

Ten top tips for improving your service

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Joy Spiropoulos outlines ten ways accountants and bookkeepers can better equip themselves to look after SME clients.

Small and medium sized firms often need help building their business and that role requires something in between an accountant and a bookkeeper. Bookkeepers tend to spend more time understanding how businesses work in a hands-on way, whilst accountants have a wider box of financial tricks to choose from.

Bookkeepers have a huge role to play in helping these clients, but they need to become more proactive and hands on within the businesses they serve. The process of developing my business has helped me to understand the ten key skills required to become a great bookkeeper. There may also be a few interesting ideas for accountants reading this too.

Learn to serve

We are not the masters of the business universe - our role is to help facilitate the goals of the people who run businesses. They need help, whether it is with paying their bills, offering advice where required, or looking for every possible way of making the business run more efficiently and effectively. If we can earn money doing that then we have a framework for success at every level.

Learn to ask for help

Every problem has a solution but none of us have all the answers to hand, all of the time. However, someone, somewhere will - it could be a friend, a relation or a colleague. Never be afraid to ask them and make it clear that they should always feel free to ask you. A support group like this can benefit everyone within it, and a friendly voice is always a lot more reassuring than Google.

Learn to share

Businesses stagnate when people hide their knowledge. Don't try to build yourself a bunker to work in secretly and alone. Let people understand what you are doing and why you are doing it.

This has multiple benefits, not least that people will understand that bookkeeping really can be interesting and value-adding. It also means that people can cover for you when you are ill

or taking that much deserved holiday. Spreading knowledge makes you more, not less valuable to a business.

Learn to learn

Knowledge is power. Many bookkeepers believe that once they qualify, they know it all and they create a comfort zone in which they feel secure. Fortunately, the world moves on. Yesterday's text book is soon out of date and there is a limit to what any syllabus can cover. If you keep listening and learning then you will become increasingly useful to your clients and as a bonus, what you learn can be interesting too and you will be picking up new disciplines for the future.

Learn to make changes

However good at your job you are and however pleased your clients are with you, none of us are perfect. If you keep asking yourself 'how do I make things better?' then your clients will soon see the benefits. Ultimately, as a bookkeeper, you will be judged on the effect you have on a business finances.

Learn to save your clients money

For a start, every penny you save them will then be made available to pay you! Money can be saved in so many ways from avoiding duplication and useless processes, to finding cheaper suppliers, to having creative ideas on your client's behalf that can really make a difference and validate your greatness in the meantime!

Learn to organise

People like things to work like clockwork; they hate chaos even though many people work in conditions best described as haphazard. Pulling together people, processes and means really can improve the way a business works. This is an area where you can add value quickly and easily.

Communicate

If people don't know what is going on within their business or their personal lives then they are minimising their chances of success. Opening channels of communication by telling people what you are doing and why you are doing it will improve the way you all work together. It is important to discuss problems as well as successes. Clear and accurate communication means that people will not be surprised - and surprises in business tend only to lead to blame and recrimination!

Learn not to give up

Occasionally you will get it wrong or work will just seem too tough. Gary Player, the South African golfer, once said: "The more I practise, the luckier I get" - and he had a point. We all make mistakes but greatness only comes to those who learn from them and continue.

Be unique

All my previous tips have been about things you should do. This final one is the opposite. Don't be the same as everyone else, in other words, be unique. There are many bookkeepers out there. Why should people choose you? Every business needs a unique selling point. What's yours? It's your difference that people will talk about when they recommend you. Once you have found your mark and made it your signature, greatness is not far off.

To conclude, I'll quote Jim Rohn, who said that 'wages make you a living but profits make you a fortune'. Furthermore, there are three maxims to remember:

- Don't wish it were easier, wish you were better.
- Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills.
- Don't wish for less challenges, wish for more wisdom.

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The above article is based on a presentation given by Joy Spiropoulos at the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers annual conference, held on 26 - 27 November in London.

www.bookkeepers.org.uk

Top tips

I have not read something as refreshing as this in many years. I grew up in the "service above self" culture; to read something that still advocates those values is indeed very refreshing to me.

Posted by Anonymous on Tue, 08/12/2009 - 06:46

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