

## Voices Four quadrants to master for 2018

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Now is the time of year when many of us sit down to finalize our business plans for 2018 and beyond. Like most professionals, CPAs will say they want to hit X amount of revenue or land X new clients in the coming year. But those numbers are just a byproduct of how you do business and the team you have in place. What you need to figure out is where you really want to be three years from now. What will an ideal day look like for you then and how you're going to get there?

It starts with answering four simple questions:

1. WHY we do it?  
 (i.e. what are our core values? What gets us out of bed every morning?)
2. WHO do we do work with?  
 (i.e. who are our ideal clients?)
3. WHAT do we do for those ideal clients better than anyone else?
4. HOW do we do it?  
 What is our unique process?

As one of my favorite authors, Simon Sinek, likes to say: "Start With Why." He argues that the highest performing organizations start from the inside out. They start with WHY before they figure out HOW they Do it, WHAT they Do and WHO they do it for (see bull's eye in the graphic below).



Simon Sinek's TED talk  
[YouTube](#)

### 1. WHY

The WHY is the lens that helps you understand the reason behind how you operate. First, make sure your employees are aligned with your core values and then make sure your clients are aligned with your core values.

For instance, our firm's core values are: "A commitment to excellence, continuous improvement and having fun." If you don't think the enemy of great is good, or if you don't think you'll be continuously learning, then you'll have a hard time being successful at our firm.

**1. Align your employees.** This helps you confirm whether have the right people on the bus, i.e., the right team in place. Once the core values are established, employees who can't get behind those values 100 percent will eventually leave your firm because they know they won't be successful there.

**2. Align your clients.** Are their core values compatible with your firm's? This helps you filter out prospective clients that aren't a good fit for your firm. In fact, we place our firm's core values front and center in our capabilities deck when we meet with prospective clients. It's very important that they know from Day One what we're all about.

### Real world example

I was out of town recently, and sure enough, we had an issue right after I left with a client who was concerned about his trust documents. No one had followed up with him at our firm or at the estate planning firm we had brought in to help us. When I checked in with our office to find out why, I received an email back from a team member: "Don't Worry. We got this. #Micromanage."

In the old days, I would have flown off the handle with that kind of response, but with our core values and process in place, I keep my cool and said he could joke all he wanted once the problem was resolved—but not before then. I reminded him that having fun is our third core value, not our first. After our talk, the team member responded: "You're right. We'll get it done right now." Sure enough, the issue got taken care of, the client was happy, and the team dug in to the issue to determine how to keep it from happening again (continuous improvement, our second core value). It was a simple realignment of our core values at the firm to make sure we are delivering daily.

## 2. WHO

Who do we work with best? Who are our ideal clients?

Too many CPAs are afraid to turn away business and that's why you'll see dozens and dozens listed on their website under who they "specialize" in serving. You can't be an expert in an industry unless you spend extensive time working with clients in that space and truly understanding their issues. So, they'll keep grinding out hours for clients who aren't an ideal fit for them. They don't create much value for those clients and certainly don't get referrals. There's a better way.

### Identify your five best clients

So, how do you figure out which clients you want to spend the most time working with and who will be most profitable for you and the best source of referrals? Identify three to five clients that you love working with the most:

- Write down their names.
- Describe them.
- Now, read the description of each of those five names. What do they have in common? What do you like about them?

Now, imagine what your day would be like if you only met with those five clients? I bet it would be a lot more enjoyable. Now write down your three to five least favorite clients. I bet it's painful just putting their names on a sheet of paper. Write down all the reasons you dislike working with them. There's a pretty good chance those attributes don't exist in your ideal clients.

Go ahead and fire your least favorite clients, or at least refer them to another firm whose core value and style is more in alignment with theirs. I know many of you hate to turn away revenue, but it will allow you more room to work with your favorite clients.

When I did this exercise for our firm, I discovered that the reason we like working with our five favorite clients is because they are not meddlers. Regardless of their business line, they are "amiable delegators"—nice people who like to have stuff done for them. They do not want to see options. They do not want to see overly detailed pieces. They want the absolute best option and they want you to handle everything. Some CPAs don't want clients like that. They don't want that much responsibility. If they're smart, they'll refer those clients over to us and in turn, we'll gladly refer the Detail Danny's over to them.

## 3. WHAT

Now that you've identified who you really like working with, figure out what those clients really need—even if they don't know themselves. Going back to those favorite clients and see which three to five core services they find most valuable? For instance, quarterly advisory services, business planning, HNW planning, cost segregation or M&A advice, etc.

In our case, we determined that our ideal clients want CFO services. They want somebody at the table who can coordinate with all the expert advisors working on their behalf. We build the stable of experts for our best clients. If a client wants us to know everything there is to know about cost-segregation, we bring in the cost-seg expert to work with our client. We don't pretend to have that level of expertise ourselves. If they need complex trust documents completed, we bring in the estate attorneys, etc.

It's a process we can repeat and perfect for every client situation and it becomes part of our DNA. We don't have to think about it.

## 4. HOW (our core process)

Imagine one of your best clients has brought in a friend who's thinking of working with you. The goal is to say: "We work with people just like you, and here is what we provide." Then they'll probably ask, "Hmm. How do you do that?"

This is where you reply: "We work with clients just like you and here's what we deliver and how we deliver it, so let me walk you through our process for delivering advice and excellence to you." You could add: "The reason we have a process is because without a process, we're going to miss important details. Your life and your business are very important to you. That means they're very important to us and we can't afford to miss any details."

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You could then describe what the onboarding process looks like for a new client over the first 90 days. What are the initial meetings like? How are expectations set over the first 90 days? What's the new client's experience going to be like? What are they feeling and what are you going to deliver to them and when? How often are you going to hear from us?

After the first 90 days, explain how they're going to be shifting to ongoing client mode. How often will you be checking in with them for regular progress meetings to make sure they're on track with the goals you mapped out?

In my next article, we'll explain how this Four Quadrants approach can help you create a culture of accountability at your firm and lay the foundation for a powerful two-page business plan. That's right....a business plan on just two pages that gets referred to again and again. Isn't that better than a three-ring binder gathering dust in the senior partner's book shelf?

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