

Intro ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to Real Money Real Experts, a podcast where leading financial counseling and coaching experts share their stories, their challenges, and their advice for helping people manage money in the real world. I'm your host, Rachel De Leon, executive Director of the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education for A-F-C-P-E. And I'm your co-host, Dr. Mary Bell Carlson, an accredited financial counselor, or AFC, and the President of Financial Behavior Keynote Group. Every episode we're taking a deep dive in the topics that personal finance professionals care about, helping clients, building community, and your professional growth. The opinions of our podcast guests are their own, which means that their stories, views, or lived experiences may differ from yours or mine. However, the one thing you will always find on this show is a common thread. Our guests are passionate about helping people with their money to improve their lives, and they believe in upholding high standards for the clients and the communities that they serve. We encourage you to tune in to real money, real experts with open curiosity. Why? Because it's oftentimes in the conversations where viewpoints or stories differ from our own that we learn the most.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([01:21](#)):

Amanda Christensen is an accredited financial counselor and extension professor, specializing in personal finance, educational outreach throughout the state of Utah and Utah State University. She's a co-principal investigator on the statewide empowering financial wellness grant and co-author of the Power Pay Money Master Online Course. Amanda is a creator and editor of the Utah Money Moms Blog and social Media Platforms. She regularly contributes personal finance content to Utah's Studio five television show and Utah Public Radio. In her 14 years with USU Extension, she's authored Award-winning personal finance resources. Amanda is also a mom of two kiddos, so she knows the importance of balancing budgets and bedtime stories. Her mission goes beyond numbers and she's on a to empower women in their financial journeys with contagious enthusiasm. She helps women break free from financial stress, fostering confidence and independence, whether she's decoding debt elimination strategies with a Diet Coke in hand, or belting out Taylor Swift, Amanda's goal is clear to help you achieve your financial dreams and savor every sip of life's fuzzy moments. Welcome, Amanda.

Amanda Christensen ([02:36](#)):

Thank you. My goodness. <laugh>, I'm so glad to be here. Diet Coke in hand and everything. Thanks for having me.

Rachael DeLeon ([02:43](#)):

I love it. Amanda, diet Coke in Taylor Swift, your speaking, my love language and the love language of my daughter. So you're in good company, fellow Swift, we're doing great stuff. To get us started, tell us a little bit about your background. You work in Extension for 14 years. How did you come to find yourself working in Extension?

Amanda Christensen ([03:04](#)):

Well, I had some great college professors who knew that they needed us to see, you know, what could we do with personal finance education in real life. There was a presentation in a career seminar class at Utah State where I learned about Extension as a career. I interned with then Adrie Roberts, who was the, the county faculty at the time in Cache Valley in Logan, where I was going to school. And I was hooked at the combination of education and then working with the community leaders and elected officials to figure out the needs in the community and then program to those needs and evaluate to see the impact of those needs. So that just, I was just hooked at the sort of all the facets that come into play with an extension career.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (03:54):

And so you came from school, you came within the program and then decided to stay at Utah State and launch into Extension. Is that how the road led?

Amanda Christensen (04:03):

Yep. So I am born and raised there, and then <laugh>, you know, in my career at least, uh, and never left to sort of took that route into extension and stayed connected through the university the entire time, and then became a colleague to the folks who were mentoring me in that upper level master's degree coursework. Really, it was just kind of a best case scenario to hit the ground running, so to speak, in your career.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (04:30):

You know, one thing I wanna ask is not everybody is gonna know what Extension is. Could you maybe give those listeners that don't know what extension is, A little primer of what you do?

Amanda Christensen (04:40):

This is the speech I give every Thanksgiving, by the way as well,

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (04:44):

<laugh>

Amanda Christensen (04:46):

Who are like, what is it exactly that you do? Because you teach, but you don't teach students <laugh> and you <laugh> and you're like, right, <laugh>. Yeah. So, so extension was developed sort of a long time ago. Abraham Lincoln even had the vision for an extension or a system through land grant universities across the country that would have a, a mandate to educate the people, take the university education resources and bring it out to the people in the communities where they were located. So instead of college credit, you know, classes taught for college credit, I am creating and developing and teaching classes for community education. But I do still have to show impact and that people are learning something from the work that I do in, in that regard. But it's, instead of four credit classes, it's community education and outreach.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (05:36):

And let me go a little further on that. Is there cost to extension? Like who can access that and become a part or learn from extension?

Amanda Christensen (05:44):

Anybody, everybody, youth, adults, anyone with the interest and desire for continuing education or even just learning a new skill or, you know, wanting to hone in on, on something that they'd like to be a little better at. You can Google or, or check the extension universities in your states, and typically there's one, in some cases there's more than one. And, and you can look and see what's happening in my local area. What courses or or classes can I, can I dive into? What online programming can I easily access from the comfort of my couch? Yeah, it open and available to anyone who wants to engage.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (06:23):

Awesome. Thank you for that background and refresher. And now we're gonna go a deep dive into something that your extension service offers that many of us have used before, especially if you're in

financial counseling. And it's called Power Pay. We love Power Pay. If you've been in this committee for a while, if you haven't heard of it, would you give us a quick overview of what Power Pay is and how individuals can use it? Oh,

Amanda Christensen ([06:46](#)):

Absolutely. Power Pay is really your secret weapon when it comes to debt <laugh> elimination. And it started, I had a colleague who a long time ago, someone came to him and said, I, here's my situation. I don't know how best, what's my best path forward for getting out of debt? And he thought, well, surely there's a spreadsheet somewhere that's been developed that will help figure this out. We can plug the numbers in and it, and it will tell us essentially. And he searched and searched and nothing. So he created, so it was like a super calc spreadsheet way back in the day, and then it was on a floppy disc and now The floppy disc. I mean, I remember, woo, I remember in college using some discs for a hot minute there, <laugh>

Rachael DeLeon ([07:32](#)):

Right there with you.

Amanda Christensen ([07:34](#)):

And then now@powerpay.org, you cannot sign right in. And Power Pay is a free sort of personalized self-directed debt elimination plan. So you plug in your numbers and it spits out based on highest balance, lowest interest first, you know, based on the different scenarios that you can choose from. And it'll show you side by side comparisons of all of those scenarios to see at what point can I get outta debt, how much interest can I save using this power payment strategy? And if I had even an extra 20 bucks to throw on that debt every month, would that make a difference in the money I save? And the timeline, and it is empowering, let me tell you. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>, it is just a fabulous free tool just to see how much you really can save in interest costs, in interest costs by following that plan and not adding any new debt to that plan as you go forward. So, uh, USU extension has provided that for free worldwide. We have users who log in and use that resource. So we would invite any and all to check that out if you haven't already.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([08:53](#)):

Absolutely. And we'll make sure and include that link in our show notes today for anyone who wants to access that. What I love about PowerPay is not only does it work for you as an individual, but if you are a financial coach or a counselor working with clients, it is a fabulous tool to work with them. And it's free. That's the best part, is it's a tool that in your bucket that you don't even have to pay for. Now, Amanda, sometimes Power Pay is for those who don't like spreadsheets may seem a bit overwhelming. And I know that you're the creator of the Power Pay Money Master Online course. Can you tell us more about that resource? Well,

Amanda Christensen ([09:29](#)):

A few years ago we just decided what, you know, what if there was a companion course that if folks wanted a deep dive, the Power Pay Money Master course is designed to teach real life money smarts. We go into, uh, there are, it's an online course, it's video based. So we chat about your personal financial vision and your money, personality and tracking expenses, budgeting, managing debt, understanding credit, all of that good stuff. Saving money of course is in there. And then there are bonus modules to dive into on insurance investing and home ownership. It's also approved for CEUs, by the way, for the, for the AFCs listening. That's a, a route you can go to get some of those. But it's real fun to get feedback on the, the course is totally video based and then worksheets and, uh, things that you can do on your own. So it's self-directed. And then from time to time through our extension channels, we offer sort of a workshop

series where you can do the course and then log in every Friday and, and chat with us and get some motivation and questions answered. So you're talking to a real life person, but the course is completely self-directed and you, you don't have to speak to a real life person if you don't want to. You can go through this totally, you know, asynchronously and come out the other end with a real good refresher of personal finance 1 0 1. I guess if you'll,

Rachael DeLeon ([10:57](#)):

Amanda, do you see a lot of professionals going through the course or, or more consumers? How are you marketing the course right now?

Amanda Christensen ([11:04](#)):

Mostly, the majority are consumers. And, and then I do see a handful of professionals logging, you know, going through as well for that, for that purpose, I assume the CEUs. Uh, but yes, the, the majority are, are consumers who are just ready. I think, you know, post pandemic finances have found us in a very interesting place where we're not yet, well, like we are still digging out and recovering and utilizing resources to, to do that. So we've seen quite an influx really in folks that are signing up for that course.

Rachael DeLeon ([11:41](#)):

Let's shift gears a little bit. I know you're also the co-principal investigator for a statewide program called Empowering Financial Wellness. Can you tell us a little bit more about this program?

Amanda Christensen ([11:53](#)):

This program came to be, we have grant funding through the Department of Workforce Services in Utah. And, and bless them for their financial vision and their foresight to say personal finance education is important. It's even critical. We'd like to fund a project that would support that. So that's us and our mission is to empower women and limited income households and community educators across Utah to make informed financial decisions, decisions that serve their life goals and improve financial wellness. So to accomplish that, we develop resources, we offer timely educational opportunities, and we increase awareness of personal finance best practices on social media.

Rachael DeLeon ([12:40](#)):

The start of this program, has this been emulated, do you know in other states or have you learned, you know, when you're doing these types of programs or submitting for grants, is there a sharing across the extension about what's working and what's not?

Amanda Christensen ([12:52](#)):

Sure, yes. We go to conferences and present best practices or oftentimes if you win an award, then you're required to present or do some kind of webinar about what you're doing that's working and how the funding, you know, with or without funding, there are things that people can implement when it comes to our, you know, our online webinar strategy or our social media outreach strategy or an online course. Something there if you're creating online or any kind of online content, which people really sort of expect nowadays. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> in person and face-to-face is my favorite. But people expect that you'll also have some kind of virtual option for education. And so we've shared a lot of best practices when it comes to those types of, of things. Yeah.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([13:46](#)):

Amanda, you wear so many hats. I would love to know also about this Utah Money Moms, I see it everywhere on social media. You're doing great content and producing it all the time. What inspired you to start it and what are you doing with this focus of Utah Money Moms? What is it?

Amanda Christensen ([14:03](#)):

Oh, Utah Money Moms. Well, it changes weekly, so I dunno. I mean,

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([14:09](#)):

<laugh>

Amanda Christensen ([14:09](#)):

You know, here's the truth. I was sort of from 2016 to 2018, I was a lurker on social media and I saw so many people who would start an account and call themselves a personal finance expert because they had a sob story, frankly. And they were just willing and ready to give people anything from investing advice to budgeting advice to advice about credit cards and credit. And I just sort of sat back in the rafters for as long as I could soaking in thinking. And finally, I, I don't, I don't remember a specific like tipping point. I just remember a marketing team at USU extension and a department head who were all willing to take a chance on me, frankly, to say, you know what, if you, if you wanna do it, we are, we will back you and we are, we're behind you. So thank heavens for them set foresight. And I, you know, I've never felt stifled in my career or in my desire to, um, innovate in that way. So, so taking, you know, Utah Money Moms is an arm of USU extension, but it, it was the first time someone in our area really had done it. It is my face, it's my personality. It is Amanda that you see on there. Not necessarily Utah State is sort of secondary in that messaging on purpose, um, with the goal to just reach women with some real life money smarts, because I am an expert. I, I actually do have the, the background, the education and and certification as, as an AFC to come to the table with some, some best practices. And, and always in the top of my messaging at Utah Money Moms is that personal finance is personal. And if you have, if you have a financial expert or a guru that you're paying attention to and they are saying, this is the only way to do this, it's the right, this is my 10, my 10 step program, or, or this is how absolutely must be done, please put your critical thinking caps on and and really dissect if that is right for you. And that's sort of the messaging we're trying to put out into the world as well as obviously advertising all of our free webinars and the online course and all the things that we're doing content wise.

Rachael DeLeon ([16:41](#)):

Yeah, and you have some really great content on that website and I love how collaborative it is. Like you said, it's your face and it was your vision, but there's resources and articles and things from lots of women, you know, who are AFCs or AFC candidates who are working in this space and are experts in the field really collaborating together on these resources, which is really fun to see.

Amanda Christensen ([17:03](#)):

Yes, it is a joy to collaborate with others that are also passionate about getting the message out there and educating in that way. So it's been a team effort for sure since the beginning. The folks that are following along now, they really wanna be there. I mean, it is so fun to dive into Instagram stories and interact with people who they want to engage. I'd say a third of people that are following along, really they're there 'cause they're, they wanna share their personal finance insights and know how as well. And then two thirds I think are those that want to be better and they, they need it. They, they would like to hear what is the best practice or what are the things I could be learning? And so together that audience is just delightful.

Rachael DeLeon ([17:54](#)):

So you touched on a little bit that you're also an AFC and I'm curious what led you to pursue the AFC?

Amanda Christensen (18:01):

If there's any small twinge of regret, it's that we had, you'll remember the names like Jean Lown

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (18:09):

Yeah.

Amanda Christensen (18:10):

At Utah State who Alina Johnson who said, please get the AFC while you're in school. Do it while, you know, before you graduate even. And I was one who did not, I didn't do it. I think in, at the time I thought I am doing extension, I know I'm not going to be counseling. So I, I don't, you know, at the times I didn't see what value that might be to me, right. Even if I wasn't actively counseling. So now, you know, I've had that since 2019 and I can tell you that the value and the standard that you're held to and the reminder, uh, the ethics involved and it has been so great. That lens has been absolutely the best kind of professional development, even though I'm not actively counseling for someone in my shoes. So I finally got my Headspace right and thought I need to be an AFC, what am I doing? <laugh>. And I, and I went that route in 2019 and have never looked back. And do I wish I would've done it sooner? Yeah, I think I would, I would tell someone who's currently a student listening to this or you know, if you're wondering if the AFC is, or even if you're not a hundred percent that you're gonna counsel, it was absolutely worth the value add for professional development for me. I'd

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson (19:37):

Actually second that I had a similar experience for both the AFC and the CFP thinking, kind of like you, I love the financial education round and I thought, I'm never gonna use it directly, but I went ahead and got it anyways. And it has been such a help to me. So regardless of what you think you're going to do in the future or not do, I would highly recommend getting your designation and the earlier the better because it really gets you into a community now that will help you flourish and take you places that you couldn't even imagine. Amanda, I am curious, 'cause I'm sitting here listening to this episode thinking, what if someone's out there listening and says, I wanna do what Amanda does? 'cause you were doing so many really cool things. And by the way, we have tons of links in the show notes of all the things Amanda's doing. But what if someone's out there listening and say, well, I wanna be like Amanda, I want to become an extension agent. What would you tell them to get started in this path of working in extension

Amanda Christensen (20:31):

At Utah State, at least our entry level faculty positions require a, a master's degree in a related field. So that's sort of entry level, but, but also at Utah State, we hire program coordinators that are bachelor's level and entry level positions. And I'd say, if you're wondering at all, well first of all, if you want to rub shoulders with extension professionals, just go walk in the, the door to your local office and say, I, I'd like to volunteer. Do. And, Let me tell you, anyone would say you, you will be taken up on that. Uh, I can tell you right now. So that's like, you know, the best injury level advice I could give someone is to just go see what's going on in your community and if your finance education is your, is your jam, see what's going on in your local area with regards to that. But for a career, the, the program coordinators at Utah State are bachelor's level, you know, entry level positions. And that's where you are really doing a lot of the teaching and a lot of recruiting and, and program development and evaluation. And that is a fun place to be. And then faculty members from there are the master's level, um, entry level positions who in a, a master's degree in a, in a related field, really almost anything is related to extension. It's adult education. So whether it's related to the topic or it's related to, you know, the philosophy of adult



education or community development, right? Or any of those topics are wonderful, uh, supports for someone in an extension career.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([22:14](#)):

I really hear two big things coming out. One is education, so keep doing your education, definitely don't stop. That sounds very important for extension. And then the other thing is reaching out and I will say I have found a, a tool to where you can find extension in your home state and we will include that in the show notes. So if you're very interested in this, we highly encourage you to use that. And like Amanda said, get in touch with your local extension office. That's great.

Rachael DeLeon ([22:40](#)):

Amanda, at the end of each interview, we ask our guests to share their 2 cents. If you had one piece of advice to leave with our listeners, what would it be?

Amanda Christensen ([22:50](#)):

Oh, I love this. It's so fun to consider that one piece of advice. I think about this a lot in sort of, um, a lateral advice sort of professional to professional, which is I find myself assuming that people know this stuff, they, that they know. Because if I think back to my childhood and experiences in early education and then, and then post-second, I don't know, I just sort of gravitated to this topic from the beginning. So it's hard for me to remember a time when I did not know about basic budgeting skills or how credit worked. And I am the odd ball out there, really. That's not normal <laugh>, I think don't assume everybody knows what you know about personal finance, about decision making, about good, better, best decisions. And certainly then just the basics of how credit works and, and how debt, you know, debt is spending future money and the mental emotional decision making side of money that affects the numbers, right? Those are the things I find myself having to remember. Oh, okay. Right. Like people don't assume everybody knows meaning you're never gonna work yourself out of a job in this line of work. It's just one of those topics that we shouldn't come to the table acting like a no it all, but I find myself having to remind myself, okay, it no, like start even more basic with some of the, you know, a blog post or, or the content that I'm creating because people do, when they find you and they trust you, they do care what you have to say. They want to hear from you and they need to know what you have to say. People do just sort of need whether or not they're ready to lean in. And when they are, they find you. Like I said, the folks on how many moms are leaning in there and it is really fun. And so I, I remind my team that quite a bit and I remind myself that still that assuming everyone knows what you have to say, they need to hear you

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([25:04](#)):

Well. And it helps break down any of those barriers we put up. I think often as financial professionals, we use so many acronyms Yes. To put up boundaries and we don't even recognize it. Right. And I, I love that advice of just break it down, don't make it complicated, don't over complicate it. And what you think is plain is not plain to the rest of the world. Great advice, Amanda, thanks so much for joining us today. Please tell our listeners where they can connect with you.

Amanda Christensen ([25:28](#)):

Happily have you join the, the crew on, on Instagram at Utah Money Moms the blog with that same title at um, as Utah money moms.com. And then our finance.ussu.edu is where you can find all things Utah State University extension, personal finance related, including Power Pay.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([25:50](#)):

Well thank you so much for coming on our show today.

Amanda Christensen ([25:53](#)):

You're welcome

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([25:55](#)):

Rachael, This was really enlightening to me. There were several things that I learned that I didn't know about Extension. She gave a great background of it and I kind of dug in a little bit more because I don't, we talk about it a lot in our community inside A-F-C-P-E or even in academia because, and I think a lot of people in those spaces are familiar with it, but not really outside of that much. And so I love that she dug into that. And what I also love about Amanda is how creative she is. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, it is just amazing to see her creativity and wanting to bring good certified education to the marketplace because she's right. There's a lot of people starting channels and influencing for things that they don't know about. And I think this is a great way to bring education to the masses that really is well done.

Dr. Mary Bell Carlson ([26:41](#)):

And if you aren't using Power Pay yet, heck, if you don't know where to start after Amanda, she gave me so many resources. But if there's one place I would start you at and point you to, and that is power pay. I think that is such a powerful tool, whether you're a professional, whether you're an individual or both, because it really does have an amazing effect. And I love to hear the story. I didn't realize that it dated that far back. And I love the floppy disc that it really has been around for that long because it's such a powerful tool. I first learned of PowerPay when I started at A-F-C-P-E almost 10 years ago. And even seeing the evolution of the website over the last 10 years has been really eye-opening. And you know, we talk about creativity and vision and things like that and it's come aesthetically a long way, but I don't know, an A FC who hasn't used it or doesn't rave about it. And so if you haven't had an opportunity to check it out, it's free and it's a really great resource to use with your clients or even if you're just an individual who's, you know, interested in, in managing your debt. The other thing Mary, that I really loved is, you know, her honesty around pursuing the A FC. And I love hearing the name Jean Lown and Alina Johnson, you know, really pioneers in our field and just a reminder that, you know, people come into the certification in different ways, but you don't have to be doing that one-on-one counseling.

Rachael DeLeon ([28:01](#)):

A lot of AFCs are doing research or education and there's so many uses, um, and value behind holding the designation. And so just love her honesty of how she came through that program as well. And then her reminder at the end, you know, don't always assume that people know it and the longer you work in a space, I think that's applicable in any industry. You just sort of assume because you know what you know is really innate to you. And I think going back to that foundational advice and education is really critical and we can all use it. I mean, even the really great course that she's developed through PowerPay, it's great for AFCs too because we can all use that refresher and that back to basics. And so, um, some great resources today and always a pleasure to be able to speak with Amanda.