Secrets to Career Success
An Accounting Student’s Guide
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Introduction

Transitioning from accounting student to working professional can seem challenging as a junior or senior student in college. The days of spending hours studying for accounting exams, attending campus events, or spending full summers off from school enjoying friends and family will look quite differently than days will look once you’re working in your full-time profession.

As a soon-to-be accounting graduate, you might be wondering what you want to do with your accounting degree. And, what steps can you take to stand out amongst all the other applicants wanting the same position at the firm where you most want to be employed?

You’ll also probably wonder if you should continue your studies in graduate school or start working right away.

Something else to consider during this time is that accounting is one of the fields that is projected to be impacted by artificial intelligence. As such, becoming a licensed CPA as quickly as possible is extremely important for your success using the profession’s most cutting-edge technologies.

These and many other career questions and concerns will surface the closer you get to your graduation date and might seem overwhelming at times.
The good news is there are steps you can take to ensure a successful and smooth transition from accounting student to accounting professional. In this eBook co-authored with accounting professor Bennet Tchaikovsky, CPA, we’ll help you prepare for career success as you go from accounting classroom to the accounting firm where you will obtain immediate professional independence by becoming a licensed CPA.

We hope you find this guide helpful, and as always, if you have any questions, feel free to reach out to our team at staff@rogercpareview.com. Or give us a call at 877-764-4272.
While a business economics major at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Bennet Tchaikovsky discovered that taking accounting classes could lead to a full-time job and great work experience learning how various businesses operate.

He started the accounting firm recruiting process during his Junior year and was fortunate to land an internship at Coopers & Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) in the summer of 1990.

After passing the CPA Exam with the help of Roger Philipp, CPA, Tchaikovsky started working full-time at Coopers & Lybrand in 1991. Fast forward to 2018, and he now teaches accounting at Irvine Valley College (“IVC”).

In addition to teaching, Professor Tchaikovsky is equally passionate about assisting his students beyond the classroom: preparing them for the interview and recruiting process, assisting in jump starting their accounting careers, and helping them to become licensed CPAs.

As someone who has gone full circle (from accounting student to CPA professional to accounting professor), Bennet Tchaikovsky, CPA, has a unique perspective on what students need to do in order to obtain career success.

Although many of his former students have felt that recruiting is another “full-time job”, they also realize that if you don’t put the time into it while a full-time student, you’ll find it extremely challenging to obtain a job with an accounting firm upon graduation.

About Bennet Tchaikovsky, CPA

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Why Become a CPA?

Make a difference in the world
CPAs stand at the forefront of financial integrity for businesses and organizations. Unlike some other professions, accountants are held to higher ethical standards. By hiring a licensed CPA, a business is not only retaining a tested professional, but the CPA must also “do the right thing” or risk losing their CPA license. CPAs also contribute to society by volunteering, working for not-for-profits (NFPs), serving on NFP boards, donating money, and promoting practice areas such as sustainability accounting. Learn more about how CPAs save the world in this article by the AICPA.

Enjoy a competitive career track
The CPA credential remains the gold standard in the accounting profession. The CPA license has incredible value and demand and shows no signs of waning. It is recognized in 55 U.S. Jurisdictions, as well as internationally. Most all reputable public accounting firms expect their staff to become licensed CPAs to be promoted. In addition, CPAs add integrity, quality, and value to the firm’s brand.
Becoming a CPA means that you’ll always have job security. CPAs are constantly in high demand, which means that you have the most geographic mobility and can work in any industry that interests you. Here are some areas that you can start your CPA career in:

• Forensic Accountant (FBI)
• Financial Planner (Investment Company)
• IT Consultant (Software startup)
• Environmental Accountant (EPA)
• Accounting Professor (University)
• Entrepreneur (Business Coach)

Now is the most exciting time to become a CPA because you can also work with technology that’s changing the profession. This includes:

• Artificial Intelligence
• Cloud Computing
• Blockchain Technology
• Cryptocurrency

Have long-term flexibility in career options

Work with technology impacting the profession
Earning your accounting degree allows you to jump into the profession in a variety of industries with a solid starting salary. But obtaining your CPA license can open up the door to more promotions, managerial opportunities, and a higher salary. On average, CPAs earn 5-10% more than their uncertified counterparts and are also estimated to make over $1 million more during the course of their career.

According to the AICPA, based on a report from 2010, by 2025 75% of current CPAs will be retiring, so there will be plenty of opportunity for growth.

The chart below shows the effects that company size, CPA licensure, and years of experience can have on CPA salary.

### LARGE COMPANY CPA SALARIES ($250+ MILLION IN REVENUE)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GENERAL ACCOUNTANT</th>
<th>LICENSED CPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANAGER</td>
<td>$92,750-$128,250</td>
<td>$97,387.50-$147,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENIOR</td>
<td>$75,000-$95,750</td>
<td>$78,750.00-$110,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 YEARS</td>
<td>$58,750-$75,750</td>
<td>$61,687.50-$87,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP TO 1 YEAR</td>
<td>$49,750-$59,500</td>
<td>$52,237.50-$68,425</td>
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### MIDSIZE COMPANY CPA SALARIES ($25-$250 MILLION IN REVENUE)

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<th>GENERAL ACCOUNTANT</th>
<th>LICENSED CPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANAGER</td>
<td>$81,750-$106,250</td>
<td>$85,837-$122,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENIOR</td>
<td>$66,500-$87,500</td>
<td>$69,825-$100,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 YEARS</td>
<td>$54,000-$71,000</td>
<td>$56,700-$81,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP TO 1 YEAR</td>
<td>$45,750-$57,750</td>
<td>$48,037-$66,412</td>
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### SMALL COMPANY CPA SALARIES (UP TO $25 MILLION IN REVENUE)

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<th>GENERAL ACCOUNTANT</th>
<th>LICENSED CPA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANAGER</td>
<td>$73,000-$97,000</td>
<td>$76,650-$111,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENIOR</td>
<td>$63,250-$76,250</td>
<td>$66,412-$87,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 YEARS</td>
<td>$50,000-$64,250</td>
<td>$52,500-$73,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP TO 1 YEAR</td>
<td>$44,250-$51,250</td>
<td>$46,462-$58,937</td>
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* Source: Robert Half International 2017 Salary Guide
Setting Yourself Up for Success While You’re Still in School

If you’re considering becoming a CPA, it’s important to start setting yourself up for success while you’re still in school. Start with getting to know your professors.

Research accounting faculty by reviewing their university webpages and/or any types of professional biographies that can be found via a general web search (e.g. LinkedIn profile).

Did the instructor work at an accounting firm (large, medium size, or small)? Is your instructor a licensed CPA? You can look up whether or not your instructor is a CPA via your particular state’s board of accountancy website.

Doing this type or research is important if you are seeking specific career guidance.

Knowing your instructor’s background can give you additional insights as to what to ask when gaining knowledge from their experiences. Also keep in mind that websites like ratemyprofessors.com (RMP) are not always accurate. You may only see reviews whereby students are looking to vent after receiving a B/B+ but having 89.9% of the points. This is not necessarily the result of a poor instructor; rather only those looking for an emotional outlet. So you can do your research on RMP, but don’t rely on that resource alone.
Lastly, if you are at a school that firms generally don’t recruit from, your relationships with your professors are that much more important as your professors may have the ability to potentially assist you in job placement.

Finding a summer leadership program (SLP), internship, and/or full-time job is the student’s responsibility and will be easier or harder depending upon your school’s reputation in the accounting community since alumni generally like to recruit from the schools they attended.
Do not take accounting courses from lenient instructors to boost your overall GPA. You will be cheating yourself and creating a future uphill battle to succeed in accounting.

Therefore, aim to take classes from instructors who will challenge you and give you the best practical education possible. Your success in intermediate accounting will directly correlate with the rigor of the lower division financial accounting class you took.

Professor Tchaikovsky teaches intermediate, financial, and managerial accounting as well as accounting ethics at Irvine Valley College. His exams generally consist of long, complex problems personally written by him. Completing these types of problems was how he was taught as an undergraduate accounting student at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

While many students find these problems difficult, they later understand just how valuable this type of testing is. Their future employers want well educated candidates who know how to approach and solve complex accounting problems.
If a student goes into a professor's office and is solely focused on their points or grades, the professor will generally not look favorably upon this student in the future. Why? It’s not about the grade, especially if the student has learned and retained the information.

The issue is when a student becomes extremely hostile when it comes to exam points which immediately places the instructor in a defensive mode.

If a student is pushy and fighting over something that in life will, overall, be relatively insignificant (5 points out of a class that's graded on 1,000 points), they should consider becoming an attorney.

If a student believes that their answer was correct or partially correct, they can ask their instructor to explain the exam question to them for further understanding. Then, the student should explain why they answered the way they did on the exam and then request a review and possibly new grade by the professor.

Grades are great, but do not equate to workplace success. Ultimately, your social abilities and work ethic will generally be the main factors to your success the workplace.
When Professor Tchaikovsky was a student at UCSB, he took almost one third of his classes on a Pass / No Pass basis. Why? He wanted to focus on his accounting classes which took a considerable amount of time compared to his regular subjects.

For example, by taking a political science class P/NP, he was able to devote more time to accounting. From his experience, employers generally look at two items: overall GPA and accounting GPA.

It's rare for an accounting firm to care whether or not a student took a certain number of classes on a P/NP basis as long as the P/NP election was within school guidelines. Note that if a student is transferring to a four year school or planning on going to graduate school, they'll want to make sure that P/NP grades are acceptable.
Get Socially Involved on Campus

Now that you know what you can do inside the classroom to prepare you for accounting career success, here’s what you can do outside the classroom: get involved! This is just as important as grades when obtaining a full-time accounting position. Your ability to interact with clients and others in accounting are critical for your professional success.

When writing student recommendations, by far the most amount of time spent by professors will be for the students who are involved on campus or helping others in the classroom.

Therefore — and this cannot be stressed enough — make sure you’re getting involved on campus, in accounting clubs and organizations. This won’t only help you stand out on your resume and when you’re talking to recruiters, but it will also help you practice your soft skills and networking skills for your future career.

Here are a few ways you can ensure you’re getting socially involved on campus.
Join the accounting society, accounting association, Beta Alpha Psi (BAP), and/or other honors societies at your college or university as soon as possible. These are great organizations that help accounting students with professional development skills and connects them to accounting firm professionals.

Accounting firms coordinate their on- and off-campus interactions with these organizations and look toward accounting societies for speaking engagements and/or recruitment. Attend as many events as you can. Most accounting societies will have at least one speaking event each week.

If your school does not have an accounting society equivalent, you will need to go to your on-campus recruiting department for assistance. If you are considering transferring to a four-year school from a community college and/or from a four-year school to another school as an accounting major, be sure to see how robust their accounting society is and how active their alumni are involved with the school.

The more established the accounting society, the easier your process will be.
It’s also important to remember that there’s a difference between being a member and being an active member of an organization. Make yourself stand out from the crowd by running for a leadership position. If there are none available, volunteer for everything. Additionally, the older students you interact with in the accounting society will more than likely come back to recruit for their firm. Having this connection gives you an immediate ability to make a connection with the firm you will be interviewing with.

And, this will help you get a lot more experience for your resume, especially since you won’t have a lot of actual work experience.

Lastly, these positions not only enhance social skills, but boost self-confidence. This, in turn, improves your ability to network and work with others. Recruiters are looking for that capacity because you often have to work collectively with others on a team and are not flying solo. The more you can demonstrate this ability, the better off you’ll be during recruiting season and once you start your actual job!
Attend on-campus accounting firm events

On campus events generally consist of speakers from accounting firms and other accounting-related areas (for example: CPA Review courses, California State Board of Equalization) that come to speak on a particular topic and meet with students. Go to these events and make time to converse with the speakers before and after. You never know who you will meet.

Also, be sure to research the speaker/organization prior to the event so that your questions are on-point while being friendly and conversational. Speakers from accounting firms will later come back to a campus for future recruiting events. If you've made a positive impression on the speaker, when they come back to recruit, your conversation at future events will be that much easier.

Lastly, follow up your conversation with an e-mail. Keep it brief and do not expect an immediate response. Don't cyber stalk firm personnel. Speakers are busy and may not be able to get back to you for some time.
Aside from developing your social skills through on-campus involvement, try to position yourself where you will have a significant amount of interaction with other accounting students off-campus as well.

Summer Leadership Programs (SLPs) are one- to three-day meetings during the summer after the freshman, sophomore, or junior year where students meet accounting firm personnel. The firms will sometimes form separate panels of associates, senior associates, current interns, managers, and partners to field questions from participants.

Students generally apply for multiple SLPs. If there is a match during the SLP, the accounting firm will often extend an offer for an internship position to the participant for the following year. SLPs can be a great way for a student to gauge whether or not they will be a good fit with the people at the firm.

Note that you generally need to have only one summer of school left after the SLP whereby you could complete an internship and come back to school to complete the remainder of your coursework. More than likely, you will not be eligible for an SLP if you are going to be graduating in the following academic year.
Accounting internships, depending on the firm, generally are in the summer (Big 4) while other accounting firms may offer “working” internships between January–April or September–December. Upon completing the internship, interns are generally offered a position for full-time employment with the firm.

The significant majority of accounting internships are paid. Unpaid accounting internships are rare as the internship would need to be specifically designed not to have repetitive tasks.

Internships are extremely competitive. The availability of internships and SLPs are directly dependent upon the school that you attend.

For example, students attending the University of Southern California (USC) will have extensively more internship and SLP opportunities than newly established schools as there are many firm partners that attended USC who tend to recruit from their alma mater.

If you are attending a school that has been newly established where the accounting program is without a significant alumni presence, you may have a more challenging time obtaining internship and SLP opportunities from larger firms. Here's how to land an internship if you find yourself in this position.
I can’t be involved since I work full-time

If you are working full-time and unable to participate on campus, use your job as an opportunity for your social development just as much as you would for accounting societies and organizations.

For example, if you’re working at a restaurant or other customer service position, know that accounting firms value these skills as they reflect on your ability to interact with others. Just make sure that your resume reflects the hours you were working while going to school.

However, if you do have any off time, make an effort to attend accounting events.

Working at an accounting firm requires an ability to interact with others and you need to be developing those types of skills while in school, however possible.
How to Conquer Meet the Firms

One of the best ways to prepare yourself for accounting career success is through Meet the Firms (MTF). MTF is a career fair that is typically hosted on college and university campuses during the spring and fall semesters. Public accounting firms, private industries, and government agencies attend this event to recruit students seeking professional careers in accounting.

In fact, this event is so imperative that we’ve reserved an entire section of this eBook for it alone. Remember: Meet the Firms is not the end game, rather it’s the beginning. The impressions that you make on employers will only be reinforced with your subsequent follow-up.

If you’re a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior level college student, attending Meet the Firms is your best chance to start the process of landing an internship or entry-level position with a firm to kick start your way into an accounting career.

Similarly, for many firms who are looking for the next group of top talent, this event is also their best chance to find young and bright candidates to fulfill their firms’ needs.

In order to find your ideal firm and become the ideal candidate, here’s everything you need to know to conquer Meet the Firms.
Poise and confidence

Although we were all taught to never judge a book by its cover, this unfortunately doesn’t always ring true in the professional world. Recruiters easily talk and interact with a hundred or more students in a short amount of time, so first impressions are everything. That’s why it’s so important to know how to carry yourself before you walk into the event.

Having poise and confidence are key when it comes to recruiters deciding whether or not they want to continue having a conversation with you. It also shows them how you will represent their firm when dealing with future clients. So here are some helpful tips to remember before attending the event.

- Smile and be friendly
- Use body language
- Have straight posture
- Be graceful
- Speak loudly & clearly
- Have a firm handshake
- Avoid physical & verbal ticks
- Maintain good eye contact
- Don’t act arrogant
- Be honest
- Be professional
- Be genuine
Personalities that match company culture

In the accounting profession when long days, nights, and sometimes weekends are required to get the job done, you’ll be spending a lot of time with your coworkers. A big factor of productivity is liking the people you’re around. So recruiters try very hard to match candidates’ personalities to their firm’s company culture. By hiring like-minded people, retention rates are higher and employees are happier.

Additionally, when you’re put in front of clients, they want to be assured that you represent the firm’s values and mission. Therefore, they’re looking for someone whose personal principles align with the firm’s. This reinforces positive company culture and further develops the staff work ethic. When employees truly believe in what they do, they are more passionate about their work, and relay this to the clients they’re working with.

So as you’re interacting with these recruiters, let your personality really shine through! Here are some pointers to get you started:

- Be honest about yourself
- Talk about your hobbies
- Have a sense of humor
- Be compassionate
- Be optimistic
- Take initiative
- Show that you’re a good team player
- Be outgoing
- Have interest in learning new things
Communication Skills

You can have a fantastic resume, but if you don’t know how to be socially engaging, it could mean the difference between you and the next candidate getting the position. Firms are looking for good communicators with whom they can easily have fun, natural, and engaging conversations. This gives them an idea of how you will speak with their clients.

Everyone has the capacity to communicate with one another, but the way in which communication is given and received depends on the way you speak, listen, and generally interact with someone. Here’s our best advice on what the most optimal communication skills look like.

Adapt to communication styles.
If the recruiter you’re talking to is very analytical and serious, you probably shouldn’t be turning the conversation toward how they feel about their childhood. Conversely, if your recruiter has a very personal communication style, talking about how your hometown sports team has a huge influence on how you spend your weekends could build a strong connection.
Be honest.
Don’t pretend to know something you don’t and don’t embellish anything on your resume. Recruiters can spot a fraud from miles away.

Know your resume.
Depending on the situation some recruiters may have the opportunity to review your resume. If so, the recruiters will probably be asking you some questions about what’s on your resume, so you should be able to answer articulately. If you can’t remember what one of your service projects or jobs entailed, leave it off. You don’t want to lose credibility when they ask you about something that you aren’t prepared to answer thoroughly.

Be articulate.
Make sure you’re speaking clearly and cohesively. Be straightforward and take initiative in the conversation if you feel it is starting to wane.

Use good body language.
Maintain eye contact and use your hands to talk. Relax your body and don’t be too stiff. The more natural and easy going the conversation is, the better.

Be a good listener.
Show that you are listening and not just hearing by responding accordingly and incorporating terms and phrases they used in your conversation.

“600 employers revealed what they want most from new graduate hires—they want people who can speak well, write well, listen to others, present well, sell ideas to others, and negotiate with others in the course of running a business—*in other words, they want communicators, with a capital C.*”

-From the article, “Employers Want Communication Skills in New Hires”
Goals and ambitions

While your resume lists your past and current career objectives and experiences, it doesn’t clearly spell out what your goals and ambitions are. Recruiters want someone who’s working toward high goals they set for themselves and who is also an ambitious go-getter.

Because these recruiters will only be meeting you for the first time, the only way they’ll know that you’re goal-oriented and ambitious is through examples. So if there are opportunities in your conversation where you can do some show-and-tell, make sure they’re stories that show your professional eagerness and your willingness to do the following:

- Take calculated risks
- Be open to new ways of thinking/doing things
- Focus on execution
- Partake in friendly competition
- Take initiative
- Go above expectations
- Be motivated and determined
- Work hard
Leadership and teamwork skills

Recruiters want to make sure they’re hiring someone who can work autonomously and be a great team player. Working in accounting can be a tedious and demanding job, so recruiters want candidates who can work independently and also be part of a team. These types of leadership and teamwork skills help the firm grow.

Recruiters know that college students aren’t going to have a ton of expert, professional experience in the accounting field, so don’t worry—that’s not exactly what they’re looking for.

What they are expecting to see are resumes packed with volunteer and community service hours since it reflects transferrable skills that can be utilized in their future jobs.

Similarly, in order to show recruiters that you possess leadership and teamwork skills, you’ll have to provide them with some examples. Here are the following scenarios that work best to demonstrate these skills:

- Active membership of an organization
- Officer of an organization
- Involvement in volunteer services
- Leadership of projects for other organizations
- Active participation in campus events
- Growth of involvement year-over-year
- Ability to delegate and execute projects
**Technical skills**

Having technical skills is a huge part of being a good candidate for accounting firms. In addition to everything listed above, you also should have sufficient ability and knowledge to perform specific tasks. Because technology is always changing, candidates should show that they can adapt and learn quickly to meet industry demands.

- Computing abilities
- Quantitative analysis
- Production of charts and model trends
- Gather/produce/analyze data
- Coding or programming abilities
- Technical writing
- Managing social media platforms
- Microsoft Office applications

Technical skills ranging from practical to mechanical to IT and especially mathematical are all important factors recruiters take into consideration when looking for an ideal candidate. Here are some ways you can flaunt your technical skills both on your resume and face-to-face.
Targeting accounting firms

Remember that Meet the Firms is just as important for recruiters to find candidates as it is for you to secure a position. While firms are scouting out their best new hires, you should also be scouting out which firm is right for you.

Sometimes up to 35 accounting firms can attend Meet the Firms, and you cannot meet everyone. Rather, you need to focus on getting to know some of the accounting firms that interest you. There are many differences between small, medium, and large sized accounting firms.

Therefore, your targeting depends on where you are in the recruitment process and how well you have positioned yourself for hiring.

If you are working full-time and are precluded from accounting society involvement, obtaining a full-time offer from a Big 4 firm will be extremely challenging due to the nature of the recruiting process.

Sophomores and juniors should look at larger firms and mid-sized firms for SLPs or internships so that they can obtain a better understanding as to where they would like to work full-time upon graduation.

Remember to do your research on the firm (e.g., Glassdoor) and its firm personnel (e.g., LinkedIn). Also, if the accounting firm audits publicly traded companies, try to find out before meeting the firm which clients that particular office serve.
Take the CPA Exam as soon as possible

Your resume should indicate when you are eligible to take the CPA Exam, the units needed for licensure, your overall GPA, and accounting GPA. Firms want to know when you meet your state’s educational requirements to determine your CPA eligibility. They also want to know when you plan on taking the CPA Exam. Firms want to see their staff licensed as quickly as possible and will often limit promotion for those without a CPA license.

So try to take the CPA Exam as soon as possible. Many firms offer bonus incentives upon completion.

Remember that it’s helpful to take the Exam while you’re still in academic mode and the information you just learned in school is still fresh in your mind.

In addition, the longer you wait to sit for the CPA Exam, the more life gets in the way, and the more likely licensure gets away from you. So take advantage of your free time before you start your career.
Meet the Firms is a two-way street

So whether you’re attending Meet the Firms for the first time or it’s your 3rd or 4th attendance, don’t be nervous; the recruiters are looking forward to meeting you as much as you’re looking forward to meeting them!

Now that you know what recruiters are looking for in an ideal candidate, it’s time for both parties to put their best foot forward to find the right fit.

Which is why it’s important that you understand the structure of accounting firms and how they work. Luckily, the next section dives right into this, and you’ll learn how all the qualities recruiters are looking for apply to real-life scenarios as a new hire.
The Recruiting/Hiring Process

Prior to seeking any full-time position in any business industry, it’s important to understand the type of organizational structure that you are entering into. This will give you the mindset as to how and what to prepare for.

The structure of an accounting firm looks generally like a triangle: the partner is at the top, with several managers reporting to the partner. Several senior associates report to each manager and staff accountants report to the senior associates. Although there may be additional layers and different titles within firms, this basic structure reflects how accounting firms have been structured for decades. Partners bill clients at the highest rate, given their experience, while interns and entry-level associates have the lowest billing rate.

Why this form of structure? Would you want a partner with an extremely high billing rate assisting an entry-level associate with how to audit receivables, or should that partner be going out and obtaining new business while a senior associate, with the lower billing rate, mentors the entry-level associate? The answer is, of course, the latter.
As a brand new associate, you will have the most client interaction. However, when it comes to interacting with clients, the triangle is inverted. The associates generally spend all their time with the client. Senior associates toggle between the office and client location, while managers and partners are predominantly office-based.

If partners were to spend all of their time with one client, they could never be successful. Why? A partner and/or manager’s goal is to obtain as much new business as possible while ensuring a high level of service to their existing clients. A firm could not survive if the partner stayed with one client all day.

An accounting firm has to trust that you will positively represent the firm, treating client personnel from the administrative assistant to the Chief Executive Officer with dignity and respect.

During pitch meetings for new business, accounting firms are sometimes asked to bring their associates to the meeting. Potential clients may want to see who they will be spending their time with.
Now that you’re aware of what accounting firms expect and are positioning yourself for hiring by developing your interpersonal skills, you need to enter the recruiting process as soon as possible. If you wait until you have graduated or passed the CPA Exam, you’ll miss the opportunities to jumpstart your accounting career.
The informal interview process

Recruitment is a marathon; not a sprint. Accounting firm employees are evaluating all of your interactions with the accounting firm during social situations and want to interact with you on- and off-campus to get a good sense of who you are. This is all part of the “informal” interview process: those associated with the firm are giving their feedback about potential hires to the head of human resources.

Why? As a new associate, you have the most client interaction and how you treat and interact with others is crucial.

If you come into a client’s workplace inebriated and your firm is fired by the client, that will pretty much be the end of your employment at the firm. This is also the reason why if you wait to enter into the recruiting process until late in your senior year, you’ll have a hard time catching up with the process.

This occurred with a former student of Professor Tchaikovsky. The student graduated with a 3.7 GPA from a top ranked university, but didn’t get a job due to being uninvolved with the accounting society and recruiting process. Don’t let that happen to you!
Accounting professors are in an excellent position to help evaluate potential candidates for career placement. They value being able to assist students with obtaining full-time employment.

So, never burn bridges with your accounting professors and always carry yourself professionally.

You never know who is evaluating you or what type of connection you’ll be able to leverage, including that of your accounting professors.
The formal interview process: on-campus

Once recruiters have scouted you out and think you’ll fit into their firm nicely, the formal interviews and hiring process begins—usually prior to the year of graduation. However, be aware that obtaining an entry-level associate position at accounting firms is not: meet a partner, receive an offer, start working. The process often begins with an on-campus interview.

The on-campus interview tends to be the initial “official” screening performed by the accounting firm’s human resources professionals. Other methods can be used as well. Video interviews via Skype or another video meeting platform have also been used for screening. There are many different techniques for interviewing and answering questions.

If you are nervous about an interview, practice with friends or with an on-campus career center (many offer classes on how to effectively interview). You can also practice your interview answers while driving or walking around your home.

Remember, you are not the first person to ever interview. Here are some great interview tips and interview questions to ask accounting firms.
The formal interview process: off-campus

If you have had positive interactions with the firm and a successful on-campus interview, you’ll be asked to interview at the firm’s office. During this interview you’ll most likely go out to lunch and meet with a human resources representative, partner, manager, senior associate, and/or fellow staff that you’ll potentially be working with.

At lunch, remember that you are not involved in a professional eating or drinking contest. Use manners and common sense during your lunch interview.

All of these individuals will have a say as to whether you get hired, including interns at your school who have already received full-time offers from the firm. So, remember your professional etiquette: arrive on time (be sure to allow plenty of time to get to the office location), treat everyone kindly and professionally (yes, office assistants can have a say in your hiring), and no matter the end result, follow up positively and graciously.

It’s a small world after all and you’ll be seeing everyone again soon.
Conclusion

We covered a great deal of information in this eBook and hope you have a better understanding of how to successfully position yourself for a successful CPA career – starting while in college.

We want to thank Professor Bennet Tchaikovsky, CPA, for all his great advice used in this eBook.

And, remember, “Who you are tomorrow begins with what you do today.”
– Tim Fargo

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