

Survey: Despite Staffing Woes, Most Firms Not Willing to Turn Down Clients

Even though managing partners list a shortage of professional staff as the greatest challenge to marketing their firms, most are not turning down new work or shedding clients to ease the situation, according to the results of a recent survey.

Every firm has clients who are no longer a good fit—clients with little growth potential, clients who are slow to pay, clients who treat CPAs poorly—says **Jean Caragher**, president of **Capstone Marketing** in Chesapeake, Va., who conducted the survey. In addition, many firms are questioning how they will complete their existing work. Yet slightly less than half of firms are willing to turn down new business due to staffing shortages, and just over 30 percent have fired clients in the past year due to those shortages.

Caragher polled managing partners to find out more about their relationships with their own marketers and marketing departments. She says the results point to a need for greater cooperation between accounting firm management and marketers.

Firms may wonder why they need to market themselves when they can't manage the engagements they already have, but marketers, Caragher says, can help identify the types of businesses an accounting firm *should* be seeking.

Marketers can help with the process of establishing client acceptance criteria. They can be the gatekeeper on the types of opportunities partners are working on by asking strategic questions: Does an engagement support a particular niche within the firm? Are there opportunities for cross selling? Does the client have a good payment history? Could we fire an inappropriate client and take on one that is a better fit for the firm?

And, marketers can play a role in communicating with clients who are being transitioned out, Caragher notes.

The marketing connection

The survey's overall aim was to measure managing partners' expectations of and attitudes toward their marketing departments. It asked MPs

questions about the marketing tools their firms use, the firms' marketing cultures and client satisfaction programs, the priority of their marketing programs and how marketers gain the respect of partners.

Caragher says she wants accounting firm marketers to understand management's perspectives and attitudes.

The survey results offer another opportunity for marketers. When asked about the greatest challenge to marketing their firms, more than 20% of MPs cited "motivating partners to be more active marketers." Armed with this information, marketers can target partner motivation.

"Marketers can work with partners to develop a personal marketing plan and provide them with opportunities to be out in the community, networking, to mix with referral sources," Caragher says.

The survey, titled the *Accounting Marketing Tools & Trends Survey*, is available at www.capstonemarketing.com. †

