

MY FRIDAY THE 13TH

By Marianne Nolte

For the past three years my goal has been to earn the CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ certification aka CFP® marks. I would like to share my story.

Requirements

I fulfilled the required CFP® certification course work, more than 4,000 hours of apprenticeship experience, taken multiple live review classes, and studied countless hours in preparation for the CFP® exam. The CFP Board provides one week of proctored testing three times a year, in March, July, and November. On March 13, 2020, I passed the exam!

Originally, I took the exam in March 2019 and received “did not pass”, I took it again in July and “did not pass”, then I sat out of the November test window to revisit my study plan. Blessedly, after my second failed attempt, my dear friend Derek said, “It took John F. Kennedy, Jr. three times to pass the bar, you are in good company”. So, I switched gears. In prep for my first two attempts, I used a review program by Brett Danko. Brett is an exceptionally gifted speaker and educator. He sparked the students’ interest with humor and story telling while reviewing often dry subject matter like risk management and tax. Brett operates at a thirty-thousand-foot perspective. He is a genius, but I am a mere mortal. I learned so much from his course, but after my two failed attempts, I knew I needed to switch education providers. I signed up for the Dalton review. The Dalton course provides a strong foundational emphasis. They have a remarkable and robust question bank (Qbank) with 2,050 questions. When you answer the questions, right or wrong, you are then given the correct answer and rationale behind the answers. This allows you to understand the “why”. Dalton’s testing strategy is centered around an over-prepare style. The questions are considerably more complex than what you should expect on exam day. This can play a head game on candidates as they repeatedly are knocked down by wrong answers, but the challenge also spurs you forward.

My Exam Day

When my Friday the 13th CFP® exam date arrived, our entire world was already in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic. My exam time was 8:00 AM. The Prometric testing center I chose is in mid San Diego County and my home office is about an hour North in Fallbrook, CA. I arrived an hour early. Test takers must bring a valid Government-issued photo ID. Fingerprints and a photo are taken. Proctors then do a brief visual body scan and they “wand you”. I guess the wand picks up on illegal electronic devices. No jewelry or jackets may be worn. Proctors check out your reading glasses and financial calculator. They have been known to take the batteries out of calculators and hit the re-set button which would then cause the test taker to momentarily panic as they then need to frantically re-calibrate their financial calculator to four decimal places and 1-year pay period. The candidate is then led into the testing room and assigned a cubicle with computer and scratch paper. The exam is 6 hours in total, but broken up into two 3-hour stretches with a 40-minute lunch break in between. There are 170 questions and this breaks down to allow solving time of a little over two minutes per question. The first time I took the exam last March, the tax laws had recently changed and, as a result, the CFP Board did not release information regarding Pass or Did not Pass for over a month. For the July exam, they emailed me notice within an hour of completion of the exam. I again expected this to be the procedure, but on March 13, 2020, when I submitted my final answer, a black screen appeared before me with one word, “Passed”. I wildly waved out the test room window to the proctor. He came to escort me out of the testing room. When I got out I immediately asked, “It said Passed on my screen, did I

really pass or was that simply indicating I had completed the exam?”, he said, “Yes, you passed”. My reply, “I’m a CFP® professional?” He said, “Yup”. I burst into tears.

Why CFP® Certification

When asked, “What does it mean to have the CFP® marks after your name?” I like to answer with a direct quote from the CFP Board, “CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ certification has been the standard of excellence for financial planners. CFP® professionals have met extensive training and experience requirements, and committed to CFP Board's ethical standards that require them to put their clients' interests first” (“CFP® Certification: The Standard of Excellence” 2020).

Thank You Family and Friends

My family and friends put up with so much during this time. I would get up crazy early to study. When I began this journey I kept my alarm clock set for a 3:00 AM study time for several months. Finally, I settled into a more respectable routine of 5:00 AM. I took books, notes, and a computer on vacations. Ordinarily, vacations are about fun and adventure, but no, not me...I would rise early to study before allowing myself to go galivanting.

Thank you to my family: Chris, Lane, and Julianne. Thank you to our travel friends: Rob and Linda, Jimmy and Kathy, Mark and Roxie, Bill and Judy, Michael and Arlene; and Indranil.

References:

“CFP® Certification: The Standard of Excellence.” CFP® Certification: The Standard of Excellence | CFP Board, www.cfp.net/why-cfp-certification/the-standard-of-excellence.

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