

# Women of Influence 2021: Ann Claire Johnson and Andrea Rothe, Iris Financial Group



Image: Nashville Business Journal

Andrea Rothe, left, and Ann Claire Johnson of Iris Financial Group | MARTIN B. CHERRY | NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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*Ann Claire Johnson, right, and Andrea Rothe founded business accounting management firm Iris Financial Group in 2014. As partners, the primary responsibility of the duo is to effectively manage and oversee the daily tasks of their team. They also provide monthly financials, manage small businesses' accounting needs and provide budgets and forecasts.*

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**Do you feel more or less optimistic about more women in leadership posts/government than you did five years ago, and why?**

**Johnson:** Without a doubt, way more optimistic. I feel as if it has been a long time coming, but the way has been paved. My hope is that it will no longer be a surprise to see a woman in an important role; instead, it will be a common, normal occurrence.

**Rothe:** I feel more optimistic than ever about women in leadership. There has been a huge movement of women empowerment and female leaders around the world. I feel like we have just hit the iceberg and more equality is

yet to come. We've definitely turned the corner of the old fashion female role of cooking and cleaning, and we have a much higher percentage of females in the workforce, funding/grants, and leadership opportunities.

**If you could invite five people to a dinner party, who would they be?**

**Johnson:** Jaqueline Kennedy, Betty White, Celine Dion, my grandmother and Dolly Parton

**Rothe:** Michael Jordan, Warren Buffett, Oprah Winfrey, Andy Warhol, Jennifer Aniston

**What's one habit you've dropped during the pandemic you don't want to start up again?**

**Johnson:** A rushed morning routine. Pre-pandemic, I was more often than not in a hurry to get ready in the morning and make it to the office, a meeting or a breakfast. When shelter in place began, I found myself starting each morning at a slower pace, taking walks and enjoying coffee with my husband before the day started. ... While life has picked back up, I still attempt to practice at least one, if not all, elements my morning regime. It makes a world of difference!

**Rothe:** I have dropped the habit of being available 24/7. I think it's extremely important to have some boundaries around work-life balance, and life is so short and your kids grow up so fast. [I've been] putting the phone down at home in the evenings and being present with my children and family.

**What question do you wish we would have asked you, and how would you answer it?**

**Johnson:** I wish I would have been asked what I am most proud of in my business. My answer would have been my team. We have grown from myself and my business partner to a team of 14. Every individual plays a vital role in the growth and success of Iris Financial, and without them, we would not be where we are today, retain the clients that we are lucky to have, or be positioned to grow even more in the future.

**Rothe:** How do you build inner resilience as a female leader? It's all about the mindset. The balance of being nice and tough, and maintaining the mindset of being self-confident and empathetic at the same time. You don't have to be one or the other, you can be both.

**What question are you tired of answering?**

**Johnson:** Any question about what I would have told my younger self. I feel that trying, failing, learning hard lessons and making mistakes along the way are all part of my makeup and who I am. Going back in time and wanting to redirect my path would have yielded different results. I am proud of my past, present and future!

**Rothe:** Aren't you afraid that Nashville is growing so big and all these new accounting firms are taking over as your competition? No, not at all! There is plenty of business to go around for all of us and that holds our team accountable to provide the best service to our clients and retain them.

**Biggest challenge we're facing:** Staying connected. We value in-person communication and relationships; they are a strong foundation of our business. Like everyone, we had to enhance our communication tactics with our clients and our team. Slack, Zoom, Teams and Web Ex became our best friends! While it does not have the same effect, we are grateful for technology as we navigated 2020!

**One book everyone should read:** "Who," by Geoff Smart and Randy Street. It addresses a widely known problem in business development - unsuccessful hiring - and how to turn around your hiring game with fundamental methods proven for success!

**As a young professional, I needed to hear this:** You can never tire of hearing you are a respected professional. At the end of the day, that is the best compliment from anyone when you are a business owner. Hearing that we bring value to a business, no matter the size, is what keeps us going.

**Song getting us through the pandemic:** "9-5," by Dolly. Who doesn't love Dolly? Not only does that song represent our daily grind (that never stopped because of Covid), Dolly has been in the forefront of the fight against Covid, with her financial support of research at Vanderbilt Medical Center and for the vaccine. Our world needs a little more Dolly!

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## About Johnson & Rothe

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