




The ultimate post-tax season guide:

Transform learnings from this year into next year's success

You've wrapped up tax season and celebrated in style. Now it's time to reap the benefits of your hard work. Gather your team to review the last few months and strategize your way to even greater success next year.

 **Expert Insight:** To get you the inside scoop, we asked **Allison Hawkins**, co-founder and partner at [Hawkins & Co. Accounting](#) in Windsor, Ontario, to share her advice for putting together a tax season debrief your future self will thank you for.

Prepare for your debrief

- Take notes during tax season.** Use shared documents, such as Google Docs, for real-time recording and sharing of information.
- Include everyone.** Tax season is a team effort, everyone brings unique and different insights into what worked and what didn't.

"It's a very communal process," Hawkins says. "I might not know exactly what would make tax season better for you, so everybody needs to have a seat at the table."
- Get a general consensus** on how tax season went. If there are dramatically different opinions — "So straightforward!" "Horrible!" — dig deeper to find out why. "Was the work not allocated evenly across the team? Did some people have access to resources that others didn't?" Hawkins suggests.



Assess your internal processes

- **Pinpoint areas that consistently caused confusion.** Did multiple team members raise concerns about the same overlooked or missed tasks? According to Hawkins, one major challenge her team faces is ensuring smooth handoffs, which involve clarifying responsibilities, tracking the progress of each file, and addressing follow-ups.

→ **Expert tip: Embrace technology**

Use project management tools to create workflows and track each file as it progresses from person-to-person through every stage.

While Hawkins uses [ClickUp](#) at her firm, other tools such as [Xero Practice Manager](#) or [Asana](#) are great options to consider.

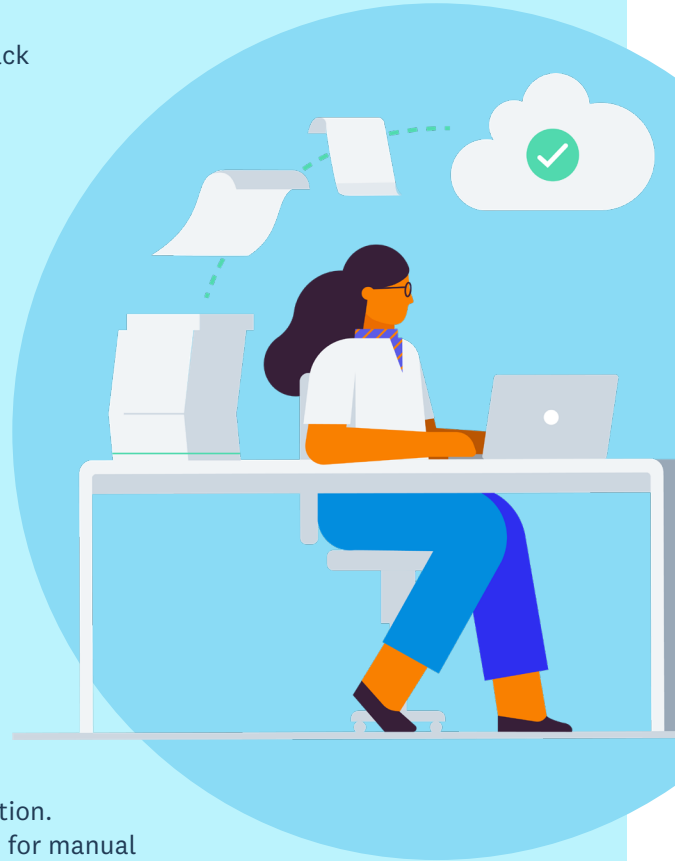
- **Adjust your process template.** Once you've identified any gaps, modify and update the checklist you follow when handling files. Include any information that can help with reviewing, handing off, or picking it up again next year.
- **Eliminate bottlenecks.** While some tax-related tasks naturally require a certain amount of time, there are definitely some that can be streamlined with the right tools and tech.

→ **Expert tip: Automate your workflows**

- **Step 1: Choose the right tools:** Automation is a game-changer, saving time, eliminating tedious tasks, and reducing errors in manual data entry. Xero's cash coding functionality is one example of automation in action. It effortlessly generates trial balances without the need for manual data entry, significantly reducing the chances of errors creeping in. [Learn more about Xero.](#)
- **Step 2: Integrate.** Save time, reduce overlooking important details, and minimize the costs of paying for multiple providers by consolidating data in one place. For example, TaxCycle seamlessly integrates with Xero making it easy to import GIFI codes from Xero into TaxCycle for T1, T2, and T5013 returns ensuring accuracy and efficiency. [Learn more about TaxCycle.](#)
- **Step 3: Get paid faster.** For small businesses like Hawkins's firm, maintaining a healthy cash flow is crucial. Streamlining the invoicing process can accelerate payment. Consider leveraging invoicing integrations between platforms like Xero and TaxCycle. Effortlessly create and send invoices based on completed client work, improving efficiency and ensuring prompt payment.

Additionally, integrated payment service providers like [Stripe](#) offer the convenience of clients making payments directly from their invoice, resulting in a seamless payment experience.

- **Stay up to date with any changes.** Build processes that ensure your team is always on top of any changes introduced by the CRA in any given tax year. Hawkins recommends reviewing updates via the CRA website, visiting TaxCycle's website, or attending [Video Tax News'](#) Annual Tax Update. "It covers new legislation that's come in, so we can put together a list of clients we think it's going to impact," she says.



Examine your client communication

- **Review your timing.** The sooner you can get your clients' information, the smoother your tax season will be. To encourage timely submissions, you can explore incentives. "In February, we told clients we'd honour last year's prices for anyone who was able to get their information to us by March 15," Hawkins shares.

→ **Expert tip: Avoid last-minute scrambles**

Simplify document management with integrated tools like Hubdoc. Quickly upload information throughout the year, easily extract data from bills, invoices, and bank statements, and seamlessly sync it with Xero. With everything in one platform and accessible in the cloud, you and your clients can both avoid a last-minute scramble — and the dreaded piles of paper.

[Learn more about Hubdoc.](#)

- **Manage payment expectations.** When discussing taxes with clients, be transparent about what they have to pay. Don't make false promises about getting money back if they might end up owing. It's important to find a fair and honest way to communicate their tax responsibilities.
- **Communicate clearly.** Set your clients up for tax season success by providing them with the information they need ahead of time, including checklists and deadlines. Make sure you have a quick and easy way to communicate with them, so you can ask and answer questions and send reminders.

→ **Expert tip: schedule your reminders**

In Xero, you can set reminders for your team so no important deadlines slip by. [Xero HQ Ask](#) allows you to create and send queries to your clients when you need to request information or documents. You can see their replies and respond all in one platform, so you both have a record of your conversation. [Learn more about Xero HQ.](#)

- **Be empathetic.** Tax season is stressful for clients too. "They just don't know what they don't know, and they're doing the best they can," Hawkins says. Look for ways you can make them more comfortable. For example, Hawkins tries to match clients with team members they've already worked with "so there's consistency and continuity of care." Introducing them to tools that can make the process easier also helps.

Analyze the business implications

- **Tax season tells a bigger story.** "Debriefing after tax season is a framework for debriefing on your practice as a whole. The things we learn in tax season help us run the firm all year," Hawkins says.
- **Make careful cuts.** Run a cost-benefit analysis to identify any tax season offerings that are creating too much work and stress and not enough profit. Hawkins's firm stopped doing personal tax returns for individuals who didn't also have a business account with them because they weren't generating enough value to justify the extra work. "It's allowed us to improve the tax services we offer our corporate clients," she says.



- **Look for new opportunities.** While you're cutting old services that no longer make sense for your business, look for new opportunities. Analyze your client demographics to see if there's anything about their size, industry, and location that could indicate a new market or service you can explore.

→ **Expert tip: leverage tech to grow advisory services**

Tools like Hubdoc and Xero optimize workflows, freeing up time for new services. By simplifying tax document sharing with clients year-round, you can create space to offer financial strategy or take on more accounts.

- **Set your team up for success.** Assess your team to make sure everyone is in the best position to contribute to tax season. "Somebody might not be the right fit for tax work. Maybe they have no interest in it, they don't have the right training yet, or they shouldn't be client-facing," Hawkins says. "Get the right people in the right role and support them."



Hawkins's 3 key tips for tax season success

- 1 Iterate, don't overhaul.** "Change is hard, so be careful about how much you put in place. Think of it as iterative. We've never completely ripped up our entire tax season process because the concepts and the stages are pretty consistent."
- 2 Test before tax season.** "Test your solutions throughout the year. You don't want to think, 'This is great, it's going to be fantastic,' then get a few days into tax season and realize it makes it worse."
- 3 Have your plan ready by the end of December.** "Once you get into January, you get into a bunch of corporate year ends and T4 slips, and through to the end of February, you have all the dividends slips. So you really want to come into the year knowing that you're ready."

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