

MANAGEMENT OF AN ACCOUNTING PRACTICE

CPA Firms Recruiting of Accounting Students: A Faculty Perspective

Although I have watched CPA firms recruit accounting students for 10 years at three different universities, I find it difficult to begin this discussion on recruiting. Many firms are taking steps that are viewed positively by faculty, but there is always room for improvement. Faculty want all of the firms to get their share of the brightest and best students, but the important point is that the students be satisfied with their choices.

Let us start with the situation where a firm does not hire any students from a school that is deemed a good source of recruits. The firm has few recruits to "spread the good word" at that school, so where should the firm begin its efforts? Each school is different—some are national recruiting schools, some are regional schools, and some are for local office recruiting only. Different approaches may be needed at the various schools. Get to know several faculty members at each school so that you know the school and the students. Remember, your consumers are the students and your product is your CPA firm. Make the long-term commitment, get organized, and do your long range planning.

Image

Look at your image. Many students say that there are more differences from office to office of the same firm than there are differences among Big Eight firms and local accounting firms. What image best describes your firm? Competitive? Laid-back? Aggressive? Computer-oriented? Specialized in one or two industries? Progressive? Education-oriented? Different students want different things. They will be at different levels of maturity and sophistication. Find your niche and sell it. Differentiate your firm by selling its positive points, not by saying negative things about other firms.

Student Perceptions

Think about how students learn about CPA firms. Maybe a school holds a "meet the firms" night where all the firms send representatives to be available in one location. Maybe your firm made a presentation to Beta Alpha Psi and/or the Accounting Club. Maybe the literature in the placement office helps students learn about firms. Sometimes, students ask faculty about the firms.

Certainly, students learn a lot from interviews.

However, one of the biggest sources of information is other students. Graduating students who have been through the interview process discuss their interviews and perceptions with their friends. Also, new staff accountants will talk with their friends who are still in school. Some firms even ask their new staff members to spend time back on the campus laying the groundwork for recruiting. Students do spend significant amounts of time discussing CPA firms and the recruiting process as they compare notes. So, if your firm makes a mistake, it may take several years to overcome it.

How can you create positive perceptions?

1. I've already mentioned Beta Alpha Psi and Accounting Club programs. If you agree to do a presentation, be sure it is a good one. If you grab a staff member and hand him a speech at the last minute because a partner had a client call, the presentation will not leave a good impression. I remember attending one Beta Alpha Psi meeting where a partner had given a senior the text of a speech and a set of slides. The senior was quite embarrassed to find that the slides were for a different speech. Students talked about that one for a long time.

Get to know the faculty advisor for Beta Alpha Psi or the Accounting Club and offer your help. Schedule a softball or volleyball game with the Accounting Club so the students can see that you do not work all the time.

2. Work with the placement office to organize a "meet the firms" night. The students can ask questions in an environment that is less formal than the interview.

3. Have a tailgate party before a football game for the students who are signed up for interviews.

4. Offer a summer internship to students who will graduate the next year. Be sure they have a positive experience so they will "spread the word."

5. Offer a three day or one week opportunity for a few students to visit with your office. We call this an externship where the student spends a few days in the office learning about public accounting. Give the students some work to do as they are anxious to learn. The placement office can help you contact and screen students. The externships could be offered at the end of spring and fall semesters and at spring break. Naturally, the students would not expect to be paid.

Editor:

David W. McThomas

International Group of Accounting Firms

Contributor This Month:

Harry D. Dickinson, PhD, CPA

Virginia Commonwealth University

6. Offer a scholarship for an accounting student. Even a small amount will help pay for books and get you some recognition each year.

Some of these suggestions sound costly, but there are also some easy things to do. Send firm publications to the school's library. Once a year, send enough brochures on an accounting or tax issue or on recruiting tips for distribution in classes. Get to know the faculty so you feel comfortable asking them to distribute brochures. Different approaches may be needed because of the variety of schools. The key is to develop name recognition and maintain it.

Faculty Relations

Realize that students are sometimes influenced by faculty in unintentional or subtle ways, so think of ways to help the faculty.

1. Help with Beta Alpha Psi or the Accounting Club.
2. Send firm publications to the faculty.

3. Provide computer software for use in the classroom.

4. Provide faculty with interesting practice problems or research ideas. I am sure most of you are aware of the need for faculty publications, so offering your ideas or help in reviewing or co-authoring papers would be appreciated.

5. Provide opportunities for faculty to attend your CPE courses or to teach some of your CPE courses. When faculty take ideas from CPE courses back to the classroom, it is good publicity.

6. Offer faculty fellowships where faculty could work for you for the summer or a longer period.

Many firms ask for faculty time during the recruiting process with receptions, dinners, or advice on recruiting. Do not expect that the faculty will always be available. Faculty have many other demands on their time.

Remember that the future of your firm is in hiring the right people. Recruiting is a year-round activity, not just a matter of showing up at interviews. The effort is worth it.

Students' Decision Processes

The aforementioned are some things that you can do to get exposure, but what about the decision processes students use in picking their future employer? For the average student, two or three firms will make the "final cut." Typically, students are not in a situation where one firm rises above the others. Rather, students find reasons to knock firms off their list. Students will have different criteria—office size, degree of computerization, industry specialization, client variety, fringe benefits, career options (tax or consulting), travel, or overtime. The latter two seem to be more important each year in today's era of quests for leisure time and of less feeling of dedication to an employer. It's just not the way it was 20 years ago!

Here's a group of "don'ts" (in no particular order) to help keep you from being knocked off a student's list of choices.

1. Don't get behind on your campus interview schedule. Students do not want to miss classes.
2. Don't miss the schedule you tell students for follow-up letters.
3. Don't misspell students' names on letters.
4. Don't send a really "cold" rejection letter. It might get tacked up on a campus bulletin board.
5. Don't appear inflexible when

scheduling office visits. Students have to worry about school first. Don't schedule office visits during final exam periods.

6. Don't delay reimbursements for office visit expenses. Students are on tight budgets. Consider having hotel and airfare charges billed to your firm, as many students do not have credit cards.

7. Don't miss the schedule you tell students for an offer letter.

8. Don't treat students from the same college inconsistently.

9. Don't promise CPE courses, client assignments, or career options if you cannot keep your promises.

10. Don't allow staff, or partners for that matter, to miss office visit interviews. One student reported waiting an hour for an interview with a partner only to have the partner breeze in and say, "At least you got to shake my hand. I'm busy now. Try to come back another day." That experience in rudeness spread through the student body like wildfire. If a schedule conflict arises, find someone else to talk to the student

THE SOFTWARE TRAINING CENTER

Approved Sponsor in the Continuing Professional Education Program.
New York ID# E-48

- Hands-on training for IBM & Macintosh Software
 - Private Classes and on-site Training
 - Hotline Support
 - Classroom Rentals
 - Sunday and Evening Classes Available.

Corporate Accounts Welcome

47st. Computer
Software Training Center
116 Nassau Street, 4th Floor
(212) 513-7063

CIRCLE 21 ON READER SERVICE CARD

You may have seen software.
But not like this!

Only \$95 each

**Business Valuation
Lease/Buy Analyzer
Ratio Analyzer
EOQ+ Planner
Sales Forecaster
Proffit Planner
Individual Income &
Cash Planner**

Not templates.
Standalone programs.

Call (414) 475-3450
Visa/MC
60 day money back guarantee.



Essential Software

1126 South 70th Street, Ste. 200
West Allis, WI 53214

CIRCLE 80 ON READER SERVICE CARD

instead of offering a magazine. A better policy is to make interviews a high priority and not allow interviewers to miss their scheduled time.

11. Don't ask illegal questions. Students will complain to the placement office, faculty, and worst of all, other students.

12. Don't agree to make a presentation on campus unless you know that it will be outstanding. The bad publicity might take years to overcome.

13. Don't forget to send recruiting literature to the school.

14. Don't change interview dates.

15. Don't send an interviewer who is new to your firm.

16. Don't tell students that you are a substitute interviewer. That makes students think interviewing is not important to your firm.

17. Don't appear unorganized, indifferent, or bored during the interview.

18. Don't forget to have information about other offices of your firm.

19. Don't forget that you represent the entire firm, not just your office or department.

20. Don't try to be "hard-nosed" during interviews by asking questions just to see if students have a back bone. "What the hell is this C in intermediate accounting?" will not leave a favorable impression. When the other recruiters are pleasant and friendly, you need to take the same approach.

21. Don't forget to give students a business card with your name and address.

22. Don't send interviewers who lack the interpersonal skills and interview skills needed to make a good impression. Select your interviewers carefully and train them. It helps if they have a tie to the school or at least have learned a lot about it.

23. Don't forget to follow-up on any referrals that you make to other offices of your firm. Sometimes a firm will lose a good candidate because a referral was "lost in the paperwork."

24. Don't forget to follow-up. Don't pester students with lots of phone calls, but you do need to stay in touch. Sometimes a personal note works better than a phone call.

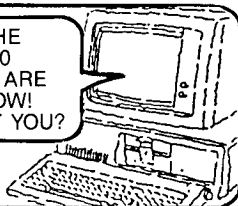
Large offices may be able to afford a full-time recruiting coordinator. However, lack of a full-time person does not mean that you can let things fall through the cracks. Your presence on campus will evolve into a good recruiting experience. The extra effort will provide the rewards of hiring more of the brightest and the best. Ω

Harry D. Dickinson

NOW YOU CAN AUDIT PC'S WITH A PRO AT YOUR SIDE

(without the risk of altering or
destroying user disks and data)

MANY OF THE
FORTUNE 100
COMPANIES ARE
DOING IT NOW!
HOW ABOUT YOU?



Join the many Fortune 100's taking charge of their audits by using the PC AUDITOR today. It's the hottest software on the market. PC AUDITOR, a complete methodology, helps you "take charge" of an out of control problem, identify exposures, and report control exceptions, all without risk! Audit your PC with a Pro at your side, PC AUDITOR.



Send me more information on PC AUDITOR today.

Name _____

Company _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Mail this coupon to TACT Specialists, Inc.,
P.O. Box 4691, Lynchburg, VA 24502.
Phone: (804) 237-8356

CIRCLE 42 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Conclusion

All of this may sound like you are bending over backwards for these "kids." You are! They are your consumers when you are recruiting. Yet, they are also young, impressionable individuals. Little things and a lot of attention are important to them. However, even though the competition for good students is tough, please do not swell their heads too much. They get told by faculty how great they are and recruiters wine and dine them. They may be hard to live with when they start work and have very big expectations.

You must get organized, make a long-range plan, set your recruiting goals, and make a commitment to recruiting, especially since declining enrollments will increase the competition for good students. Most CPA firm interviews are scheduled for the fall semester. If you wait too late to project your hiring needs and schedule interviews, you probably will not meet your goals. You cannot expect to call a faculty member in May to see if any of the best students have not yet accepted jobs. Usually the students will have accepted job offers by January or February, although there may be a few exceptions.

END FRANTIC DEADLINES!

WITH TRACKER,* THE PREMIER
DUE DATE MONITOR FOR CPA'S
AND CORPORATE COMPLIANCE.

Easy to use with unmatched features like:

- Track Any Service-Tax Returns, Financials, Estimates, Business & Property Taxes, Etc.
- Automatic Due Date & Extension Calculations Based on Calendar or Fiscal Year
- Services Repeat Automatically
- Target Due Dating
- And More!

Only \$200.

30-Day Money
Back Guarantee.
Order Today!

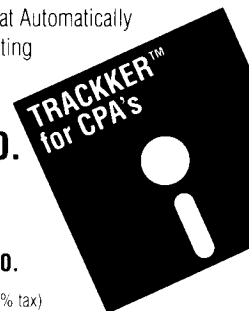
Demo Disk \$20.

(CA residents add 6.5% tax)

*Requires MS DOS 2.0 & Hard Disk

SAMPSON INFORMATION SYSTEMS
46 Ina Court • San Francisco, CA 94112

415/469-9852



CIRCLE 77 ON READER SERVICE CARD