**Documenting Your Workflow Processes**

Whether you operate as a solo practitioner or with a team, documenting your processes makes sense for productivity, efficiency and minimising stress.

When you’re up against deadlines, having documented processes that are easy for you (or any team member) to follow, you reduce the chance of omissions, confusion or errors. Even for routine tasks, having a procedure to follow makes it easier for everyone, including your clients.

Workflow processes take you through the sequence of starting, working on and finalising a specific task. Duplicating processes as much as possible, or at least starting with a default template and customising from there, will make your work easier and faster and reduce bottlenecks in your processes.

Documenting processes means that the information required to complete a task is based on a sequence of steps that can be followed by anyone, rather than the information staying in one person’s head. If that person leaves and there is no documented process, you’ve lost valuable information. Similarly, if you operate on your own and need to hand work over quickly to a colleague because of an emergency, the less that is in your head the easier it will be for someone to pick up and look after your clients temporarily. If you take on a new team member, so much time and effort is saved by having documented processes in place when they start.

**What Processes Should You Document?**

The services you provide, the type of clients and industries and the number of people in your team will govern what processes should be documented.

In general, the larger your team, the more important it is to document as much as possible.

Some workflows to consider are:

* Client onboarding process.
* Protocols for communicating with clients and their tax agents.
* Compliance work processes, such as BAS or payroll tax.
* Process for sending, obtaining and filing client authorisations.
* New employee setup in software.
* Supplier payments procedures.
* Management of private and confidential documents that contain personal information.
* Cyber security protocols.

For smaller teams or solo operations, think about the areas in which you most commonly encounter errors or bottlenecks that make the process inefficient and start there.

If you are planning on growing your practice into a business, then documenting processes is essential. The less the business’ services are dependent on information in your head, the more professional your services will be.

Some workflow processes are simple and repetitive, based on a strict progression of tasks that rely on a prior step having been completed. Some processes are variable and may have general principles but depend on particular application of the principles to each client. Some processes may have a mixture of defined and variable steps.

Some processes may end up being a simple checklist. Some may require more information in order to apply principles of problem solving to specific client situations.

**How to Document Your Processes**

1. Start with one process that is relatively simple, for example, client onboarding.
2. Outline the main steps in the task first as a draft.
3. Question the steps – do they make logical sense? Are they in the correct order?
4. Break down each of the main steps into sub-tasks. Add details as needed – but only enough to get the job done.
5. Don’t add information that is not relevant to the process. For example, you might have client relevant information for a particular process – this is better filed in client notes, rather than the process document.
6. Consider what stops the process from working as it should – is it a lack of information, client communications, one person having too much responsibility for the process? Try to factor in processes to address potential setbacks – or add this information later once you are testing the process documentation.
7. Decide on a format for your processes and stick to it. It is confusing and time-wasting if you have a different format and style of documenting different processes. Standardise the processes to make it easy to follow.
8. Create a process-based checklist for each client and customise as needed.
9. Test the process and refine as needed.
10. Save your processes and procedures documents in a dedicated file.

Once you have a document outlining the process for a particular task, it is easy to modify or refine it as needed. It is natural that your processes will change over time as you learn new ways of doing things, respond to changes in compliance requirements or change technology. Monitor the process over time and adjust the documentation so it is always current.