



Honoring flexible and supportive employers.

Certes Financial Pros

When CPA Karen Oman started Certes Financial Pros in 1994, she was a mother of two in a busy, dual income household. Her vision was to create an environment where high level professionals could actually put in a 40-hour week and go home to a life. It was an idea that immediately resonated with potential employees, and this unique financial staffing firm has never had a problem finding skilled employees. Today there are about 200 of them, 170 of whom are financial professionals with more than ten years experience; 80% are CPAs and many have additional degrees. They consider Certes their employer and get their benefits and paychecks here, but they are contract workers and spend their days working for other companies.

The average tenure for a Certes employee is four years, almost unheard of in the staffing industry, points out communications manager Dori Estrella. There are many reasons for this longevity, reasons like mutual and clear expectations, a sense of community, control and autonomy, and work-life balance.

Employees here have choices about their work-lives, and while they may choose to put in the 60 or 70 hour-weeks that are common to CPAs, they're fully compensated for those extra hours; all get time and a half for anything over 40 hours. And their opinions are sought not only about the hours they want to work, but their compensation as well. "We allow all employees a lot of input," says Estrella. "They tell us what they think they should be making and how many hours they want to work, and we work with them. Our surveys tell us that more than 90% of our employees are as busy as they want to be." More than 15% take the summers off, and men (who comprise half the Certes workforce) want balance just as much as women do. Many take advantage of flexible work schedules, including the opportunity to take six month sabbaticals without losing benefits.

The company offers a host of benefits, both traditional and non-traditional – comprehensive health, medical and dental care, 401(k) with company match, and a long list of voluntary benefits, long and short term disability, life insurance, etc. But there are other perks that epitomize this culture of work-life balance. Employees get complimentary tickets to Broadway shows when they come to town, and tickets to the Timberwolves and the Twins. When Prince held a rare appearance there was a drawing for the chance to see him. And this staff gets its choice of five vacation homes around the country at no cost – only a minimal penalty from the added taxable income. One is in Manhattan Beach, California four blocks from the ocean; there's a condo in Sanibel (on the ocean), one on a Fort Myers golf course, one on a Brainerd lake, and for skiers, a condo in Park City, Utah, with a view of the Olympic ski jump in the distance. It's not uncommon to hear contractors' families refer to them as "our vacation home" when sharing stories about their holiday trip or family vacation.

Because its contractors are working all over the Twin Cities, the company believes it's important to give them a sense of community. Sally Mainquist, who assumed the roles of President and CEO this year, hosts quarterly "Take Five" events at her home, where employees gather for three hours of networking and refreshments. Regular events celebrate accomplishments and daily e-mails and monthly newsletters report on company and employee news.

This year, Certes was ranked by the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* as one of the state's Best Places to Work, and 97% of employees believe its leaders are committed to that end; 100% believe their leaders value people as the most important asset. Estrella agrees. "We do put our employees first, but that means we're really putting our clients first too. When you value your employees, they give back to the clients tenfold."