



Member Spotlight

Meet Tammy Smittenaar!!

Tammy currently lives in Montgomery County, Maryland. She has also lived in California for about 18 months, Utah for a spell and the Netherlands when she was about 4 years old. She is the youngest of five children. Educationally, Tammy has earned an AA in Office Technology, Executive Office Option, from Montgomery College with honors, and a BS in General Studies. Individualized Studies Concentration, from Charter Oak State College with honors. She also obtained a BS in Accounting from Upper Iowa University graduating Cum Laude Meritum in 2018. She is the first in her family to graduate from college. Recently, Tammy earned her CMA certification. *Well done!* She joined the IMA in February 2018 as it was a requirement to obtain her CMA certification.



She is an avid reader who enjoys too many books to pick a favorite. 😊 Her favorite movie is The Princess Bride – such a great choice! She loves going on Disney Cruises and her hobbies are reading and counted cross-stitch. If she didn't work in finance, you would find her in a classroom teaching the next generation. She spends a lot of time volunteering as she has served in various capacities with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, mostly working with children, and held multiple positions within the Boy Scouts of America organization including Den Leader, Assistant Scoutmaster and Merit Badge Counselor. Her favorite quote is "Lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part."

Tammy currently works at DfR Solutions, LLC as their VP of Accounting. She has been at this company for over ten years. Her title has changed twice, but the work remains the same. Her favorite part of her current position is the variety. DfR Solutions LLC is a small business which allows her the opportunity to be involved in a full spectrum of accounting activities daily that would likely not occur in a larger company with more narrowly defined roles. She has worked in her specific industry for over ten years, but she has been involved in Finance to some degree since the late 1980s.

Previously, Tammy has worked at Minnesota Fabrics, Maryland National Bank, Dutch Master Builders, Gaithersburg Health Store, Marriott Corporation/Marriott International, and Montgomery County Public Schools holding a variety of positions from a store supervisor to an elementary teacher to a co-owner of a home-based vitamin export company.

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Your IMA Chapter Board

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Member Spotlight *(continued)*

Oh yeah – she was a bookkeeper and office manager as well! Very well-rounded experience! She didn't really choose Finance as her career. She worked in many different jobs that either required or were enhanced by accounting/finance related knowledge. As with other skills, she was mostly self-taught in these areas. Only recently did Tammy go back to what most people do at the beginning of their working life and obtain a field specific degree.

Professionally, Tammy really enjoys finding ways to simplify or automate manual processes since it usually requires learning something new. This can be as simple as learning a new Excel function that she was unfamiliar with or as complex as learning an entirely new software program and how it can be customized or integrated with other functions.

When asked about any advice she would like to share for people embarking on a finance career, she says “Go with your strengths and do something you enjoy. Don't be afraid to learn something new or to take a non-traditional path and see where it leads. Help out your colleagues whenever you can, especially in other functional areas. You'll be surprised at what you can learn and the areas where you might gain a new interest.”

Regarding the CMA exam, the test was pretty much how she thought it would be since she used a test-prep product (Gleim) to get an idea of the format and style of the test. Tammy did not spend as much time as she originally planned. In February, she registered for the May/June testing window. Then, literally within days, she injured her back to the extent that she wasn't able to start focusing on test prep until the end of March. So, instead of three+ months, she only had just over a month. Tammy ended up taking part 1 on May 12 followed closely by part 2 on May 23. Then the nail-biting wait for results which finally arrived July 12.

For all those of you who are preparing for the CMA test, it may be good for you to know that Tammy is fairly calm at taking tests. She is more nervous afterwards waiting for the results to be available. And there was a level of frustration she experience as she prepared for part 2. There seemed to be a large quantity of different formulas, ratios, etc. that were all very similar but had slight differences. While practicing, she would keep getting them confused. In the end, she decided to go “old school” and made a set of flashcards to drill on straight memorization of various formulas and definitions that she was mixing up. Going through these cards several times a day for a week or so, she was able to go into the test confident that she had them mastered. **Congratulations on earning your CMA license!**

Thanks Tammy for sharing and allowing us to get to know you better!



President's Message



Jesse Reid, CPA, MBA
Delmarva Chapter President

Welcome to the Delmarva Chapter of the Institute of Management Accountants. I am excited and honored to serve as your Chapter President for another year. We have a great Board of Directors that have committed to providing you with quality continuing professional education and a rewarding networking environment. Your Delmarva board has been hard at work planning CPE events for this upcoming year. Our annual shore fraud conference was so successful this past fall that seats sold out in record time, so please be sure to register early. Our goal is to schedule a speaker or chapter event in every month, so please continue to check the events & education section on our website for updates. If you would like to find out more about our chapter or about becoming a member, we encourage you to contact us by clicking [here](#) to get to our website.

Awards, Recognition, and Plain Great Stuff!

Welcome New Members to our IMA Chapter

Staci Ostrowski joined in October 2018
 Theresa Titus joined in November 2018
 Rita Mecca joined in November 2018



IMA Milestone Membership Anniversaries

Christina Burke - 5 yrs on 1/14/2019 Wendy Dutton - 5 yrs on 1/23/2019
 Shannon Ryans - 5 yrs on 1/23/2019 Angela Hastings - 5 yrs on 1/29/2019
 Mieshia Horsey - 5 years on 1/29/2019

If you would like to share any "Plain Great Stuff" in the next Dispatch, please email Paige-Marie.Davis@perdue.com.



Perplexing Puzzle

Source::7sudoku.com

1						4	
		5	2			7	3 9
3					4	5	
			3	2			
		4				1	
				6	5		
		1	5				6
8	3	7			9	2	
	2						8

Dispatch Submissions

If you have a submission for next quarter's Delmarva Dispatch, please submit it by 02/28/2019 to Paige-Marie.Davis@perdue.com.



Quarterly Quote



Featured Funny

© Randy Glasbergen
 Glasbergen.com



"Healthy food is expensive. Can you write me a prescription for groceries?"

On the Road to Becoming a CMA...

Real-life Reflections on How to Get There



My name is Derek Leitner. I am the Logistics Accounting Manager at the Perdue Foods Corporate Office and in my fifth year with the company. I am currently in the process of studying for Part II of the CMA exam. I sat for Part I in early June of this year. There are a few main points that will surround anyone that plans to sit for the CMA. First of all, there will always be excuses. This is the third time in my career that I decided I would sit for the exam. I started with excitement each time saying, "I can do this." I would run through the test questions and then I always found a reason to let it slide. Home remodeling, daily household chores, kids, just enjoy the summer, trips with the family, even at one point I thought, "I really need to clean out this closet." Anything to avoid the extra work it takes and the fear of not passing. Secondly, the key to becoming a CMA is to set your exam date. This gives you a hard date that you HAVE to focus on. The money is paid and most accountants I know, hate to

waste a dollar. I pushed off sitting in 2017, because I didn't feel I was ready or that I had prepared enough. I wondered the same as my exam date was approaching. If I hadn't already set the date for the exam, I probably would have let it slide again. Finally, does it really matter if you don't pass? There is no need for the additional stress. Trust in yourself and if you don't pass, you can always retake the exam. You will also have a better understanding of what areas you should focus on. It doesn't matter how many times you take the exam, we are all CMAs once we are done with this process.

I have noticed some keys for studying are being able to find a study system that works for you. Gleim and Wiley both offer great opportunities to prepare yourself. Personally, I am able understand the concepts better by listening to the lectures, but I know others find it easier to read, review study guides, or scan the outlines of the subject materials. Once you get the understanding of the basics in each area, the key is to test and retest. The more questions you take, the more prepared you will be with the style and urgency that will be felt during your exam. I noticed that I was obtaining 75-80% the last few times I took sample tests on quite a few of the units. I shifted my focus to take sample tests in the units that were more difficult for me until I was consistently getting 70% or higher. For those remaining few units, Gleim allowed me to setup tests that focused just on the units where I struggled. As I grew more comfortable with the questions for those units, I would drop them from my test bank.

Here is my advice for the taking the test... I knew I had a good understanding of the concepts, terminology, and application of the material. There was going to be some issues with the problem solving and validation of the calculations during the exam that would take more time. My approach was to run through the test answering the questions I could answer quickly. If I felt that I would have to spend a decent amount of time on calculations, I skipped it to make sure I could answer all the problems that had minimal calculations or had conceptual answers. Once I ran through the questions I could answer quickly, I came back and focused on the questions that required more in-depth calculations. That way if I was running out of time, I knew I could "guess" on the last few questions that could take a substantial amount of time. This ended up being 12-15 of my exam questions.

I was able to finish the multiple choice with around 25 minutes remaining. I was happy about this and hoped to take a short break before starting on the essays. I was not aware that once you clicked to say you were complete with the multiple choice section, it would roll the test right into the essays. It makes sense due to the fact that the extra time that is left on the multiple choice section can be used on the essays. I needed all the extra time I could use on the essays, as I finished the final essay with less than five minutes remaining. I spent the last few minutes revising my answers and trying to show a deeper understanding of the concepts being asked.

My approach on the essays was to review the two questions and then plan my attack. Luckily, both my essays were similar and I was able to use the two questions to develop in-depth answers that applied to both questions. The essays did get me a little because I knew the basic concepts, but not the terminology that probably would have gotten me a few more points. I did struggle a little, but I continued to think back to the 11th hour webinar I attended where the host was talking about if you get an 80%, **you studied too hard**. Most of us aren't concerned with being a medalist. We are just concerned about getting our CMA designation.

So, as you prepare your journey to become a CMA: join the IMA, set the date of your exam, find a program that works well for you, do as many sample questions as you can, and trust in yourself. I know that as I progress in my studying for Part II, whether I pass or not, I will make sure that I accomplish this goal that I have for my life and career.

Editor's Note: Derek has graciously agreed to be our first CMA candidate in the "On the Road to Becoming a CMA" column. Now that he has Part 1 complete, he is currently working on Part 2. Please wish him well on Part 2!

Derek - Thanks for the great advice! Good luck on Part 2!!

CPE in Review

“Tax Reform & the Impact to Individuals, Trusts, and Estates”

Submitted by Crystal Croll, IMA Member Since 2015

On Tuesday, October 23rd, 2018, the Delmarva Chapter of the IMA hosted a Lunch-N-Learn event at Adam’s Taphouse in Fruitland. Attended by 25 IMA Members, this was a 1-hour CPE event on Tax Reform, presented by Dave Einhorn. Dave, a tax partner since 1998, has been with KPMG for more than 29 years. He received a law degree from the University of Baltimore while he was a member of KPMG, and he currently leads the Tax practice in Baltimore. Dave provides tax services to clients in the consumer markets, manufacturing and business services industries. He has significant experience in providing tax services to publicly traded corporations, closely-held businesses and portfolio companies of many different private equity firms.



An expert on the topic, Dave did an excellent job effectively using the hour to deliver relevant information to his audience. Overtly stating that there were still many unknowns, and tax authorities that are subject to change, he touched on many subjects. Below are a few:

- The “marriage penalty” was eliminated for married taxpayers below \$400K, by making the tax rate brackets for married couples filing jointly double those of single individuals.
- Standard Deduction increases for single and married filing jointly, with the exception of the elderly and the blind.
- Medical Expenses - AGI threshold decreases from 10% to 7.5%.
- Mortgage interest - Home Equity Lines of Credit interest is no longer deductible.
- Charitable donations - limit for cash contributions increased from 50% to 60% of AGI.
- Child Tax Credit - increases from \$1K to \$2K per qualifying child. Refundable credit of up to \$1,400 per qualifying child.
- Moving expense deduction (other than military) suspended until 2026.
- Entertainment/Membership Dues - No deduction allowed for amount paid or incurred after 12/31/2017. Currently 50% is deductible. Rethink those season tickets!

As tax preparation season is fast-approaching, this was a great session to attend. With so many bills floating between the House and the Senate, we’re all on the edge of our seats wondering how any changes will affect us. Dave encouraged us to seek professional tax help and make sure to use updated tax software if preparing our own returns.



CPE in Review – Shore Fraud Conference

“Shore Fraud Conference keynote speaker: John Hall, CPA”

Submitted by Sharon Jones, CPA, CMA, IMA Member Since 2016

Mr. Hall spoke on How Executives, Managers, and Employees Can Prevent, Detect, and Efficiently Handle Wrongdoing, Misconduct, and Fraud as it relates to the business environment. Mr. Hall has over 40 years of experience as a speaker, consultant and business owner.

Most companies and people want to do the right thing, but things happen. Fraud can occur unintentionally by just signing something and passing it on, without verification. Things like blind trust, willful blindness, not having the proper information and situational incompetence all contribute to fraud. Most importantly, the culture at the top makes a big difference. Most people can understand why fraud occurs but do not condone it.

Controls fail because of the human element. The problem is that most of us do not think like thieves, and that is what is necessary to find fraud. How would I commit, benefit from, and conceal the fraud? We also need to question the strange, odd, or curious (SOC). When *YOU* see something, *YOU* say something. The greatest fraud threat comes from the people in your circle of trust. We need to look, ask, doubt and resolve.

The most important message that I took away from this session was that we all need to do our best to make sure fraud doesn't happen on our watch. We need to consider what we can do better (Mr. Hall's favorite word) so that fraud does not occur on our watch.



“Shore Fraud Conference Speaker: Kelly Paxton, CFE, Licensed Private Investigator”

Submitted by Marilou Gordy, IMA Member Since 2011



Kelly Paxton, the “Pink Collar Crime Lady”, was one of the speakers at the Shore Fraud conference. Kelly has spent most of her career in law enforcement specializing in fraud and embezzlement. According to Kelly, “Unfortunately there is no honesty gene, good people sometimes make bad choices.” In the past, the focus of fraud was on men. However, in the 1980's Kathleen Daly defined pink collar crime as women in low to mid-level positions that steal from their employers. Kelly has focused on investigating and studying women who commit fraud although she does investigate men as well.

Kelly said to “never underestimate a woman's ability to commit fraud.” Women are just as capable of fraud as men if given the opportunity. The fraud usually starts small and escalates if they get away with it the first time. Fraud is usually committed by a long time, trusted employee -someone who likes their job and may be a control freak. Or it could be a trusted volunteer of a PTA, sports youth club or church. Fraud perpetuated by a woman can be different from fraud committed by a man. One such difference is that

CPE in Review – Shore Fraud Conference

“Shore Fraud Conference Speaker: Kelly Paxton, CFE, Licensed Private Investigator” (*continued*)

women almost always work alone in a fraud. Some other “pink flags” that Kelly mentioned are someone who does not take a vacation, fancy cars, shopping sprees, expensive hobbies such as horses or gambling, garnishments, expensive travel or other financial pressures. One statistic that Kelly mentioned that I found staggering, is that 60% of dentists are ripped off by office managers. Proving her statement that “fraud is usually committed by someone that lives amongst us and is committed by someone that we can relate to.” Even a background check will not necessarily reveal a fraudster since most of these people are not in the system.

Examples of fraud used by women include cash skimming, forging unauthorized checks, vendor fraud, unauthorized electronic transfers, payroll shenanigans, and credit/debit card abuse. The fraud is usually not complicated and even the smartest boss/manager can be duped. The biggest woman embezzler was Rita Crundwell, a controller for Dixon IL, who stole over \$53 million over the course of many years. The money was spent on her lavish lifestyle and horses. There was even a movie made about this fraud called “All the Queen’s Horses.” The trailer can be found [here](#). You can also visit her website at <https://pinkcollarcrime.com> for more information.

“Shore Fraud Conference Speaker: Jeremy Clopton, CPA, CFE, ACDA, CIDA”

Submitted by Ed Flanagan, MBA, CPA, CISA, IMA Member Since 2015

Jeremy Clopton, Director at Upstream Academy, provided a presentation after lunch regarding “All Data Considered: Using data beyond the accounting system to detect and prevent fraud”. Jeremy basically started by stating that most people/auditors are already using some type of analytics via Microsoft Excel and/or IDEA, ACL, etc. However most of those types of analytics are “reactive” and not “proactive” and are limited to “structured data”.



From this Jeremy talked about two types of data, structured and unstructured. First structured is the simply data contained in rows and columns, with headers. This data can be easily sorted, separated, and combined. Structured data makes up about 20% of the data available to a user. The other type of data that is not as easily available is unstructured data, which makes up the other 80% of all data. This type of data is video, audio, email, social media, etc. From Jeremy’s perspective unstructured data is where “people tell you what they are doing”. In the unstructured data you can understand and increase your “fraud risk scenario” by looking at an area such as “communication” within a company’s email traffic.

Given this initial presentation on the type of data, structured and unstructured, Jeremy talked about the “relevant technologies”.

Jeremy categories the types of Relevant Technologies into five different groups:

1. Traditional Analytics
2. Robotic Process Automation
3. Machine Learning
4. Artificial Intelligence
5. Augmented Intelligence

Most people are familiar with items one through four, so Jeremy focused on number five “augmented intelligence”. According to Jeremy augmented intelligence is the “best of human with

CPE in Review – Shore Fraud Conference

“Shore Fraud Conference Speaker: Jeremy Clopton, CPA, CFE, ACDA, CIDA” *(continued)*

the best of machine” which allows for the learning of humans and the learning of machine. When will augmented intelligence be available? It is available and being used today. The example that Jeremy gave was today’s marketing departments which are using data to understand their customers and their customers buying habits.

Jeremy spoke about the importance of being proactive with data that is already available. He emphasized that there are two categories for Data Critical Success, behavioral and communication. The key item with behavioral and communication is looking at patterns over a period of time, such as an employee not making any entries into a system for two years and then making 40 entries in two days. This focuses on identifying patterns, trends and activity, what is unusual for an employee.

Jeremy did emphasize that there may be some privacy issues so prior to performing any review of data you may want to contact your company’s Legal and Human Resources Departments.

“Shore Fraud Conference Speaker: Tom Hardin, Tipper X”

Submitted by Linda Dittrich, MBA, IMA Member Since 2010

The Shore Fraud Conference never disappoints and this year was no different. Besides the networking opportunity and chatting with old friends, the speakers are always engaging. Among them this year was Tom Hardin, also known as Tipper X.

Tom grew up in a middle-class family in suburban Atlanta as one of three boys. He attended the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business as an undergraduate. At 29, he was a junior partner at a small hedge fund, with a wife and a promising career. Then he threw it all away for 4 felonious trades that amounted to just \$46,000.

The first illegal trade began with a tip about Kronos. Convincing himself by using self-rationalizations, he allowed himself to cross the line. He sized these trades at 0.9 percent, small enough that he used their size as further justification that he wasn’t doing any real harm to anyone. It was the tip on Blackstone Group’s takeover of Hilton Hotels Corporation that placed him on the government’s radar in 2007.

In July of 2008, he was approached by FBI agent David Makol and another agent. It was at this point that Tom became an informant for the FBI. For almost two years, he would wear a wire and secretly record people as he enticed them to make implicating statements.

While Tom was able to avoid prison, with a felony conviction, he found it hard to have a career. In 2016, the FBI contacted him about speaking to rookie FBI agents about how he crossed legal lines and rationalized his actions to himself. This was the beginning of his speaking career.

Tom provided a few quotes, but one really resonated with me. He said that “you are the average of the five people with whom you surround yourself. Choose wisely.” The perspective of those who have committed crimes continues to serve as a reminder to not become lax in your day to day responsibilities. Comfort in your role, in whatever Finance position you may hold, is something that you should always resist. Always strive to be better than the average of those around you.



Other Updates

Memorial Education Fund

The Memorial Education Fund Grant exists to award scholarships and other forms of assistance to students; to make educational opportunities available to students interested in accounting or management accounting; and to provide for the acquisition and preservation of books, documents, and other objects of historical interest.

As we mentioned in last quarter's Delmarva Dispatch, we will be using this grant to hire Toby Groves for our annual joint meeting with the Student IMA chapter that we sponsor at Salisbury University. The joint meeting will be held on February 19th on the Salisbury University campus.



Come listen to and interact with
Dr. Toby Groves as he presents

**When the Facts Aren't Enough: The Art of
Communicating Complex Information**

Sponsored by the IMA Delmarva Chapter
and the Salisbury University Student IMA
Chapter

Date: February 19, 2019

Time: 3:15pm to 5:15pm

Location: Salisbury University Bennett
Auditorium
CPE: 2 hours



tobygroves

UPCOMING EVENTS

Delmarva IMA Chapter

- 01/22/2019 Personal Finance Planning at United Way Facility from 11:30am-1:00 pm
- 02/19/2019 When the Facts Aren't Enough: The Art of Communicating Complex Information by Toby Groves (see above more information)

IMA Leadership Academy Upcoming Webinars

- 01/08/2019 Embracing Change

IMA Strategic Management Upcoming Webinars

- 01/28/2019 How to Accelerate Results with Effective Performance

Connect with Us

Delmarva Chapter or 

IMA Global Does It Again!

“Professional Body of the Year” - Again!

For an unprecedented second consecutive year, IMA® (Institute of Management Accountants) has been named the Professional Body of the Year by prestigious global accounting publisher *The Accountant* and *The International Accounting Bulletin* (IAB).

Presented to an organization with profound influence within the accounting and finance profession and beyond, the Award affirms IMA’s ongoing advanced certifications, more. IAB Awards are an independent panel

This year, award recipients Accountancy Forum & Awards October 4. Fatema El-Wakeel, London Chapter and member and Pauline Gilbert, CMA, the event and accepted



Professional Body of the Year efforts to support members through learning programs, research, and presented annually and selected by of judges.

were recognized at The Digital at the Waldorf Hilton in London on CMA, past president of IMA’s of IMA’s Global Board of Directors; London Chapter treasurer, attended the award on IMA’s behalf.

“I can think of no better way to celebrate our centennial as an organization than with this extraordinary recognition,” said IMA President and CEO Jeff Thomson, CMA, CSCA, CAE. “In the last year, we’ve witnessed the digital age unfold within our profession and as an organization, we’ve dedicated ourselves to providing our members with the right resources to ensure continued success in an evolving field. We’re incredibly honored to receive this award for the second time.”

IMA was also a finalist for the Communication Campaign of the Year for its 2017 integrated communications campaign, which highlighted the power of certification in today’s digital age. IMA expanded this theme with the recent launch of its 2018 campaign.



IMA Global - Book Nook

It Takes BOTH Creativity & Discipline to Generate Innovation Value!

As markets grow increasingly unpredictable and value propositions need to evolve, innovation isn't just a buzzword with a hashtag; it's a lifeline for any business that wants to sustain its value. But business leaders face a challenge: Innovation as a concept can seem amorphous. How should we define innovation at our organization? How do we go about implementing innovation processes and channels? Can innovation value and progress be measured?

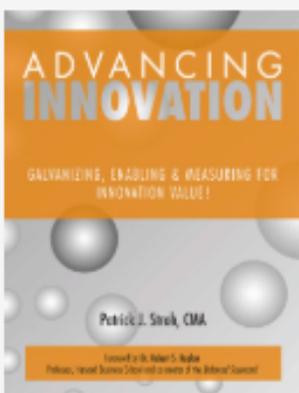
In *Advancing Innovation*, Patrick Stroh, CMA, offers a solution that sits right at the crossroads between the dreamer and the doer. The book inspires organizations to use best practices while considering thoughtful customizations for success. *Advancing Innovation* also gives readers specific tools and guidance to execute, measure, and optimize for the most impact.

The result is innovation governance—a Yin and Yang combination that fuses ideation and creativity with execution and discipline to drive value. Most important, as the book reveals, this framework can be measured by Stroh's unique Innovation Value Score (IVS). IVS uses a balanced scorecard model but with a focus on innovation value. The metrics and functionality of this model hinge on and morph with an organization's "strategy archetype" (how it goes to market with its value proposition). Those results can then be used for competitive benchmarking and goal-setting.

With an engaging, first-hand narrative, Stroh's book invites readers to discover how managing and measuring innovation opens the door to greater and sustainable organizational value.

About the Author

Patrick Stroh is president of Mercury Business Advisors, which provides management advisory services in business strategy, innovation, product development, and turnaround situations, and is the author of *Business Strategy: Plan, Execute, Win!* and *Advancing Innovation: Galvanizing, Enabling & Measuring for Innovation Value!* He serves on the IMA Global Board of Directors and also on the board of directors for Vail Place, a Minneapolis-based agency supporting those with mental illness. In 2004, he was appointed to serve on the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) Advisory Board to review the update of the 2004 COSO Enterprise Risk Framework. Prior to consulting, Stroh most recently held positions at UnitedHealth Group, including chief strategy & innovation officer, client experience officer, president of consumer health products, and senior vice president of business strategy. Stroh also writes a column called "Innovation Elixir™" for the American City Business Journals—which covers 43 metro markets across the United States—is an active member of the Prior Lake Rotary Club, and is a classically trained chef having studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Minneapolis.



Advancing Innovation

Galvanizing, Enabling, and Measuring for Innovation Value

Author: Patrick J. Stroh, CMA

Foreword: Dr. Robert S. Kaplan, Professor, Harvard Business School;
Co-creator of the Balanced Scorecard

Management Advice: Time for a Career Path Discussion With Your Team?

Do you spend enough time talking to your staff about their career paths? Probably not, according to a recent [survey](#) from global staffing firm Robert Half, which found many employees want to spend more time discussing their future. Of the 1,200 accounting and finance professionals polled, 93 percent said they would like to talk about their career path on a regular basis, yet 40 percent said they *never* have this conversation with their managers.

The benefits of career path direction

Career planning should be a vital part of any [staff retention strategy](#). Employees are more likely to stay at a company if they feel there is a long-term plan in place for their professional future. Otherwise, they're liable to take matters into their own hands and look for a job elsewhere. As a manager, touch base with your staff on a regular basis to ensure they're satisfied with their position and career path.

Frequency of career path discussions

Many employers will include career progression as part of an annual review. This may not be enough, though: 48 % of respondents in the survey said they would like to discuss their career path quarterly or even more frequently. So how often should you have a career path talk with staff? There's no one-size-fits-all schedule, but the answer may be as often as they want to discuss it.

How to talk about a career path

If you're among the many managers who have never had a career path discussion with employees, or if you do so irregularly, here are some tips:

- **Uncover goals.** Some staff members, especially those at the beginning of their professional journey, need guidance in turning their goals into a tangible [career plan](#). As a manager, ask questions to discover what really motivates them such as: which type of work they are drawn to, if they would be interested in supervisory roles in the future and what weaknesses are holding them back. Work with your employees to define a career path that leads to clear, attainable goals.
- **Help them along the way.** When you outline career path objectives, you undertake partial responsibility for helping employees achieve those goals. This means [mentorships](#), training, on-the-job experience and perhaps another degree or certification. If they're on a management track, professional development can help staff members acquire the leadership skills and general business acumen they'll need later in their career.
Be realistic about opportunities. As with all plans or promises, you shouldn't make them unless you think you can deliver. It's best to be transparent and open about the opportunities that will — and will not — be available. For example, if the company won't be able to offer reimbursement for an MBA, or if there are no senior-level vacancies expected in the next five years, be up front about it. So as to not discourage ambitious accounting professionals, talk about the opportunities you anticipate *will* become available.
- **Mix formal and informal chats.** Even if you and your staff discuss their formal career plan only once a year during [performance review](#) time, you can have casual talks more often. Go out for coffee and ask how it's going and whether they feel they're on track to meet their goals. Take the time to show you're interested in their career progression.

You should never experience turnover due to the lack of career planning. With the cost and time associated with recruiting new finance professionals, as well as the even greater toll of losing top talent, it's in your best interest to prioritize career path discussions.

Accountemps, a [Robert Half](#) company, is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm for temporary accounting, finance and bookkeeping professionals. Accountemps has more than 330 locations worldwide. More resources, including online job search services and the [Accountemps blog](#), can be found at [accountemps.com](#).

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Remote Control: How to Make Telecommuting Work for Your Team

Telecommuting and remote work arrangements are fast-becoming the norm at many companies. Internet connectivity and mobility have left managers with few reasons to flat-out say “no” to staff requests for a telecommuting option. And the shortage of skilled professionals available for hire has many businesses relying more on remote workers.

Telecommuting opportunities can also increase a firm’s ability to attract and retain top talent. Indeed, one of the most-wanted perks today is the ability to work remotely, according to research for the [2019 Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals](#). Also, in a [recent Robert Half survey](#), more than three-quarters (77 percent) of workers polled said they’d be more likely to accept a job offer if they could telecommute at least some of the time.

An employment package that includes telecommuting possibilities can increase the likelihood that a candidate will sign on (and stay) with your company. Remote workers can help you access specialized skills and keep projects moving along smoothly. Managing a team where everyone is scattered to the four winds? That prospect is not quite so appealing to many managers.

Overseeing employees who work remotely on a full-time basis can be challenging enough, let alone keeping tabs on a bunch of telecommuters with varied schedules. That’s why it’s so important for managers to lay the groundwork for successful telecommuting arrangements from the start. The following six tips can help:

1. Gauge employees’ remote readiness

Many people would like to telecommute. But not everyone is cut out for this way of working, which requires a lot of self-discipline. The best remote workers are those with excellent time management and [communication skills](#). They should also be responsible enough to complete tasks with minimal supervision. So, rather than having a blanket policy allowing everyone — or no one — to telecommute at your firm, give yourself the flexibility to make case-by-case decisions.

2. Determine which roles are eligible

Not every position is suitable for telecommuting, either. The amount of in-person “face time” a role requires is one good indicator of whether a job can be done from home effectively. For example, financial analysts can easily examine data sets and evaluate investments from home, but a payroll supervisor is often needed in the office to oversee data clerks and other support staff.

Therefore, when weighing whether to allow an employee to telecommute, think about the impact that arrangement might have on the everyday operations of your office. Consider questions such as, “Can this job be performed remotely with little disruption, if any, to existing standards and deadlines?” and “Is this role really suited to independent work?”

3. Set clear expectations

When it comes to quality and deliverables, there should be no difference between the work an employee performs remotely or while that person is present in the company's office. Set equal standards for on-site and off-site professionals in areas such as client service, deadlines, office hours, and response times for emails and phone calls.

4. Choose the right tech tools

In a virtual environment, technology is everyone’s communication lifeline. Slack, Google Hangouts and Skype for Business are some of the platforms employees can use to reach out to you and each other throughout the day. File-hosting services like Dropbox, Google Drive or an in-house system also foster virtual collaboration and information sharing in real time.

5. Keep virtual team members in the loop

Some perks of being an in-office employee include impromptu invites to happy hours after a long day and free treats when someone brings in homemade cookies. On the business front, there are also the unscheduled meetings and brainstorming sessions that telecommuters often don’t find out about until later — if at all.

Remote Control: Telecommuting for Your Team *(continued...)*

Be careful not to encourage a two-tier system where one subset of the team is in on everything and others miss out. Managers can do much to help telecommuters and other remote workers feel like part of the team. Here are some ideas:

- **Include virtual workers in spontaneous discussions.** Send them instant messages to join spur-of-the-moment conversations.
- **Switch from audio to videoconferencing.** That way, everyone can see each other's faces and reactions.
- **Focus on virtual team-building.** The start of group meetings is a good time to acknowledge birthdays and encourage people to share personal updates. You can even schedule casual video conferences for nonwork-related chats once a week, open to all in-office and remote workers who want to talk about sporting events, binge-worthy TV shows, upcoming or recent trips, or anything else they'd like to share.

And remember, even though remote workers value their autonomy, it doesn't mean they don't want or need to hear from you. Staff meetings offer a great way to share departmental news and stay updated on projects, but it's important to schedule one-on-one time, too. Biweekly status calls and regular feedback let telecommuters know that out of sight is not out of mind.

6. Don't overlook the needs of your on-site workers

Your employees who don't have the option to telecommute — or may simply prefer working at the office — would likely enjoy having access to some of the same perks as their telecommuting colleagues. So, consider easing the office dress code, allowing flexible scheduling or offering commuter benefits like subsidized parking or transit passes for those workers. Also, make sure your on-site employees don't end up covering the work of their telecommuter colleagues. If it happens, it should be the exception, not the rule.

To make telecommuting work well for your workforce, make sure that remote team members never feel left out. Likewise, don't overlook the need for your in-office employees to maintain better balance between their professional and personal lives and to work in a more relaxed environment.

Preparing for the future of work

Mastering the ability to manage a team of professionals with different types of flexible work arrangements will become even more important for accounting and finance leaders in the future, as more companies embrace the new labor model for finance.

That new model is a flexible labor force that includes full-time employees, interim and **project-based professionals**, and other specialized resources that provide additional capabilities and perform high-value work as needed. Many firms are also looking to external resources, such as **managed solutions providers**, to help them recruit, develop and manage their talent, including full-time and interim staff.

*To learn more about the new labor model for finance, [download the free white paper](#), *The Labor Model for Finance in the Digital Age*, from Robert Half and global consulting firm Protiviti, a Robert Half subsidiary.*

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