



A Culture of Growth

An Interview with Alan D. Whitman,
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Baker Tilly



Alan D. Whitman

EDITORS' NOTE Alan Whitman is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP. He leads the firm's strategy, operations and philanthropy designed to build Baker Tilly's position of leadership within the profession. Prior to being appointed CEO-elect in 2014, Alan held various leadership roles with increasing responsibilities on a national scale at Baker Tilly and spent 15 years with a national CPA firm where he led the Detroit middle-market tax practice. Reflecting his global vision, Alan founded Baker Tilly's international services platform and continues to chair the firm's International Steering Committee. Alan serves on the boards of directors of several civic and community organizations. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants (MICPA). As the chairman of the AICPA Political Action Committee (PAC), Alan is committed to making the voice of the profession heard on Capitol Hill.

FIRM BRIEF Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP (bakertilly.com) is a nationally recognized, full-service accounting and advisory firm whose specialized professionals connect with clients and their businesses through refreshing candor and clear industry insight. With approximately 2,700 employees across the United States, Baker Tilly is ranked as one of the 15 largest accounting and advisory firms in the country. Headquartered in Chicago, Baker Tilly is an independent member of Baker Tilly International, a worldwide network of independent accounting and business advisory firms in 147 countries, with 30,000 professionals.

How do you define culture and how is it kept front and center at Baker Tilly?

Culture is the foundation of who we are and from that comes all we do. Even though it is something one can't touch, culture can definitely be felt. Without question, a strong culture propels an organization. A weak culture holds everyone back.

Culture is so important to us that it is one of the first things we consider when exploring potential mergers. And culture is that "thing" we lean on when considering a new hire.

There are many factors that go into shaping culture. For us it all starts with our core values. These constitute what we believe and what we expect from each other. They guide our decisions. They inspire our actions. And they gauge how we do business. They're shorthand for what we stand for – and what we stand against.

Our core values – collaboration, integrity, passion and stewardship – are fundamental and timeless. We keep these at the forefront in creative ways – desktop displays and other visual reminders throughout our offices, for example. But the best way is through our team members' own experiences and personal expression. As a firm we can profess what makes Baker Tilly special but it's much more powerful and authentic to hear it from our team members – from their heart in their own words. We incorporate our core values into our everyday lexicon and actions. That's how we bring it to life. That's how we make it stick.

Growth also infuses our culture. We pursue growth to create opportunity for our people, our clients, our firm and our profession. This is a bold and clear statement that establishes growth as a critical ingredient of our culture. A culture of growth – not just growth itself – is more of a mindset that is shared by everyone in our firm, client-facing roles and support roles.

Growth is *embedded* in our overall strategy. We grow to get better – not just bigger. And we grow to make a difference – not just make a profit. For our team members, growth provides a challenging and rewarding career centered on lifelong learning. For our clients, growth brings greater solutions that enable their businesses to thrive.

And so we live our core values to shape our culture and we foster a culture of growth to bring our values to life. We work on this every day.

When you're hiring talent, does cultural fit hold as much weight as education?

We place a lot of value on experience and education – and consider cultural fit a two-way street. We need to be a good fit for a candidate just as much as the candidate needs to be a good fit for us. Having a shared set of values are table stakes.

Knowledge and skills are important. Business acumen is essential. Yet there is something that goes beyond all of that. One has to love what one does. Passion is something that can't be taught – and it beats experience alone every time. When one loves what one does, one tends to be more curious. One carries a confidence that helps one navigate the unknown. One is more willing to consider what's possible – not just what is certain. As leaders, we need to recognize what drives our people – what makes them tick, what they're passionate about – and then give them a platform to shine.

My predecessor saw this in me. He knew I had a passion for international business and so he gave me the responsibility of building our international practice. Neither of us knew how far it could go or if I would ultimately be successful. He took a chance with me – and I honored that trust by giving it my all. Today we are the largest member firm of Baker Tilly International, one of the largest accountancy and advisory networks in the world.

Do you focus on metrics to make sure you attract and hire a diverse workforce?

It's a popular refrain that what gets measured gets managed. So, of course we track metrics to know that our efforts are working. However, we go beyond typical hiring and promotion rates. We look at things like participation on firm governance committees, visible leadership roles on special projects and access to executive leadership.

Our people strategy is centered on cultivating a diverse, engaging and inclusive culture where exceptional people thrive. These aren't just words. This is the directional North Star for fully realizing the talent of each and every team member throughout our firm. We place much greater emphasis on the "why" and "how" versus the metrics themselves.

We view both "diversity" and "inclusion" as equally important. Our approach is not a standalone program. Instead it is a lens through which we make *everything* better in our firm. Yes, diversity and inclusion informs our people strategy – and it also influences our four other strategies around specialization, valued business advisors, financial fitness and growth. In other words, it touches all aspects of our firm.

We have a national diversity and inclusion steering committee, which I chair. The purpose is to deepen our firm's understanding of diversity and inclusion in order to strengthen it. We do this through research, benchmark studies, internal focus groups, trend analysis and key metrics. And we do this with ongoing and open dialogue – honest dialogue – on the committee and throughout our firm. It's about putting principle into practice.

How valuable is your focus on community when it comes to attracting talent and how ingrained is this in your firm?

Being a part of our communities where we live and work is very ingrained in our firm. Making a difference in our communities does matter to us – especially for young professionals just starting out in their career.

Community involvement is an expression of our core value of stewardship – we invest for the future with the intention of leaving everything better. We are intentional in giving back – and we do this with a blend of firm-wide initiatives and individual efforts. This keeps our community involvement personal and local. It keeps us connected.

We encourage community involvement through our Helping Enrich Relationships through Outreach (H.E.R.O.) program that provides paid time off for volunteer community service. Additionally we bring the power of the firm together to make an even stronger impact in several different ways. One example is our annual Stewardship Day – a single day of service where team members across the firm come together to serve their communities. It makes a big difference – this year we supported 71 distinct nonprofits – and it gives our team members a meaningful shared experience.

Our community involvement isn't just planned. When hurricanes pummeled the Gulf Coast and Puerto Rico, our response was swift. Our firm donated \$50,000 to the American Red Cross to support their life-saving work – and then matched another \$50,000 raised by our team members in three days. We then assembled a dozen different teams across the firm with the goal of helping devastated communities recover. We have highly specialized experts on the ground working with businesses on the complexities of insurance and rebuilding efforts to mitigate the storm's financial impact. And we're helping government entities and not-for-profits get access to federal and state funding, including FEMA. The work is complex and demanding – and extremely rewarding.

Is there a sweet spot for this firm when it comes to its client profile or company size?

We cover a broad range of client profiles through our different practices and specialized services. Some of our teams play in very big arenas with global conglomerates and some play in close one-on-one relationships with individual investors and start-up companies. Each requires its own skill complement.

There is a misnomer in our profession that complexity is only associated with large revenue clients. We see complexity differently and are committed to strong client relationships that need and value expertise on different scales. We see this every day through our client work in tax, international, transactions, and forensic litigation and valuation services, to name a few.

In terms of a revenue size, I often say it's not *what* we are, it's *who* we are. Our strategy is designed to make us two things: relevant and sustainable. These go way beyond a targeted revenue number or a certain company size.

Relevant means having a seat at the table in our profession. It means being indispensable Valued Business Advisors for our clients. Relevant is seeing trends and understanding market forces and playing a role in shaping the future of our profession.

Sustainable means viable. It means balancing short-term and long-term goals and making smart investment decisions. Sustainable is building our future today – and leaving a legacy that we can all be proud of.

How important is it for you to communicate the need for change and how do you make sure people are on board?

Change is constant. Unfortunately the word “change” can have negative connotations. It suggests a loss of control. It can be threatening. It's something to resist. So I prefer to describe change as *progress* because that is exactly what is happening. It's a subtle but important nuance. Progress implies forward-motion, forward-thinking. Progress is something that is done with us, not to us.

When change comes at us from the outside, we are forced into a position of reaction, of putting out fires. But when change comes from within – when we embrace and acknowledge the progress we're making and when we look beyond our four walls at what's possible – we can anticipate, not just react. This allows us to embrace change and take hold of opportunity. This is where growth occurs – both personal growth and organizational growth.

We recognize that innovation is a hallmark of our firm's entrepreneurial spirit. One way we continue to cultivate that is with a movement called *Ideas in Action*. It is a mindset that encourages and embraces new ways of thinking from all team members. It's a way to drive change from within. *Ideas in Action* creates a workplace that fuels ideas and drives sustainable growth. Progress that happens *with us*, not to us.

Is technology enabling better client relationships or does it take away some of the personal touch?

Without question, emerging technologies are advancing at a rapid pace. This is changing the way work gets done in every industry, including ours. First and foremost, this has a major impact on our clients. Our obligation is to help our clients navigate this transformation for their benefit.

As for our profession, we are taking an active role in shaping its future. AI, robots, blockchain – all of these have the power to eliminate repetitive activities and shift our focus to better serving our clients. This elevates our role as Valued Business Advisors – exactly what we want to be.

I'm not letting technology run our business. Instead, I'm focused on running our business better *through* technology. This means seeing

the implications of technology even when they're not obvious. Take our learning and development strategy. One may think that technology advancements are improving our learning management system. Yes, they are. But technology is also influencing the non-technical aspects of learning.

The majority of our talent development is shifting to hands-on experience that focuses on project work, job rotations, coaching and even community involvement. It's the new generation of apprenticeship. A much smaller portion is formal training such as classroom and webinar learning. This transition is due to technology. As repetitive tasks get replaced, there will be even greater emphasis on critical thinking, communication and judgment. Business acumen is bolstered by technical expertise. As Valued Business Advisors, we're up to the challenge and we're leading the way.

As CEO, how important is it to spend time with clients?

It is very important and something I really enjoy doing. I make it a point to connect with clients and be with our team across the organization. I opted for something less formal than the usual town halls where a CEO crisscrosses the organization's footprint a few times a year. Instead I visit several markets every month. For starters, it's a chance for me to get to know better our incredibly talented men and women throughout the firm. Over coffee or lunch, we cover the topics that they want to discuss. We keep the setting small enough for conversation – and PowerPoint presentations aren't allowed. Market visits also keep me grounded with our clients – it's a great touch point that keeps our firm's focus on them and what's happening outside our four walls. I never want to lose the pulse of our clients. This high-touch, highly personal approach has been instrumental in helping to share – and shape – our vision for the organization. ●

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We pursue growth to create opportunity for our people, our clients, our firm and our profession.
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Creating Opportunity for Our People Cultivating Innovation

An Interview with Todd Stokes, Managing Partner, Baker Tilly



Todd Stokes

EDITORS' NOTE Todd Stokes has nearly 20 years of experience in professional services and is managing partner of Baker Tilly's metro D.C. office. Todd also leads the firm's innovation initiative.

Baker Tilly has a very nimble feel to it despite its size. How important is this to fostering innovation at the firm?

Part of being innovative starts with a willingness to be adaptive. Our leadership has really set the tempo for this. With this philosophy in place, it's about having an environment that encourages people to bring forth ideas. The more ideas we have, the more ideas will be actionable and a big hit for the organization.

This approach produces great ideas and it also leads to people who are highly engaged in our organization's success.

It's one thing to say you're an innovative firm. How do you put it into practice?

Innovation starts with an idea. While not every idea leads to innovation, one cannot have innovation without ideas. We've created a movement called *Ideas in Action* to nurture ideas – big and small – with wrap-around support to get to implementation.

We have an online tool that makes it easy to capture ideas and see common themes. And we have intrapreneurs – they are an active peer network throughout the firm rather than a formal committee. Their primary role is to connect and communicate. When a team member submits an idea, an intrapreneur will personally reach out and help put the wheels in motion. This is a crucial step because it demonstrates to team members that their ideas are heard.

Every day, ideas surface from every corner of our firm. Ideas bubble up in meetings. Ideas are inspired by clients. Ideas come from our team member engagement survey. Connecting and accelerating ideas fosters a workplace where people express their views and feel confident that their opinions are heard – no matter where the idea starts. That's how we're cultivating innovation.

Where is the innovation taking place within this industry?

In our point of view, there are two main areas of interest from an innovation perspective – user experience and advance analytics. Innovation is happening across all user touch points – this includes employees, vendors, partners and most importantly customers. Optimizing their experiences is critical to any organization's success. The second area of innovation is leveraging innovative technologies, such as AI, Deep Learning or RPA. The ability to access large amounts of data to create even greater insights is exciting and will be a game changer for professional services firms.

Is technology changing what the workforce will look like in the future?

Yes – and organizations must adapt. In fact, the future is now. Today's workforce is purpose-driven and socially responsible. People are learning at a faster pace and the amount of information available grows exponentially. Technology is an integral part of our lives. Employees want the same digital experience at the office as they have at home – that is, if they even go to the office. We're managing different work arrangements – full-time, part-time, contingent, and remote. To us, technology is not necessarily the change agent, rather it is an enabler.

How important is it to keep culture at the forefront when merging with other firms?

We're a people-centric business so culture has to be the first line of defense. It's not just one-sided – there needs to be a mutual fit that

is recognized by both firms before any negotiations start. We know that great ideas and best practices exist in both firms. We believe in diversity of thought and inclusive leadership. It's the right approach and it provides the best results. ●

Creating Opportunity for Our People Becoming a Talent Magnet

An Interview with Karleen Mussman,
Chief Human Resources Officer, Baker Tilly



Karleen Mussman

EDITORS' NOTE Karleen Mussman is the chief human resources officer at Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP. Mussman provides forward-thinking leadership to guide the firm's employee value proposition and enhance the firm's position as an employer-of-choice. Mussman has more than 25 years of experience creating and executing global talent strategies.

How do you keep up with ever-shifting workforce expectations?

We are constantly researching, benchmarking and staying on top of workforce trends. Above all else, we listen to our team members. Understanding what motivates *Baker Tilly* team

members – not just employees in general – leads to insights that improve all aspects of our business.

We involve our team members in the process. One way we do this is through our team member engagement survey. Our engagement scores continue to rise and are way above average company scores.

Beyond the numbers, the value of the survey lies in the volume of feedback and ideas received. From here we look for ways to make things easier so our team members can focus on what they love to do, which is work with clients. For example, we simplified our dress code into one sentence: *Dress for Your Day*. And we streamlined our flexible work arrangements to focus on the value and productivity of work, not where it gets done.

What is the value in making sure your workforce mirrors your client base?

It's important to our clients and our team members, so it's important to us. Every voice counts and different perspectives lead to more creative conversations and better business results.

Every day we work to create a diverse, engaging and inclusive culture where exceptional people thrive. Diversity and inclusion is integrated into all aspects of our business – from recruiting and talent development to client engagements and operational excellence. Our national steering committee drives our strategy and is taking our two signature programs – GROW (Growth and Retention of Women) and SOAR (Supporting Opportunity, Advancement, and Recognition for All) to new heights.

Talk about the value of corporate responsibility.

Stewardship is a core value at Baker Tilly. We know that being connected to something greater than oneself is important.

It's amazing to see how our team members bring stewardship to life in creative ways that come from the heart. In every one of our offices in any given month, one can find an event that is supporting a local cause – organized fun-runs or taking up a food collection. Community outreach is woven into all kinds of programs across the firm. This year we coordinated with the USO and made care packages for veterans on Take Your Child to Work Day. Our summer interns prepared emergency kits for the American Red Cross.



How important is it to have leadership engaged in the people part of this business?

It's critical. The adage "people are a company's greatest asset" is especially true in a professional services firm where *people* create value. Our entire leadership – not just HR – has a shared priority in delivering on our people strategy.

It's gratifying when our collective efforts are recognized beyond our four walls. In the past five years, we've received 60 "best workplace" awards in every market in which we operate – and many of these are since the award's inception.

This year we were recertified as a Great Place to Work® by the Great Place to Work Organization and *Fortune* magazine. It's the gold standard in workplace recognition and benchmarks our workplace culture against the world's most successful companies – providing invaluable data and best practices. It's a level of recognition that gets noticed by our clients and the marketplace and makes our team members proud. ●

Creating Opportunity for Our Clients Safeguarding Critical Information

An Interview with Raina Rose Tagle, Partner, Baker Tilly



Raina Rose Tagle

EDITORS' NOTE Raina Rose Tagle has nearly 25 years of experience providing consulting services to higher education institutions, not-for-profits, governmental entities and government contractors. She is the firmwide leader of Baker Tilly's risk, internal audit and cybersecurity as well as higher education and research institutions consulting practices. Raina is a member of Baker Tilly's Board of Partners.

What are your specific areas of focus and key mission at Baker Tilly?

I lead our risk, internal audit and cybersecurity practice across the firm. It's a collection of services.

The overarching capability we provide is identification of risk. What can go wrong? What can stand in the way of taking advantage of opportunities? We address those areas to achieve the best outcomes and strategic objectives for our clients.

What is the client sweet spot for Baker Tilly within this particular area of focus?

We aren't trying to be everything to everyone. We focus on specific industries and capabilities within those industries. What sets us apart is speaking the language of our client's industry. We help our clients navigate and effect change and do this in a customized way to fit our clients' needs.

How is the role of professional services changing?

It's changing in many different ways. Just one example is internal audit services. The profession of internal audit is moving from a "gotcha" mentality to serve more as an advisor and partner to key stakeholders. At Baker Tilly, this is the approach we take as Valued Business Advisors.

In the audit world, it's easy to fall into the trap of seeing things only in black and white and missing opportunities. As advisors, we align ourselves with our clients and their missions. We don't believe in the "gotcha" approach. This philosophy is how we add value and cut through the noise to help our clients be the best possible organization they can be.

Talk about the critical role cybersecurity is playing today.

Board directors face challenges in cutting through the noise, interpreting all of the risks and tax implications that their companies face, and understanding the right approach to address that in a risk-appropriate way.

Safeguarding critical information has become exponentially more complex. Compliance requirements around cybersecurity are also increasing across multiple industries.

However, compliance and security are two different things. Just because a company is compliant with cybersecurity regulations or laws

doesn't mean that company's information is secure. Over time, company boards and senior leaders must provide not only assistance but *assurance* that a company is addressing its cybersecurity challenges. That's where we can help and make a difference for our clients.

How much of an impact is technology having within the audit sector?

Technology can provide better information for decision making – pinpointing where there are possibilities of wrongdoing or process breakdowns in the organization. Technology enhancements shift auditors' focus from collecting data to interpreting data – taking the results of a technology-based analysis and using the information to help companies become more secure and efficient in their processes.

Within Baker Tilly, what is the value in having a collaborative culture?

There is a great deal of collaboration across our firm. Our clients realize that one person doesn't have all the answers. But they expect – and they deserve – access to knowledge and expertise from our entire firm. And that's exactly what we do.

Baker Tilly is large enough to provide a full range of services and highly specialized solutions to our clients, yet nimble enough that our people understand and can readily access the full breadth of capabilities across our firm. ●

"We strive to be transformation advisors to our clients rather than simply software implementers."

-Ann E. Blakely

Creating Opportunity for Our Clients Winning with Human Capital

An Interview with Ann E. Blakely, Principal, Baker Tilly



Ann E. Blakely

EDITORS' NOTE As a leader of the firm's human capital services team, and with nearly 20 years of experience, Ann Blakely specializes in helping organizations optimize HR strategies, processes and technologies to reshape the employer/employee relationship to drive success and business returns.

What makes Baker Tilly unique and how important is the human capital area to maintaining this?

What makes us special is our ability to lift up our heads, look around, and understand what is going on in the marketplace. We listen to our clients and understand what problems they're having. We strive to be transformation advisors to our clients rather than simply software implementers. Business outcome is the end game and we have a knack for helping clients align their technology improvements with their overall HR and business strategies.

As HR methodologies have evolved and organizations have asked more of their leaders, the approach to human capital has also evolved. The fact that the firm showed commitment to me as a partner and asked me to lead this practice demonstrates Baker Tilly's commitment to specialized client service in this area.



What has been the evolution of Baker Tilly's human capital services since its inception?

As Valued Business Advisors, we know it's critical to understand the business climate and market and continually evolve as it evolves. In the last decade there have been three significant forces driving the human resource function within an organization to make some wholesale changes: economic pressures, changes in the employee value proposition and adoption of agile and modern technology.

After the Great Recession, organizations were faced with some tough choices centered around their workforce. Back office functions that weren't driving top line revenue were forced to cut programs and offerings – HR being one of the most affected.

What motivates an employee to build a career within an organization is very different today than in previous decades. This requires HR and executive leadership to look at development programs, compensation programs, career frameworks and employee engagement in new ways.

Technology is key to rolling out new programs to employees. Leveraging cloud, mobile and social are ways to engage employees in their day-to-day work lives.

These shifts are causing the business of HR to step up its game – change the way they deliver services to the company, change the way they help enable employee career progression and expand their own skill sets to support these changes. As Valued Business Advisors, we provide methods, paths and technologies to help HR leaders to identify and execute these changes.

Who is Baker Tilly's ideal client and what symptoms do clients need to exhibit to be a good fit for your services?

Every company, regardless of size or industry, employs people. Every company needs to hire, attract and retain the best talent. Every company needs HR programs, processes and technology to accomplish that. Fundamentally, there is no magic equation to where Baker Tilly's Human Capital Services team can help.

Typically, though, our clients exhibit some sort of scale and complexity that necessitate bringing in outside expertise and methods. Often this is driven through characteristics like high turnover, large volumes of disparate workers regionally or globally, industry requirements or compliance challenges. Changes in strategy or the need to re-think an HR function and its service delivery are also triggers that signal where we can assist with transformational improvements. Our services are designed to help an organization through those inherent challenges as they grow and to bring solutions to make these changes sustainable over time. ●

Creating Opportunity for Our Clients

The Value of Valued Business Advisors

An Interview with Christine M. Anderson,
Managing Partner, Baker Tilly



Christine M. Anderson

EDITORS' NOTE *Christine Anderson serves as the managing partner for growth and specialization and leads the firm's financial services practice. She has nearly 30 years of experience working within professional services and financial services organizations, including leadership roles in finance, operations, compliance and project management. Chris is a member of the firm's Management Committee and an ex officio member of the Board of Partners.*

You have a unique are of responsibility. What is your focus?

As managing partner of growth and specialization, I oversee strategy development and execution of select practices that are

undergoing substantial evolution and represent growth potential. Today, these include healthcare, financial services, manufacturing & distribution, risk, internal audit and cybersecurity and construction & real estate. I also oversee Baker Tilly's business development and marketing functions, focusing on our firm's client service and go-to-market strategies. This role allows me the opportunity to look across the firm and help connect and accelerate the great work we're doing for our clients in our regions, practices and service lines.

Baker Tilly has grown quickly and yet maintains an entrepreneurial feel. How ingrained is that in the firm's culture?

Preserving an entrepreneurial spirit is extremely important to our firm. As any firm grows, it can be a challenge to stay nimble. This is something we keep top of mind in order to respond to client needs or market changes. The opportunity I have in my role is to enhance connectivity so the pockets of entrepreneurial spirit and development can take place without getting mired in too much bureaucracy. We have a relatively flat organization and that's intentional. This keeps our partners close to our clients – and that's what spurs their creativity and innovation. This is how we operate differently from other firms.

What makes Baker Tilly unique within this crowded industry?

Technical skills are an expectation in this industry. Differentiation lies in advising our clients and helping them solve problems. We play a vital role in our clients' success as Valued Business Advisors by listening to our clients and really getting to know them. We understand what's important to them, we learn what they need and we pinpoint where we can really help.

We know we can't be everything to everyone. On occasion, we will bring in a business partner to provide a specific solution. That's how we keep our client first. As Valued Business Advisors we are well positioned to help our clients address business issues and capitalize on opportunities.

Is it important that Baker Tilly offer seamless service across all markets?

Yes. For example, the financial services team that I work on is a national practice and our clients are national. Our clients expect a high level of specialization and expertise, so that requires our ability to collaborate. Collaboration is a core value of our firm – it's that important to us. We know we are at our best when we work together. This isn't something we hope will happen. We believe this is how we should work. And we expect this is how we will work – for the benefit of our clients and our team members.

What does it mean to have a culture of growth?

We pursue growth to create opportunity for our people, our clients, our firm and our profession. If we're not growing, we're standing still. We focus on achieving sustainable growth, which is really about creating opportunities.

We've embedded growth – both organic and expansive – into our overall strategy. We choose growth to better serve our clients and stand out in our profession. And we choose growth to make a difference in our communities. ●

“Technical skills are an expectation in this industry. Differentiation lies in advising clients and helping them solve problems.”

-Christine M. Anderson



Creating Opportunity for Our Profession The Future of Assurance Services

An Interview with Heather Acker, Partner, Baker Tilly



Heather Acker

EDITORS' NOTE Heather Acker leads Baker Tilly's public sector assurance practice and has more than 20 years of experience specializing in serving the needs of state and local government clients. Heather has served on a number of committees with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and is the current chair of the AICPA State & Local Government Expert Panel.

Tell us about Baker Tilly's public sector assurance practice. What has made this part of the firm so strong?

Baker Tilly is one of the top three single-audit providers in the nation and a leading provider of financial statement audits. Our team really understands the challenges facing municipalities, public hospitals and special district governments.

Within our public sector group, and across the firm, we've built an assurance practice based on a strong foundation of collaboration. We work across geographies with a focus on client service and industry specialization and we use a consistent and proven methodology.

Our clients in the public sector face many headwinds. They have budget constraints while still needing to maintain services. They compete for economic development opportunities. And they must be stewards of public funds. We help them take advantage of every opportunity to enhance efficiencies and consider alternative sources of revenue.

How has the firm's assurance practice evolved in recent years?

Baker Tilly has grown over the years in a number of ways, including expansion through mergers. With that comes different ways of doing things, including different strategies for approaching an audit. We had the opportunity to take the best of the best from different approaches and move to an integrated software and methodology platform. This was a major undertaking that required significant time and investment by the firm, but we saw it as business-critical.

It led to our deployment of Global Focus US – a versatile assurance methodology that was developed in partnership with CaseWare International, Inc. It provides our clients with more effective and efficient engagements, greater business insights and realized value. At the same time, it provides our professionals with a flexible, adaptable platform to evolve with assurance standards and technologies to support the changing ways of doing business.

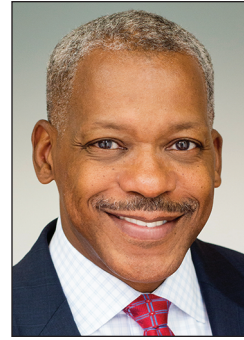
How is technology changing the assurance field and how is Baker Tilly a part of that?

Standard setters are issuing new standards at a very rapid pace. We are incorporating robotic process automation, artificial intelligence, and other transformations into the audit process. This is happening at the same time our clients are facing new challenges, including cybersecurity threats. Investments in assurance technology, along with a flexible adoption strategy, will be an ongoing priority.

Baker Tilly is spearheading efficiencies in audit and taking a proactive stance in shaping the future of the profession. We are advising CaseWare based on our experience of implementing the Global Focus US methodology on a major scale. We're also closely monitoring, and advising when appropriate, CaseWare and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) as they move toward the development of a new dynamic audit – a cloud-based intelligence solution. This will be another step in the transformation of our audit practice and positions Baker Tilly at the forefront of these trends. Our clients will benefit from these changes as they occur. ●

Creating Opportunity for Our Profession Mentoring and Giving Back

An Interview with Julius Green, Partner, Baker Tilly



Julius Green

EDITORS' NOTE With 30 years of experience working with tax-exempt organizations, Julius Green provides consultation on tax compliance and consulting matters for not-for-profit, healthcare, senior living, higher education, membership organizations and private foundation clients. Julius is a member of Baker Tilly's Board of Partners and is a past-president of the Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants (PICPA).

How do you differentiate in the tax-exempt space when services can seem so similar?

We differentiate in our role as Valued Business Advisors. It's somewhat misleading to call organizations tax-exempt because there are all kinds of tax considerations that affect their business. We help our clients understand these complexities – certainly from a compliance position but also from a strategic vantage point.

Baker Tilly stands out by bringing solutions to our clients even before they realize they need them. The Affordable Care Act is a great example. There is a provision requiring tax-exempt hospitals to perform a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) every three years – a very big undertaking. We brought together our specialists in public health, tax, finance, healthcare big data analytics and strategic planning to create a comprehensive CHNA approach. We have a ready-made solution that can be adapted for hospitals and healthcare systems.

What role does mentorship play in the accounting and advisory profession?

Mentorship is particularly important in accounting and advisory where there is a high degree of technical and business acumen. Mentorship elevates rising stars and teaches skills that aren't covered in college classes. It spotlights team members who may not otherwise raise their hands or have been sought out for new projects or stretch assignments.

During the year I mentor 20 to 30 young people inside and outside Baker Tilly – these are high schoolers, college kids and young professionals just a few years into their careers. It can be as simple as reviewing a resume, making an introduction or having regular touch base meetings. It feels great helping someone along the way who will pay it forward.

You championed diversity at the PICPA and continue to do so today. What is the importance of diversity in the accounting profession?

I launched PICPA's diversity initiative and led the committee for several years before joining its board of directors. In many respects, the PICPA was ahead of the industry on this topic. Diversity in accounting is critically important. There has been some progress over the years, but the gains have been slow to take hold. This is something the AICPA acknowledges and continues to address.

Diversity and inclusion enables companies to maximize the unique insights of each team member. This is far easier to accomplish when one works with colleagues who have different experiences, backgrounds and perspectives. I am confident Baker Tilly will play an instrumental role in moving diversity and inclusion forward for our profession.

You've been very involved in the profession in leadership roles. What advice do you have for others who are thinking about getting more involved?

My advice is to jump in with both feet! I've had such a rewarding career in accounting that I feel it is incumbent on me to give back to my profession. Not only that, my involvement has helped me grow as a professional and as a leader.

At Baker Tilly, we encourage our practitioners to get involved. It's an important way to shape the future of our profession while developing our leaders. Our partners currently hold 24 AICPA committee appointments and have recently held the top leadership positions of three state CPA societies. Our CEO Alan Whitman chairs the AICPA Political Action Committee and Regional Managing Partner Jeff Ferro serves on the AICPA Council. ●