

Kemper CPA Group

By Matt Ottinger

Personal Approach Rules for Team Members and Clients

While standing in front of Kemper CPA Group's Greenfield office and gazing westward, a visitor sees Hancock County's historic courthouse in the distance, looming over the firm's sign.

Although Kemper may not be approaching 120 years of age like that historic courthouse, managing partner Ronald Dezelan explains it has been a fixture in the communities it serves since it was founded in Mount Carmel, Illinois in 1958. The company now has 25 offices and over 300 staffers spanning four states. With its largest Indiana location in Evansville, Kemper employs over 100 Hoosiers.

Respect effect

When Washington (Indiana) native Emily Schenk recently graduated from Indiana University, she figured she'd leave Bloomington and start her career as a mere cog in some big accounting machine, so to speak. But after being with Kemper for over a year, she's grateful that hasn't been the case.

"My favorite part about working here is that I really feel respected and like an important part of the team," she relays. "My opinion matters. Being just out of college, it's nice to be treated with respect. I didn't expect as much opportunity and responsibility as I've gotten here."

Schenk also appreciates the insurance benefits and the opportunity to join the 401(k).

"Having (Kemper Capital Management LLC) as a part of the organization, it's also comforting to know they will be managing it,"

she adds.

Those positives, among others, are why Kemper finds itself on the 2015 Best Places to Work in Indiana list – its first time receiving the honor. Dezelan, who says the firm had only applied once before, sees the designation as a testament to the culture.

In the family

Kemper strives to build a collegial atmosphere and foster an environment of open communication between partners and staff. This can be a challenge, however, when a company has a variety of locations.

"Our firms are broken up into regions (northern and southern Indiana, etc.), and those groups get together a couple of times per year. And we have a firm-wide Christmas party in Indianapolis," Dezelan points out. "Those get-togethers allow the younger employees to meet, and it's turned out well."

He admits that having offices in smaller locales can create challenges in keeping young staffers with visions of working in big cities. However, he believes it's a notable attraction and retention tool for those who want to raise a family and enjoy the limited commute time that comes with living and working in the same place.

Health is also an important component, and Kemper has recently ramped up efforts to help its associates maximize well-being.

"We have a nice wellness program and each office has a 'wellness champion,'" Dezelan explains. "They send out emails about health and what foods to eat."

The company also offers bio-testing twice a year, which allows employees to monitor their measurements and be proactive about making changes when needed.

"If the results are good, we reduce the employee's (contribution to their health insurance premiums). We also supplement some costs for fitness center memberships. We've had this going for a few years, and we can see our health costs are not increasing as much as they used to, so we think it's paying off."

Quality check

Kemper provides consulting and services in accounting, auditing, payroll, taxes, technology and wealth management. While its offerings are diverse, Dezelan contends there is one constant theme in all of the company's endeavors: quality.

"I think there are some other larger CPA firms that try to rush things out the door," he contends. "I've been with Kemper for about 35 years but worked for another firm when I first got out of school, and it was just not as personal. You didn't know the clients, and I wanted to be able to help them (more closely)."

That smaller-town camaraderie breeds an attitude that permeates throughout the company, and the personal rapport allows Kemper to become a business partner for its clients, according to Dezelan. The firm also parlays its low turnover into becoming a beacon of consistency for those it serves.

"It's likely our clients will see the same people (from Kemper) year after year," he conveys. "Whereas with the larger firms, there's a lot of turnover. We work to help them grow their businesses and they trust us; I hear that from the clients. In fact, a lot of them become family friends. They have our cell numbers."

"Growth is always a goal, but we'll make sure we maintain our quality while we do it," Dezelan concludes.

Accountant Emily Schenk works diligently for Kemper's clients and is grateful the company takes the same attitude toward its staff.



Kemper employees spent their day of service last fall landscaping and sprucing up the daycare center at the Terre Haute YMCA.