

TAX STRATEGY

5 Questions to Ask Before Your Next Tax Filing (That Your CPA Won't Ask First)

By Timothy C. Franklin · April 12, 2026 · 4 min read

Nobody Is Coming to Save You

Here is something most people do not fully understand about the American tax code. The biggest benefits in it are opt-in. They do not come to you. You have to go get them.

Your CPA files an accurate return. That is what you are paying for. But filing accurately is different from hunting for incentives. Most of the strategies that move the needle require a separate engagement, a separate study, and a level of specialization outside the scope of standard tax preparation.

If you do not ask, nobody asks on your behalf. The IRS does not send you a letter explaining what you missed. It simply stays on the table until someone goes to pick it up.

These are the five questions you should be asking before every single tax filing.

"The biggest benefits in the tax code are opt-in. They do not come to you. You have to go get them."

COST SEGREGATION

1 Did I acquire, build, or significantly improve any real estate in the last three years?

If yes and you do not have a cost segregation study on that property, there is a strong chance you are depreciating it too slowly. A study reclassifies components into shorter depreciation schedules, front-loading deductions that would otherwise be spread across 27.5 or 39 years. On most commercial and residential investment properties, the result is a meaningful six-figure deduction in year one. The study is retroactive. Missing it last year does not mean it is gone.

R&D; TAX CREDITS

2

Did my business develop, improve, or figure out anything new this year?

Most business owners hear "R&D;" and think Silicon Valley. That is not what the law says. Section 41 rewards any business that tries to improve a product, a process, a formula, or a system and has to work through uncertainty to do it. Manufacturers. Contractors. Food producers. Engineering firms. Real estate companies building better internal processes. If your team spent time figuring something out, a portion of those wages and expenses may qualify for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. Not a deduction. A credit.

SECTION 179-D

3

Has my building had any energy efficiency improvements?

The Section 179-D deduction rewards building owners who improve energy performance. Lighting upgrades. HVAC systems. Building envelope improvements. The Inflation Reduction Act significantly increased the maximum benefit, which can now reach up to \$5.65 per square foot. On a 20,000 square foot building, that is a potential six-figure deduction most owners never know to claim.

BONUS DEPRECIATION

4

Am I capturing full bonus depreciation on every qualifying asset?

100 percent bonus depreciation is back. The One Big Beautiful Bill restored it after a phase-down period that started in 2023. Right now, qualifying assets can be written off entirely in the year they are placed in service. Equipment. Certain building components identified through cost segregation. Software. The window is open. But windows close. Capturing this requires intentional planning before the return is filed.

THE BIG PICTURE

5

Has anyone sat down with me this year to look at the whole strategy?

A tax filing looks backward. A tax strategy looks forward. The difference between a business owner who pays 37 cents on every dollar and one who pays significantly less is almost never one big move. It is the compounding effect of several strategies deployed together. Cost segregation. R&D; credits. 179-D. Bonus depreciation. Each one is powerful on its own. Together, the impact can be dramatic.

The System Is Designed This Way on Purpose

None of this is accidental. Congress created these incentives deliberately. They exist because the government wants businesses to invest, to innovate, to build, and to improve. The tax code rewards that behavior. But it only rewards the people who know to ask for it.

The businesses that pay the least in taxes are not the ones with the best luck. They are the ones asking the right questions every year, with the right people in the room when they ask them.

Five questions. Ask them every year. Before the return is filed, not after.

Ready to find out what applies to you?

Free analysis. No fee. No commitment.

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