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FUTURE FORUMS USE VISIONING TO SEE THE FUTURE

Life is uncertain. Yet, most of us never take the time to consider how the world will change and how this change will affect the CPA profession.

The CPA Vision Project and its Future Forums will facilitate this complex, thought-provoking process by giving more than 4,000 CPAs the unique opportunity to pause and view our world 15 years from now. Future Forums aren't focus groups that concentrate on opinions about specific products or services. They are dynamic, interactive meetings of CPAs who use visioning tools to analyze how the roles, services and skills of the CPA will change.

Beginning this month and continuing through mid-December, more than 165 Forums will be held throughout the United States. Participants will spend eight hours with peers to understand how the visioning process contributes to insights into the profession's future. Future Forums will be hosted by state CPA societies, and professional facilitators will moderate each session.

One of the most important aspects of the project is making certain all CPA voices are heard and recognized no matter where the individual works or lives, or what opinion each participant may have about the profession. State societies have gone to great lengths to ensure Forums have representation from members in public practice, industry, government and

education, as well as an appropriate split of age ranges and gender.

Open minds are requisite to success. CPAs review, rank and discuss global forces, significant issues, core values, CPA services and core competencies—all components of the vision process. By looking at examples and scenarios, participants actually craft a model of the CPA profession 10 years into the millenium.



For example, one exercise focuses on services provided by all CPAs. Groups are asked to review a list of services and determine which ones will be the most important to the future of the profession. One group might confirm that tax compliance and assurance services are key, while others may argue that management consulting is the answer. In fact, there are no right or wrong answers; the goal is consensus-building to create a profession capable of dealing effectively with life in the year 2012.

CPAs will find themselves questioning the effect of the business marketplace, political and social concerns, and their own profession's reputation and position as the day progresses. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Forums is the last exercise in which a vision statement is written based on the day's discussions. Groups even question whether the world can survive without the CPA profession, and what would participants *not* change even if it meant a loss in income.

Forum participants and all interested CPAs can involve themselves in the vision process by logging on to the CPA Vision Project Website, www.cpavision.org and using the site's tools and discussion areas.

The result of each Future Forum will be discussed at the January National Future Forum in Tucson. Data collected will be used to draft a CPA Vision Statement. After this conference, the statement will be circulated for review and comment, culminating in a final report given to AICPA Council in the fall of 1998.

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HORIZON PERSPECTIVES

SEPTEMBER 1997 VOLUME 1 NUMBER 3



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Phil Lange and the Business of Marketing

He delivers
old-fashioned
services in
new-fashioned ways.

Phil Lange likes to upset the apple cart and shake things up. This Maryland CPA serves his clients by providing traditional CPA services, but doesn't believe in going about it in the usual way. He is a self-described "devil's advocate" in a quest to have his clients analyze and comprehend where they are headed, offering a value-added component to solving the business puzzle.

THREE INGREDIENTS TO SURVIVAL

Phil's mantra is rooted in keeping his clients on track with where they want to go. He follows three rules to successfully operate a business:

- 1 understand the market,
- 2 remain customer-focused and
- 3 stay cost-efficient.

"The public doesn't know what to expect from their accountants, and there still is the image of bean counters and eye shades," he says. "I think that image is changing. We are now providing more than just traditional services. Owners and clients are getting more sophisticated and demanding."

On any given day, Phil is writing a business plan, developing a customer satisfaction survey or developing benchmarking models for cost containment. "I try to make sure my clients understand what market they are in and the need to remain customer focused," he says. "I urge companies to get feedback from customers on services and products, as well as what they would like to see in the future."

Analyzing trends and meeting needs aren't new objectives, but Phil believes these con-

cepts are new to the small CPA practice and knows he must gain an edge over competition by constantly emphasizing the science of marketing. He has maintained his own practice for four years, and prior to that, spent 13 years in industry with a vehicle management and leasing company. That combined experience led him to realize that CPAs can do more than just partner with business to provide real-world, tangible advice.

"My clients expect me to challenge their business," says Phil. "I'm always asking them what services they need, and throw out ideas, suggestions and questions to consider for improvement, such as 'do you really understand your customers' needs?'"

MEDICAL CHALLENGES

Phil has most recently applied his slant towards CPA services in the medical community. He now serves as a consultant and project manager in opening a new outpatient ambulatory center, and hopes to soon expand his practice even more into the medical industry. His visionary approach to meeting customer needs enables him to keep a watchful eye on operating as a business and market leader rather than simply remaining another service provider.

"The medical profession is being turned upside down trying to gain control of costs, and doctors are being hurt because their fees are questioned," says Phil. "Managed care has become a market player, and requires providers of medical services to be customer-focused and efficient. I see opportunities for CPAs in this industry and that's why my focus is currently in medicine."

This is another story about innovative techniques CPAs are using, either in their practice, or in business and industry. We are interested in receiving tips on future Pathfinder Profiles. E-mail suggested comments to pathfinder@cpavision.org.



NOTEWORTHY PRINTINGS

Spotlighting Publications Dealing with the Future

*The Art of the Long View:
Planning for the Future in an
Uncertain World*

by Peter Schwartz, Bantam
Doubleday Dell Publishing Group,
Inc, 1996 (Source: amazon.com,
available at the CPA Vision
Website's online book store)

Right-brain enthusiasts will have a great time with this innovative approach that applies intuitive skills used by artists and musicians to navigate the future. Peter Schwartz, one of the world's leading futurists, has served as a consultant to clients as diverse as Volvo and the White House.

Contrary to popular theory, Schwartz uses the "intangibles" of life—hopes, fears, beliefs and dreams—rather than "tangible" aspects of a company's spreadsheet to demonstrate a path to preparing for a better future. Schwartz outlines the "scenaric" approach, giving readers the tools to develop a strategic vision within business. Schwartz describes the new techniques, originally developed within Royal/Dutch Shell, based on many of his first-hand scenario exercises with the world's leading institutions and companies, including the EPA, BellSouth and the International Stock Exchange.

From the publisher:

"Forget number crunching, says our foremost futurist; it's vision that makes things happen—and this guide to his ideas is a vital tool for planners, managers, entrepreneurs, investors, or anyone interested in tomorrow."

RESOURCES PROVIDE RESEARCH, TOOLS

The CPA Vision Project is in full swing with a number of dynamic, timely efforts.

The linchpin of the process is the Future Forums. Currently, state CPA societies are coordinating the participant lists to ensure a demographically sound array of profession-wide voices in the Forums. Starting in September, Forums will be conducted throughout the United States.

At the same time, clients and employers have been contacted by Yankelovich Partners, a leading market and consumer research firm, to discover the forces of change driving the concerns, business and financial strategies, and needs and values of users/employers of CPA services.

Professional market research will determine if a gap exists between the services CPAs are providing today and the services clients/employers would like to receive today and two to three years into the future. These 15- to 20-minute interviews targeted high-income individuals and top management of small businesses.

For more information on the project, CPAs can draw on a variety of printed and electronic communications pieces. *Horizon Perspectives* is a monthly newsletter with news and features for Future Forum participants, AICPA Council and staff, and state CPA societies and related groups. Position papers will be written and produced during fall/winter 1997 that serve as a basis for discussion and commentary. Topics include an examination of how companies have used visioning to affect their bottom line, an analysis of the meaning and value of core competencies, and the importance of technology on the accounting profession.

Perhaps the largest endeavor based on immediate information retrieval is the project's Website, www.cpavision.org. This interactive arena offers a variety of thought-provoking and challenging topics, stories and issues for all CPA Vision audiences. Our intent is to encourage all segments to access the Website rather than depend solely on *Horizon Perspectives* and other printed information.

(continued next page)

BITS AND BYTES

1 Prudential Securities believes in maximizing its investment. The company spends between \$60,000 and \$100,000 for each new trainee and payoffs are huge. Successful trainees who stay with the firm generate an average of \$14.5 million of client assets each.

TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS
FOR BUSINESS AND THE
ACCOUNTING PROFESSION

3 Advertising spending on the Internet

10,000 by the year 2000, and 21,200 by 2010.

is expected to skyrocket from \$301 million in 1996 to an estimated \$7.7 billion in 2002, according to a report from Jupiter Communications.

2 In a recent issue of *Bottom Line* (Sept. 1, 1997), mutual funds expert Sheldon Jacobs predicted that the Dow could reach

CPA VISION PROJECT TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 1997

- More than 160 grassroots Future Forums, professionally facilitated throughout the United States and its territories
- AICPA Leadership and state society Ad Hoc Forums conducted across the country

JANUARY 1998

- National Future Forum conducted in Tucson, AZ

FEBRUARY - MARCH 1998

- All research and forum results consolidated and statement of direction drafted, along with preliminary report
- Validation process begins

MARCH 1998

- Statement of direction and draft Vision Report shared with AICPA Council, state societies and other strategic partners

APRIL – MAY 1998

- Vision report refined, adjusted and presented at AICPA Spring Council meeting

MAY–SEPTEMBER 1998

- Summary, draft report is widely distributed; road shows held and comments solicited

OCTOBER 1998 +

- AICPA Council asked to adopt final vision and statement report
- Report released to CPA profession at-large
- Implementation phase launched, beginning with a new National Professional Strategy Conference

RESOURCES, CONT.

Pathfinder Profiles are real-life, case-study examples of what CPAs in all segments of the CPA profession have done to change the way they do business. Look for a Pathfinder Profile in each issue of *Horizon Perspectives* and visit the Website for expanded and archive profiles.

A full array of video presentations also are beginning to be produced. AICPA Council, state CPA societies and other audiences can stay in touch with periodic updates summarizing the latest news and messages delivered by key groups. A video module series is planned for the National Future Forum in January 1998, followed by a final program, The CPA Shared Vision, in October 1998 that will illustrate, illuminate and celebrate the final Vision Report.

HORIZON PERSPECTIVES BY E-MAIL

Tired of shifting through paper piles? Receive *Horizon Perspectives* electronically next month by providing us with your e-mail address. Access the Website at www.cpavision.org/horizon.htm and give us your request.

Back issues of *Horizon Perspectives* will be available on the Website. Also, we welcome your comments, suggestions and solutions via e-mail at horizon@cpavision.org.



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