

INSIGHT

Fall 2019

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EMPOWERING

SUSAN KOSS Charts course to top with expert credentials

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1969-2019
CELEBRATING
YEARS



Robert Hall

The tenacity to explore, adapt and trust her instincts has guided Susan Koss' career. She's now top in her field as managing director and partner at O'Keefe and an expert in business valuation and forensic accounting services.

EXPERTISE PROPELS ACCOUNTING ALUM TO TOP

By Rene Wisely

Calculating the variables that lead to a satisfying and successful career is not always a simple equation. Initially interested in medicine, Susan Koss, ACC '94, changed direction after working in a hospital during high school. While exploring an interest in engineering, a calculus class helped her decide that career path didn't add up. She discovered the right answer for her in an intermediate accounting class her sophomore year at Oakland University.

"It made sense. I liked balancing my checkbook to the penny each month," she says. "I liked having the numbers right."

That tenacity to explore, adapt and trust her instincts has guided her career since. She's now top in her field as Managing Director and Partner at O'Keefe, a Bloomfield Hills, Michigan-based consulting firm that provides financial and strategic advisory services.

Koss uses her accounting and CPA skills daily. She's also an expert in business valuation and forensic accounting services, providing expert testimony in court and in preparing complex financial analyses used in business turnarounds. That expertise led Crain's Detroit Business to honor her as one of its Notable Women in Finance in 2018.

"This industry really didn't exist when I was a student at Oakland University, so it wasn't a career I could have imagined," Koss says.

It's one in which she excels, says Patrick O'Keefe, founder and CEO, O'Keefe.

"Sue projects confidence and her pleasant nurturing demeanor has assisted in growing the young professionals at our firm," he says. "She has established herself as a leader among her peers."

BOLSTERING HER CREDENTIALS

Koss is one of a small group of women in Michigan with her skillset. It's readily apparent in a courtroom, where few women in the state qualify as an expert in economic damages related to business disputes and personal claims. Not only is Koss a licensed CPA, but the National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts (NACVA) named her a Certified Valuation Analyst (CVA), and she was awarded the Accredited in Business Valuation (ABV) and the Certified in Financial Forensics (CFF) designation by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA).

These are special skills she sought after working in international accounting at DaimlerChrysler Corp. (now FCA) and as divisional controller at a software company undergoing a merger, a valuable foundation for a career at O'Keefe.

The finance and valuation industry evolved significantly since she joined O'Keefe in 2001. "I'd go to conferences with 100 people and only three were women including me," she says. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of female accountants grew 21 percent between 1983 and 2012.

EXPANDING THE NETWORK

Her experience and those statistics spoke volumes. They motivated her to get actively involved in the industry. Koss is a past chair and past recording secretary of the Michigan Chapter of International Women's Insolvency and Restructuring Confederation (IWIRC). She is an active member of Oakland University's Accounting and Finance Advisory Board. She is also a member of the Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants (MACPA).

She learned the importance of professional development and industry involvement as an OU accounting student, where she was involved in Beta Alpha Psi and OASIS. "At OU, the faculty members instilled in us the idea of joining professional groups to network and reminded us to stay in contact with people who could serve as mentors," Koss says. "All the things I was able to do (as a student) gave me the basis for my career and what I've accomplished."

As an advisory board member, Koss stays connected to the University as well as to her faculty mentors, such as Professor of Accounting Joseph Callaghan, Ph.D., who shares her interest in valuation.

"(Susan's) management style, personality and collaborative skills make her stand out professionally," Callaghan says. Today's accounting students can learn a lot from Koss' career, Callaghan adds. "Work hard, collaborate and give back. Do these things and you will succeed." 🌙

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