

A Relationship Business

An Interview with Samuel A. DiPiazza Jr.,
Global Chief Executive Officer, PricewaterhouseCoopers

EDITORS' NOTE Sam DiPiazza joined Coopers & Lybrand in 1973 and became a Partner in 1979. He headed the Birmingham, Alabama, and Chicago offices before being named Midwest Regional Managing Partner in 1992 and head of the New York office two years later. Following the merger of Coopers & Lybrand and Price Waterhouse in 1998, DiPiazza was named the Americas Leader of Tax and Legal Services. In 2000, he was elected Chairman and Senior Partner of the U.S. firm, and assumed his current role in 2002. Among numerous professional and civic affiliations, DiPiazza is a Trustee of the International Accounting Standards Committee Foundation, Chairman of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, a member of the executive committee and immediate past Chairman of The Conference Board, Inc., and a member of the executive committee of the International Business Council of the World Economic Forum. The Coauthor of Building Public Trust: The Future of Corporate Reporting, published in 2002, DiPiazza holds a degree in accounting from the University of Alabama and an MS in tax accounting from the University of Houston.



Samuel A. DiPiazza Jr.

COMPANY BRIEF Formed by the 1998 merger of Coopers & Lybrand and Price Waterhouse, PricewaterhouseCoopers (www.pwcglobal.com) is a global professional services firm, employing more than 146,000 people in 770 offices in 150 countries. The firm offers industry-focused assurance, tax, and advisory services.

Have you been happy with the strength of PricewaterhouseCoopers' business over the past year, and what is your outlook for growth for the firm?

We have had another successful year, with continued growth in our global revenues. We are very pleased with the ability of our network to sustain growth in the face of some very challenging economic conditions around the world. Our assurance business grew despite a slowdown in demand for services to meet regulatory requirements. Our tax practice continues to perform very well, and our advisory business, now focused more closely

on our core competencies, is also expanding.

It's difficult to predict exactly how our business will perform in 2009. Much will depend on the state of the unsettled worldwide financial markets, the lingering credit crisis, and, of course, the cost of energy and the threat of inflation. We anticipate that market conditions may be dramatically different in different parts of the world. In many cases, it won't be a matter of what businesses we're in, but where we are in them.

That said, we anticipate that our business will continue to grow, particularly in the emerging markets, where demand for our services has surged in recent years.

How is PricewaterhouseCoopers structured? Is it around industry expertise or type of service?

We provide our services through a broad range of industry practices. These include the financial services sector, technology and information services, consumer and industrial products, and many others. Our clients expect us to have in-depth knowledge of their businesses and the industries in which they operate. We work hard to maintain our industry expertise and to deliver our insights to clients, as the centerpiece of our services.

How has the role of professional services firms evolved over the years, and what do your clients expect from PricewaterhouseCoopers today?

Back in the '90s, the marketplace was focused on revenue growth. There was not enough importance attached to transparency. But the changes in the early part of this decade, particularly new regulatory requirements, have shifted the focus for the better. We've become even more committed to being transparent.

Our clients tell us that they want to work with people who are willing to invest in building strong relationships, and who want to share and collaborate with them. Our clients want us to be able to see issues from their perspective and put our focus on building value. They want us to bring both our heads and our hearts to work for them. In building relationships of that nature, we also must carefully guard our objectivity. We have to retain that balance if our business is to remain relevant.

PricewaterhouseCoopers operates in

a competitive marketplace, where services can sound very similar from one company to the next. How does the firm distinguish itself?

I say it every day: The big difference is in the people. Delivering that message consistently to everyone in our organization is one of the most important things I do. We are in a relationship business. The strength of our relationships with clients is at the heart of our success. Our network may have advantages in some areas, and we're zealous about our unsurpassed reputation for integrity. But the real differentiator for our clients is in the experience they have with PwC's people. Do we understand and care about their business? Do we help them succeed both professionally and personally? We want PwC's people to deliver the distinctive experience that our clients expect from our brand, so that when new opportunities or problems arise, clients call us first.

Are you happy with the way PricewaterhouseCoopers has continued to attract and retain talent?

The problem of attracting talent is everywhere, in every company. We are in a knowledge business, so attracting very smart people is critical for us. Therefore, we're constantly seeking new avenues, like blogs and social networks, through which we can attract the best people. We're proud that recent studies show us to be the most attractive employer in our profession.

PwC is committed to being an organization in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfill his or her professional and personal potential. This commitment is based on our belief that, in order to deliver distinctive service to clients, we must first create a distinctive work experience for our own people. Accordingly, we're continually creating innovative workplace programs to develop and retain our people.

In leading the firm, your time is pulled in many different directions. How critical is it for you to have direct client interaction?

I make it a personal commitment to talk with at least one client every day, regardless of where I am. If I'm forced to miss a day, I make it up the following day. We're in a service business. If the leaders of a service organization lose touch with the concerns of their clients, they threaten its ability to succeed. ●