

Sing Along with the CPA

BY DAVID PLASKOW, NJSCPA COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Howie Kutcher's childhood almost sounds like a Neil Simon play or Woody Allen movie. He grew up an only child in Brooklyn. His dad, Marvin, was a professional drummer who played at presidential inaugurations and at Carnegie Hall; his mom, Natalie, was a homemaker. Musicians and other creative types often visited the Kutcher household.

"My parents always encouraged me to play an instrument," says Kutcher. "But they said I shouldn't make it a career because it's a tough life."

Kutcher decided to major in accounting at Baruch College. "I've always liked quantifying, sorting and putting things in order," says Kutcher.

After receiving a B.B.A. in accounting in 1981, Kutcher joined the audit staff of the firm where he had been an intern: Marks Paneth LLP in New York. "Unfortunately, the firm lost its largest client that year and let go many of the staff, me included," notes Kutcher.

For the next several years, Kutcher worked at KPMG in tax. At night, he went to Pace University where he received an M.S.T. in 1988. "I started in audit, but switched to tax because I simply found tax more interesting," says Kutcher.

Kutcher left KPMG for greener pastures and became a tax manager at Sterling Drug. Kutcher was again downsized when Sterling was acquired by Kodak in the late 1980s. "Despite that experience, I wanted to stay in industry," says Kutcher.

Kutcher discovered an opportunity when he noticed a dearth of recruiters in corporate taxation. "There were maybe 20 of these recruiters in the country, and I also had a few ideas about how to enhance the process," he notes.

So, in 1990, the Briarcliff Manor, NY, resident started his own tax

recruiting company in the NY metro area. "It was tough in the beginning," says Kutcher. "But I tirelessly networked, built a database and have been active on social media. These days, all I do is recruiting. I don't even do my own taxes anymore."

Being a member of the New Jersey Society of CPAs has also helped. "The personal development and networking events have been tremendous assets to my practice," says Kutcher.

When he's not matching tax accountants with companies looking to add personnel, Kutcher likes to travel and stay in shape by playing tennis and walking. "I've walked a mile every weekday for 10 years, even if I was sick or there was a blizzard outside," states Kutcher.

Kutcher's original passion, playing the piano, nearly fizzled before it got a chance to blossom. "When I was in grade school, practicing Bach and Beethoven every day got boring," says Kutcher. "However, I got a new piano teacher who was a hippie, and he introduced me to The Beatles, Billy Joel, Elton John and other rock musicians, and it renewed my interest in playing." It may not have hurt that Kutcher's father told young Howie that "knowing how to play an instrument could one day come in handy with the ladies."

"I went into the school auditorium one morning. It was dark and quiet. I began playing, and after a while



I looked up and there was a crowd watching me perform. I have to admit, it was quite exhilarating," recalls Kutcher.

These days, Kutcher (singalongwithhowie.com) gives his time playing at schools, nursing homes and private parties. "One day, I played kids songs at a nursery school at 8:00am, then at 8:00pm I played show tunes at a nursing home – talk about the circle of life," he says.

Kutcher's song catalog is decidedly eclectic: hits, doo-wop, TV theme songs, holiday music and more. While most of his gigs are nonpaying, he definitely derives a benefit. "It's a great feeling when you play at a nursing home and you see someone who is frail and sullen one minute and smiling and tapping his toes the next," he adds.

What does Kutcher's family think of his performing? "My wife, Barbara, and kids, Matt and Hayley, love it. And having two teenage kids lets me stay current with popular music." ❧