



# 10 TIPS TO BRING YOUR A-GAME

## DURING BUSY SEASON

By Monica Hauser, CPA



IT'S YOUR ROOKIE YEAR, AND YOU WERE JUST DRAFTED BY A CPA FIRM. CONGRATULATIONS! NOW, HOW DO YOU MANAGE THROUGH YOUR FIRST BUSY SEASON?

# BUSY SEASON CAN BE A VERY CHALLENGING TIME TO LEARN A NEW JOB. STRESS LEVELS ARE HIGH, CLIENT DEMANDS ARE HIGH, AND DEADLINES CAN BE SHORT.

Here are 10 tips for a rookie to get through busy season and perform like a pro, making you the season's MVP.

**1. Willingness to learn** – You might think you learned a lot in college, but be prepared to learn more. In your first busy season, you will learn how to use a variety of new software programs and tax forms, how to prepare workpapers, etc. It might be overwhelming, but try to be a sponge, soaking in as much as you can. Listen and learn from others around you. Don't get frustrated when you can't figure something out right away. You will not be expected to know everything.

**2. Be flexible** – You will be expected to complete multiple projects and work for a variety of people. You will need to reprioritize what you're doing to meet client deadlines, to accommodate other workloads, and to survive the occasional emergency. Be flexible and change projects when needed. Partners and managers get numerous calls and emails from clients throughout the day. Many times this work trickles down to new staff. Just realize that you may go into a day expecting to do one thing and end up doing another thing, or you may have to work a few extra hours in one day to meet deadlines.

**3. Be organized** – You will have several projects to handle at one time. Keep track of deadlines and priorities. If you have questions on priorities, ask a partner or manager for help. It can be detrimental to you to miss a deadline, but sometimes it may be out of your control. Communication is the key. Let others know if you can't get things done on time or if there are problems. It's better for you to be upfront and get help right away than wait until the deadline is looming.

**4. Time keeping** – Many CPA firms bill based on time entered into their billing software. This causes employees to be diligent about keeping track of how much time they are working for each client and what they are doing for the client. When first starting, keeping track of every tenth of an hour, or whatever increment the firm uses, can be daunting. Just be aware of the fact that at the end of the day, you have to account for what you've done that day.

**5. Understand expectations** – Don't be afraid to ask if you are unsure of the number of hours expected of you or if you're meeting the expectations. Understand what's expected when coding time to training or to clients. Speak up and ask questions when you don't understand something.

**6. Be a team player** – No matter what department you're working in, you will be working with other people. Be willing to help out others whenever possible. Learn from others and teach others when you can.

**7. Find a friend/mentor who has been through it** – Finding someone you're comfortable bouncing questions off can help make busy season less stressful. Having someone to give you advice or just help you can be a tremendous relief. Using laughter in the office to break the stress can make the day more enjoyable.

**8. Make time for fun** – Having fun at work seems a bit contradictory, but many firms have programs to encourage everyone to take a quick break and have a little fun. Take part in these events/programs. They can help you build relationships with others around you, take your mind off your long list of projects, and reset your body.

**9. Sleep and exercise** – These might seem like such basic things, but too often they're the first things we cut. Getting the right amount of sleep is very important for your mind and will help you feel refreshed and ready to go the next day. Exercise can be a great stress reliever and help you feel better.

**10. Reward yourself** – Getting through your first busy season is an accomplishment. Find something that you can reward yourself with and use that as an incentive to get through it — a day at the spa, a new laptop, dinner at a nice restaurant. A reward will give you something to look forward to and motivate you on those stressful days. >>



Once busy season is over, hopefully the “coaches” will acknowledge your hard work and effort and nominate you for rookie of the year. Getting through your first busy season as an intern or a new hire is a great accomplishment and can set the framework for your future or career with a firm.



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