



Alton Miyashiro, Vicki Shinsato and Dennis Higashiguchi have helped to make N&K CPAs one of Hawaii's Best Places to Work. Higashiguchi says N&K uses the Best Places survey to keep in tune with what employees' "needs are as they change over time."



Positive Returns

How N&K CPAs relies on pleased, productive employees to weather the busy tax season

By Kyle Galdeira

As tax time rolls around each year, certified public accountants shift into overdrive. It's a stressful season, so to help their employees cope, N&K CPAs brings in a massage therapist, provides meals and even holds a fun Stress Release Day.

Executives said these perks help N&K attract and retain good employees. In Hawaii's Best Places to Work survey, it finished fourth highest among medium-size

companies (those with 50 to 149 employees), thanks in part to its high employee response and satisfaction rate. The company says it also provides an exceptional level of training, services and benefits to keep workers happy and productive.

"In terms of the auditing and accounting practice, most firms do it the same way," said managing principal Alton Miyashiro. "But, it's the people behind the process that make the difference. We've invested a lot of time and

PHOTO: OLIVIER KONING

money in cultivating the people part of our practice. We feel that our people are technically competent, they're very customer-service oriented, and those are the things that set us apart from most of the other accounting firms."

Tax season is a hectic time, Miyashiro said, and that's when the company goes the extra mile, bringing in a masseuse, having a dry cleaner pick up from and deliver clothes to the office, bringing in meals and offering other benefits.

"In the middle of tax season, we have what we call Stress Release Day, when we close the office down in the afternoon, despite how busy we may be, and we bring in food and have games where people can just hang out and have fun," he said. "In the past, we've had a casino-themed event where people play games to earn fake money that they can redeem later for prizes."

Employees appreciate the break, so the company plans to continue the special day, he said.

Employees also love the massages, said firm administrator Vicki Shinsato. "Whenever we do surveys, that brings in the highest positive response. We've had very positive comments about all of our activities," she said.

Who They Are

N&K CPAs, which opened in 1973, has 62 employees and two major divisions – tax preparation and auditing services. The company also offers management consulting, which informs other companies about tools for coaching, planning, training, leadership and mentoring.

The recession has helped generate more job inquiries than usual at the firm. "In the past, that's always been a problem, finding good talent out there," Miyashiro said. "Even before the economy went south, we were very fortunate that our investment in our people and our culture

CUT COSTS, NOT PEOPLE.

Turn the Page to find out How



started to pay off. There was a lot more interest, especially from the younger folks, to come and join us.”

The company is in a business where demand for services remains relatively constant, even in a recession.

“The profession is very fortunate because the government requires people to file tax returns, and the financial institutions require businesses to have financial statements done for credit purposes,” Miyashiro said. “That work has remained fairly steady. It’s the special work, like tax and estate planning, that we’ll probably see a drop in demand for. But, that’s not a very large part of our practice.”

“We do see clients telling us that we have to drop our fees, or they want to go from an audit to a less-costly review, which we look at as positive because they’re looking at the bottom line and they’re taking steps to reduce their overhead. Likewise, within our organization, we’ve looked at our expenses and made adjustments accordingly.”

Employees had some concerns about the economy, he said, but they were reassured that overall the firm was fine. “We’ll weather the storm. They shouldn’t have to worry about their jobs or anything. In our 36 years of

business, we’ve never had to lay off anybody because of the slowness in our business, so we’ve been very fortunate. We try to get creative to keep everybody employed as opposed to letting people go.”

Manager of consulting services Dennis Higashiguchi said the company uses the Best Places to Work survey to maintain and improve employee satisfaction. “It keeps us in tune with what people’s needs are as they change over time.

“Now that we’ve been part of [Best Places to Work] for four years now, it’s given us a good tract of data that can tell us how we’re doing when we try to improve, and where else we need to go to improve.”

One of the company’s tools is N&K Academy: educational programs on everything from accounting practices to customer service, mentoring and coaching, and even etiquette for both professional and personal life.

“We’ve tried to maintain a situation where we retain the people that work here, and as a result of that, the younger folks have stayed and gotten a lot smarter, and the firm’s gotten smarter,” Higashiguchi said. “We’re now in a position where we’re trying to take learning to a whole new level, both in terms of what we teach, and how.” ■

KEEP YOUR EMPLOYEES AND THEIR HEALTH-CARE WITH ACCESS TO A QUALITY EASY CARE PLAN FOR LESS THAN \$10 A MONTH.

dontcutpeople.com