Wellness for Public Accountants

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by

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Abstract

The work environment at a Big Four public accounting firm includes a grueling work schedule and eating habits that are often far from nutritional. Additionally, leading an unhealthy lifestyle can be costly and can cause a wide-multitude of medical conditions. Therefore, it is important to address wellness issues for public accountants and how these professionals can improve their lifestyle. There are five essential elements individual accountants must consider to improve wellness. These elements are career, social, financial, physical, and community. Despite the demanding work environment experienced in public accounting, it is possible to take action towards wellness-related goals. This could include improving interactions with co-workers, enjoying one’s career, lessening financial burdens, eating healthier, and getting more involved in the community.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 4
Accountants ........................................................................................................................................... 4

*The Work life of a Public Accountant* ................................................................................................. 4

*Personality Traits of Public Accountants* ......................................................................................... 6

*Negative Consequences of an Accountant's Personality Traits & Work life* ................................. 7

Discussion on the Importance of Wellness ......................................................................................... 8

An Understanding of the Big 4 Accounting Firms’ steps towards Wellness .................................. 14

Ernst & Young ...................................................................................................................................... 15
KPMG .................................................................................................................................................. 15
PriceWaterhouseCoopers ............................................................................................................. 16
Deloitte ............................................................................................................................................... 16

5 Essential Elements of Wellbeing ..................................................................................................... 18

1. *Career* ........................................................................................................................................... 19
2. *Social* ........................................................................................................................................... 20
3. *Financial* ..................................................................................................................................... 21
4. *Physical* ....................................................................................................................................... 22
5. *Community* ................................................................................................................................. 23

Discussion & Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 25

What an Individual can do about it ...................................................................................................... 25

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 28

References........................................................................................................................................... 30
Introduction

Based on the experiences I had at Ernst & Young, I realized how important wellness was to managers within the firm. Their leadership and success was in part due to their commitment to be mindful of their health. Although I considered this to be very inspiring, I soon realized how difficult wellness can be for public accountants. Wellness conflicts in so many ways with the work life of an accountant. Although this is true there is a strong economic argument to make a commitment to wellness as well as an argument to improve one’s quality of life. In order to make a commitment to wellness, one needs to understand the components of wellbeing. The dimensions of wellbeing accountants should consider are career, social, financial, physical, and community. In respect to these dimensions, individual accountants have the chance to make improvements in their lives to better their overall health.

Accountants

The Work life of a Public Accountant

In order to understand the balance between a career and the other elements of wellness, it is important to understand the work life of a public accountant. Certified Public Accountants or CPAs experience time constraints, extensive travel, and regular performance reviews. The work is seasonal in nature and many experience stress related to job functions. The turnover in this line of work is generally high, and many public accountants become burnout or overworked. CPAs either work in tax, audit, or advisory service lines which generally can cause slight deviations in work experiences. For the most part though, public accountants have similar experiences regardless of service line.
Public accountants have a peak season generally referred to as “busy season”, which occurs from January to April. During this time it is not uncommon for accountants to work 55 to 70 hours a week. This generally is comprised of four 12 hour days Monday through Thursday and the remainder of hours occurring on Friday and Saturday. During this time, it is mandatory for most firms to have employees work Saturdays and a minimum of 55 hours. Lunch and dinner are typically consumed at the accountant’s desk or dinner may be taken after work is completed for the day. Working this many hours with the same people can create an undesirable work atmosphere as many accountants are stressed during this time. From my experience though, everyone tried to remain upbeat and positive.

It is easy to see from the above description, free time is very limited during busy season. Accountants lack sufficient time for interaction with family members or friends or considerable time for physical activity. This does not even take into consideration the travel requirements for public accountants. During my internship I traveled for eight weeks straight to cities such as Chicago, West Lafayette (IN), Evansville (IN), and Shelbyville (IN). Some of my other co-workers traveled as far as Atlanta, Boston, and Colorado. The local travel proved to be more challenging because the winter months, January through March, bring about ice and snowy road conditions. Traveling sometimes meant limited access to fitness equipment and nearly all meals were eaten out. These challenges just further add to the complications of busy season.

Along with these pressures, CPAs must worry about regular performance reviews and are generally eligible for promotion every year for the first five years with a firm. This means constantly taking on new responsibilities and learning the business operations for new clients. Also, the public trusts that auditors are sufficiently reviewing clients’ financial statements, so there is pressure to find all material misstatements and failing internal controls. This pressure is
far greater for firm partners, but this obligation affects all employees. Other professions may experience similar pressure and some professions far greater duress, but it is still necessary to have an understanding of the work experiences of busy season.

Although these are the pitfalls to public accounting that make wellness difficult, there are some advantages that make wellness an obtainable goal for CPAs. First, it is important to consider busy season is only temporary and the rest of the year consists of more stable work weeks. Although auditors may travel a lot still, work weeks are shorter leaving more time for physical activity and fewer meals at the office or client site. Most firms work with individuals for doctor appointments and allow for more flexible hours provided they work a required number of hours in a week while completing all their work. This allows accountants to have fewer difficulties making doctor appointments and taking time for their health. Also, entry-level accountants generally have 15-20 vacation days per year and 10 paid holidays. Time off can be a great way to refresh ones mental state and take time to accomplish other goals outside of work. More so, some public accounting firms are incorporating wellness programs into the work life of their employees.

The challenges to working as a CPA can make wellness more difficult, so it makes understanding the significance of wellness that much more important. It is evident busy season, dining out, traveling, and work-related stress are not helpful factors, but accountants can still make time for wellness. The remainder of the year outside of busy season and the flexibility of the employer help to make this slightly more obtainable, even if the work life is not ideal.

**Personality Traits of Public Accountants**

Another important factor to consider when determining the need and importance for public accountant’s wellbeing is the personality traits of CPAs. Public accountants are unique in a multitude of ways, just as teachers would have some similar attributes. Public accountants
generally exhibit a Type-A behavior making them very practical and logical. CPAs are also more motivated by deadlines and have a strong work ethic. These qualities are often necessary to achieve career satisfaction and to perform well on the job. While these attributes may be beneficial for career performance, these qualities can sometimes lead to negative outcomes.

Accountants are often considered to exhibit Type A behavior pattern. “The Type A behavior pattern (TABP) is defined as an action-emotion complex stimulated by certain environmental events. It is characterized by traits such as impatience, aggressiveness, a sense of time urgency, and the desire to achieve recognition and advancement” (Type A Behavior). This competitive nature can be a good for accountants to exhibit because it allows public accountants to excel at their job. Since there are a lot of deadlines in accounting, it is important to work aggressively and with a sense of time urgency. Adversely these qualities can have a negative impact on an accountant’s health and wellbeing.

**Negative Consequences of an Accountant’s Personality Traits & Work life**

This type of personality behavior can often led to unpleasant health consequences and can increase an individual’s stress level. This increased stress level has been linked to heart disease, facial tension, teeth clenching, and rapid speech (Type A Behavior). Aside from the Type A behavior pattern commonly exhibited by accountants, purely being overworked and exhausted can led to other unfortunate side effects. “Some of the serious, long-term effects of working too hard can include headaches, sleep deprivation and high blood pressure. Over long periods of time, these things can lead to other, worse conditions such as cardiovascular disease and even heart attacks or stroke” (Colia, 2009). These physical conditions take a toll on an individual’s health and generally people do not realize these symptoms are creeping up on them. Even more of an issue is that people with Type A personality behavior are more likely to ignore these symptoms of exhaustion as a part of their eagerness to work diligently (Colia, 2009).]
Although these are the negative consequences experienced by accountants due to their work life and personality, there is a positive side to this reality. Accountants are logical, practical individuals that will generally make time for things provided it can be proven to be in their best interest. If accountants are better educated on the long term consequences of their unhealthy behavior, they might be more likely to change for the future. Public accountants need to understand the costs of not continuously striving for personal wellbeing and also logical ways to solve the problems of wellness-related issues. When people fully understand the benefit on making changes and how to make those lifestyle changes, it is more likely they will change their attitude and actions towards wellness.

**Discussion on the Importance of Wellness**

Aside from the fact wellness should matter to the individual accountant because it is the healthier option and better for one’s physique, there is also an economic argument for wellbeing. The simple economic argument for wellness in that leading an unhealthy lifestyle *costs* more. Despite the short term expenses for wellness that may include an increase in food expenses, gym memberships, and time lost devoted to wellness-related activities, the long term costs are far greater. There are three main causes for the increase in medical costs that are mainly preventable. These causes are physical inactivity, obesity, and smoking. All of these causes have both direct and indirect costs related to them. These costs are not only to the individual, but have a major impact on businesses as well. One way society can address these issues is to focus on prevention instead of treatment. First, it is important to discuss the three main causes in detail.

The first lifestyle behavior that can cause increased financial burden is physical inactivity. Seventy percent of adults do not get the recommended amount of physical activity and
37% report that they are not physically active at all (Hunnicutt, 2011). “According to nationally renowned exercise scientist Dr. Steve Blair, physical inactivity and low fitness is perhaps the most important predictor of morbidity and mortality that we know of. Low fitness accounts for more sickness and deaths in the population than anything else that we’ve studied” (Hunnicutt, 2011). Although many people may believe physical activity is not necessary as long as they are not overweight, there is a strong argument that physical activity is necessary for all people. The need for physical activity is often underestimated, but everyone needs to make physical activity a priority in their life. This is especially true for accountants since they spend much of their day stationary.

Obesity is a disease that can be expensive to an individual and is unfortunately very common in the United States. As of 2008, 33.9% of adults 20 years and older were considered obese and an additional 34.4% were considered overweight (Obesity and Overweight, 2011). “America’s obesity rate is the worst in the world and is almost universally believed to be a major predictor of future illness, particularly diseases that are most difficult and costly to manage; diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer” (Hunnicutt, 2011). Although the number of accountants that are considered obese is unknown, the condition is common enough that it is occurring in the accounting profession. Nearly two-thirds of society is considered obese or overweight, which is a clear majority and a problem that needs to be addressed. Therefore, society needs to consider the implications of the disease and how to prevent it.

Obesity is linked to several medical conditions that range from harmful to completely detrimental to one’s health. It can be linked to serious conditions such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, age-related dementia, and osteoarthritis (Hunnicutt, 2011). Unfortunately, cancer is also linked to obesity. Colorectal and uterine cancers are so strongly correlated with
obesity such that obesity is considered to be the greatest risk factor for the cancers. Also, for
women who after the age of 18 gain at least 45 pounds they are more than twice as likely to
develop breast cancer. Obesity is also linked to cardiovascular disease because obese people are
more likely to have high blood pressure. (Hunnicutt, 2011) Overall, it is clear that obesity is
either linked to or directly causes a number of medical conditions that are both harmful to one’s
health and expensive.

Physical inactivity and obesity have similar direct and indirect costs associated with
them. Obesity costs $109.8 billion annually, while physical inactivity costs $201 billion
(Hunnicutt, 2011). Although these are aggregate total costs for unhealthy lifestyle behaviors,
they have a bearing on the individual. These expenses increase medical costs, which in turn
increases medical insurance premiums for all health care participants. “The annual premium in
2008 for an employer-sponsored health plan covering a family of four averaged $12,500—about
as much as an entire years pay for a person working at minimum wage” (Hunnicutt, 2011). This
cost is extremely distorted compared to what individual’s pay for necessity goods and other basic
needs. Not only is this cost unmanageable for many families, it is expected to continue to rise. In
the next seven to nine years a family of four could spend around $64,000 for healthcare annually
(Hunnicutt, 2011).

Aside from healthcare expenses, individuals also have other medical expenses to
consider. “An estimated 81 percent of all American’s now take at least one prescription
medication every day—the average prescription now costs $70” (Hunnicutt, 2011). Although
insurance may cover part or all of this prescription expense, many individuals are responsible for
part of this expense or all of this expense if they do not have health insurance. These general
medical expenses as well as health insurance premiums can add up when an individual leads an unhealthy lifestyle.

These medical expenses and bills can have a lasting impact on a family. It is estimated that 1.5 million families lose their homes annually and medical bills attribute at least partly to this occurrence (Hunnicutt, 2011). Most people would not expect to lose their home in part due to medical bills as it is difficult to plan for unforeseen medical issues. The possibility for large medical expenses only increases when individuals do not live a healthy lifestyle whether it be from physical inactivity or obesity.

There are also indirect costs resulting from leading an unhealthy lifestyle which mainly relate to productivity loss at work. This includes time spent away from work in the form of absences and short and long-term disability. There is also presenteeism which relates to time lost while at work due to health issues affecting ones job performance and ability to complete work-related tasks (Edington, 2009). This can have an impact on the salary or hourly wage one receives from working. For example, if one experiences a lot of absences as a result of a medical condition he or she will not make as much money as anticipated. This could impact the individual’s ability to pay living expenses, rent or mortgage payments, or other bills the individual normally is responsible to pay. Physical inactivity and obesity truly have the potential to negatively impact one’s ability to stay current with one’s life expenses.

Smoking is another cause of multiple medical conditions that are unhealthy and costly to an individual. In 2010, 19.3% of adults or 45.3 million people are currently smokers (Smoking and Tobacco Use, 2012). This is the equivalent to almost 1 in 5 people are smokers in the United States. Ironically, many of these individuals would prefer that they were no longer smokers and have made efforts to quit. About 52% of smokers tried to quit in 2010, while 69% want to quit
completely (Smoking and Tobacco Use, 2012). Although there is support for smokers to quit smoking, it is not an easy thing to do and is much easier for people to just never start the bad habit. This is especially true for individuals who are under a lot of stress and use tobacco as a coping mechanism, such as an accountant might. Since many people are unable to quit smoking, they suffer from a wide variety of health conditions. Smoking has been known to cause cancer, heart disease, stroke, and multiple types of lung disease including bronchitis and emphysema. “In the United States, tobacco use is responsible for about one in five deaths annually (i.e., about 443,000 deaths per year, and an estimated 49,000 of these smoking-related deaths are the result of secondhand smoke exposure)” (Smoking and Tobacco Use, 2012). Consequentially, the potential year’s loss for a smoker would equal to 13 or 14 years versus a nonsmoker. Aside from the fact people generally do not want to die 13 or 14 years sooner, it results in productivity loss and medical expenses related to attempting to treat medical conditions related to smoking.

The economics of smoking are very astonishing since people in essence pay to have their lives shortened and for future medical expenses. “The total economic costs (direct medical costs and lost productivity) associated with cigarette smoking are estimated at $10.47 per pack of cigarettes sold in the United States” (Smoking and Tobacco Use, 2012). Since some individuals smoke a pack of cigarettes a day, this can be expensive habit to an individual. The total costs related to tobacco smoking are also a major economic concern. “During 2000–2004, cigarette smoking was estimated to be responsible for $193 billion in annual health-related economic losses in the United States ($96 billion in direct medical costs and approximately $97 billion in lost productivity)” (Smoking and Tobacco Use, 2012). Direct medical costs and lost productivity are harmful both to the individual and to the employer. There is certainly an
economic argument for accountants to be nonsmokers in order to save themselves and their employer financially.

In general the Center for Disease Control (CDC) offers four guidelines to avoid these economic costs to living an unhealthy lifestyle. These guidelines are: don’t smoke, eat an all-natural diet, keep your BMI below 30, and exercise 3-1/2 hours per week (Yarn, 2011). These are fairly basic recommendations that can be applied to all accountants as it is possible to follow these suggestions. The CDC cautions that not following these rules can lead to multiple diseases, diabetes and cancer. As previously stated, the costs of these medical conditions can add up. The George Washington University School of Public Health and The United States Health Services’ Department of Health Policy recently released a report titled “A Heavy Burden” which used a series of measures to evaluate the cost of leading an unhealthy lifestyle. “The report found that men and women not leading a healthy lifestyle spend $2,646 and $4,879, respectively, more per year than those that follow the CDC guidelines outline above. When adding the value of lost life, those figures rise to $8,365 for women and $6,518 for men not living a healthy lifestyle” (Yarn, 2011). This is a significant cost to an individual which if people were more aware of this financial burden, they may be more likely to make some impactful changes.

Although the primary focus should be steps an individual accountant can take to improve wellness, there is a cost to businesses that should be considered. “Recently, Starbuck’s chairman noted that his company spends $200million per year on insurance for its employees—more than the company spends on coffee” (Hunnicutt, 2011). This demonstrates that healthcare is a significant expense to businesses. Businesses may be inclined to attempt to cut corners on healthcare in order to reduce the overall expense and often this means cutting wellness programs.
While this may cut their healthcare expenses in the short term, these businesses should consider the long-term implications as well.

The impact of wellness relates to the debated balance between healthcare spending allocated between prevention and treatment. “According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, about 95 cents of every dollar we spend on healthcare is the US is spent on treatment, 5 cents on prevention” (Edington, 2011). Based on this information, it is evident healthcare spending is far more related to treatment rather than prevention. Wellness programs would generally fall under the category of prevention and could potentially reduce treatment spending. Prevention is more about investing in an individual’s current health to avoid future expenses that would have been incurred had the money not been invested early on. Some people believe if something is not currently a problem, then it does not need to be addressed. This theory is short sighted and lacks understanding of long-term consequences.

Accountants need to understand the costs associated with living an unhealthy lifestyle, so that they are more inclined to make changes. Individuals will not address their obesity issue if they do not know it is harmful. This could not be truer when realizing the economic costs of wellness. Accountants are “number people” and would be more likely to react to the economic argument for wellness. This is true for the individual accountant and the firms accountants work for. Although society more so understands the economics of wellness, these arguments should be continuously researched and promoted to accountants.

**An Understanding of the Big 4 Accounting Firms’ steps towards Wellness**

To understand some of the differences in firm wellness program, the actions of the Big Four will be discussed in terms of the five dimensions of wellness (career, social, financial,
physical, community). As these companies are all accounting firms of similar size and nature, career satisfaction should be equivalent. All are recognized for having superior training, inclusive culture, diverse workforce, and commitment to developing each employee’s individual career path. All of the Big Four accounting firms are ranked in Fortune’s Top 100 Companies to Work For and DiversityInc’s Top 50 Companies For Diversity (2012). Therefore, the alikeness in career satisfaction proves career wellbeing is not essential to this analysis. Aside from this, professionals that have chosen accounting as their career field hopefully enjoy the work they do on a regularly basis. Therefore each firm will be compared in terms of social, financial, physical, and community wellbeing.

**Ernst & Young**

Ernst & Young offers programs that support almost all components of wellbeing. Ernst & Young is committed to encouraging the employees to participate in community activities, which improves community wellbeing. EY Connect day is a company-wide day devoted to volunteer efforts; such community event days are common at other accounting firms. Ernst & Young also provides access to financial planners for personal financial planning at no additional cost which helps employees improve their financial wellbeing. As a far as social wellbeing, Ernst & Young offers an inclusive culture that encourages employees to build professional relationships within the office and in all offices worldwide. The area in which Ernst & Young lacks wellbeing support is physical wellbeing. The company does not offer incentives for physical activity or living a healthy lifestyle like other firms do. (Life at Ernst & Young)

**KPMG**

KPMG also participates in community service as their employees supported 120 not-for-profits in 2011. The company offers more programs directly related to wellness initiatives compared to Ernst & Young. KPMG participates in the LifeWorks® Program to provide
information about well-being. The company also has Simple Steps to a Healthier Life which is an online service to be used as a health education resource. Also to address physical wellbeing, the company has a discounted Weightwatchers program to encourage employees to achieve or maintain a healthy weight. (Who we are)

**PriceWaterhouseCoopers**

PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) is another participant of the LifeWorks® Program designed for employees to deal with life problems. PwC also has a Well-Being Rewards Program that offers financial incentives for participating in a wide range of healthy and responsible behaviors and activities. Examples of activities that are rewarded include yoga, running, weight lifting, volunteering which allows employees to redeem points for gift cards. This is a great way to incentivize employees to participate in physical wellbeing. PwC also offers opportunities to improve financial wellbeing. The firm has a Wells Fargo mortgage program and a Retirement Wealth Builder Plan. Also the company is committed to community wellbeing as well. One hundred percent of their employees give back to the community either with their time or financially. This is very impressive and may leave employees feeling more engaged in the community that they live and work in. (Careers at PwC: A Network for Your Life)

**Deloitte**

Deloitte, the final of the Big Four firms, potentially offers the greatest number of opportunities for wellness. Deloitte has the most tangible and recognizable physical wellbeing initiatives. For example, Deloitte has The National Health & Fitness Program, which offers employees numerous health-related incentives. "The National Health & Fitness Program is a long-term investment in our people. Deloitte is committed to helping our professionals lead
healthy lifestyles. After all, healthy people are happier and more productive professionals.” (Life at Deloitte). This program includes discounted rates at national gyms, discounted rates for purchasing fitness equipment, annual health fairs at every office, monthly e-newsletters with tips to living a healthy lifestyle, and healthier vending machine options. The program also has a Health & Fitness team with 12 certified fitness professionals available to address fitness concerns. As a result of these initiatives, Deloitte has been named a Gold Level recipient of the American Heart Association’s Start! Fit-Friendly Companies recognition program from 2007-2009. This distinguishes Deloitte as a company committed to wellness. (Life at Deloitte)

Aside from physical wellbeing, Deloitte also has programs related to the other areas of wellbeing. The company offers a tuition assistance program, mortgage assistance program, and a discount purchase program which are all helpful in improving financial wellbeing. Deloitte also offers multiple opportunities to build one’s social network at work. Programs such as the International Network and Black Employee Network are designed for those purposes. Deloitte also has an annual IMPACT day, which provides employees with the opportunity to volunteer in the community. This type of involvement improves an individual’s community wellbeing. (Life at Deloitte)

It is clear firms are implementing wellness programs and moving in the right direction, but some firms are doing more than others. Based on the information from the websites, Ernst & Young seems to be making the smallest commitment to wellness. Deloitte and PriceWaterhouseCoopers both appear fairly committed to wellness and address the importance of wellness on their websites. Although these types of programs make it easier for accountants to improve individual wellbeing, these accounting firms need to be doing more. For example, the firms need to provide more support for traveling and eating out during busy season. This is
undoubtedly a concern for public accountants, so it should be addressed. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind how difficult it can be to implement a wellness program. Wellness naturally contradicts with work life of accountants, so a lot of this is easier said than done.

5 Essential Elements of Wellbeing
Wellbeing encompasses so many aspects of our lives and can have a tremendous impact on our quality of life. Our society now recognizes there is more to health than eating habits and exercise, but multiple areas that we need to focus on to feel well. “Contrary to what many people believe, wellbeing isn’t just about being happy. Nor is it only about being wealthy or successful. And it’s certainly not limited to physical health and wellness. In fact, focusing on any of these elements in isolation could drive us to feelings of frustration and even failure” (Rath, 2010). The key to wellness is balancing all aspects of wellbeing and understanding the relationship between the areas.

Success in all areas of wellbeing is critical to an individual’s wellbeing. “While 66% of people are doing well in at least one of these areas, just 7% are thriving in all five” (Rath, 2010) It is easy to focus on thriving at your job and career advancement, but this often leads to us neglecting the other areas of our lives. As commonly expressed, too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. This is also true for our outlook on wellbeing. We have to be able to work on improving our actions in all areas of wellbeing and not let short-term decisions prevail in determining what is best for us in the long run.

The five elements of wellbeing are career, social, financial, physical, and community. Although each of these areas will be discussed in detail, it is important to have a broad understanding of each area. Career wellbeing encompasses how you spend the majority of your time each day and liking what you do each day. Social wellbeing is about the relationships in
your life. The third element is financial wellbeing which includes managing your money and economic situation. Physical wellbeing deals with having good health. The final element is community wellbeing and it encompasses being engaged in the area you live in. All of these elements together make up our total wellbeing and our important to our lifestyle in many ways.

1. Career

Although it is natural to associate career wellbeing with work or an individual’s job, career wellbeing encompasses more than that. When evaluating career wellbeing, one needs to ask a simple question. “Do you like what you do each day?” If the answer to this question is yes, then generally your career wellbeing is high. Career wellbeing means doing something you enjoy which is not necessarily your job. It is about having an outside interest in what you do. This area of wellness is about enjoying weekdays as much as weekends. Ironically the person we least enjoy being around is our boss, which was found accordance to a time use study. Also enjoying what one does each day can lower the risk for anxiety and depression. Career wellbeing better relates to how an individual spends their time each day. For an accountant, the majority of their weekday will be spent at work, so it is important they have an outside interest in business and enjoy accounting. (Rath, 2010)

A few recommendations can be made in regards to career wellbeing (see Figure 1). The first recommendation is to use your strengths every day. If you are good at doing something generally there is a lot of personal satisfaction in performing those tasks. The second piece of advice is to determine an individual with common goals as you and spend more time with this person. In theory, you will be able to motivate each other to achieve goals and learn from the other person’s experiences. The final recommendation is to opt for more social time with the people you enjoy being around at work. Having good relationships with people at work can be
beneficial and improve the quality of time spent with these people. Conveniently, all of the Big 4 offer groups and organizations to promote social time with co-workers. (Rath, 2010)

2. Social

Social wellbeing is the next aspect of wellbeing which includes all interactions with another person. “Scientists are discovering how relationships shape our expectations, desires, and goals. Emotions spread quickly from one person to the next. When you seed a friend who is happy, this often causes you to smile, and as a result, you feel better” (Rath, 2010). The common theme surrounding social wellbeing is surrounding yourself with good people so that you are a better person. Sometimes it is easy to overlook the “Debbie downers” in life, but people need to recognize who these individuals are and consider spending less time with them. There is a concept of secondhand happiness and obesity. Basically, it is easy to pick up on an individual’s good and bad habits. (Rath, 2010)

A few recommendations can be made to improve an individual’s social wellbeing (see Figure 1). The first is to spend six hours a day socializing with friends, family, and colleagues. This may sound like a large portion of the day but this includes all social communication at work. When viewed this way, it is possible for an accountant to have six hours of social communication daily. The second recommendation entails strengthening one’s network. As accountants are members of the business world, networking is a concept continuously encouraged and should therefore be a priority anyways. The third suggestion is to mix social time with physical activity. This really is a great way to multitask social and physical wellbeing, which is great for an accountant that is short on time. Exercise is difficult to make time for, but may be easier with the help of a companion. (Rath, 2010)
3. **Financial**

Financial wellbeing applies differently to accountants than it might to other individuals since accountants are generally more financially literate. Although people generally assert money does not buy happiness, research suggests that is does. People of wealthier countries generally have a better chance of having a good life and higher wellbeing. Although wealth provides a better opportunity for happiness, one should consider their debt load into this equation. High levels of debt tend to make people worry, which is not in their best interest. Accountants are generally prudent investors and more likely to save money, which can be beneficial to financial wellbeing. Many people are not rational when they spend money, which can have a negative impact on financial wellbeing. Fortunately, accountants are more likely to make rational spending decisions but it does not mean accountants are immune to irrational spending behavior. (Rath, 2010)

Financial wellbeing can be improved not merely by how much money we have to spend, but by improving how we spend the money we have (see Figure 1). There are three fairly simple recommendations made when it comes to financial wellbeing. The first recommendation is buy experiences rather than consumable or unnecessary goods. For example, one will find more satisfaction from a vacation or outing with friends than purchasing a good that provides them with no useful value. The next suggestion is to spend money on others and not solely on material possessions. It is a common belief that it is better to give than receive and there is actual truth in this. People may feel more satisfaction from this and improve their wellbeing by spending on others. The final is to establish default systems to lessen daily worry about money. This includes automatic payments as well as automatically depositing money into a savings account. Although this is a good idea, it is important to pay attention to deposits and withdrawals from one’s bank account as it may be possible to cancel frivolous expenses when they are no longer necessary.
Also, it is more financially responsible to understand the state of your bank account. (Rath, 2010)

4. Physical

Physical wellbeing is an extremely important focus to the argument for public accountant wellness. Since most of the economic arguments focus on improving one’s physical wellbeing, it is an important piece to one’s overall wellbeing. “With every bite and drink we take, we make a choice: We can select something that is a net positive and benefits our health or we can choose something that is net negative” (Rath 2010). When put into terms like that, it seems simple to positively influence one’s individual physical wellbeing. Unfortunately, it can be challenging to make net positive healthy decisions. The reason why people make net negative decisions is because they think about the short-term gratification rather than the long-term consequences. For example, eating fried food may sound like a tasty meal choose but people do not assess the fact it will increase their risk of having heart attack. This is what people need to think about to make good decisions for physical wellbeing. (Rath, 2010)

There are also two other components to physical wellbeing that accountants should consider. These components are physical activity and sleep. Most people do not get enough physical exercise, which has an effect on our mood and overall health. Even small amounts of exercise can improve our mood and energy levels. Sleep is also another important physical factor to consider and potentially very difficult for public accountants. Getting adequate sleep at night allows our body to recharge and rejuvenate after a long day. Also, people need to make sure they are getting quality sleep and to remember sleep is incredibly important for brain development. (Rath 2010).

Although there are many recommendations to improve physical wellbeing, Rath focuses on three main points (see Figure 1). The first recommendation is to strive for at least 20 minutes
of physical activity each day. Although accountants are very busy, twenty minutes is a fairly minimal daily commitment that can have a big impact on wellbeing. The next suggestion is to sleep enough to feel well-rested. This varies from person to person but is generally around seven to eight hours a night. This may be the most challenging step to physical wellbeing, but should be obtainable nightly for the exception of busy season. The final recommendation is to set positive defaults when shopping for groceries. In other words, plan on buying natural foods and healthier items to avoid making poor decisions. This is certainly possible when accountants are shopping for groceries, but slightly more difficult when eating meals out. ( Rath, 2010)

5. Community
The final dimension to wellbeing is community wellbeing, which is a component not typically considered in the realm of wellness. Community wellbeing includes basic conditions such as the quality or water and air, and also includes safety. If one feels safe in their environment, their community wellbeing will generally be higher. Community wellbeing also includes how well you fit in with your community and how involved you are in the community. People are happier when they are connected to their community and enjoy the people they live around. There is a lot of satisfaction in being a part of the community and feeling a sense of belonging with your local community. Fortunately, all of the Big Four accounting firms encourage community involvement. This includes community service and serving on various boards in the community. ( Rath, 2010)

There are a few recommendations to boost community wellbeing, which are fairly easy to apply (see Figure 1). The first involves aligning your personal mission with serving your community. For an accountant they might wish to further their knowledge of not-for-profits and voluntarily offer to help with accounting services for these organizations. The next suggestion is to tell people what you are passionate about so they connect you with groups of people that have
similar interests. By spreading the word about your interests it is more likely you will get to work with a group you enjoy and is comprised of people with similar passions. The third is to opt in to a community group or event. Sometimes it is easy to make excuses or claim to not have time for a community group, but there are benefits to taking advantage of those opportunities. Being involved in the community improves one’s network and can truly be beneficial to one’s wellbeing.

The concluding argument for wellbeing is to consider not only the material outputs on one’s life or the immediate gratifications in life, but to consider the quality of life. It is far easier for an accountant to barrel through a work assignment and skip a workout or a few hours of sleep, but we need to consider the lasting effects on our health. People generally function better when they feel balanced and happy, so individuals need to consider all aspects of wellbeing. Career, social, financial, physical, and community wellbeing all affect our health and we need to evaluate all these aspects of our lives. Also, these components often overlap and intertwine, so we should also take a holistic approach to determining our wellbeing. Basically wellness is important and something accountants need to take seriously if they wish to live a long, happy life.
**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Recommendations from Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career Wellbeing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Every day, use your strengths.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Identify someone with a shared mission who encourages your growth. Spend more time with this person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Opt into more social time with the people and teams you enjoy being around at work.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Wellbeing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Spend six hours a day socializing with friends, family, and colleagues (this time includes work, home, phone, e-mail, and other communication).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Strengthen the mutual connections in your network.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Mix social time with physical activity. For example, take a long walk with a friend so you can motivate each other to be healthy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Wellbeing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Buy experiences—such as vacations and outings with friends or loved ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spend on others instead of solely on material possessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Establish default systems (automated payments and savings) that lessen daily worry about money.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Wellbeing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity each day—ideally in the morning to improve your mood throughout the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Sleep enough to feel well-rested (generally seven to eight) but not too long (more than nine hours).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Set positive defaults when you shop for groceries. Load up on natural foods that are red, green, and blue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Wellbeing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify how you can contribute to your community based on your personal mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Tell people about your passions and interests so they can connect you with relevant groups and causes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Opt into a community group or event. Even if you start small, start now.</td>
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</tbody>
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**Discussion & Conclusion**

**What an Individual can do about it**

As described by Figure 1, individuals can take simple steps to make significant strides towards wellness. These recommendations should be deliberated by public accountants if they so choose to lead a healthy lifestyle. Also, accountants must take action to avoid common obstacles individuals often face by following the recommendations in Figure 2. This includes...
recommendations an individual can take to eat healthy with a busy schedule, sleep v. exercise, and sitting at your desk for extended hours. These are all common problems accountants face with a few recommendations to address each problem. The important concept is to take these recommendations and apply them to an individual’s life.

Wellness can only be addressed if individuals make the necessary steps to improve wellness-related behaviors. Society needs to change its viewpoint of health-related goals, so the individual believes these goals are obtainable. Currently, many view wellness goals as overwhelming, but people need to change their attitude towards wellness. The first change that must occur is people need to think of health as energy and vitality and not the absence of disease. Also, people need to embrace the mentality of improving one’s health not stop is from getting worse. Health is more about making lifestyle improvements and seeing positive results rather than not getting worse. (Edington, 2009)

Although these are steps an individual can take to improve their mindset, society needs to consider changes in the workplace environment. The workplace environment has a major impact of one’s ability to achieve wellness goals. Accountants should consider the wellness programs at their firm and potentially consider encouraging their employer to institute wellness programs. It may be beneficial to make the argument these programs can save the employer money in the long run. Accounting firms need to really consider the health of their employees as it could have an impact on their business.
Figure 2 – Common Wellness Obstacles a Public Accountant may Encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Obstacles</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating Healthy with a Busy Schedule</td>
<td>Get to know your Grocery Store by sticking to the perimeter of the store (where the healthy food is located)</td>
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<td>Sleep v. Exercise</td>
<td>Make workouts shorter by working harder during your workout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sitting at your Desk for Extended Hours</td>
<td>A standing workstation may improve concentration</td>
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</table>

Conclusion

Individuals really have an opportunity to make decisions that can have a positive impact on wellness. By viewing wellness in terms of the five essential elements of wellbeing; career, social, financial, physical, and community, accountants have an opportunity to achieve overall wellbeing. Key points to take away about wellness relate to all five essential elements of wellbeing. For career wellbeing, individuals must keep in mind career wellbeing encompasses what you do each day and therefore, you should use your strengths every day. Social wellbeing can fundamentally improve if accountants have adequate social time of six hours daily. Since accountants should possess the necessary skills for financial wellbeing, this is not a major concern for the health of accountants. Adversely, physical wellbeing is extremely important for accountants to address. Public accountants should address this element by getting sufficient physical exercise, eating healthy foods, and getting enough sleep. Finally, community wellbeing should be improved by joining a community group or event.

As indicated, the Big Four public accounting firms are taking steps to improving wellness, but it is clear that more needs to be done for accountants to truly maximize their personal wellbeing. These firms should take into consideration it is their best interest to promote wellness programs. For example, Deloitte mentioned that wellness makes for happy employees and happy employees are more productive. The other three firms should take this into consideration. Additionally, there is a strong economic argument that should be kept in mind in terms of wellbeing. Preventive treatment can eliminate direct and indirect costs related to leading an unhealthy lifestyle.

In general, accountants have the personality type and ability to reach wellness goals. Although their Type A Behavior pattern can led to unhealthy consequences, it can also make it
possible for them to commit to wellness goals. Despite the challenging work environment these professionals face, they have the ability to overcome these barriers. A few changes must be made from an individual standpoint and the employer in order for wellness to be achieved, but this is not an unobtainable goal. Accountants are committed individuals that can make better wellness decisions with more information, experience, and support to take more action towards leading a healthy life.
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