



## Abe Schlissfeld CPA, EA

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Abe Schlissfeld is a tax partner and leader of the Real Estate Group at Marks Paneth, one of the 50 largest accounting firms in the U.S. He is a recognized thought leader on Qualified Opportunity Zones, often blogging on hot topics in real estate.

### Have you always embraced marketing and business development?

There's a joke about an extroverted accountant being one who looks at your shoes when he's talking to you instead of his own. That was me. Even as a partner, I believed if I did good work, new business would come through referrals, and that was it. If I went to an event, I would make a beeline for the coffee and stand in a corner until the speaker came on. Now when I'm at conferences, I'm hardly in my seat at all. I'm always up, walking around, meeting people. Marketing has changed me, both professionally and personally.

### What brought on this change?

We brought in a new chief marketing officer, and one of the first things she did was rebrand the firm: "Success Is Personal." This tagline reflects our focus on our clients' needs, a deep understanding of their businesses and a commitment to their unique goals. She pushed beyond traditional advertising to include thought leadership, speaking engagements and social media. We used to buy canned content but now it is all written internally. It's cheaper, a better showcase for our talent and more relevant to our clients. I learned marketing is like fighting a war - you have to come at it on all fronts.

### What marketing tools have been most effective for you?

LinkedIn is so important. I joined LinkedIn when it was really new and have fully embraced it, spending up to an hour and a half per day posting, responding to and reading what others post. I look at what my competitors are posting. It's part of the job and it is so easy!

We also have stepped up our appearances at conferences. I try to attend at least one event every week and schedule a speaking opportunity once per month.

### How do you differentiate yourself and your firm?

I've learned if you take ownership of a topic, whatever it is, you become recognized for it. When the Tax Cuts and

Jobs Act passed, the outside business world couldn't have cared less about tax compliance. We decided to become experts on opportunity zones. Now we're industry leaders. A nationally recognized opportunity zone leader recently posted on LinkedIn a list of the top influencers on opportunity zones, and I was number 41 on the list. I know there are more than 40 people in the country who know or have done more on this topic, but I made the list because of how much I was out there speaking and on social media.

### What are some of your current marketing or business development initiatives?

Our chief marketing officer recently started an eight-month networking class for managers designed to help them develop networking skills and provide them with the tools needed to contribute to the growth and success of the firm. They meet once a month, partners come in to speak, they are assigned homework, and then we host a major networking event with other young professionals at an upscale venue.

There's also a big focus on achieving internal diversity. "Success is personal" in this case means our partners can relate to the experience of our clients. For example, of the eight new partners we announced in January, six are women. It's the fruit of many years of putting in the effort to recognize and empower women and other groups.

### Any advice for accounting marketers?

Educating "old school" partners is about taking them out of the comfortable world of tax and accounting and into a world where they have to be an advisor. To get into that mindset, they have to embrace something different. I'm a big believer there is no secret sauce when it comes to marketing and business development. There are simple, straightforward things you can do that will get results. So much of what we do in marketing is branding. The more you amplify your brand, the more success you'll have.