

## **CPA to CFP® Certification Journey**

Sharif A. Muhammad, MBA, CPA, MST, CFP®

In my work as a CPA for the past 16+ years, I have been regarded as a “professional problem-solver”, a trusted professional that my clients turn to for help with almost everything – taxes, family tragedies, business management guidance, audits and financial investigations, etc. So, when I decided to expand my service offerings into comprehensive financial planning, I knew that the CFP® mark (along with the educational, experience, and examination requirements) would provide a “seal of quality” on my ability to deliver competent services in this growing area of need.

Although I started my career in public accounting, I have always had an interest in financial planning and investment management. I serviced investment and brokerage companies as an auditor, trained as a financial engineer in structuring corporate finance transactions, and further developed my skills as a risk manager and portfolio manager in the hedge fund and private equity fields. When I decided to leave the corporate world to run my own CPA and financial services businesses, I knew that having the appropriate licensing and credentials would be ideal for establishing myself as a “go-to” source for education, guidance, and execution of financial planning.

As a CPA, I was allowed to bypass the CFP® certification coursework, take the Capstone Course and sit for the CFP® exam under the “Challenge” status (Now called “Accelerated Path.” Visit [CFP.net/AcceleratedPath](http://CFP.net/AcceleratedPath) to see if you qualify). This was an ideal path for me, but not just because I was a CPA. In addition to my CPA certification, I have an undergraduate degree in Economics, an MBA in Finance (with a concentration in Accounting), a master’s degree in Taxation, my Series 7, 66, Life, Health and Disability Licenses, and over 22+ years of working experience (nine of which are in Financial Services). The standard CFP curriculum is worth the time and money. I highly recommend and encourage that you take them if you don’t have a strong background in financial planning, investments, or taxes.

I took the Capstone course in the fall of 2017 and sat for the exam in November 2018. I passed and was awarded the CFP® certification in December 2018.

Now that I have my CFP® certification, I believe that my eminence in my field has grown. Many of my CPA clients are coming to me for financial planning related matters. My role as a “one-stop shop” for financial solutions has grown among clients, and other professionals that I collaborate with (attorneys, P&C insurance brokers, mortgage lenders, etc.). Ultimately, I feel accomplished and confident in my ability to serve my clients competently in my capacity as a CPA as well as my capacity as a CFP® practitioner. Embarking on this journey has been one of the best decisions that I have made in my career thus far, and I believe that it is one worthwhile for any others searching to establish themselves within their field.