

# Achieve Success with Seasonal Hires

By Gayla Hannon, CPA, SPHR

In a perfect world, CPA firms would always be perfectly staffed. We'd have employees during our busy seasons and then they'd take off during our dead times. They would work that ideal schedule of January, February, March, April, September, October, and do some year-end planning with our clients in December, but take off the whole month of November, which is typically the slowest month for CPA firms. Unfortunately, this never happens because we will never be perfectly staffed! That doesn't mean we should stop trying, and one way to do that is with seasonal hires.

With the tight labor market, one of the best recruiting tips is to actually retain existing staff. If we experience low turnover, then at least we won't need to find replacements. We have young professionals groups, fun committees, offer flex-time schedules, provide plenty of free food, extend robust benefits plans, and more, all in an effort to keep our people. But we also need to put this same kind of effort into our seasonal hires. They need to "feel the love" so they will continue to come back to our firm year after year.

Seasonal hires need to feel like they are a part of our firms. One way to accomplish this can be as simple as continuing to allow them to have a key or card to get into your office space. Yes, we may need to drop their license on Microsoft Office 365 or the tax software because there is no need to pay for a license in the months they aren't using it, but having an office key or card costs nothing and lets the individual know that they can stop by any time. Be sure to include them in all your fun firm events. Invite them to your holiday party, state of the firm update meetings, and internal training events. Continue to pay for them to get 40 hours of CPE, so they can maintain their CPA license. Even pay for their CPA license renewal. Seasonal employees will appreciate this.

Decide if you want to keep them on your "all staff" email list. Some seasonal employees enjoy being in the know, but also respect the wishes of those workers who want to disconnect from you and truly take a complete break when they aren't on the clock.

Where to find these seasonal employees is another issue entirely. One of the easiest ways is to make sure your firm offers flexible work arrangements with reduced hours for those employees who don't want to work the full-time schedule. You've invested in their training. They know your firm and can easily transition into seasonal employees. At our firm, we've typically seen this with young parents. They still want to be part of the work force, but also need more hours to allocate to home. It is worth your time to work something out with these employees. Occasionally, they will even circle back to work full time for you after their children start kindergarten.

You can also place ads in the usual places such as Indeed.com, LinkedIn or MOCPA's career center. Another idea would be to reach out to alumni networks at the various local universities. Statistics would show that a large number of CPAs are due to retire over the next several years. Some of them may want to continue to dabble in working seasonally. Think about where you can post ads that will engage and attract these people. Beyond just using ads, really build up your brand so people recognize your name. Consider advertising and sponsoring events where CPAs read and attend. Be visible in accounting publications, online forums, LinkedIn, Facebook, Glassdoor, and so forth.

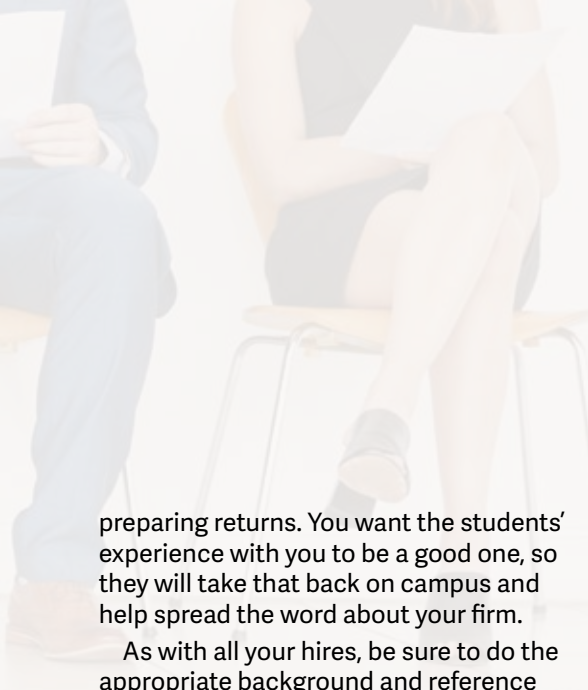
Some firms have started exploring the "gig" economy. There are online networks for freelance professionals where you can find extra hands or people with specialized knowledge for certain projects. These include Upwork, Freelancer, Accountingly,

Indeed, Guru, LinkedIn ProFinder, and FlexJobs. Things to think about when hiring a gig worker include having them sign an independent contractor agreement, determining what tools and access the person would need to get the work done, and figuring out how will they submit invoices and get paid. Expectations need to be shared and timelines set.

Consider offering referral bonuses to your existing employees for helping you find a seasonal worker. You could also give incentives to seasonal workers to return next year; this could include a retention bonus or even a pay raise for returning.

Don't shy away from taking a look at seasonal workers who live in other states. With all the technology innovations, remote workers can get the job done as well as those at your office location. Communication is key for this to be a success. If you want to really go bold, consider establishing an office in another country with an abundance of skilled workers looking for employment.

Seasonal hires can also include interns. To talk about crafting an internship program would take a whole other in-depth article. Suffice it to say, internships are a great way to build your pipeline for future full-time hires. Firms are continuing to reach down to students earlier in their college careers. Two quick ideas include having a two- or three-day summer leadership program for freshmen with an interest in accounting or offering an "administrative" type of internship to freshmen and sophomores. The administrative internship includes scanning client documents, putting together the final tax return package for the client, and doing basic data entry and software tasks. Once these interns become juniors, they can morph into doing the traditional internship with more complicated tasks such as actually




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preparing returns. You want the students' experience with you to be a good one, so they will take that back on campus and help spread the word about your firm.

As with all your hires, be sure to do the appropriate background and reference checks to protect your firm and your clients. The cost of identity theft of your clients or embezzlement are too high to take any chances.


Make sure you have a detailed onboarding plan for your seasonal hires. They need to understand your culture, workflow, and firm policies and processes, so they become as efficient and productive as possible as quickly as possible. Be sure to give immediate feedback, especially on their first few projects, so they can course correct and these mistakes don't recur.


If you can find good seasonal employees, treat them right so they will come back again and again like your favorite song on repeat. 



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