

# Long Island Business News

## Keeping accountants happy

By: Bernadette Starzee April 25, 2017

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Attracting and retaining top talent is an ongoing challenge for public accounting firms, particularly at the senior accountant/manager level.

“It’s around the four- or five-year mark when people are deciding whether public accounting is for them or not,” said Chris Roberts, director of talent management at Mazars USA, a 700-professional firm whose office locations include Woodbury.

Public accounting, with its long hours during busy seasons, is not for everyone.

Professionals “get to a point where they’re either going to be in or out,” Roberts said. “If you’re in, this is what you love – you enjoy working with clients and the team, and you’re able to find that balance between your professional and personal lives. For some, the appeal of going to private practice is greater. They have this dream that they’re going to work from 9 to 5.”

Programs that promote work/life balance are a significant piece of accounting firms’ efforts to retain and attract the best and brightest.

### Work/life balance

Accounting firms of all sizes have made significant efforts in recent years to make it easier for professionals to manage their work and family commitments.

Now in its third year, Marcum has a paid sabbatical program that allows eligible professionals to take a specified period of time off after busy season, while still receiving a percentage of their base salary and 100 percent of their benefits.

“For employees with young children at home or families overseas, those wishing to study for the CPA exam or anyone who just needs a breather,” this benefit allows the firm to demonstrate its “commitment to work-life balance for its associates,” said Claudio Diaz, chief human capital officer for Marcum, which is the 16th largest accounting firm in the nation and has major operations in Melville.

Last fall, Deloitte – a Big Four firm with Long Island operations in Jericho – launched a new family leave program that provides up to 16 weeks of fully paid family leave in support of a range of life events, from childbirth to elder care.

In addition, Deloitte has instituted a policy in which non-critical emails are not circulated internally during evenings, weekends and holidays, “when people should be off the grid,” according to Randy DeYulio, Long Island managing partner.

“Our professionals have a very strong work ethic, and in the digital age, when they see an email come over, they feel compelled to act on it right away,” DeYulio said. “If it can wait till the next morning or Monday, it won’t be forwarded to them, so they won’t have this continuous pressure. We want to provide them with an opportunity to recharge; if you don’t have that balance, you will burn out.”

Through a new partnership with Bright Horizons, Mazars USA is launching a program in which it provides emergency daycare to its employees.

“If the nanny falls sick, the employee can bring their child to a Bright Horizons center near the office,” Roberts said.

In addition, Bright Horizons can provide employees with assistance regarding elder care.

“We recognize that our employees have different needs and expectations at different phases of their life and their career,” Roberts said. “Through employee surveys and informal dialog, our HR team is in tune with what people are saying and thinking and we try to act on as much of it as possible.”

Firms are also providing flexible work schedules for employees juggling childcare and elder care.

“If employees have a need, we tailor their schedule to fit that need,” said Barbara Weisbein, director of human resources for Manhattan-based Raiche Ende Malter & Co., which has offices in Melville. “They may have an earlier than normal finish time; they might work from home some days. If they need to wait for the cable guy, they can work at home – technology makes it possible. We are as flexible as we can be and still have our business needs met.”

## Training/career advancement

Beyond work/life balance, professionals find it motivating if they are given training and advancement opportunities, said Roberts, who noted that Mazars focuses on training programs that provide technical skills as well as those that bolster soft skills – “the people skills they need to master in order to build their business and accelerate their own career development.”

Deloitte has a national training center, which provides “a consistent message” across firm offices nationwide, DeYulio said.

“In order to serve our clients in the best way, we have to have the top talent and be able to develop them and challenge them with complex assignments and empower them to make decisions and show creativity,” he said. “Our goal is to create an environment of continuous learning and growth, and to provide professionals with challenging opportunities and empower them to make a difference. We want them to have opportunities to succeed or fail – either way, they’re learning and growing.”

“We also encourage open collaboration, where there is an exchange of ideas between different levels of the firm,” DeYulio added. “We have younger professionals shadow more seasoned professionals, and we give them continuous feedback to help them improve.”

Raiche Ende tries to expose its employees to “all the industries that they want to learn,” Weisbein said. “The overriding philosophy is you’re going to do well in what you like to do. We try to help them figure out what they like doing and let them do it, and have them teach others. You move up by teaching others, and it’s part of the obligation. Everyone’s a teacher.”

## Team-building

Raiche Ende also empowers its employees by having them sit on committees, such as those concerned with community service and employee social activities.

“For our REM Cares community service program, employees form groups and figure out what they need to execute the program that they want to do,” said Weisbein, who noted projects have ranged from collecting pajamas and books for needy children to planting trees to holding blood drives.

“Our social events program is staff-conceived, partner-approved and staff-run, and includes baseball game outings, monthly birthday parties, costume contests on Halloween and ice cream socials,” she added, noting events like add a fun factor to the work routine.

Some firms have annual days of service, in which employees bond while giving back to the community. For instance, on Marcum’s day of service – held the day before Thanksgiving each year – the firm closes its doors and pays its 1,500 associates to volunteer at designated nonprofits.