision, continue to develop your skill sets.
A member of my firm whom I work closely with has a terrible communications style—he’s argumentative and given to complaining. It sometimes affects our ability to tackle projects together. How can I improve how we communicate and work together?

Short answer: Be the bigger person

Long answer: Start by having a candid conversation with him—there’s always the possibility that he’s unaware of how his style may be affecting you or the work. Explain to him that you want to give him and the project your optimal performance, but his communication style is inducing a negative impact. So that he doesn’t feel attacked, avoid assigning blame and, instead, frame the conversation as an opportunity for you both to work more effectively and efficiently together. It will help, too, if you can be specific in pinpointing the issues, so come prepared with examples of when the argumentative and complaining behaviors hindered the project’s progress. For example, did a one-hour meeting turn into two hours, thus wasting time and energy? Or did an argumentative discussion cut short efforts to come up with a strategy that might have benefited the project? Ask for his understanding and help to better focus on completing the project, and also for suggestions on how the two of you can improve your communications. Then, make a few suggestions of your own. At the end, try to come to a mutual agreement on what you will both work on and contribute to the relationship and to the project. If having a conversation doesn’t help to address the issue, escalate the matter and bring in a “coach” (an external expert or a third-party manager) to mediate. He or she can help guide you in improving communication and the working relationship.
The average CFO doesn’t typically jump into a van and start doing surveillance. Brian S. Aryai, a member of the NYSSCPA’s Nassau chapter, would be the first to tell you that. Yet in 2008, as a senior financial executive for one of the largest construction companies in the world, Aryai found himself parked outside a worksite, surreptitiously taking notes on the crew. It was part of his ongoing effort to gather evidence of a billings fraud that he suspected was being perpetrated, not just...
within his own company, but across the industry. Which reflects another truism he’d share with you: Sometimes, convention gives way to circumstance.

The days, months and years that followed have all the makings of a Hollywood drama: Aryai would eventually blow the whistle on the largest fraud ever recorded in the construction industry, triggering criminal investigations and a multi–million dollar settlement. Yet, the decision to speak up wasn’t without consequence. On paper, or in the confines of a classroom, doing the right thing seems simple; in real life, it can be scary. “Actually encountering it and having to make decisions in real time is a little different,” Aryai said. “It’s not like a textbook, where you can go back and read and reread and revisit. You’ve got to act quickly.”

Though Aryai describes himself as “battle worn” by the events leading up to and following his revelations, he said that speaking up was the right thing to do, and if he had the chance to do it all over again, he would. CPAs, he said, rank high with the public because of their insistence on ethics and objectivity.

“Financial executives don’t wake up in the morning and decide they’re going to become a whistleblower,” he said. “It’s a very traumatic event, but a critical one.”

A CRASH COURSE
In 2008, Aryai was hired as the controller and senior vice president of finance for Lend Lease Project Management & Construction (formerly known as Bovis Lend Lease LMB, Inc.), the prestigious Australian firm that built the 9/11 Memorial in lower Manhattan and the Mets’ Citibank stadium in Queens.

In the past, he’d held top positions at firms and companies such as Cablevision, where he was vice president of internal audit, and Grassi & Co., CPAs, P.C., where he was partner-in-charge of consulting. But his background also included a 14-year stint as a federal agent employed by the Treasury Department to investigate white-collar criminal activity. It was this mix of experience, he said, that led Lend Lease to ask him to join the company. It was also what led him to eventually spot the fraud, investigate it and notify the authorities.

Aryai said he first became uncomfortable when he learned about the industry-wide practice known as “gratis pay,” or “8 + 2,” in which labor foremen are given two hours of extra overtime as a matter of course—though they never actually worked them. After asking around, and monitoring Lend Lease’s crews himself, “it was clear that it was an everyday event,” he said.

One would think that a company would be relieved to discover fraud and immediately put a stop to it. But when Aryai went to fellow executives within his company as well as peers outside of it with concerns about serial overbilling, he found that this wasn’t the case. Instead, he said, his inquiries were met with suspicion and defensiveness. “People would ask me, ‘what’s your problem?’” he said. “They were going through hoops to try and tell me this isn’t criminal activity, that this is something that’s done and is the common practice.”

Aryai compared his attempts to reason with colleagues to trying to tell someone that the sky is blue and having them tell you, without flinching, that, no, it’s purple. “These were not unintelligent people,” he said. “But they would argue the point over and over that what was being done was OK, and that it would be best if I just ignored it.”

Before he discovered the fraud and went to the authorities, Aryai said he’d enjoyed his position at the company, where he managed approximately $3 billion in revenues. But from the time he first began inquiring about “8 + 2,” until the moment he was unceremoniously “laid off” in the spring of 2009, he said he faced a campaign of resistance.

“Every imaginable tactic was used to obstruct me from correcting the issues,” he said, noting that whistleblowers, in general, face everything from colleagues trying to undermine their efforts, to smear campaigns that try to paint the whistleblower as the source of the problem. “It’s a very lonely place to be. And it’s one that I hope to never be put into again.”

Aryai eventually alerted the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York and the FBI. Last April, the company admitted to having committed the fraud from 1999 to 2009 and agreed to pay $56 million in fines and restitution. Investigations into other companies within the industry that are suspected of also committing the fraud are still pending.

Aryai said that while he didn’t get a hero’s welcome from his company, he is grateful to have had support from his staff, friends and family, and his old law enforcement colleagues, all of whom helped keep his spirits up during the process.

Because, at some point, he said, “you have to leave 26 Federal Plaza [the FBI’s location in New York City] and go home and think about what just happened.”

CREATING A NEW REALITY
After being laid off from Lend Lease, Aryai started Icon Compliance Services, a compliance consultancy firm, with former New York Gov. David A. Paterson, and serves as its CEO. He said he helped found the firm partly to counter the “long–entrenched entities that sell their services as compliance consultants and integrity monitors,” but nonetheless look the other way when it comes to incidents of fraud—like the ones he said he encountered in the construction industry.

“It was interesting that these monitors, who sell these services, were posted at the job sites I reviewed,” he said. “It was impossible for me to digest how they could close their eyes to the omnipresent and inescapable presence of fraudulent activity.”

Given his experiences as a high-profile whistleblower, he acknowledged that there will be companies that don’t want anything to do with him or the services that his firm provides. As far as “companies with owners and executives that are part of the crime and problem, I do not get those calls,” Aryai said. “They will never come to me. I get hired to do projects by companies who want to genuinely clean up their act.”

NEXT GEN 19
Calling out Fraud

What a young CPA should know

Though confronting fraud can be a daunting prospect, Brian S. Aryai urged young CPAs not to be afraid of speaking up, however scary it might be at the time. “If someone is just starting their career and they witness activities of a questionable ethical nature, my advice would be to find someone trustworthy high up in the company—be they a board member, the CFO, the general counsel or someone on the audit committee, if it’s a public company, and talk to them about it,” he said.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) bolstered its own whistleblower rules and procedures as part of the Dodd-Frank Act, with final regulations approved in 2011. Under the new rules, people who witness violations of securities law can go directly to the SEC with information. Before, they were required to address the matter internally before going to regulators, although the SEC still encourages people to do so.

To be considered a whistleblower under the SEC’s rule, a person must voluntarily provide the commission with original information that leads to a successful enforcement action on the part of the regulator, resulting in monetary sanctions that exceed $1 million.

To submit information as a whistleblower, one should either fill out the appropriate form on the SEC’s website, www.sec.gov/whistleblower, or file a Tip, Complaint, Referral (TRC) form and mail it to the SEC’s Office of the Whistleblower. People can choose to submit anonymously, but the information would need to be submitted by an attorney, who would retain a copy of the original signed submission on behalf of the whistleblower.

Not only is coming forward the right thing to do; the risks for looking the other way can be high. Speaking at an NYSSCPA panel on fraud last October, Walter Mack, Esq., a former assistant U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said that because accounting professionals are closer to the numbers than other executives, they can’t plead ignorance about fraud the way their colleagues sometimes can. “While the CEO can say, ‘I relied on my CFO,’ the CFO is going to have a hard time denying he or she didn’t know what was going on, because he or she will have had the resources to investigate,” he said.

Resigning wouldn’t necessarily protect an accounting professional whose company has engaged in fraud from being caught in a prosecutor’s crosshairs either, he added. “It depends on how much you know, how long you’ve known it and what steps you took to rectify [the situation],” he said.

In the end, Aryai said, go with your instinct and act on principle. “Because if you just turn your head the other way, there’s no guarantee you don’t become part of the problem,” he said. “And then there’s no coming back once you cross that line.”

—C.G.

Quick Tip!

For more information about the SEC’s whistleblower program, visit www.sec.gov/whistleblower.
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