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## Finding balance is AGH accountant Paris' way

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When one partner of a three-partner Internet advertising agency decided to leave the firm, Paul Paris — their accountant — helped them not just with the financial ramifications but also with ensuring that conflict stayed at a minimum and helping each decide on a future direction.

"The bottom-line aspect to a lot of things is not everything is that important, that urgent," said Paris, managing partner with Atlanta-based boutique accounting firm **Aarons, Grant & Habif LLC (AGH)**. "You've got to get people to understand that they sometimes have to give on something."

The episode is just one example of why the 64-year-old Paris is known by clients and colleagues as a psychologist in an accountant's body, as comfortable mediating intra-company challenges as crunching numbers and never neglecting to advise everyone to budget family and fun into the bottom line.

"What Paul brings to the firm more than anything else is his compassion for the clients he serves," said Adrian Grant, one of AGH's founding partners. "The other unique thing about Paul is his strength as a leader and mentor, helping clients as another set of eyes to manage their business."

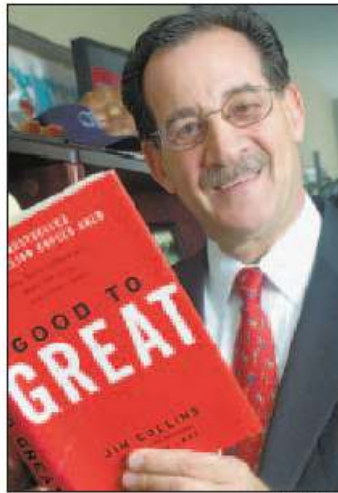
Paris gives much more than tax advice but rather key strategic guidance at all levels of a business from financial matters to employment issues to work-life balance, said Michael Koziol, a principal with Atlanta-based entertainment studio **Dragonfruit Studios LLC**.

Paris also coached Koziol and his previous partners from launch to sale of their company, Ant Farm Interactive.

"I never think of Paul as an accountant," Koziol said. "We never had a board of directors, but Paul was our ... most trusted business adviser."

At AGH, Paris' areas of expertise include shepherding startups and established closely held businesses in the finance and service industries, as well as brokering arbitration and mediation settlements for mergers, acquisitions and troubled businesses.

Observing relationships, being a good listener, reading expressions and cultivating patience are the key qualities to which Paris attributes his own



JOANN VITELLI

**It all adds up:** Listening well and patience are among the assets that have made Paul Paris successful.

success and what he loves most about his job, he said.

His development of those qualities has everything to do with his roots, he added.

Born in Brooklyn in 1943, Paris said he drifted toward accounting because he enjoyed calculating numbers in his head, and also in rebellion to his mother's oft-made declaration that her son was destined to be a doctor.

His mother, a bookkeeper, also taught him a priority that he shares with clients — not to just budget money for food and rent but also for vacations.

His father, who owned and operated a handbag and luggage repair business, taught him to appreciate others and nurture their growth — skills he uses not just advising clients but also to mentor young accountants at AGH.

"I enjoy that the most — career-pathing people and then letting them go and watching them blossom," Paris said.

He added that most people already know the solution to problems but just not how to get there.

Paris graduated from Bethany College in Bethany, W.Va., in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and received a master's degree in business administration from Bernard M. Baruch College of the City University of New York in 1972.

He moved to Atlanta in 1976 to be comptroller and chief financial officer for Continental Can Company Inc., now part of **U.S. Can Co.**, for the "adventure" of living in a new place, and liked it so much that he refused a transfer back to New York, he said.

"I just liked the way people treated each other here," he added. "They actually said 'please' and 'thank you,' and it was a beautiful city, too."

Before joining AGH, he was a partner at Papadakis, Nelson, Paris and Bohannon from 1978 to 1983, operated his own accounting firm from 1983 to 1986 and served as an independent CPA and mortgage consultant from 1986 to 1991.

He met his wife, Jill, also an accountant, in 1983, and they married the following year.

Indeed, Paris said he does not define his own success through financials but rather by the quality of his family life.

He also has a secret childhood passion and has been helping AGH plan for his own succession to ensure he can retire and pursue it on his 70th birthday.

With all five of his children graduated from college by then, he looks forward to singing and learning how to play guitar.

As children, Paris and his sister Shelly, who tap-danced, entertained residents at Brooklyn old-age homes.

Despite some recent humorous forays into rapping for his daughter Audrey's bat mitzvah, his son Josh's wedding and his father-in-law's birthday, he does make one promise:

"I won't be a Jewish rapper," Paris said.