

She's On Her Way
Featuring an Interview with Dawn Torres-Gale, Candidate for CFP® Certification
CFP Board Candidate Forum Blogpost

Dawn, Thanks for joining us today to talk about your career in financial planning. First, what is your earliest money memory?

My earliest money memory is my single parent mother telling me it was too expensive to buy a car in response to my asking her about it while we were waiting in the rain for the bus in San Francisco where I grew up. I was probably around 4 or 5 years old but the fear I felt then has always stayed with me.

When did you discover financial planning?

I think I had always heard of Financial Planning as a profession but I really got to see it in action because of a retired Army Colonel, Dick Power, who wrote a letter to the editor of the Christian Science Monitor telling people that the Financial Planning Association of Massachusetts would match active duty military families with Financial Planners for guidance at no cost. My husband was an active duty Coast Guard member at the time and so we contacted the FPA chapter and got connected to a local CFP® professional. When we had our session with the CFP® professional it likely planted the seed for me then.

What inspired you to pursue your CFP® certification?

I volunteered as a mediator in small claims court in Honolulu while I was a graduate student at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. I saw many defendants who were in court because they had made bad financial choices based on a lack of financial literacy. I was unaware of the importance of financial literacy prior to this and the mediation work in court really opened my eyes. I came away from the experience wanting to do more to change the situation with financial illiteracy but I didn't really know how to go about it. Fortunately, a few years later I found out about the FINRA Foundation's Military Spouse Fellowship Program which funds the training for military spouses to become Accredited Financial Counselors through the Association of Financial Counseling, Planning and Education. I was accepted into the Fellowship and earned my AFC certification in 2012.

Where do you find community in this industry?

I feel fortunate that I have developed a great network of financial professionals through my work over the years. AFCPE has been an important source of connections especially through their annual symposium. I also have done a fair bit of networking locally particularly with groups of women business owners who are also moms since I have three daughters myself. Being able to run a business and be a parent takes some real skill.

What strengths do you have as a female advisor?

I am very compassionate and definitely non-judgmental. This comes from my own life experiences having struggled to overcome many obstacles. So many people avoid talking to a financial professional out of insecurity about past or current financial situations. I pride myself on meeting people exactly where they are in their financial life without imposing my ideas and standards and then showing them what's possible regardless of where they are coming from

What keeps you motivated during difficult times?

Thinking about the people who care about and believe in me first and foremost. Also, remembering people I have either met or know of who have faced much greater trials in life than most people and still come out the other side winning. I think it's so important to have some type of perspective that is not only focused on one's self or you will get crushed by your own doubts and insecurities

Who will be the first person you tell after passing the CFP® exam?

My husband. He's been my biggest supporter.

What's a special moment you've had with a client while working as an advisor?

I worked with Navy and Marine Corps reservists for a year through a Department of Defense contract. One Navy Reservist asked me to explain to him how to dispute a negative entry on his credit report. I went through the steps with him and also provided him with a template letter he could modify to send to each of the three primary credit reporting bureaus. The next time I saw him he was so happy to tell me that he had put my guidance to work and had successfully disputed the negative entry and it had been removed. I also once caught a clerical error for a Marine who had me review his closing documents for his first mortgage before he signed. He saved a thousand dollars on his closing costs as a result. These experiences are why I believe in the saying 'The devil is in the details.'