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Leading with purpose

How to inject real purpose into your firm's working day.

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Purpose in accounting

To know your firm's purpose is to know the why. Why does the firm exist? What does the firm aim to achieve? How does the firm help improve the people, clients and communities around it?

Whether you are the leader of a firm or an apprentice just starting out, knowing and fully understanding what your work actually aims to accomplish each day is vital. People increasingly want their work to feel meaningful, and firms that fail to make that clear will find it harder to hold on to good people.

The business value of purpose

Having real purpose within the leadership structure of a firm has human value as well as business value. When people believe in what they are working on and can see how their work has a positive effect, they are more likely to be engaged and less likely to burn out. Gallup's latest reporting shows a wide gap between employees with strong work purpose and those with low purpose on both engagement and burnout.

The business impact is clear too. Gallup's updated meta-analysis links stronger engagement with 23% higher profitability and materially lower turnover. In practice, that means purpose is not just a cultural statement. It influences performance, retention and the quality of work people are willing to do when pressure rises.

In an accounting firm, that matters. When people are disconnected from the firm's values and purpose, effort becomes more transactional. Work can still get done, but energy drops, ownership weakens and quality becomes harder to protect. Over time, that affects delivery, client experience and retention.

Stronger employee engagement is linked to 23% higher profitability and lower turnover

Gallup 2025

So, what does a firm with purpose-driven leadership look like?

1. Leaders speak to their people in terms of outcomes. They do not stop at the task itself. They explain what delivering that audit, tax project or set of accounts actually achieves for the client. The team can then see the value of the work more clearly and take more pride in doing it well.
2. Strategy and values are clearly linked. Quarterly meetings are not just used to announce decisions. They are used to show people how major decisions support the firm's purpose. That reduces cynicism and makes change easier to understand.
3. People can explain in one sentence how today's task connects to the wider mission. When that connection is clear, engagement improves and errors are more likely to be caught early because people care about the result, not just the process.
4. New hires are brought into the firm's purpose early. They do not just learn the systems and deadlines. They learn what the firm stands for, the type of work it wants to be known for and the stories that bring that to life.

5. Recognition is tied to meaning. Wins are because of why that work mattered. That gives recognition more depth and helps people see that good work has a real effect beyond the immediate task list.

Purpose brief

If you are aligned with the vision for your firm, the next question is how to build it into daily delivery.

One practical way is to use a short Purpose Brief at the start of every client project. The aim is to make purpose visible in the work itself, rather than leaving it as a leadership message in the background.

Start by adding a short purpose section to your engagement templates. That section should answer three questions. What is the client's why? How does this piece of work link to your firm's purpose? Which success metrics will show whether the work achieved what it was meant to achieve?

Then walk through that section at the start of each project. A project lead should spend a few minutes explaining it in plain language. For example: this project will help the client build investor confidence and move towards a successful funding round. That matters to the client, and it also aligns with our purpose as a firm.

Finally, review it at the end of the project. Ask whether the success metrics were the right ones, whether they were achieved, and what should change next time. This keeps purpose grounded in delivery rather than turning it into something abstract.

Key takeaways

Used consistently, a purpose-led approach helps teams stay connected to the value of their work. Clients notice a clearer standard of delivery and employees get more value from the work they are doing. Over time, purpose becomes part of how the firm operates each day.