

Clients' Calls For Help Spawns Accounting Firm

Davis Associates Specializes In Personal Service, Small- And Medium-Sized Firms

**African-American
Success Stories**

The way Darlene Davis tells it, she wasn't planning to start her own accounting firm. "It just sort of happened," she says with a wry smile. When friends and business acquaintances kept asking Davis, a CPA and chief financial officer for a larger company, for help with tax issues, entrepreneurial visions started to appear.

"More and more people started coming to me for help, and before I realized it, I was in business. I always had the entrepreneurial mindset, but I always thought I would buy a business and use my accounting skills to help out. I never imagined I would own an accounting business."

Davis, who founded Davis Associates in 2000, is living proof of the adage that if you give people what they want, they'll beat a path to your door.

Obviously, there was a need out there," Davis said. "People are looking for a good accountant that they can relate to."

Davis Associates provides accounting, tax and management consulting services to small businesses and individuals.

With only a handful of women as local members of the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA), Davis is believed to be the only African-American woman-owned CPA business in the St. Louis region.

"I have really enjoyed this experience," said Davis of her time as an entrepreneur. "They say when you find a job you like doing, you will never work another day of your life. I truly know what they are saying now."

Davis separates herself from the competition by working closely with clients and being accessible to answer questions. "Most clients don't want to hear the accounting jargon," she said. "I break information down to them in plain English so they understand what every number means. I also try to be as accessible as possible. All my clients have my cell phone number, and even if I am running from appointment to appointment, they have access to me."

Davis said her emphasis on the small-business market is an ideal fit. "The small market is ideal for me because I can relate to what they are going through," she said. "We get excited about each other's business, and we can relate to each other. I'm going through the same things as my clients, and they appreciate that."

"It's fun sitting with clients and explaining their numbers to them and telling them what those numbers mean. It helps them realize what will help their businesses grow."

Davis is utilizing past experiences to help her clients. Before starting her own business, Davis worked in the internal audit department of Monsanto Co., then was chief

financial officer at TLC Next Generation, a wireless communications business. After TLC was sold a few years ago, she gained client-side experience as a chief financial officer with Brown-Kortkamp, a real estate and moving and storage business.

"My past experiences give me a wide perspective on what business owners should be concerned with," Davis said. "I think my clients appreciate that I can bring that experience to the table."

Davis maintains the goal of creating the accounting firm of choice for small- and medium-sized

businesses. She's currently working solo with two part-time employees, and she plans to add more employees in the future.

Said Davis: "I really don't think I compete with the big firms. So many clients out there can't afford the larger firms, and I don't think those larger firms can give them the time and attention that I can offer. I want to grow, but I never want to lose sight of the smaller, entrepreneurial clients."

Darlene Davis founded Davis Associates in 2000.

