

SMALL OFFICE/HOME OFFICE

Auspicious Energies

An organized, harmonious work environment is a business asset.

By Barbara Weltman and Michael Hayes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MANY CPA FIRM STAFF MEMBERS AND SOLE practitioners as well as chief executives use home offices in their professional work. CPAs can apply some principles of feng shui—which uses placement design to achieve harmony, health and prosperity—to make a workplace more pleasant and efficient.

PRACTITIONERS WHO WANT TO IMPROVE an office, whether at home or elsewhere, should follow some simple principles. One is to keep desk and drawers, cabinet tops, ledges and tabletops as clutter-free as possible. Stay on top of the situation by filing daily, purging weekly and doing a major cleanup twice a year.

CPAs WHO SPEND MANY HOURS A DAY on the computer will experience less eyestrain if they have warm lighting rather than overhead fluorescent. Too little light can depress productivity while too much can cause glare and headaches. A table or standing lamp with a full-spectrum bulb helps in a work area.

PRACTITIONERS DON'T HAVE TO TAKE feng shui literally to benefit from incorporating some of its easy-to-implement ideas into an office, at home or elsewhere. A tidy environment, pleasant sounds, attractive touches such as mirrors and plants, balanced light and healthy air flow all contribute to well-being and success.

Can CPAs boost success by fostering harmony and balance in the workplace? According to the principles of feng shui, you can. Half art, half mysticism, feng shui—Chinese for “wind” and “water” and pronounced fung shway—is the ancient practice of placement design to achieve harmony with the environment and a salutary effect on health and prosperity. Feng shui holds that arranging certain elements according to traditional guidelines can influence outcomes in all areas of life. It has become a popular way to improve the ambience of a home, and entrepreneurs are turning to it to reduce stress and enhance business possibilities. Reports say real estate mogul Donald Trump’s buildings incorporate feng shui, Virgin Atlantic Airways founder Sir Richard Branson uses it and Texas First National Bank and Mutual of New York apply it in their offices. You may even have feng shui consultants among your business clients.

New York feng shui master Alex Stark designed the three personal workspaces showcased here. In his view a harmonious, well-balanced environment liberates creativity and vitality and opens up new opportunities. Feng shui, the holistic practice of space design, is a valuable tool in creating salutary business environments, he says.



The red wall is about power and achievement; its artwork by a prominent artist nourishes with its intensity and prestige. The green and red carpet is about power combined with growth. The foliage pattern brings more natural elements into the office, which would be otherwise too rigid and corporate. The black of the desk and in the artwork promotes career. The sculpture of a woman reminds the owner of her feminine qualities

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HOME-OFFICE DOs

Many CPA firm staff members and sole practitioners work from home, and chief executives use home offices, too. Here are some feng shui considerations for augmenting a home work space.

Choose a dedicated area.

Keep business activities separate from your living environment. A separate entrance is best; next best is a location near a front or back door. If your work area must be a part of your living space, separate the two with a room divider.

Get an air purifier.

Keep the environment pleasant. To create a harmonious workplace, you must take all of your senses into account. Cooking or pet odors aren't ideal for your health and may discourage business visitors. Use an air purifier or keep windows open.

Choose color wisely.

In the classic feng shui tradition, color balances an individual's innate personal qualities, strengthens a desired effect or compensates for structural factors in the environment. The ultimate goal is harmony, so what's important is to use hues you truly enjoy—an office doesn't need to be power red to promote success.

Here is a list of some color affinities:

Green—stimulates business and money.
Peach—represents health, healing and overall well-being.

Blue—enhances peace and stimulates intuition.
Pink—is good for relationships. Gold—symbolizes abundance and wisdom (a good career color).
Red—enhances energy and success. Violet—inspires insight and peace.

Accessorize.

Small touches can effectively incorporate feng shui nuances in your home office.

-Include Crystals to deflect negative energy. A crystal figurine on your desktop will do.

-Add I Ching coins, which symbolize wealth. Three coins tied with a red thread are said to attract wealth. Place them in your wallet or somewhere discreet in the office.

-Add Jade, a symbol of good fortune. A small jade Buddha may bring good luck to your home office.

-Add Wind chimes. Hang these near an open window, air conditioner or fan to generate a relaxing sweet sound.

-Add a bowl of fruit. A bowl brimming with fruit symbolizes abundance. A bowl of crystal and jade fruit will encourage peace and good fortune and won't need to be replaced every few days.



In this office the desk occupies the fame and recognition area of the room (central rear). Red flowers promote success, and the bamboo plant and crystal decorations in the wealth and power corner of the desk also promote business growth. The lamp and family photos are in the relationships sector and encourage activity in the business. The black laptop is in the career sector of the desk, and its color promotes career advancement.



An important rule in feng shui is that you will become what you see, in this case from your desk. This photograph shows the view from the owner's desk, which is actually a work table—hence the clutter of work in progress. The strong colors of the art and artifacts aim for an ideal balance between elements that evoke success, prosperity and renown and images that affirm the client's lifestyle, interests and health.

RESOURCES

AICPA Resources

Publications Management of an Accounting Practice Handbook, loose-leaf version (# 090407JA); e-MAP, online subscription (# MAP-XXJA). Chapter 210 is on "Site Selection and Office Facilities."

Creating a Virtual Office:

Ten Case Studies for CPA Firms (# 090426JA).

For more information or to order, go to www.cpa2biz.com or call the AICPA at 888-777-7077.

Other Resources

The Internet lists many feng shui books, articles and consultants. Here are one of each.

"Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui" by Karen Kingston, Broadway Books, New York.

"Feng Shui Made Easy" by William Spear, Shambhalla, New York
www.alexstark.com—feng shui master Alex Stark's Web site.

www.techfengshui.com—a blog with links to articles for reining in technology clutter (new from blogger Ernie the attorney).



Will increased productivity and success inevitably follow if you arrange your work environment just so? You won't know unless you try it. Here are some very basic, easy-to-implement feng shui tips CPAs can use to make an office more pleasant and efficient, at home or elsewhere.

Remove clutter. Piles of papers look messy and create negative energy—and you waste time looking for information. Keep your desk and drawers, cabinet tops, window ledges and tabletops as paper-free as possible. File needed documents and put away items daily. Purge clutter weekly, and do a major cleanup twice a year.

Position your desk strategically. To attract prosperity place your desk so you see as much of your workspace as possible. According to feng shui, southeast is the "wealth corner," so it's preferable to put your desk on the south side of the room. Avoid having a window or a door behind you, which may leave you "unprotected." Note: Bulky furniture such as an overstuffed couch or an extremely large desk can overpower a room and disrupt harmony, the essential goal of feng shui.

Avoid placing furniture in or near a doorway. An entryway allows for the flow of ch'i (pronounced chee) or life energy. Blocking an office doorway blocks ch'i, decreases productivity and curtails privacy. It's better to keep obstacles away from an entrance.

Select the right room lighting. Too little light can depress productivity while too much can cause glare and headaches. The right wattage depends on the size of your office and your particular work process. Warm lighting is preferable to overhead fluorescent if you spend hours on the computer. A table or standing lamp with a full-spectrum (day-balanced) bulb helps counteract gloom in a work area.

Use mirrors. Feng shui precepts hold that mirrors protect against threats. Opposite a main entrance they may frighten away clients, however. Full-length mirrors on side walls denote a doubling of clients. Energy should move upward, not down, so make sure the long edges of mirrors hang parallel with walls. Octagonal mirrors draw positive ch'i, practitioners say.

Decorate with plants. Green promotes business growth, and plants brighten any work space. Bamboo and rubber plants represent good fortune, making them good office plants. If a plant dies, dispose of it right away.

Water is key. In feng shui, water symbolizes money. New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg—founder of worldwide financial communications company Bloomberg LP and a self-made multibillionaire—has aquariums throughout his business offices. If your office doesn't have room for one, use a mini interior fountain with clean, smoothly flowing water to achieve the desired effect. If you think a fountain will distract you, substitute a tasteful seascape or a picture of a waterfall.

Use images to reinforce goals. Feng shui holds that you're likely to achieve the outcomes you visualize. If you would like a particular client or project, for example, prepare a sample engagement letter and put it where you can see it. Replace it as needed.

Hire a Feng Shui consultant. If you are too busy or feel silly about applying feng shui techniques to your workspace, consider hiring a professional. Just as interior decorators can do big jobs or recommend small changes, feng shui masters can work with your space and budget limitations, and they may even become clients. If they suggest using wind chimes to bring luck or color to encourage an outcome, be willing to follow their advice. To experience any real change, you must be flexible enough to try.

Regardless of the kinds or number of changes you may make, using feng shui in the workplace can be a plus for today's busy accountant. A tidy office, pleasant sounds, good light and healthy air flow all contribute to well-being, efficiency and success.