



Alumni Spotlight

Jesse Sullivan brings her KPMG experiences and a love for her hometown to her role at First National Bank of Omaha.

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*A native of Omaha and graduate of Creighton University, **Jesse Sullivan** spent eight years at KPMG in her hometown, rising to Senior Manager, Audit. For the past six years, she has worked at First National Bank of Omaha, including the last two as the Chief Audit Executive, striving to make it a great place to build a career.*

What was your journey to KPMG?

I was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, and was an accounting and finance major at Creighton University. I love Omaha, and I was really excited for the opportunity to stay here for college. I don't usually tell this side of the story – I danced all through grade school and high school, and I wanted to be on the dance team in college. I was a big Bluejay fan, and I could never cheer for another school. So, I was on Creighton's dance team and had great seats at basketball games for four years. It was amazing to wave to my family and friends at the games and be a part of it with them. I knew I wanted to major in something business-related, and I had to take all the introductory classes. The accounting class was a mess – our teacher had gotten sick and there was chaos throughout the semester – but I did well and sort of stumbled into accounting and finance.

At Creighton, all the interviews with public accounting firms happened over the course of three weeks. There was a local firm in Omaha that I was leaning toward, and I had an interview with KPMG the day before. I thought it would be a good practice interview. It went very well though, and I was invited to a second-round interview. I really enjoyed the people I met and realized the doors that public accounting with KPMG could open.

What are your favorite memories from the KPMG Omaha office?

The Omaha market is unique because we were exposed to a lot of different industries. I was able to build relationships with my team, work alongside clients during their challenges, and feel like I brought a lot of value to the work. I grew up with my clients, and that's a really neat thing. Anyone from the Omaha office will roll their eyes if they read this, but I loved the Henry Doorly Zoo audit. It was a small audit, and it reminded me that this is what auditing is. It was such a unique client, too.

One year, they trained cheetahs to be around people. Cheetahs are the largest cat to purr, so they would walk around us and purr! The minute I was assigned the audit, I would not give it up. I was on maternity leave, and I made sure I still got to work on the zoo.

Besides that, it comes down to relationships. Since you start in classes, you automatically have a support network, and I love that about KPMG. There was a small group of us, and we bonded right away. Five of us all got promoted to senior associate at the same time, so we went to Las Vegas to celebrate. After two left the firm, three of us got promoted to manager at the same time, so we went to Napa to celebrate. Our first busy season, we even made a CD – it sounds so lame now, but the five of us submitted three songs each to keep us focused and motivated at work.

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What were some of the songs on the CD?

Oh my gosh – one was “Dog Days Are Over” by Florence and the Machine. We had “I Can Go the Distance” from “Hercules”, “Africa” by Toto, and “Break my Stride” by Matthew Wilder. It was such a hodge-podge, but you could listen to it because your computer still had a CD player. And, as a first year, you were always tasked with going to get dinner, so you could blare it in your car.



How did you choose First National Bank of Omaha, and what are your current responsibilities?

I had a hard time leaving KPMG. I always thought I'd be a partner there, but in a way, I feel like I've made partner at FNBO. First National is privately owned, and I don't take that for granted. It was important for me to work for a company that gives back to Omaha because I'm so proud of the city. FNBO is constantly sponsoring events, and they are a great big, small bank. I took a role as a senior director of accounting policy and handled the financial report. It was interesting to transition from auditing reports to creating them. Even though I never had a banking client at KPMG, I was exposed to so many industries, and I learned to adapt quickly. I've now been at FNBO for six years, and two years ago, I became the Chief Audit Executive. I feel at home in this role.

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As a senior leader, I don't have a typical day, and I think that's why people in public accounting do so well in other roles because we have been trained to pivot quickly and effectively. It is a lot of strategizing and relationship building. Talent and building my team is a huge focus.

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What do you do for fun outside the office?

I spend my free time with my husband Jack and our three kids – Emmett is seven, Michael is four, and Molly is two. We also have a French Bulldog that Michael named Beau Handsome. Last year, we bought a little, quiet cabin about 45 minutes from home in Fremont, Nebraska. We go there on weekends and the kids dig in the sand, try to catch frogs – just spend quality time together. It's far enough removed but close enough that you can make it back for a soccer practice if you need to. Omaha has so much for us to do. It has the Children's Museum, the zoo, the Durham Museum. My husband and I met in high school and both went to Creighton, so we go to a lot of Bluejay basketball games. I also sit on the board of the Omaha Symphony. It's a great excuse to get a babysitter and have a date. We attend as many of the symphonic events as we can.



What key advice do you have for others?

Encourage others, especially in this remote environment because there's more than just getting the job done. There's a lot to be said for coaching and development and not giving up on people. It can be hard work, but it's important to give feedback and be purposeful with it.

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