

"Accounting for My Taxes"

It is never too early for me to put off doing my taxes. And it's not as if I'm sweating over the tax tables myself, because I usually delegate the chore to an accountant.

I look at filing my own taxes as I would look at, say, removing my own kidney. While I am certain I have enough gauze and sharp utensils around my kitchen, hiring a professional still seems more prudent.

That's because unraveling the complexities of the tax code can be as difficult as deciphering the Dead Sea Scrolls. But unlike making even a tiny mistake on a tax return, a scholar could botch the translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls miserably and not have to worry about someone confiscating his house.

Even the notorious Al Capone got away with racketeering, bootlegging, and machine gunning his colleagues. Yet the only reason the government sent him to prison was because he didn't do his taxes correctly.

I suppose I just don't want to clutter my brain with tax regulations. I believe we have a finite number of brain cells. Imprint cells unnecessarily with tax law and they'll be rendered useless for anything else.

I don't want to look back when I am 90 at all the precious brain cells I wasted on depreciation tables and regret I have none left now for remembering marginally more important things like my own name or where I live.

So why do we have to file at all, because the IRS already knows to the penny how much we earned and how much we owe them? They're happy to send us notices months after we file saying we neglected to list the interest on some long forgotten savings account. Then they tell us exactly what we owe. Why don't they just send us an invoice, then we can forgo the drudgery of sending them our tax data, which they apparently already have. In the end, we could spend more time at work, earn more money, and ultimately pay them more taxes.

Until then, I'll continue to use an accountant who is less likely to cause a costly error. Remember, the IRS still takes delight imposing stiff fines for even an honest mistake. The penalty, as you may already know, is still calculated using the following time honored formula: Take the amount you owe, and multiply by... the amount you owe.

This year, by stuffing a shoe box with all my receipts for my accountant, I have compressed my tax preparation chores into one step, or at the most 2 steps if I have to count driving the box to my accountant as a separate step. I will take comfort knowing that he will surely get me back more money than I ever could. On the other hand, I'd be satisfied if he can get me enough back to cover his fee.