

CPAS CAN HARNESS RELATIONSHIPS TO PROTECT MENTAL HEALTH

How CPAs are coping—and what comes next

By **Jessica Musslewhite**

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CPAs are trained to be precise, ethical, and reliable—qualities clients and teams depend on. But the same traits can create internal pressures: perfectionism, taking on too much responsibility, and a tendency to prioritize others' needs over one's own. Add rapid shifts in technology, economic volatility, and rising expectations, and it's easy to see why many CPAs quietly carry significant cognitive load.

Mental health challenges are particularly prevalent among accounting professionals due to the demands of their roles.ⁱ Studies show professionals in high accountability roles experience elevated rates of anxiety and burnout.

Mental health shouldn't compete with professional excellence; it should support and enable it. Sustainable performance comes from integrating well-being practices into the way we work, lead, and serve. And some of the most effective practices are human-centred.

Resilience often starts with connection

Resilience isn't just an individual trait; it's a network effect. Whether you're in public practice, industry, government, or academia, peer relationships can buffer stress, provide perspective, and normalize challenges. Having someone to share challenges with can reduce feelings of isolation and overwhelm. Social support reduces cortisol levels and improves

problem-solving under pressure. Simply put, connection is a protective factor against burnout.

Peer support and mentorship

Research shows mentorship is a powerful way to increase career satisfaction and development. Structured mentorship and informal peer circles create trusted spaces to ask questions, share tough moments, and celebrate wins. Sharing what you've learned across years of practice (or learning from those newer to the profession) combats cynicism and fuels optimism. In fact, professionals with strong mentorship ties report higher job satisfaction and resilience during peak stress periods. When CPAs talk with peers, they realize their stressors are common and not personal failings. This normalization reduces self-criticism and promotes resilience because challenges feel manageable rather than unique or insurmountable.

Burnout can spread through teams like a social contagion, but collaboration helps reverse that trend. *Harvard Business Review* reports that purposeful collaboration can reclaim up to 24 per cent of workload time, reducing stress and increasing efficiency.ⁱⁱ Finding innovative and creative ways to redistribute work during peak periods lowers error rates and mitigates burnout. In addition, short check-ins to clarify

work and identify risks early make room for relief and learning. Collaboration isn't just about efficiency; it's about creating a culture where asking for help is normalized.

Boundaries built together Boundaries protect mental health by reducing decision fatigue and preventing overwork. Teams that cocreate norms—such as response-time expectations, meeting limits, and “focus time” blocks—report higher productivity and lower stress. These norms foster accountability and respect, ensuring that well-being isn't left to chance. For CPAs—who often juggle client demands and regulatory deadlines—clear boundaries are essential for sustainable performance.

Community care strengthens individual care

Engaging in broader networks like volunteering, mentoring, and participating in professional committees builds resilience beyond the workplace. Studies confirm volunteering improves life satisfaction, reduces depression symptoms, and strengthens social connections.ⁱⁱⁱ For CPAs, community involvement offers a sense of purpose that counters isolation and reinforces professional identity. When you give back, you also gain—a stronger support system and renewed perspective.

Practical strategies to try

- Pair up with a colleague for a “resilience buddy” check-in every two weeks. Use a simple script: What's feeling heavy? What's working? What's one action I'll take this week. Keep it short. Consistency beats intensity.
- Create a fun team tradition to acknowledge and celebrate achievements to boost recognition for and visibility of the team's work.

- Set communication guardrails. Agree on response-time norms with clients and colleagues (e.g., non-urgent emails within 24-4 hours). Add “focus time” to your calendar and share your availability proactively.
- Organize an annual team volunteering day then showcase and celebrate the community work.
- Normalize help-seeking. Reaching out, whether to a colleague, supervisor, or a confidential support line, is a flex not a personal shortcoming.

The bottom line

Mental health is not a luxury; it's a foundation for professional excellence. By investing in relationships like peer support, collaboration, mentorship, or community engagement, CPAs can build resilience that sustains both wellbeing and performance.



ⁱ Occupational Burnout among Accountants: A Systematic Literature Review

ⁱⁱ Beyond Collaboration Overload: How to Work Smarter, Get Ahead, and Restore Your Well-Being | Harvard Business Impact Education

ⁱⁱⁱ Volunteering may be good for body and mind - Harvard Health