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[Banking, Finance & Accounting](#)

Firms tackling talent shortage by recruiting early and sweetening the pot

By [Daria Meoli](#), February 22, 2016 at 3:00 AM

As if the pressure for accounting majors to pass the CPA exam after graduation weren't stressful enough, students with big-firm aspirations are sweating out the recruitment process in their sophomore year of undergrad.

With barely a basic level accounting course under their belts and a legally purchased beer through their lips, they are being courted by potential future employers.

"Recruiting starts younger and younger and we are extremely active on our target campuses," said Hayes MacArthur, co-partner-in-charge of EisnerAmper's human resources department in the firm's Iselin office. "We start identifying candidates who demonstrate some of the traits we look for in the freshman year, and definitely by sophomore year."

Each year, EisnerAmper recruits about 25 entry-level accountants. To be considered, students must have both a strong academic record and participate in extracurricular activities, and the firm has developed a system for identifying personal traits it believes makes for a good accountant.

"We look for future accountants that have 'SPARC,'" MacArthur said. "That stands for savvy, passionate, approachable, resourceful and collaborative. When you think of an accountant, you don't think of them in those terms. But the people who have been the most successful at our firm and in business, have that SPARC."

Once a viable candidate is identified, he or she can expect more than a signing bonus, salary and benefits in a job offer from a large firm.

At Marcum LLP, a global accounting firm with offices in Roseland, new hires are offered paid enrollment in a CPA review course, reimbursement for expenses incurred to sit for the exam, plus a \$2,000 bonus for passing the exam, and reimbursement for licensing fees.

Marcum started a paid sabbatical program for its employees. There is no time limit, and employees retain benefits and continue to earn a portion of their salary while they take time off for other pursuits.

Students today are savvy enough to ask for these perks, and because of the shortage of young accountants to replace retiring baby boomers, they often get them.

This leaves smaller firms with shallower pockets struggling to compete for talent.

Thomas H. Martin is managing partner of Klatzkin & Co. LLP, a Trenton-based accounting firm with nine partners and 40 accountants.

“We have good starting salaries, but we can’t always compete with the salaries and signing bonuses the big firms offer,” Martin said. “We stress that accountants are able to have a better work/life balance with a smaller firm like us. We also offer experience in all different areas of accounting. At the big firms, you are an auditor or a tax person. At our firm, young CPAs have exposure to a variety of consulting engagements and a wider variety of service within the profession.”

Martin started at Klatzkin as an intern more than 25 years ago, as did a few of his fellow partners. He said this demonstrates the opportunities available for interns.

“We try to start our interns as early as sophomore or junior year because we know if you start too late, the big firms will gobble up all the talent,” Martin said. “They come in and sweep everybody up. So, before they do, we want to bring some talent in to see if they are a fit for us and for them to see if we are the firm they want to start, or even spend their career with.”

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