

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MEET CHRIS COLE, SFDS Class of 1971

In honor of International Women's Day last month, we took the opportunity to have one of our seniors interview **St. Francis de Sales alumnae and business leader, Chris Cole.**

Chris Cole graduated from St. Francis de Sales in 1971. She went on to graduate from Northern Illinois University with a BA in Accounting. After four years at Deloitte as an accountant, she left and started her long career at McDonalds Corporation.

Anissa Vanna, a senior at St. Francis de Sales, interviewed Chris on what it means to be a woman in the business world and what her advice would be for the students of today. Chris had lots of good advice and stories. Both women talked about their St. Francis de Sales education, their dreams and experiences. Here is some of their conversation:

Anissa: Can you tell us about your educational background? Are you glad you attended SFDS? How do you think it impacted your experience?

Chris: I grew up on the south side of Chicago and was the first in my family to attend college. Had it not been for St. Francis de Sales, I am not sure I would have gone on to college, let alone have a long and successful business career.

I attended Northern Illinois University and majored in accounting. I took accounting because I didn't know anything about it. I fell in love with business. Northern was a great place to get my education.

While in college, I worked outside the classroom too, including the cafeteria, the front desk of my dorm and as an assistant business manager for the Northern Star, the school newspaper (I also helped write some of their stories!).

These work experiences helped me develop important social and life skills. My jobs, such as the one at the Northern Star, gave me a real life education – I learned about small businesses and how to run a small newspaper. I think that working while in college is crucial to developing as a person. I also had an internship while in college in public accounting. I was busy and that was good – students need to take advantage of all the opportunities provided in school.



Every job is an opportunity, an opportunity to learn a new skill, to work with people – even my job in the cafeteria was a skill builder!

I am absolutely glad I attended St. Francis de Sales. SFDS was a place that let me take some risks. I got to try things. It was safe and supportive. I have friends from SFDS that remain friends with me to this day.

Anissa: What is your career/work been focused upon? How did your interests/career change if at all over the years?

Chris: After college, I started my career as a public accountant at one of the Big 8 (at the time) accounting firms -- Deloitte. It was great experience and I met my husband Tim there! After four years there, I moved to McDonald's Corporation for the next 36 years. I started as a staff accountant and then held numerous positions, eventually advancing to Senior Vice President of Finance and Strategy for the US business.

Anissa: What would they say is your most proud professional and personal accomplishments?

Chris: I worked full time for forty years and am proud of that, but I am most proud of my marriage and raising three successful children who are good people and have solid relationships!

Anissa: What are the three pieces of advice you would want to give to a recent SFDS graduate?

Take risks. Dare to compete. Take advantage of opportunities, big and small, that come your way.

Anissa: How does a woman's experience today differ in your field from when you graduated or does it?

Chris: I believe that the business field is actually a great field for women. Women have more natural leadership skills. At an early age, we are often put in charge of younger siblings and often take on greater responsibilities at a younger age.

Women can and do flourish in business because they are good at organizing their time and setting priorities. Women are natural at learning to balance a career and family.

However, women need to learn to take risks and dare to compete. Some of these skills come more naturally to men. Women need to take chances and put themselves out there. You won't win every time, but you have to take chances.

I tell women that no matter where you are – at home, at the office – always give 100% where you are at that time. That helps you find balance and balance is not always easy to find.

Men pull other men along and have a natural network. Women need to do the same thing and build their networks. During my tenure at McDonalds Corporation, we created women's networks in order to support and push forward qualified women.

Anissa: Are you glad you attended St. Francis de Sales?

I am absolutely glad that I went to SFDS. SFDS allowed me to take some risks. It was a safe and supportive environment. I made lifelong friends here. I fondly remember going to mass, going on field trips, having fun with my partner in my chem lab.

I was the first in my family to go to college and SFDS helped prepare me for my future success.

At the end of the interview, Chris Cole took over as interviewer and turned the table on Anissa. As you can see from the boxed story below, Anissa has a great future ahead.

Meet Anissa Vanna SFDS Class of 2017

Anissa is graduating this year and attending Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Her dream is to be a nurse practitioner. Anissa joined the Air Force and will go to boot camp this summer before beginning SIUE. She will eventually be an officer after college. The Air Force will help pay for college, help her develop new skills and will give her the training she needs for her career plans. Chris shared with Anissa that when Chris's son went to Oregon for college, he learned to navigate school, work and life on his own. Chris believes the Air Force will teach Anissa to be independent and independence is important to future success!

Anissa's goal is to be a nurse practitioner which comes from her mother. Her mother could not finish college, so Anissa is taking this amazing opportunity she has now to reach their shared goal! Like Chris Cole, Anissa is thankful for the education she has received at St. Francis de Sales and the opportunities provided. Like Chris Cole, she will make the most of these opportunities and one day "hopes to answer questions about her career and life accomplishments from a SFDS senior!"

