

With the long workdays and crazy deadlines that bear down on CPAs every spring, even the most loyal accountant can be tempted to jump at an attractive job offer that comes to them during the busy season. But for most CPAs, the wise course is to ask the recruiter to get back in touch with you sometime in May.

Should CPAs Switch Jobs During the Busy Season?

When accountants hear the expression *busy season*, they instantly conjure up a calendar that begins on January 1st and flips through with rising speed until a gigantic deadline slams into them on April 15th. These are the weeks when most tax professionals are inundated with morning-to-evening client appointments, IRS forms to complete, receipts to inspect, and 10-key calculators to be put to the speed test.

This traditional crunch time is so tough for public accounting firms that they're forced to continue their recruiting efforts during the first quarter. These offers can sometimes be unusually aggressive if the firm is desperate enough for help. Even the most loyal tax accountant who is on the receiving end of such a recruiting contact can be tempted by a busy season overture; but should CPAs switch jobs during the busy season?

In general, the answer is no, unless there is a significant personal consideration beyond your control, such as moving to follow a spouse who has been forced to relocate or help care for a family member who is ill or injured. Here a few reasons why it's typically best to stay put until the busy season has concluded:

1. **Resume:** Any tax accountant who leaves a job during the busy season has a permanent mark on his or her resume that will stick with them. If the explanation for that move is indeed an urgent personal one, then most future recruiters and employers will understand. But if it appears that you jumped ship during this season for a better offer, they will likely make note of that as a question of your dedication.
2. **References:** Make no mistake about it - if you leave your current employer with an even bigger scheduling mess by resigning when the firm's workload is at its busiest, you will inevitably be leaving on bad terms. That's one fewer reference you'll be able to provide in future job interviews and on the next draft of your resume.
3. **Predictor:** As with most decisions we make in our personal lives, we often give others a window into how we might handle things in the future by how we've handled things in the past. Many employers will view a tax accountant's decision to make a job change during the busy season as a predictor of how they might respond when another firm approaches that same professional while they're working on their own team. If you bailed on your last firm, why wouldn't you do it to me too?

Centered around the first calendar quarter, the *busy season* in public accounting is the period when most audits occur, tax returns are due and professional services are in the highest demand of the year. As enticing as it may be to walk out the door of your current job during this time of intense pressure and exhaustive schedules, there needs to be a driving force beyond your control to justify making a job change during this window of time. Otherwise, you might leave a blot on your resume that is tough to explain to future employers.

For most CPAs, the wise course is to ask the recruiter who contacts you during the busy season to get back in touch with you in May. In the meantime, it's probably best to smile and stick it out -- and keep that calculator moving.