



# Guided by instinct, entrepreneur finds success in niche tax market

BY HEATHER BIELE ([HTTPS://KANSASALUMNIMAGAZINE.ORG/AUTHOR/HEATHERBIELE/](https://kansasalumnimagazine.org/author/heatherbiele/))

As one of five children, Diane Yetter always knew she would have to pay her way through college. The Chicago-born Jayhawk, whose family landed in the Kansas City area during her sophomore year of high school after moving often—even to Panama—through much of her youth, applied to several universities, including Harvard, at her father's suggestion. But the idea of paying in-state tuition, and the fact that her older sister went to KU, made attending Kansas' flagship university an easy choice.

Financial awareness—and the drive to make her own money—came naturally to Yetter. As a young girl, she had a knack for starting small businesses and generated her own income by babysitting, mowing lawns, even ironing her neighbors' clothing. She savored weekend trips to her father's accounting office and dreamed of following in his footsteps.

"I knew I wanted to be an accountant from the time I was a little girl," says Yetter, b'85. "I just always had an inkling for business and accounting."

While her ultimate goal after graduating was to work for the global accounting firm Arthur Andersen, as her father did, Yetter first racked up experience as a sales and use tax auditor for the Kansas Department of Revenue and later as director of sales and use tax at Quaker Oats, a position that led her back to Chicago in 1988. Within a few years of her return, she finally landed a position



Yetter

at Arthur Andersen's Chicago office, where she helped lead the firm's sales tax practice and guided educational sessions for colleagues on sales tax fundamentals.

By the mid-1990s, as accounting firms were preparing for the uncertainty of Y2K and replacing their in-house sales tax calculation systems with more standardized products, Yetter was asked to help conduct trainings on the new software packages, working closely with the companies that created them.

"I'm learning the software and learning how to teach it in the classroom, realizing that all of these companies need help implementing it," she recalls. Sensing a demand for this specialty, she pitched the idea of starting a practice that focused on sales tax implementation. "I went to my partner and said, 'I think this is the next thing. I think this is where we need to go.' And they turned me down."

Not one to dismiss her instincts, Yetter struck out on her own in 1996, founding YETTER Tax, a sales tax consulting and tax technology firm, and the Sales Tax Institute, which offers in-person and online training courses and resources for tax professionals. Over the past 24 years, she has adapted her practice to changing industry needs and has worked with a variety of companies, from Fortune 10 firms to small, family-owned businesses. In July she launched the Sales Tax Nerd Community, an affectionately named online membership platform that encourages networking and education among sales tax professionals.

Yetter has been recognized multiple times by Accounting Today as one of the "Top 100 Most Influential People in Accounting" and in September was named the 2020 Woman Business Owner of the Year by the Chicago area chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners. The award is especially meaningful to Yetter, who built her practice with little guidance at a time when the field was largely dominated by men. "It was challenging," she says, "but you know, I had a real stick-to-it-ness and I was going to make it happen. I really haven't looked back."

Yetter credits much of her success to the education she received at KU, and she has remained active in the School of Business community, serving for the past 16 years on the dean's advisory board and as an adjunct professor on state and local taxation and entrepreneurship. As a leader in the sales tax industry for more than three decades, she guides and encourages young business professionals to reach their goals.

"What I like to tell [students] is if you want to succeed, you need to have passion and you need to find that thing that excites you," she says. "I have been lucky that I fell into something that I loved when I was 22 years old. I have no desire to do anything else."

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