

Q&A

CPA SPOTLIGHT

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Featuring
Cindy S. Johnson
CPA, CIT, CGMA

“MANAGING THROUGH CHALLENGE”

This month, we spoke with Cindy S. Johnson, of Bober Markey Fedorovich. Cindy's career has taken her from paraprofessional to her firm's first female partner. She now serves on the firm's executive committee.

first female partner in the firm. Last year, when we transitioned our leadership to the new executive committee format, my partners elected me to the executive committee, so that was a pretty big accomplishment.



To hear the full interview in its entirety, please listen to our podcast, season 1, episode 4 on “CPA Risk Chat.”

Q: The CPA profession has been challenged by the pandemic. How have you been managing as a firm?

A: Overnight, we went fully remote. The good news is our profession is pretty virtual anyway because we're always working at clients' offices using paperless, virtual tools. We put processes in place to continue to deliver top quality service for clients while making sure our associates felt supported and comfortable. We were going through our leadership transition at the time, which ended up being a benefit by putting a leadership team in place to really handle all the additional work. Weekly town halls provided staff with connectivity and transparency which we continue today, bi-monthly. I give our associates a lot of credit for rising to the challenge

Q: What attracted you to the CPA profession?

A: I started in high school. I didn't think I'd be able to pursue a four-year college degree, so I took an accounting course. I always liked math, so it seemed to be a natural fit. I went into accounting right out of high school.

Q: Looking back on your career, what would you say is one of your biggest successes?

A: First, getting the CPA – I think that's the capstone of your profession because it shows focus and dedication. I worked my way up from paraprofessional to the

- we didn't miss a beat in serving our clients.

Q: Has remote work impacted your firm's culture?

A: We're hoping that we can maintain the good culture we already have. We now have anywhere from 40% to 60% in the office on a regular basis. A small percentage chose 100% remote. We do a survey before the town hall so that we can address what's on people's minds. Clients are accepting the remote concept, so we do what works best for them: sometimes we'll have planning meetings or exit conferences in person, and we do the audit remotely, or vice versa.

Q: Was it difficult for you not to be face-to-face with the clients you've worked with for so long?

A: I still had some in-person audits last year in industries that could not work remotely and which wanted us in-person, too. The biggest thing I missed was the community interaction which came from events and social functions. So, we did a lot of the virtual meetings and events - some were better than others, but it's not the same.

Q: You have a long history of serving the CPA profession. Can you talk about your involvement on the AICPA Professional & Personal Liability Insurance Programs (PLIP) Committee, and the AICPA Life Insurance and

Disability Plans Committee (LIDP) which you now chair?

A: While serving as chair of our local chapter of the Ohio Society of CPAs the society CEO referred me to the PLIP committee. I didn't know a whole lot about insurance, but over time I learned a lot and recognized the importance of what we did. After investing three years on that committee I volunteered again for the life insurance committee. Most CPAs don't realize how much effort is involved in making sure the AICPA offers the best insurance available for our members. The work we do in strategic planning to stay on top of industry changes and understand how it affects CPAs.

Q: We heard that you also play a special role serving your local community.

A: I've volunteered with Inter-Lake Yachting Association for 20 years. Ten as treasurer. We host the largest junior regatta in the country at Put-in-Bay, which is on an island in Lake Erie. I was elected the 2019 Commodore, so it was my responsibility to raise funds, publish a yearbook, and ensure that all the activities go off without a hitch. We have 140 yacht clubs that are members of the Inter-Lake Yachting Association across multiple states and Canada. It was a big commitment, but a fun job.

Q: Any other ways you achieve work life balance?

A: We take a big winter vacation to West Yellowstone, Montana where we ride snowmobiles back into the mountains. You can't get into those places in the summertime, so you see things you may never see otherwise. We really enjoy snow-mobiling. We ski a little bit too.

Q: How are you recruiting new CPAs?

A: We participate in the recruitment programs of several nearby colleges. There's also a summer leadership program through these colleges which gives us the opportunity to bring students to our office for a two-day program in advance of the recruiting activities that typically occur later. We recruit experienced staff, from other public accounting firms and industry. The hybrid (remote/ physical) working environment is extremely important to attracting candidates. Once hired, if they're local we do in-person training for a period time. If they live in another state, then we're doing the training virtually. I think virtual training works just as well as having somebody in person, especially for one-on-one or a smaller group training.

Q: What are some of the biggest risks CPAs face in their personal life?

A: The biggest risk is to really plan for the unexpected. There's a lot of financial responsibility that we

have in our lives that life insurance can help us with. We really don't like to think about why we might need life insurance which is why we put off buying it. One of the reasons we developed **CPA Life Express**, was to make it so easy for younger people to put life insurance in place and not have to worry about it. Getting coverage at a younger age is the best time because it's so affordable.

Are you interested in learning more about the insurance plans available for AICPA members and their families?

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Cindy S. Johnson, CPA, CIT, CGMA, is a partner and executive committee member of Bober Markey Fedorovich. She oversees the firm's Business Advisory Services Group, which provides review and analysis, tax planning and consulting services. Cindy also assists high net-worth individuals with the preservation of family wealth, estate and family transition planning.

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