The Accountant Entrepreneur's Guide to:

# Building a Staff for the Future

# Introduction

The accounting profession continues to change at a pace that many describe as dizzying. But fast-paced as it is, great change can bring great opportunities.

- The opportunity to leverage newer and better technologies and deliver premium client products.
- The opportunity to reach beyond the walls of the firm and build a staff for the future.
- The opportunity to make deeper, richer client connections by offering high-value advisory services.

And the list goes on.

This eBook, part of a series focused on the Accountant Entrepreneur, was designed with today's accounting profession in mind. It offers a collection of proven practices and sound guidance from seasoned entrepreneurs who have built highly profitable, efficient, and sustainable enterprises.

## This eBook explores:

- How to diversify teams by hiring in new talent pools
- Moving past false assumptions
- The 7 best practices for building a firm of the future

## Meet the experts

Within this eBook series, we offer a collection of valuable insights and best practices from the accounting profession's most progressive thinkers and doers. Our handpicked experts are active, successful players within the profession. Take a moment to get to know them.

**Jeff Phillips**
CEO, Padgett Business Services and Co-Founder, Accountingfly

**Amanda Aguillard, CPA**
COO, Padgett Business Services and Co-Founder, Elefant Training

**Lee W. Frederiksen, Ph.D.**
Managing Partner, Hinge

**Jason Blumer, CPA**
Partner Blumer & Associates, CPAs

# Breaking down walls

There's a big, beautiful world out there filled with qualified candidates. The time has come to move outside the four walls of your firm and capture your fair share of the talent!

With all the advancements in technology, there's no reason to stay local in terms of staffing. More and more firms are operating on a virtual level and employing team members well beyond the boundaries of their backyard. As staffing shortages continue to plague the accounting profession, there's no better time to start building a staff for the future.

Jeff Phillips, CEO, Padgett Business Services and Co-Founder of Accountingfly, encourages firm leaders to expand their reach to a larger talent pool.

"With virtually zero unemployment in the accounting profession, you have to open the door to a bigger talent pool. You have to expand beyond your local borders to go statewide or even across the country."

**Jeff Phillips**
CEO, Padgett Business Services
and Co-Founder, Accountingfly

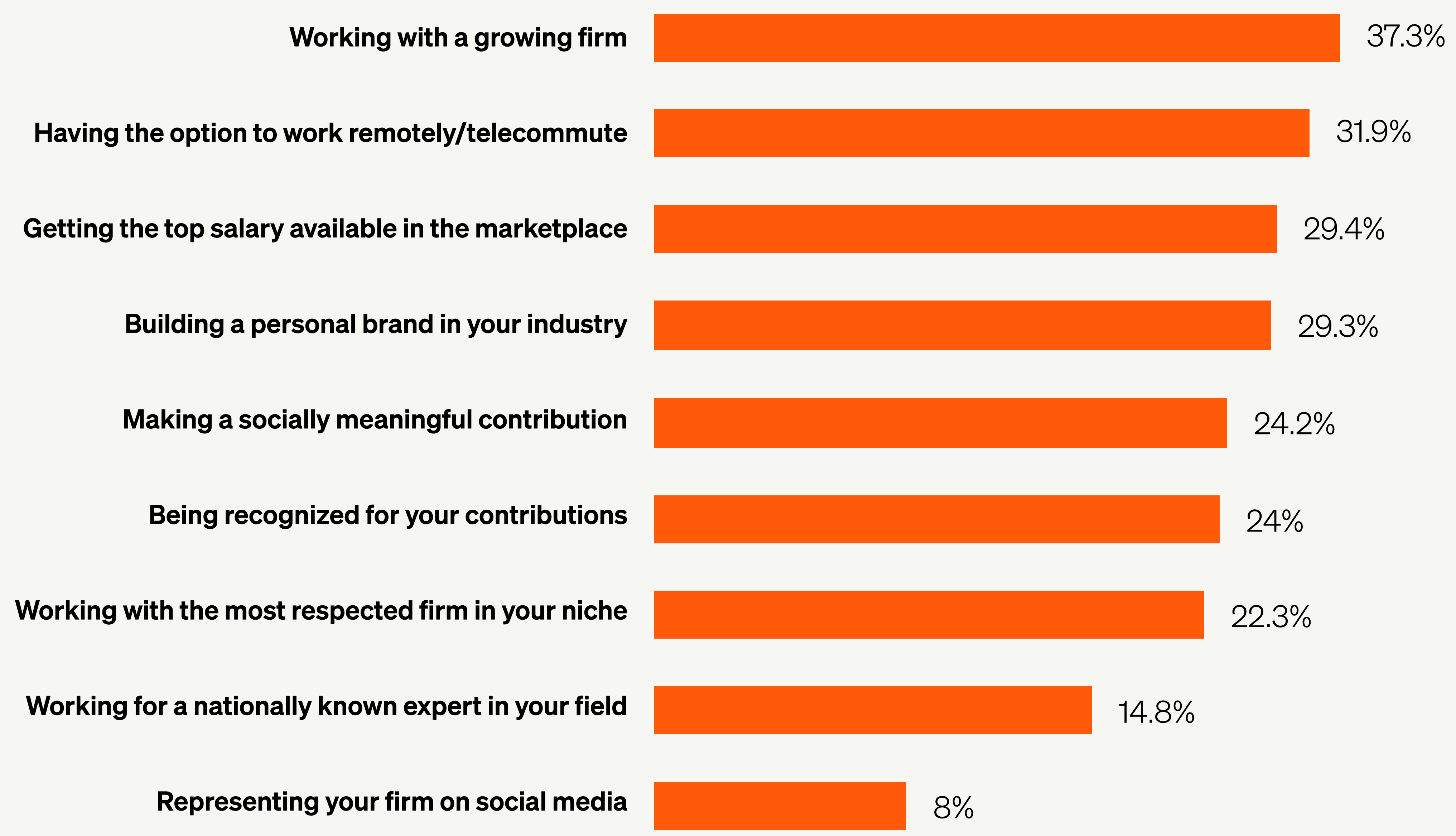
**Technology has blown the door wide open to remote workforce opportunities.**

"Imagine opening yourself up to the entire United States. You can find an abundance of talent because there are so many more professionals to choose from. Our data shows that when we post a remote position over an onsite position, we get eight times more applicants."

**Jeff Phillips**
CEO, Padgett Business Services
and Co-Founder, Accountingfly

Also consider that offering remote positions is a big attractor to the new generation of professionals. Lee W. Frederiksen, Ph.D. and Managing Partner at Hinge, points to current data that indicates what today's candidates care about most. Top on the list, at nearly 32%, is having the option to work remotely.

## What do today's accounting candidates really care about?




"Reprioritize recruiting efforts to focus on what candidates really care about. [For example], most prospective employees want to work for a firm with headroom for professional growth and plenty of flexibility."

**Lee W. Frederiksen, Ph.D.**
Managing Partner, Hinge

# Move past false assumptions

Before digging into best practices for building a remote staff, it's important to tackle (and kill) the remote work ethic myth. An all-too-common question among many firm leaders is still: "Do remote workers actually work?" This implies that if you can't see your staff, they are not working to capacity.

Amanda Aguillard, CPA, COO of Padgett Business Services and Co-Founder of Elefant Training, quickly dispels this myth by explaining that getting work done has nothing to do with the location and everything to do with the employee.

"When you hire the right employees and provide them with proper training, they will get the job done whether remote or on location."

**Amanda Aguillard, CPA**
COO, Padgett Business Services
and Co-Founder, Elefant Training

She also added that many accounting professionals tend to be far more focused and productive in a remote environment—away from distractions and the "noise" that come with common work areas.

Just as with hiring onsite employees, the key is to hire the right people. Firm leaders must put in the time to qualify recruits for the given position, thoroughly explain expectations, and ensure a good fit with the team and firm culture.

# 7 best practices for building a staff for the future

## Best Practice 1: Take your tech to the next level

Start by taking a good long look at the solutions that make up your technology ecosystem. An honest evaluation of your current tech stack will enable you to identify any holes. In other words, do you have the right applications in place to effectively support a remote staff?

As you think through refining your tech stack, consider the essential operational areas.

**File sharing:** Where are you going to securely store sensitive firm and client files so that they are accessible to all staff at all times?

> *Need a little guidance? Consider and test any of the following top solutions: Google Drive, DropBox, Box, and OneDrive.*

**Virtual conferencing:** Face-to-face time is critical for remote staff. Video meetings make it feel like everyone is together—even when scattered across the country.

> *Need a little guidance? Consider and test any of the following top solutions: Zoom, BlueJeans, Google Hangouts, RingCentral, GoToMeeting, and Microsoft Teams*

**Project management and workflow:** From real-time project monitoring and task assignment to expediting client work, project management and workflow solutions are central to any firm ecosystem.

> *Need a little guidance? Consider and test any of the following top solutions: XCM, Teamwork, and Office Tools. Wolters Kluwer and Thomson Reuters also offer cloud-based practice management solutions.*

**Internal messaging:** Email has long been the reigning tool of internal firm communications. Today, more firms are adopting solutions that support instant messaging functionality with the ability to easily search individual conversation history.

> *Need a little guidance? Consider and test the leader in this category: Slack.*

**Client-facing software:** Offer clients the convenience that comes with feature-rich and highly intuitive cloud solutions.

> *Need a little guidance? Consider BILL for accounts payable, accounts receivable, and spend and expense management.*

## Best Practice 2: Bring on the policy and procedure

As you consider adopting a remote workforce, it's important to create formal policy and procedure around key operational areas.

> "Recorded policies and procedures provide a standardized roadmap that leaders and staff can follow to ensure consistent and effective performance across departments and roles."
>
> **Amanda Aguillard, CPA**
> COO, Padgett Business Services
> and Co-Founder, Elefant Training

- **Onboarding:** Every employee should be onboarded the same way. This includes an introduction to the firm's mission and culture, technology setup, a tutorial on the solutions required to fulfill job duties, and training on individual tasks and role expectations.

- **Communications:** Map out team meetings over the course of the year to keep your entire team in the loop on all aspects of the business. Maintaining open communication is a highly effective way to build a positive culture and keep everyone informed.

- **Operations:** Every workflow process within the firm should be documented and available to staff. Procedural guides serve as dedicated "survival guides" for employees, helping them to best perform their day-to-day tasks.

## Best Practice 3: Draw your line in the sand

Only you can define just how remote you want your remote workforce to be. For some, there are no boundaries, while others maintain a remote staff within their home-state borders. When defining your geographical limits, consider the following:

- **State employment laws:** You have to decide how comfortable you are dealing with employment laws across states. If you are, expanding the candidate pool across the country is ideal. If not, staying within state lines is likely a better choice.

- **Time zones:** Working within multiple time zones can be challenging for some firms, especially those that prefer staff to be available between normal office hours (9-5). Consider easy solutions to working around time zones, such as assigning clients to staff based on being in the same time zone or coordinating weekly staff meetings to ensure face-to-face time on a scheduled basis.

## Best Practice 4: Put your firm first

Take the necessary steps to protect your firm—including your employees, your clients, and your products. Consider the following:

- **Use NDAs and non-competes:** These types of documents serve to protect your firm at all levels. You should revisit your NDA and/or non-compete. With a remote staff, it's good practice to be a little stricter with restrictions and penalties for what happens if a remote hire tries to steal one of your clients, your employees, or your intellectual property.

- **Know your laws and regulations:** Do your research on employment and tax laws by state so that the time you spend recruiting is not wasted. A seasoned advisor can help you figure out the best plan for a remote workforce that extends beyond your home state.

- **Use employment agreements:** Develop a work from home policy, which includes a list of employer expectations and other rules unique to your firm such as required in-office work hours or mandatory staff meetings.

## Best Practice 5: Cultivate the right culture

The culture within a brick-and-mortar firm and one that is virtual is very different. You have to consider these differences when you make the transition to hosting remote staff.

Jason Blumer, CPA and partner at Blumer & Associates CPAs, successfully transitioned from brick-and-mortar to completely virtual years ago, so he fully understands what it takes to cultivate the right culture. At the core is a sense of cohesiveness.

> "In the virtual world, you don't just bump into people in the hallway. You don't get a good read on emotions or have the opportunity to ask how their weekend was. When you are not onsite, you are not part of building that onsite culture."
>
> **Jason Blumer, CPA**
>
> Partner Blumer & Associates, CPAs

Being removed from firm culture works against building a cohesive team, so leaders have to be intentional about making this happen. Blumer asserts that leaders have to go out of their way to build a healthy culture by committing to weekly team meetings, in-person retreats, and other mandatory gatherings. With a healthy culture comes a healthy firm overall.

> "Virtual staff become invisible, so you have to work to keep them visible at all times. You have to work very hard at this."
>
> **Jason Blumer, CPA**
>
> Partner Blumer & Associates, CPAs

Beyond scheduled team meetings, firm leaders must also consistently encourage engagement at all levels of business. For example, if the firm posts personal staff Thanksgiving photos on the firm's internal chat channel, virtual staff should as well. It's all about reminding all employees that they are part of a larger team.

As Blumer says, "It's about creating a 'we're all in this together' feeling."

## Best Practice 6: Send the right message (and supplies)

Along with building culture, it's important to continually send the right message (and supplies) to virtual staffers. Remote workers need to feel part of the team at all times, and they need to be equipped with the right hardware. So, it's best if you send the right message and supplies from the get-go.

First and foremost, make remote staff feel like they are an equal part of your team. Start by sending new hires a welcome kit—which could include firm-branded swag such as shirts, water bottles, and pens—along with an employee handbook and other timely information. During the year, also make an effort to touch base on a personal level, such as sending birthday and work anniversary cards.

Remote staff should also receive all needed supplies to be successful—primarily the required hardware. This can include a laptop (with camera for video conferencing) and a large monitor (dual monitors in some cases). Also, make sure that remote staff have access to all the applications your firm uses to ensure full connectivity to people, products, and processes.

## Best Practice 7: Place collaboration at the core

Any successful business has mastered the art of collaboration. Teams have to be supported with tools that enable streamlined data flow, information sharing, and instant connectivity.

To craft a collaborative work environment that supports and connects all stakeholders, consider the following:

- **Adopt solutions that offer document sharing:** For example, Google Docs and Google Sheets are browser-based applications that allow multiple employees to collaborate on a document simultaneously.

- **Adopt solutions that support screen sharing:** The ability to share screens is invaluable. It allows multiple staff to communicate and share documents and data in real time.

> "People can't sit next to each other if they are remote. So something as simple as screen sharing brings staff together and makes collaborating on projects so much easier."
>
> **Jason Blumer, CPA**
> Partner Blumer & Associates, CPAs

- **Adopt tools and policy that support inclusion:** Be thoughtful in the solutions you select. Apps like Zoom allow several staff members to be in the same space (virtually) for meetings. In terms of policy, make it mandatory that all staff be onsite for an annual all-staff meeting or host a special staff retreat during the year.

> "You have to make an effort to ensure it doesn't feel like onsite employees make up the core team and your remote workers are on an island by themselves."
>
> **Jason Blumer, CPA**
> Partner Blumer & Associates, CPAs

# It’s time to build your staff for the future

Ask any successful entrepreneur what’s their biggest asset, and they’ll tell you it’s their staff. A strong team is what keeps work moving forward, clients happy, and the revenue flowing in.

Recruiting qualified staff, however, continues to be a struggle in the accounting landscape. Staffing shortages have long plagued the profession. But it’s a new era—one that boasts ease of 24/7, real-time connectivity. Technology has all but eliminated the boundaries of time and distance, allowing firm leaders to expand their reach into a much larger talent pool.

Get started building your remote firm by following the above best practices.

## The Accountant Entrepreneur eBook Series

Continue exploring advice from seasoned entrepreneurs on how to build profitable, efficient, and sustainable firms.

1. **Thinking Differently**
2. **Creating Deeper Client Connections**
3. **Building a Staff of the Future**
4. **Growing Your Firm Like a Pro**
5. **Mastering the Art of Selling**
6. **Pricing on Value**

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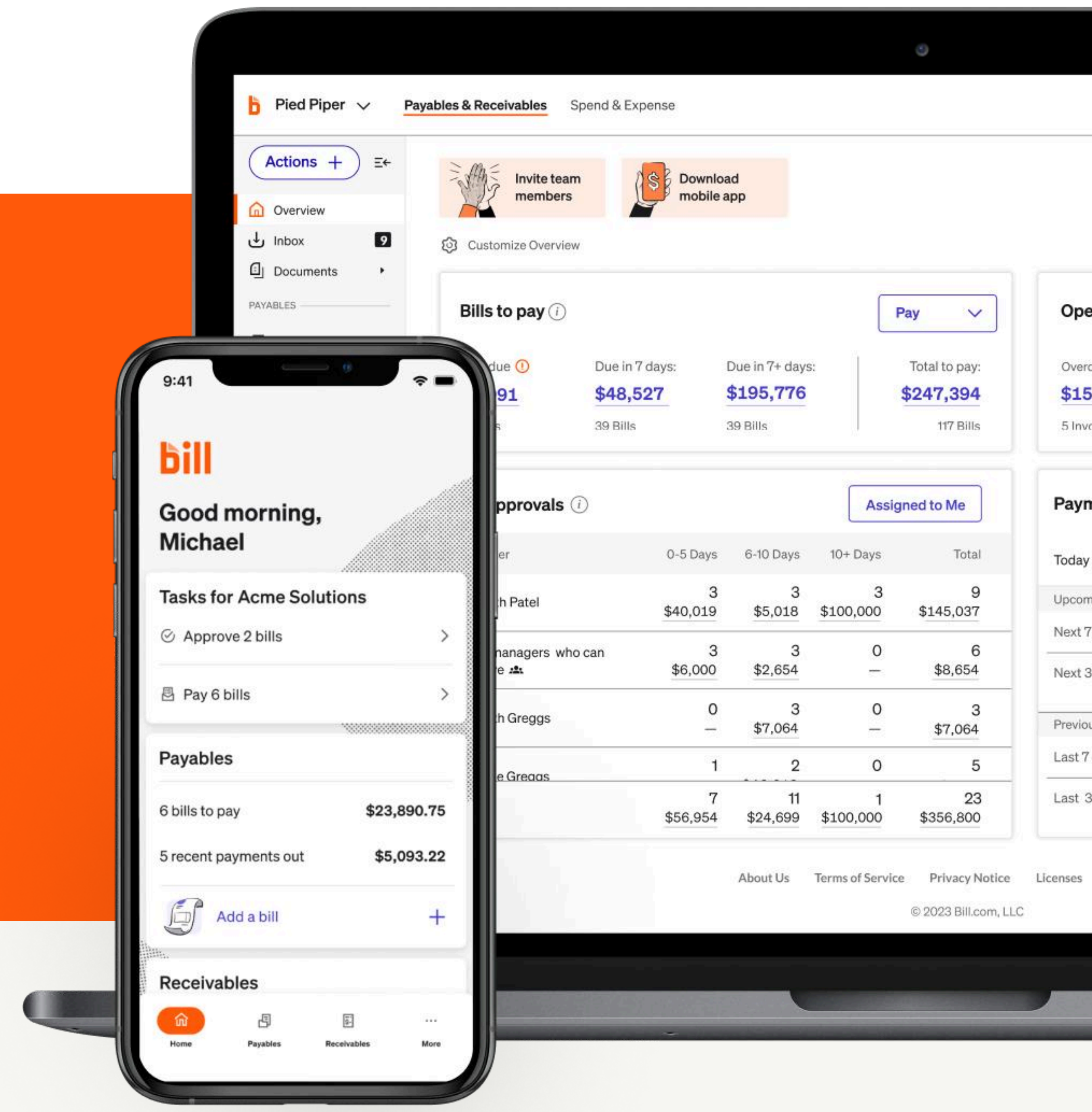


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**Nick Pasquarosa**
Founder & CEO, Bookkeeper360

"My clients love BILL Spend & Expense. They tell me, 'BILL Spend & Expense is the biggest game-changer you've added in a long time."

**Steve Chaney**
Managing Partner, Chaney & Associates