

Rachael DeLeon (00:04):

Welcome to Real Money, Real Experts, where we bring you interviews with leading financial professionals, sharing their stories, their challenges, and their advice for helping people manage money in the real world. I'm your host, Rachel DeLeon, Executive Director of the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education, or A-F-C-P-E.

Dr. Brandy Baxter (00:26):

And I'm your co-host, Dr. Brandy Baxter, accredited financial counselor, A-F-C-P-E member, and your 2025 A-F-C-P-E Board President. On every episode, we take a deep dive into the topics and stories that you care about the most, helping clients, building community, and growing in your work and your career. Our guest today is Jon Akerman. Jon grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated from college with a degree in financial mathematics. He became a credentialed actuary while working at a global consulting firm and living in the thick of the hustle right off Times Square. After several years, burnout set in and Jon began searching for a change without knowing exactly what that change would be. Instead of staying stuck, he embraced uncertainty, relocating to a new state, joining the Florida Army National Guard, serving overseas attaining the AFC credential, and joining an innovative budgeting software called My Budget Coach. Woo. Now, Jon coaches others experiencing burnout by giving them the tools to realize they can afford to make a change. He also trains financial coaches to use my budget coach in their own business when he's not matting or coaching. Jon enjoys volunteering, spending time with his wife, spending time with his two cats and traveling.

Rachael DeLeon (02:01):

Welcome to the show, Jon.

Jonathan Akerman (02:03):

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Rachael DeLeon (02:04):

Let's kind of take it back from the beginning. As Brandy read your bio, you've had quite the winding journey through your career and I think what's really interesting and you know, a lot of times people will feel burnout and feel stuck, but you made a change and have kind of really followed your passion. So, you know, starting from the beginning, what drew you into the field as an actuary and how did you manage to wind that road over to financial counseling and coaching?

Jonathan Akerman (02:33):

I like math and I like science, but I didn't want to be a doctor. I come from a family of medical practitioners and that's all. And I'm the youngest, so that's all I grew up hearing table talk and I just was so, I don't know, turned off by it just 'cause it's, it's all that I grew up with, so I didn't really know what else there was to do because there was so much of that I didn't leave room for, I guess guess other to hear other things. And this thing actuary kept coming up and I just explored it a little more and it felt like a good fit. So I went down that road and took the test pretty relatively quickly, got credentialed and got my first job while in college I interned and was offered full-time before I graduated and it was great and I still do it and I enjoy it. But what ended up actually happening was that I was in Times Square and I was walking through Times Square every day to get to work. I worked, I lived in Times Square and I worked in Midtown and I went away for two weeks to Europe and you know, it was a disconnect type of trip. Like, don't work on the trip, don't look at your emails every day, that type of thing. And when I came back, you know how sometimes if, you know, you don't see your grandmother or grandfather in a while, they, they see you growing up and they say, wow, you're so tall. So I was able to, the next day when I

went back to work and I was walking through Times Square, I kind of, you know, I didn't have my phone, my head buried in my phone. I I was able to kind of look around and see what I was living in and passing through. And I, there's nothing wrong with New York at Times Square. I grew up there for 25 years, I love it. And I go basically every few months to, to visit. But it, it just wasn't in line with what I wanted to be doing. I wanted to kind of take a, a step back and, you know, leave, create, create room in my life for other things other than, you know, the quote unquote grind. And I only got had that realization because I was able to take a step back on this trip and then I came back and, and I was able to basically see above the trees a little bit above the, you know, from a sky view rather than constantly still in, in the weeds. And then once that happened, you know, I sat on it for a couple months and it, the feeling just did not go away. And it was, it just kept, you know, nagging me and tapping me on the back like, what are you doing? Like, why are you still here? You're not happy. So I, I just moved to Florida without knowing anyone. I don't know why I, I mean, I know why <laugh>. The reason is because I lived in New York and I didn't want to move anywhere that was colder. New York was my cold threshold, so I had a friend that was moving out to Florida for work. So we just moved out together without knowing anyone or anything. And one thing led to another, I went to the 75th anniversary of D-Day, a few months after I moved, felt compelled to serve. So I signed up for the Army National Guard, I did a deployment, came back studied for my AFC. But that was, you know, one way I was trying to figure out if that was the, the right way to serve for me. And I enjoyed it and I thought it was a great experience, but it, and ultimately it didn't resonate as much with me as I was hoping. So then that led me to the AFC credential and to help people with their money. And I attained that about a year and a half, a year and a quarter ago, end of early 2024. And now I'm exploring that phase of my journey.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([06:21](#)):

That is so awesome. It sounds like when you were talking about that call to serve when you joined the Army National Guard, I don't know if you know this, but I'm also an Air Force veteran and I can totally relate to feeling called to serve, but then there at the end, you mentioned that you also felt this draw to the AFC, it sounds like you were called to serve in that capacity as well. Tell us a little bit about what made you decide to become an AFC?

Jonathan Akerman ([06:49](#)):

I think a lot of us in the AFC field, right, uh, before we get an AFC, get the AFC or, you know, move professionally into the field a lot of times where the defacto friend or family member that people come to with money questions or money issues, money advice. And that was largely true for me as well. And one of the things that happened in the military was I joined when I was 26 or 27. So, you know, I, I joined as an enlisted even though I had a college degree, I wanted to kind of be on that track rather than officer. So I was mixed in with basically a bunch of 18 year olds, fresh outta high school, 1920 maybe. And it was a great experience, but one of the scariest things I saw, and, and, and this is anecdotally, so it's not for the military at large and, and I know there's tons of great resources that the military offers to help people with money, but I saw that basically a lot of these, you know, privates speaking to sergeants, and this was in the hype of Dogecoin, not to be confused with the current doge, but when the, the meme coin was going up and down and like, there was some really intense advice given to these basically kids to invest in Doge. And like all these, what I perceive as harmful advice, especially for people that are 18 year olds, potentially have \$0 in expenses or fiscal commitments and, you know, it could be the most opportune time for them in terms of building savings and good money habits and they're receiving this, you know, not great advice. And then it made me realize, well if, if I disagree, then maybe I should, uh, put my voice into the conversation and I've already been helping people on a personal basis, so why not take that further and help people that I don't know and that can use that, you know, hand.

Rachael DeLeon ([08:44](#)):

I love that. I'm curious, did someone in particular introduce you to the AFC? And I know as an actuary you have a lot of different designations behind your name as well, you know, what made you decide to become an AFC rather than, you know, a financial planner or CPA or what made you decide AFC?

Jonathan Akerman ([09:04](#)):

Yeah, so I like the idea of AFC because I want to be able to help the people that generally speaking, these are, these are generalities. So I know it's not true for everyone that holds a CFP, but in general, right? The expectation is that if you're gonna be working with a financial advisor or CFP, a lot of times they have minimum requirements mm-hmm <affirmative>. Or in or net worth, you know, in net worth or income requirements. So I really want to help that underserved population, the people that want to take control of their money, that want to get better, that wanna break out of paycheck to paycheck, but either, you know, don't know how. And the people they do know that can help with money aren't, they don't fit into that person's niche for whatever reason, which is, you know, that's fine if the, that doesn't work for that business owner, it doesn't work. But I find that a lot of these people, you know, they, they're, they're right there. They just need to be, be, they just need a little bit of a guiding light and it's, and they, they're looking for someone and they keep getting turned away, come back later, come back when you, when you, you know, have a positive net worth or when you have this amount of assets or this amount of income. So I really wanna get people to that stage and then hand them off to the CFP for the, for the, for the long-term future and the holistic and, and all that. But I want to be at, with them at the beginning. And I found that the AFC was a really good credential and education pathway to learning how to effectively do that and implement.

Rachael DeLeon ([10:34](#)):

I love that.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([10:35](#)):

I'm so glad you said that. That was my personal journey. I was the client who was like, no, we, you don't have enough assets for us to manage, or No, you don't have enough this. And, and I felt that shuffle being pushed around. So it totally can relate to you on that. And honestly that's what propelled me to become an AFC because I wanted to be able to help people who were in the same situation that I had been in and felt as if there was nowhere for them to go. And you know, I think about when we talk about serving the population that we service as AFCs, we often jump to the underserved population. And while many of us have a heart for that, it's a misconception that people with high incomes don't also have money struggles. Right? It, we can sometimes think, oh, if you have, you know, multiple zeros in your bank account, then surely you don't have any money problems. But that's not the case. What are some of the issues that you see higher net worth clients facing?

Jonathan Akerman ([11:36](#)):

Yeah, it's really tempting to, you know, sometimes, you know, I, I've done it also, we can roll our eyes when we hear about someone that's saying they don't have enough money, but you know, that they make multiple hundreds or, or you know, even million of dollars and it's easy to roll our eyes and and write them off. But there's really so much more that goes into it because some of these people, right, they could be supporting multiple generations, they could be helping their parents, grandparents helping their kids. They can be stretched really thin. I, I mean, we all know whether or not we have kids, right? We all know that the more people a single income needs to support, right? The less there is to just go around. So if you add parents into the mix, kids, aunts, uncles, nieces, I mean some, some cultures really do really support everyone within the family and not just the immediate family. And, you know, you could be making \$400,000 a year, but if you're supporting 7, 8, 10 people, it may not stretch that far. And then in addition to that, a lot of these people, they may have organizations depending on them, right? They may be giving

thousands of dollars a way to charity and they can feel the stress that if they don't produce that organization, which largely relies on their contribution, they'll have to struggle as well. So they're stretched thin because they have these, for an example, they could have these people or these organizations depending on them and they feel the need to, you know, constantly produce and maybe not even take care of themselves first before helping others. And then there's obviously the, you know, the usual suspects, you know, lifestyle inflation, not getting off the don't treadmill expenses rising faster than income, uh, just bad money management, you know, that could be helped with a financial coach or just a financial therapist,

Rachael DeLeon ([13:28](#)):

Jon. That's really true. And I think everybody's situation is really unique. And being able to meet them where they are and listen and really understand, I think we all sort of recognize these biases behind how we look at, at people. And when you kind of peel back the curtain, there's a lot more to help navigate. You talked a little bit about some of the changes you've made in your own life, and I'm curious, when you're working with someone as an AFC, as a financial coach, what advice do you have for people who are looking to make meaningful change?

Jonathan Akerman ([13:58](#)):

Uh, I usually try to ask a series of questions that gets them, you know, a lot of times the conversations will start off a little subdued or, you know, frustration and things like that. And I'll try to ask a series of questions where I can change that temperament to joy or to happiness, and I could see a creeping up. And once we get to that point where the mood has changed and it helps isolate the things that, you know, light them up essentially. 'cause that's literally what happened. They came in frustrated potentially, you know, bored like depressed or at the situation and helping them discover what really lights them up. And then I then, then highlighting that fact and then drilling down on how to make more of it or how to just make it a reality at all depending on the type of thing it is. So once we can identify those things and say them out loud and, and help the client really identify it, right, not prescribe like, oh, I think you'll like this and that, but it's more getting them to get to that realization and then, and then pausing there and drilling down on it. Like what is it about it, how to get to it. And then essentially just building out smart goals to, to, you know, I'm forgetting the word, but to basically have them like clearly documented in stone. And you know, a lot of these, a lot of times when we do these things, we think they have to be financial related, but these goals don't need to be financial related, right? It could be learning a language or something like that. Obviously money helps because it could dictate the type of resources you have access to obtaining these goals, such as traveling to the, to a native speaking country or hiring a or buying a good course or series books. But it's really just helping the client identify what lights them up and then creating a path together to get them there.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([15:56](#)):

I wanna go back to something you said a moment ago. It just, it keeps swimming inside my brain. And you talked about you were working and doing all the things and you went on this trip and you said it was like a disconnect trip. And I'm just sitting here thinking, how many of us need a disconnect trip from the day to day of our lives? And Jon, you may or may not know this, but most of our listeners tend to be professionals in the financial space. And even for those who are not, we are not all familiar with my budget coach, and we also have some in our space who are working in private practice. So tell us a little bit about what made you decide to join up with my budget coach versus either starting an independent practice or doing some other things in the personal finance space. Tell us a little bit about how you landed there.

Jonathan Akerman ([16:52](#)):

Yeah, so the, the owner, Zach, he reached out to me a year ago, actually, I think it was March 5th, 2024. And, you know, we spoke and I was immediately, I thought this was a genius idea. So essentially what my budget coach does, it's a, it's another zero based budgeting software in that regard. It's, it's similar to a lot of existing softwares, but what makes it unique is that it builds in the coach. So users sign up, they select a coach, or we recommend a coach depending on how they want to go, if they don't wanna sift through. And then right when they sign in that coach they picked their face pops up and there's basically this built in avatar that's gonna guide them through setting up their budget. And it is a static conversation and the client clicks through it at their own pace. But what's amazing is, is that a lot of times that beginning of a relationship with a client, right, it's kind of, it could be, depending on how things are, are laid out, it could be tedious and, and at times frustrating because a lot of it is just questionnaires aggregating data, getting things together, which sets the stage for everything that's to come. But right, the client's paying money, you're spending your time and immediately you don't have anything to show for it, right? You just have all this stuff, but obviously it's very important to get that stuff. So this really streamlines that process while giving them the human touch. 'cause these conversations and avatars are written by the coach. They're not just copy paste or ai. Each coach imbues it with their money, beliefs, money, personality and financial coaching, you know, methods. And it really, it, it saves the client money and it helps them get set up on their own time, people with erratic schedules. And then it also helps the coach scale because they can theoretically onboard, you know, 10 people simultaneously at 1:00 AM when they're sleeping. And once the user and the client are set up, they have the option to message or call the coach through the app set up. And they're not gonna call as in through the phone, but they'll set a Zoom or teams call, whatever it is the coach uses for their software. And that's when they could jump right into, you know, money psychology, goal setting, fear setting, you know, any, any sort of direction that they want to go. And the foundation's already built there and it was kind of seamless and removing a lot of the friction. So once I learned about it, I, I was immediately hooked and I, and I saw that this thing, that this, this idea really could go somewhere and I, you know, immediately asked to join him on the journey. And that's where we are now.

Rachael DeLeon ([19:35](#)):

Jon, at the end of a very podcast, we always ask our guests to share their 2 cents and we like to think of our podcast as a knowledge bank. So if you had to put 2 cents in our bank, what real money quote would you add?

Jonathan Akerman ([19:50](#)):

I do love these 2 cents. I have mm-hmm <affirmative> I do listen to the podcast and there's definitely been some really good ones. So, uh, I don't know if this will rank, but I'll do my best. I personally, I always try to internally keep in mind to be contrarian and you know, there are always reasons, pros and cons to the other side. And listening to those actually listening, not just hearing, but listening to them at the least, it provides a new perspective, which you may or may not agree with. And you're, you may still, you know, fall into the same side that you came in with, but other times you could even change your mind as you learn more about the topic and either way, whether you change your mind or you don't change your mind, just listening to the other side really goes a long way. And, and just growing, you know, professionally and personally,

Rachael DeLeon ([20:39](#)):

I love that. I feel like in today's environment, being contrarian and, and open and listening not only works well within our own field, but but also within our life. So that one really resonates with me. Totally.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([20:51](#)):

I like how you talked about pros and cons of both sides. You know, as financial professionals we can sometimes feel like, well, I have all this knowledge so this is the way to do it. And, but just being open to listening and, and hearing a different perspective from our clients, super, super

Rachael DeLeon ([21:08](#)):

Valuable. I'm gonna throw you one more curve ball at the end because we talked a little bit about travel and taking that vacation. What's next up for you? Oh

Jonathan Akerman ([21:16](#)):

Wow, that is timely <laugh>. I am actually tomorrow going to a wellness retreat and they also do not allow phones or technology outside of the room. So I am looking forward to disconnecting again and I guess we'll see what comes out of that weekend.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([21:32](#)):

<laugh>.

Rachael DeLeon ([21:32](#)):

Yeah, you might have some more two sons to add to our break after that trip.

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([21:37](#)):

<laugh>, Jon is totally giving me all the ideas. I'm like, Brandy note to, so schedule a disconnect. Trip <laugh>.

Jonathan Akerman ([21:44](#)):

Yeah, they're amazing. It really, it really helps when people don't need to make big changes, right? Some people are, are good where they are, they just need to reset and start and start fresh. So this is not that, you know, everyone needs to make changes or anything, but definitely disconnecting and, and just picking things up where we, where we left 'em off is itself very powerful.

Rachael DeLeon ([22:01](#)):

Well, Jon, tell us where our listeners can connect with you.

Jonathan Akerman ([22:05](#)):

So you can find me on either cashflow fitness.com, that's my personal business where I'm able to help individuals directly. And then I'm also listed as a resource on my budget coach. And I also work for my budget coach, helping get coaches that are interested in working in, in incorporating my budget coach into their programs or with their clients. So you can reach me on my budget coach.com as well.

Rachael DeLeon ([22:32](#)):

Fantastic. Well thank you so much for coming on the show today. It was great to connect with you and learn more about your story.

Jonathan Akerman ([22:38](#)):

Thank you for having me,

Dr. Brandy Baxter ([22:40](#)):



Rachel, what another great episode. John just gave such great insights around the importance of budgeting and how we really need to be open to hearing different perspectives from our clients. But you know, my favorite takeaway from this episode was the disconnect trip. What about you?

Rachael DeLeon ([22:59](#)):

Hands down. I could actually like be there with him as he told the story of walking through, you know, New York City and suddenly seeing things differently. And I think so many of us take that for granted. You know, you remove yourself from your everyday environment and suddenly you come back with new perspective. And I really think that can also be taken into the interaction that we have with clients. It's like we, we change our perspective, you change your situation, you open your ears and you start to listen to other experiences and suddenly the way you look at the world around you shifts too. And so I just, I love that idea. I am already making plans for my disconnect trip <laugh>. It is very timely and much needed, but love conversations like John's love, hearing how people navigate through the field into the field. And so many of our professionals, you know, come from so many different backgrounds and walks of life, but they're all driven by this, like, really important, just like tug at really helping others figure out their finances and live their best life.

Rachael DeLeon ([24:03](#)):

So great episode and always fun to do it with you. Brandy, thank you so much for joining us this week. I just wanted to let our listeners know it is April, which is Financial Literacy Month. And we also have so many great things going on at A-F-C-P-E right now. Our invitation to present is open, and so if you want to share content experiences research at our annual symposium, I encourage you to visit our website and submit a presentation for consideration. Also, now is a great time to register for the symposium. We have early bird pricing from now through the summer. And of course, when you think of financial literacy month education is at its core and we're educating our clients every day, but continuing to educate ourselves, now is the perfect time to consider becoming a member of Sign Up for a Webinar, lean into the Community.

Rachael DeLeon ([24:59](#)):

It's more important now than ever. 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, it 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.