

Fueling Success: The Motivational Mindset Every CPA Needs



Whether you're just beginning your CPA journey or are already on top of your field, motivation is the engine that propels long term success. The need to strive for something, the drive for betterment is fundamental to human nature. Achieving a CPA designation is no easy task, and shows an incredible amount of hard work and commitment.

Yet technical ability alone doesn't explain why some professionals advance into leadership roles, build thriving advisory practices, or become trusted strategic partners to executive teams.

What keeps you moving forward involves a number of factors but it is the *fire within* - your motivation that will help you progress through complex financial reporting and ever-evolving business expectations. Motivation is what converts competence into performance.

Despite the critical role CPAs play in organizational success, [broader workforce data](#) suggests that only about 31% of Canadian and U.S. workers are actively engaged at work - with most employees not fully motivated in their roles. This highlights the importance of cultivating motivation not just for job satisfaction, but for sustained performance and future impact.

Given the complexity and rapid pace of the financial industry, how do CPAs set themselves up for success?

Here are 5 ways to use motivation to enhance your performance:

Examine the Type of Motivation

Whether you're motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors makes a difference to overall success rates. Extrinsic factors include the desire for compensation and bonuses,

promotions and titles and recognition. These are important but can't be guaranteed and tend to produce short-term bursts of effort.

Intrinsic motivation is more strongly linked to sustained performance, creativity, and well-being. For example, many strive to pass the CPA exam because they simply love accounting and/or business. They seek an intellectual challenge, and get satisfaction from solving complex problems. They take pride in high-quality, ethical work and have a genuine curiosity as to how business works. When intrinsic motivation is strong, resilience increases which is critical during the busy season or economic downturns.

Set Clear and Specific Goals

The path to success is filled with a series of small, incremental goals that lead the way to achieving your primary objective. Goal setting provides the structure needed to improve performance and achieve success. The desire to achieve a goal gives you the emotional fuel to achieve it, but you must be absolutely clear on what you want. Motivation without direction can lead to burnout. The key to success is alignment. Motivation increases when your daily work connects to a broader vision.

In a profession that's constantly evolving due to regulation, the global economy and advances in AI, motivated CPAs actively set learning goals that keep them ahead of the game rather than merely being reactive to everyday challenges.

Become More Resilient

In Canada's competitive financial landscape, resilience supported by internal drive often differentiates long-term leaders from those who stagnate. Accounting and finance are deadline-driven environments and pressure is constant. Whether it's year-end reporting or tax season, the ability to maintain performance and optimism during periods of sustained stress is critical to long-term success.

Motivation fuels resilience. It's not about ignoring pressure; it's about maintaining clarity of purpose despite it.

The Role of Environment

While intrinsic motivation is powerful, organizational culture is also extremely important. Employee recognition - both formal and informal - increases engagement and performance. Does your company culture emphasize the negative and focus on what people are *not* doing, or does it take into account everyone's unique strengths?

Knowing what people want goes a long way to developing a company culture that drives motivation. A team that feels as if they are getting what they want out of their career will be more motivated to do better. Understanding and harnessing a team's diverse motivations and strengths is key to success.

This is particularly important for younger professionals entering the CPA pathway. Firms that cultivate supportive cultures often experience higher retention and stronger succession pipelines.

Dig Deep to Find Your Purpose

Many CPAs enter the profession for stability and opportunity. Over time, long-term motivation often requires establishing a deeper sense of purpose. Remind yourself why you decided to become a CPA in the first place. Purpose might include the desire to help businesses navigate uncertainty, protect stakeholders through the use of ethical reporting or to build financial literacy. When professionals connect their work to broader societal value, engagement increases and burnout risk declines.

Many CPAs feel that drive is all about *creating* opportunities - not waiting for them - and about pursuing projects that stretch capabilities. As you climb the ladder of success, don't forget about why it is you decided to pursue this career in the first place.

Adopting a motivational mindset isn't a one-shot deal. It's a daily practice that involves a series of incremental steps leading to your ultimate goal. One that determines how you respond to setbacks and are able to align your work with your values and long-term vision.

For CPAs, long-term success depends on what drives you after the designation is earned. Motivation is what will carry you through the busy season, regulatory changes or economic downturns. No matter what stage you're at remember - your motivation isn't just what gets you started - it provides the fuel to keep you going.