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**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 5 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 the job. That is what you are paying for, and a good CPA does it well. But filing accurately is different from hunting for incentives. Most of the strategies that move the needle for business owners and property investors require a separate engagement, a separate study, and a level of specialization that sits outside the scope of a 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. The money does not show up in your refund automatically. 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.*

1

#### **COST SEGREGATION**

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

If the answer is 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 of the building 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. [See a real study with real numbers.](#)

2

#### **R&D TAX CREDITS**

### **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 of the tax code 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. Sales organizations building better systems. If your team spent time figuring something out, there is a real chance a portion of those wages and expenses qualify for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. Not a deduction. A credit. [See who actually qualifies.](#)

3

#### SECTION 179-D

### Has my building had any energy efficiency improvements?

The Section 179-D deduction rewards building owners and designers who improve the energy performance of commercial property. 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 depending on the project and the prevailing wage requirements met. On a 20,000 square foot building, that is a potential six-figure deduction that most owners never know to claim. If your building has been touched in the last few years, it is worth a look.

4

#### BONUS DEPRECIATION

### 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 and had dropped the rate to 40 percent by 2025. 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 benefit requires

intentional planning before the return is filed, not a conversation after the fact. [Read the full history of how we got here.](#)



#### THE BIG PICTURE

### **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, in the right sequence, with the right timing. Cost segregation. R&D credits. 179-D. Bonus depreciation. Each one is powerful on its own. Together, the impact can be dramatic. If nobody has had that conversation with you this year, ask yourself who is supposed to be having it.

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## **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.

Most of what is sitting unclaimed right now is not in a gray area. It is not aggressive or risky. It is money that Congress specifically set aside for people doing exactly what you are doing. It just requires someone to go pick it up.

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



IRS OFFICIAL REFERENCE

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### Ask All Five This Year

A free analysis will tell you which of these apply to your situation and what they are worth.

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**The 5 Questions**

1. Did I buy or improve real estate?
2. Did my business develop anything new?
3. Did my building get energy upgrades?
4. Am I capturing bonus depreciation?
5. Has anyone reviewed the whole picture?

## Go Deeper

[What Is Cost Segregation?](#)

[The R&D Tax Credit](#)

[100% Bonus Depreciation Is Back](#)

[A Real-World Walkthrough](#)

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