



EVENTS

SURVIVING THE PUSH

By: *David Finklang, MBA*

Ahhhhhh, you've made it over the hump. Busy season is half over; March 15 is just a spec in the rear-view mirror, and April 15 is in clearly in sight. No, wait, make that April 18 is in sight. Sigh.... Those lucky government employees get to enjoy a three day weekend; whereas the collective CPA community is sharing the pain of three more days of busy season this year. A Friday April 15 party would have been too convenient. Either way, we can count (we are accountants, aren't we?) that there is less than a month to go.

However, the weeks ahead are probably the roughest and most grueling of busy season; with stacks of individual tax returns and partnerships to prepare along with those pesky S corporations that didn't quite make it out the door by March 15, there is more work to do than there is time in the day. With the stress mounting by the day, how are you, the dedicated CPA, going to survive the remaining weeks of busy season 2011?

In true David Letterman fashion, this is the "Top Ten List" of ways to survive the remaining weeks of busy season:

10. Caffeine. Some call it coffee; some call it Diet Coke, but no matter what you call it, make sure you have plenty on hand. If you get really desperate, it might be time for a "Red Bull."

9. Sleep. Yea right! However, if you get the chance, sneak out of the office early a few nights a week. Experts recommend between 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night for adults, and the better rested you are, the more productive and efficient you will perform. You might need to give up something else, but keep those "zzzzzzzz" hours.

8. Food. Like your mother always told you, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Start the day with carbohydrates for energy and protein for endurance; your mind and body will thank-you. Don't forget to eat throughout the day; natural sugars from fruits will provide natural energy that will last for hours compared with the coffee that will leave you crashing thirty minutes later. Wait, what about number ten on the list? Well, sometimes we all get desperate.

7. Laughter. They always say laughter is the best medicine, and it also works as a great stress reliever. Let me start you out with some

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CHAPTER EVENTS

accountant humor. "If a tax accountant's wife cannot sleep, what does she say? Darling, tell me about your work." Now, I can't just pick on the tax folks. "Why did the auditor cross the road? Because he looked in the file and that's what they did last year."

6. Stay cool. As the stress builds, people tend to get tense. It may be difficult, but try not to take everything seriously. For example, if a client is pressuring you to finish their return yesterday, don't lose your cool. You will only stress yourself more, scare your co-workers, and offend your clients.

5. Don't forget the "me time." Just because you're a CPA doesn't mean you should spend your entire busy season inside the office. Treat yourself to a break every once in a while. You may think you don't have a second to spare during these last few weeks, but a short break at work or night away from the office will go a long way in preserving your sanity.

4. Music. Walk around many offices, and you will see most everyone with ear-phones in or the radio on. Keep several playlists ready to go at any given time - from the rock mix for a quick pep-up, to the relaxing oldies to help ease the stress. With the advent of internet radio, you can create a station for any mood.

3. Inventory lists. Although your inventory ("to-do") list will be a mile long, it will help keep you on track and help respect the FIFO rule. Remember last year when the Smiths called in a fury that you had their information for over a month, and they still didn't have their return? Your inventory list will prevent more phone calls from the Smiths which will have the pleasant side-effect of lowering your stress and your blood-pressure.

2. Forget about the 18th... If you forget about the extra three days of busy season, then just maybe they will disappear. In fact, why not target the 15th for finishing your busy season?

1. Think about the deadline-day CELEBRATION! If number two didn't help, then maybe it is time to resign the fact that you will be working hard for an extra three days this year and think about the celebration. Maybe it's a party, a barbeque, a nice dinner, or a full night's sleep. No matter what your plan is on the 18th, make it something you will enjoy and look forward to; hopefully it will help take your mind off of all those Roth conversions.

There you have it, the top ten ways to survive the last weeks of busy season. Hopefully there is at least one or two things that will help get you through the next few weeks. And, if not, at least you were distracted from that 1040 for a few minutes while you read this article. OK, time to get back to work.

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