



ApproachableAccountants

Chartered Accountants & Chartered Tax Advisers

A Guide to Getting the Best from Your Accountant



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A GUIDE TO GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR ACCOUNTANT

CAVEAT

This guide aims to help you get the best from your accountant. It is not exhaustive – you will need to take account of all your personal and business circumstances. It assumes that you've already chosen an accountant that's good for your needs, as explained in a separate guide.

Choosing an accountant should be a long-term investment. Once you've chosen, spend time to set your accountant up to serve you well and keep up an open dialogue so it can stay that way. If you need to change accountant, do it. Life's too short to stay in relationships if they're not working.

We have summarised some aspects in the interests of simplicity. Although we have taken every effort to ensure the content of this guide is relevant and up-to-date at the time of writing, requirements and needs will vary.

You should consider the need to seek further/current professional advice before relying on this guide. Approachable Accountants takes no responsibility for any action taken or refrained from as a result of any of the content of this guide.

ABOUT APPROACHABLE ACCOUNTANTS

We are a firm of Chartered Accountants and Chartered Tax Advisers. We help our clients to achieve financial security and peace of mind while doing business in an ethical way. We specialise in helping owner managed businesses and personal tax clients across the UK and beyond.

For more information please see www.approachableaccountants.co.uk.

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INTRODUCTION

You should have taken time and care to choose your accountant but there is effort involved in making sure that any relationship continues to work well.

This guide aims to help you get the best out of your accountant. Please also see our other guides, “When you need an accountant” and “How to choose an accountant” for more information.

1. ONLY BUY THE SERVICES YOU REALLY WANT

The range of services an accountant can offer is huge. Some things are easy to do yourself, others are not. It often makes sense to do your own book-keeping, reconcile to the bank account and file the annual return for a company.

If you are willing to do some work yourself, ask your accountant to talk you through the options.

2. AGREE SERVICES AND FEES IN ADVANCE, IN WRITING

Your accountant should always set out the proposed work and a fee estimate in writing for your agreement. Make sure you are clear about exactly who is doing what, and what records you need to supply. Ask your accountant to contact you immediately if they think the fee will exceed the estimate, before they start doing any extra work.

Don't be afraid to discuss fees with your accountant, or to ask them to justify them. Both of you will benefit from a fully open, two-way relationship.

3. ASK QUESTIONS

There is no such thing as a stupid question! Ask questions so that you know the range of services your accountant can offer or access for you. Ask how you can get the best service. For example, supplying your records in a quiet period might help you get a much quicker turnaround. Asking questions up front will help get the relationship started on a clear basis.

4. GET A NAMED CONTACT

Your initial meeting will usually be with a director or partner, but thereafter you will often be looked after by a more junior member of staff. Make sure you know who your day-to-day contact will be and don't be afraid to ask about their skills and experience.

Your contact with the director or partner should be a good guide to what to expect from the firm, and you should always be able to contact them if issues crop up.

5. KEEP YOUR RECORDS IN GOOD ORDER, AND RAISE QUERIES

Every effort you make to keep your records in good shape will pay off by keeping your fees down. Ask your accountant what more you can do to make their job easier. If you have queries at any time, either raise them straight away with your accountant, or make notes that will help explain the situation when you supply them with your records.

6. RESPOND TO QUERIES FULLY AND PROMPTLY

This will help your accountant work efficiently and so will help keep your fees down. Your accountant should not be too tolerant of sloppiness, as ultimately it will hit you in the pocket.

7. KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep in touch with your accountant on a regular basis. We suggest picking up the phone or dropping them a note of key plans such as of a major investment or divestment, before the event itself. This will help them spot opportunities to offer help, such as with advice on tax planning or business finance.

Make sure that visits to your accountant will add value. See if they will travel to you, or consider a short phone or video call as an alternative unless you really need a face-to-face meeting. You can easily share most information by email; you can even have meetings to go through your accounts by phone, using screen sharing software.

8. RAISE ANY CONCERNS AT AN EARLY STAGE

Your relationship with your accountant should be for the long-term. They can only deal with concerns if you are willing to raise them. The sooner you do this, the sooner they will be able to respond. Your accountant should welcome any feedback that will help them improve.

9. CONSIDER WHETHER YOU NEED A SPECIALIST

Your accountant should have a host of contacts to recommend if you need more specialist advice. Sometimes it can help to ask your accountant if there is additional help you should consider, in case they need their memory jogging.

10. BE PREPARED TO SHOP AROUND AND TO MOVE

Too many people make a bad choice and then stick with it. Be prepared to research and to shop around before choosing your accountant, and be prepared to switch if you're unhappy. Raising concerns at an early stage should help ensure that you never have to move.

WHY CHOOSE APPROACHABLE ACCOUNTANTS?

Most people choose us because they like us and they trust us. We are experienced enough to know what we're doing, wise enough to know when you need more specialist help and small and young enough not to be complacent. But don't take our word for it, from this guide. See the testimonials and other information on our website or give us a call for a chat. We'd love to hear from you.

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