

Busy Season Tips

Interns & Entry-level Staff

These tips are based on experiences in public accounting, but the basis can be applied to all entry-level type positions. You can also use this information to formulate questions during the recruiting process. Many firms treat interns the same as entry-level full-time hires, so the following information is equally relevant to both. These tips include general advice to ease the transition from student to professional and help you be successful, be sure to keep these tips for when you start!

Communication is the key to success. The majority of work and life problems can usually be linked back to a breakdown of communication. Making an effort to communicate effectively will greatly enhance your chances of having a successful busy season. Practicing strong communication includes: being able to explain problems efficiently, updating your in-charge on a project's status, and generating timely communication between coworkers and clients. These are all vital points to becoming a successful part of your assigned team and the firm as a whole. You will be expected to be a team player and appropriately communicate any issues you may have. Do not be afraid to speak up, but also realize there is a time and place for everything.

The Initial Learning Process

Do not expect to know everything at the start. As you start working, you may feel that you know very little and realize that your accounting classes did not prepare you for real world practice; rather they provided you with a foundation of accounting principles. This is completely normal and expected. The firm will provide extensive training as well as assign you a "buddy" to use as a resource for questions and help with the firm's procedures, software, and how to prepare the work. Do not get discouraged; be ready to absorb new information and learn.

It is okay to say you do not understand something. Do not try to act like you know what a senior or manager is talking about if you are unsure. This will impede your learning process and can cause further confusion later on. If you do not understand something or it is being explained too quickly, ask them to explain again and slow down. You do not want to become lost after getting deep into a project and start spinning your wheels.

Strive to understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. While it is okay to not understand something, you should be working towards realizing what purpose there is to your work. This will be difficult at the beginning and you are not expected to fully grasp everything as you start. However, attempt to make a conscious effort to do more than simple data entry and take note of why you are doing specific tasks. Also try to learn the client and how the work relates to the client.

It is important to ask questions, but be smart about it. If you have a question that does not impede your work, write it down and move on. Make a list of questions that your buddy or senior can answer all at one time rather than periodically asking single questions over a short duration. When asking for help, be sure to ask them to come at their own convenience if it is not time sensitive. If you are completely stuck, let them know and work on something else until they have the time to help you. Be sure to write down your questions and any reasonable answers you can conclude for when your buddy is ready to go over them with you. Try and show initiative in attempting to figure it out on your own.

The Preparation & Review Process

Organization is important. Whether it is keeping track of your emails, going through client workpapers, or as simple as keeping your desk tidy, proper organization will make you more efficient and reduce stress. You do not want to be in the height of busy season unable to find an important document on a time sensitive project you are working on. Set procedures for yourself with handling new client documents to make sure it stays organized.

Document and reference your workpapers as you prepare work so that it is clear what you have done and why you did it. References are important so that the reviewer knows where to go to see where you obtained information and what your thought process was preparing it. You want your reviewer to be able to spend as little time as possible with the least amount of confusion while they are going over your work. It is worth taking the extra time to document and reference work for your reviewer. Documenting and making references as you prepare the work is normally the most efficient method. Remember, your reviewer bills out at a much higher rate than you, so their time is extremely valuable. Make the extra effort to save them time.

Double check everything before putting any work into review. Spending an extra 20-30 minutes to go over everything and catching mistakes will save your reviewer, who bills out at a much higher rate than you, a lot of time and you will be perceived and valued as a higher performing employee. Quality of work is valued over quantity. It is better to spend a little more time while you are new to make sure you grasp and understand the work you are doing so that you can deliver a higher quality product.

Do your best not to make the same mistake twice. The point of putting together a reference guide is to help you remember and refer back to questions you have seen before and cannot remember the answer to. You do not want to go back to your senior or put something into review with the same mistake over and over again. Being aware of mistakes and putting in the effort to make sure you do not repeat them will show that you are learning and progressing as you need to be.

Be aware of your budgeted time on a project and do not eat your time. Generally, you should prepare a project with enough time left in your budget to have it returned to you in order

to clear review notes and process the return. However, sometimes circumstances can cause you to go over budget. It is important to be aware of the budget and speak up to your in-charge person if you are approaching the limit, especially during busy season. This needs to be properly communicated as it may be determined that the budget is inaccurate, there may be a lot more going on this year, or there may be a more efficient way to prepare the work. It is important not to eat your time when tracking time spent on any given project. Budgeted hours are often calculated estimates based off the prior year, current information for this year, and the level of preparer assigned to the project. Future projects may be inaccurately budgeted if the appropriate time is not logged and it could result in reducing revenue for the firm.

Development & Growth

Respect your peers and those you are working for. It is extremely important that you gain the respect of your peers and team members as you start a new job so that they want to work with you. If you are currently interning with the ambition of receiving that full-time offer, this is an integral part of proving yourself to get there. First impressions are important and you want to make sure that your first busy season sets you up to properly develop and grow.

Practice a high level of professionalism in the office. This will allow you to grow as an individual and offer you the opportunity to provide stronger client service. It is fine to get to know your coworkers better and to have fun sharing stories and life experiences, as well as just regular daily socializing. However, you need to remember that you are also here to work and make an impression. It can be a difficult transition going from school into busy season at a public accounting firm. There is a proper balance between socializing and getting your work done. Prioritizing your time is a key part of maintaining high professionalism.

Bring a pen and notepad with you everywhere. Has a senior asked you over to their desk to show you something? Bring a pen and notepad. Are you meeting with a manager about a new project? Bring a pen and notepad. Is a senior asking you to drop by for a second without explaining why? Bring a pen and notepad. A Senior or Manager is ready to review a project with you? Bring a pen and notepad. If you are walking through the office with the destination of meeting or talking to someone about work or project, a pen and notepad should always be in hand!

Create a reference guide for yourself. Whether it is points to remember from a meeting with managers, or seniors showing you tips or advice, you should write it all down on a notepad. Then as soon as you have time, transfer the notes into your reference guide. This will create a centralized location for you to refer back to and will reduce the need to ask repeat questions.

If you discover ways to be more productive at work, do not be shy about it. Time is money, especially during busy season. If you realize certain tasks are inefficient and you know of a way

to expedite their completion, take the initiative to bring it to someone's attention and be sure to properly document your suggestions.

Build closer relationships with other interns and new hires. Work with each other to solve problems before going straight to your buddy or a senior. The seniors will appreciate it, especially during busy times. Seniors tend to have the roughest time during busy season as they are responsible for helping interns and new hires, preparing their own work, reviewing others work, and progressing towards supervisory roles. Treat your seniors well and try not to pepper them with questions. Try to spread your questions among multiple members on your team if available.

Keep a keen eye out for who you can connect with to have as a mentor. Coming in as an intern or full-time staff, you should be assigned with an experienced staff or senior as your buddy, and a manager as your coach. You should attempt to identify people you feel comfortable confiding in as you are making your transition into the field of accounting. It may turn out that your assigned buddy or coach ends up being one of these people, but you may also find that there is someone else you feel you can go to for advice. It is important to build these relationships to help bolster your progression.

Productivity & Wellness

Set a plan to manage your personal life in preparation for the upcoming busy season. You probably know that you will end up working longer hours for several weeks which will limit your time to do things outside of work. Make an attempt to plan a little ahead so that it is easier to keep up with your normal tasks outside work.

Attempting to maintain a healthy diet and proper exercise will increase energy throughout busy season. It is easy to load up on unhealthy snacks and soda in the office. Try to eat more healthy alternatives whenever possible during busy season. Drinking a lot of water throughout the day is very beneficial. Try to work in some time to exercise throughout the week. Making small adjustments like taking the stairs instead of the elevator in the parking deck can also help.

Using headphones to listen to the right music can help you focus. While we have white noise provided throughout the office, soothing music can also help you get in the zone while preparing work. Choose music that best suits your preferences. For example, some individuals prefer songs with limited or no lyrics, as these are less likely to impede one's internal thought process. Use discretion; however, as some firms and teams frown upon the use of headphones. Look to your senior or immediate supervisor for guidance.

Try to plan for the next work day the night before. If you have an extensive morning routine, getting certain tasks done the night before like setting out your outfit and having everything packed and ready to go can help for a smoother and less stressful morning before coming into

work. Starting the day off on the right foot will help set up for a more productive day, and help ensure that you will be on time or early!

Congratulations on the new job and best of luck with busy season!