

How to Become a CFP® Professional by 25

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Although arbitrary, there's something about the age of 25 that seems like a milestone to me. You're probably reading this because you're around the same age and trying to strategically plan your next few moves into the finance industry. The CFP® designation has become a "[gold standard](#)" of advisory designations and many clients and firms are aware of the importance of this designation now. However, the CFP Board found that only 5.1% of all CFP® certificants were age 20-29, albeit, a slight increase from recent years. Further, only 23% of all CFP® certificants were female (Survey of CFP® professionals, 2019).

With these facts in mind, there is a need for young (especially female) professionals to move the needle and bring diverse ideas to the financial advisory table.

Know Your "Why"

Let's talk about this idea first, because it's an applicable grounding practice for any major life decision. Why are you getting certified? Think beyond the extra incentives that your firm might give to you. The "why" is the reason you will get up early every morning, work late every evening, and sacrifice many of your weekends to trudge through the certification process. Your "why" might be that you simply care about your clients' well-being and future, maybe you want to strive to provide best-in-class client service to distinguish your business, or perhaps you want to cater to the under-served population through pro-bono advisory work or through being involved in charity finance committees.

My "why": I want to change how the average person sees financial planning and, more generally, finance. Whatever your "why" is, it should resonate with and be driven by your inner compass.

Requirements for Certification

With the [62% exam pass rate](#) (July 2019) in mind, the full certification process can take anywhere from around three years to around ten years in some cases. Commonly known as the "Four Es," the major components to achieving certification are Education, Examination, Experience, and Ethics.

The education requirement has a prerequisite of earning a Bachelor's degree. I found that going straight into a CFP Board approved-curriculum after getting my bachelor's degree worked best. You must take (and pass) seven courses with mock exams. Each class is packed with material that is likely unfamiliar to the average young adult. This post is all about becoming certified quickly, but if you're young with limited experience, I highly recommend focusing on really understanding the material, rather than just getting through the courses as quickly as possible. This will help you in real life and on test day.

The examination is often cited on this forum as the most difficult piece and it's not uncommon for test takers to take multiple attempts. If you want to be certified before 25 though, you should focus on doing the exam right the first time around, as it's only administered three times a year: March, July, and November. Get a [live review course](#), develop a study plan, and get serious about time management.

Experience and Ethics are straight-forward. You need either [6000 hours \(standard pathway\) or 4000 hours \(apprenticeship pathway\)](#) of financial planning work experience. You also need to certify to be bound by the ethical standards of the CFP Board.

Find Your People

Finding a team, preferably in a fiduciary capacity, early on that shares the same vision and ethical drive as you is important for your experience requirement and beyond. Your firm may even help you with these professional expenses, but that shouldn't be the driving factor in your choice of employment. If you can, start your 6000 hours of experience at a financial planning firm before or at the same time as you begin your CFP® certification education. Academic knowledge partnered with real-life experience will help tie concepts together and get you to certification quicker than checking off these requirements sequentially.

I was lucky enough to find Vision Capital during my senior year of university. I never thought I'd get involved in financial planning, but things can change when you meet the right people. We're a 13-person RIA in Portland, Oregon and, as of recently, I'm a part of our advisory team. The advisory team is six people total, and four of us are CFP® professionals. During my education curriculum, I leveraged my firm's experts by asking plenty of questions and I found a mentor who has been through the certification process who helped me with study habits, what to expect, and emotional support.

Set Your Habits

I can't forget to mention how important it is to continue your healthy habits for optimal performance. I still prioritized long distance running, eating a plant-based diet, sleeping 8 hours, meditating, and attending the occasional social event while staying away from social media, alcohol, and anything else that could negatively alter brain performance. When I went to take my exam on July 16th, I knew there was nothing more I could do to prepare myself.

I turn 25 in February and still have to pinch myself occasionally about finally reaching my goal. I hope these tips help you attain CFP® certification early in life.