Dr. Brandy Baxter:

00:11

Hey friends! Don't adjust your screens. That's right. It's just me today. Rachel is off being the amazing executive director of AFCPE, and we know that the show must go on. So I'm gonna interview our guests today for our episode. Super excited. Today's guest, we actually have two ladies who will be joining me, Jayne Larson and Alicia Lawrence. Let me tell you a little bit about them. Alicia Lawrence is uh a financial guide at Your Moneyline and an accredited financial counselor with a background in human services. She brings extensive experience to behavior-focused financial counseling, including her previous work supporting the military community through one-on-one guidance and family-focused financial education. Alicia has worked with clients across a wide range of backgrounds, helping them build confidence, strengthen their financial habits, and make meaningful progress in debt reduction and savings. She approaches her work with clients from a place of empathy, practical strategies, and belief that when you feel better, you do better. She really emphasizes empowering individuals to turn financial challenges into opportunities for long-term stability and well-being. I'm super excited to talk to her today. Our other guest who will be joining us is Jayne Larson. Jayne is a senior financial guide with over 10 years of experience and a degree in family and consumer science from Utah State University. She leverages her expertise to guide participants toward greater financial stability. As an accredited financial counselor, Jayne is committed to helping individuals navigate their financial challenges with clarity and confidence. Known for her compassionate and people-first approach, Jayne provides tailored financial guidance that empowers people to build and maintain financial stability, both now and in the future. I love that. Jayne is a mom of two and currently lives in Boise, Idaho with her husband. You'll find Jayne playing with flowers and paddleboarding in her free time. I'm super excited to talk to both of these ladies today. Welcome to the show.

Alicia Lawrence:

02:29

Hi, thanks so much for having us.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

02:32

How crazy is it to have someone read your bio and you're like, oh my gosh, now I have to go and talk?

Alicia Lawrence:

02:38

Very weird.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

02:40

It's a little weird. I get it. No worries. But both of you bringing an actual strong behavior-focused lens to financial guidance, counseling, coaching, education. How does it uh land with your clients when you're shifting the conversation from what you should do and then moving the conversation to what do you think makes you do what you do? How does that change the client outcome?

Alicia Lawrence:

03:06

So really, it's a lot of the times very relieving. And you can just like sense the relief in their voice. And it's just like, okay, you know, I'm not necessarily doing something wrong. I can just do things a little bit better. And it's, you know, I've been in that position. So when I like was in that position, it was just like, okay, you know, it's not the end of the world, things are fixable. And I think the fact that we approach it with like, oh, you know, we can do things better and not like everything's broken, the world's ending. It just kind of makes it a little bit easier for them.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

03:44

That's good. I love how you say it's fixable, right? We can we can fix this. It doesn't have to be the end of the world. What about you, Jayne? What would you like to add?

Jayne Larson:

03:53

You know, Brandy, to be totally honest, I think most people, it's safe to say they know how to create an actual budget. You know, the the actual creation of it is not rocket science, but figuring out how we do that is so much harder. And so when you start digging into the why with people, you see these light bulbs go off and they're like, oh, okay, that makes sense. Now I have something actionable that I can take with me to actually see the change that I have been working for for possibly years, right? And they're finally able to see that. And so it's a really empowering experience for people to finally be making progress.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

04:31

That's good. I love how you said the actual creation of the budget. Like anybody can do that, right? Lines, spreadsheets, numbers, tracking app. That piece is not the challenge. It's the why I'm making the decisions that I'm making. You know, Simon Senec says start with why. And so when you think about this, it kind of makes me think about uh motivational interviewing. How do you get people to understand or even to communicate to you why they're making the decisions that they're making? So when you think about motivational interviewing, how does that play a role in connecting with clients through these different stages of change?

Jayne Larson:

05:11

You know, motivational interviewing is helping people discover the answers within themselves. I think a lot of time as practitioners, we already know what someone needs to do. We know what the solution is and we try to convince them that that solution is right.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

05:26

Yeah.

Jayne Larson:

05:26

It doesn't work. They have to find it within themselves, that why, the understanding of the different layers that's going to help move them through that transtheoretical model of change, right? And so motivational interviewing is meeting them where they're at to help them get to that next step. And it is so much more empowering for someone to find the answer themselves than to be told something every step of the way.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

05:52

That's so good. You know, Alicia, I want you to take a different spin on the same question, but help us understand how motivational interviewing actually helps the client when they're feeling stuck or resistant to making changes in their financial decisions.

Alicia Lawrence:

06:09

So it can actually help them understand their own motivations and reasoning for change. I know a lot of times, like Jane said, you know, people know that they need to do better with their finances, but it's like, okay, how do we do that? And what's going to work best for me? So using motivational interviewing is a great way to, you know, find the things that motivate them and that align with their values and goals and helping them create a concrete plan based on their goals and values.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

06:42

That's good. Concrete plan and their goals and values. You know, I don't want to take for granted that our audience knows what motivational interviewing is. Alicia, can you just give a quick summary of what motivational interviewing involves?

Alicia Lawrence:

06:56

So it's really just building a, I shouldn't say just because it's not always easy. Um, but it's building a trusting and collaborative relationship with um the client that you're working with and getting the conversation to a point where they see their goal and then kind of invoking them with their own goal, finding their motivations for things and helping them change from, you know, I should do better to I can. And these are small steps that I can take to do that.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

07:29

Jayne, as we think about, I love what Alicia said, the goal of motivational interviewing is building trust. And so that lets us know that there are a lot of emotions that can be connected with money decisions and and especially around change. Why do you think

it's important for practitioners to develop awareness around different patterns that our clients may be experiencing and the emotional triggers that may be associated with, you know, financial change or making changes with their financial decisions?

Jayne Larson:

08:02

Yeah. If you don't have a relationship of trust with your client and you don't know those small intricacies, right? Of like, what are their normal habits? What are those triggers? What like you know, or we hope, right, that as you get to know them, like, hey, they have a really big work deadline coming up. And when they get stressed, they're more likely to eat out or they're more likely to spend, right? To do that. If you know that, you can help prepare them in advance of that situation happening. And you can now be that proactive partner with them rather than just being reactive, right? And again, that sets them up for success. That sets you up for success as their um their financial counselor in every step of the process.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

08:51

I I think that's a good example because I'm the one like, oh my gosh, I'm stressed out. Let me go eat out, right? There's this odd correlation between the two. And so as a financial practitioner, having that awareness definitely allows me to support my clients better as they're making their financial decisions. Um, I'm gonna stay with you, Jane, on this question. Sometimes when we think about financial success, we often go right to the numbers, right? Credit score, savings, reducing of debt, all of these things. But what are some of the qualitative measures that we should be looking at when we're thinking about measuring a client's progress?

Jayne Larson:

09:34

Oh my gosh, Brandy, I love this question so much because I think historically our industry does look at the numbers, right? We want to see things that we can like actually measure. And so much of personal finance, you you simply can't do that, right? Like, how do you measure someone's confidence in making a financial decision? How do you measure someone's um ability to open up their mail when like previously that was a really stressful event for them? But being able to do those things are the little stepping stones that are getting them to financial stability. And that deserves to be celebrated. It deserves to be recognized and pointed out to people because it's also one of the areas that's most easily um falls through the cracks, maybe, right? Of like, oh, well, I opened this bill and now I have these feelings because I opened the bill. And so we forget what a big deal it was that we actually even got to that point in the first place.

Alicia Lawrence:

10:36

Yeah.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

10:37

Oh, we, how many of our clients are like afraid to open the mail? And nowadays it's probably coming through their email, so it's even easier to ignore it. Um, thinking about clients, Alicia, can you share with us an example maybe of a client that you've worked with where you saw them experience financial improvement simply because of having a better relationship with their money, more so than focus on the numbers?

Alicia Lawrence:

11:05

Yes. Um, actually, I brought this up in our um presentation at Symposium. I have a client that has a significant amount of debt, and a lot of it, the majority of it is consumer

debt. And she was not opening her mail, not answering her phone calls, like none of that, not wanting to even just look at her bank accounts, anything like that. And honestly, like the first few, probably five or six calls that we had were just, you know, exploring the feelings around that and then going into okay, this is how we feel about it. What are things that we can do? Like, even just small things like opening the mail, like Jane said, you know, I would have her open the mail one day and then just put it on the counter and then come back to it a couple days later just to see. So it's like those small incremental steps that we can take with them to increase one, the awareness, but also like allow time for us to process that because it's not always the easiest thing to deal with. And um, being able to provide support for clients is probably one of my favorite things, but also, you know, very important because money's such a hard topic that they probably don't have anybody else to talk to about it. So I think just having small actionable steps that they can take and being supportive of those qualitative steps that they're taking to get to the quantitative part is always, you know, a valuable tool.

Jayne Larson:

12:35

Alicia, can you go ahead and where she's at now because her story is actually really incredible.

Alicia Lawrence:

12:42

So she's successfully negotiated 23 credit card um payments and yes, it's it's an it's a lot, but um currently we are we're in the process of you know what she can do to kind of restructure that debt to make it to get a little bit more traction than what she's seen. But you know, she was able to have those hard conversations with the creditors. Um, I know they're not always the easiest thing to do, but you know, we worked through how to have those things to say. You know, I provided different resources for her that

she could have on hand during the call just to provide that extra support while I was not on the phone with her as well.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

13:29

Alicia, this is such a great example of what you all talked about during your session at Symposium. And and I appreciate that you shared she moved from not being comfortable opening her mail to now she's navigating 20 fee credit cards, but something happened in the middle that I think our audience needs to know about. What do you think occurred for this mindset shift to take place in your client?

Alicia Lawrence:

13:58

I would love to say that it was math, but it was not. Honestly, I think it was just, you know, having the conversation of awareness, like Jane said, of like, okay, this is the situation you're in. If you do nothing, this is what's gonna happen. Here are the options to do something, and we can pick from there. And, you know, we talked through the different options, what was gonna be the most effective, what was gonna be the most manageable for her with her mental load, with everything else that she has going on in her life, and walking through all those different scenarios with her and allowing her to pick what aligned with her goals and what she wanted to do, I think was very helpful to get her to take action versus me telling her, like, this is what you're gonna do. Like it just aligned a lot better. And once we figured out what she needed and wanted and could do, things definitely started to pick up speed from there.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

14:58

Thank you. When you think about like our listening audience, who are financial professionals, counselors, coaches, um, what do you think are some things that we

should have in our mind so that we move beyond just focusing on budgets, but really leaning more into that deeper behavior change with our clients? What suggestions would you share?

Jayne Larson:

15:22

I think first lead with curiosity, you know, instead of making a lot of assumptions about why someone is spending the way that they are or, you know, where they're making these decisions, ask a lot of questions. Get to really know them. You know, this kind of goes back to building that relationship. Hey, tell me about this thing. Like, tell me why it's important, right? Because we we've all heard, and you know, show us where you spend your money and I'll show you where your priorities are. We we've all heard that I think through, to be honest. Um, but we have to figure out why that is. So lead with curiosity um and also empathy. You know, there is a lot of shame. There can be a lot of um stress, anxiety, depression that can come with our finances. And, you know, people come to us holding all this in reserve, right? And thinking like, they're gonna judge me. They're gonna think I'm so bad at money. And you'll notice as I use language. Um, I even met with someone this morning that was like, well, I know I need fill in the blink. And I said, Well, why do you need this? And I actually asked her, she goes, Well, I know I need a budget. And I said, Oh, that's really interesting. Tell me about that. Why do you feel like you need a budget? Is there something happening in your financial life right now that is not supporting your goals? Right. Because the truth is, and let's be totally honest, you don't actually need a budget to be financially successful or to have financial stability. You don't. Um, but budgets are helpful. They're helpful to build strategy, they're helpful to build awareness, to build confidence, right? Like we all know why a budget is helpful, but it's really not necessary. And so, you know, we had this conversation. Like, why did you use that specific language that you need to? Has someone told you that you need to? Is there this inner desire to have one? Right. And that's the curiosity and then the empathy. It's like, it's okay, you know, like it's okay if you don't have one, and it's okay if you are having an experience that is leading you to want one. Um, so I think those are the two, the two biggest. And then, you know,

again, taking all those tools that we have as financial professionals and building that in, that's where you're really gonna see the magic happen.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

17:35

It's good. Alicia, would you add anything for practitioners, financial professions?

Alicia Lawrence:

17:42

So a lot of times with finances, like it's very uncomfortable for clients that we're working with, and it's something that they're not used to talking about. So, like Jane said, leading with empathy, but also providing reflection questions because a lot of times I feel like as practitioners, you know, we get stuck on the numbers, but also like our clients get stuck on the numbers. And it's easy to with social comparisons and you know what other people are doing that we see in our lives. So kind of encouraging them to get tunnel vision and seeing, like, okay, what is your specific financial situation? What do you want to work on? And kind of going from there, I use uh a lot of reflection questions with clients that I work with, whether it's, you know, while we're working together or on their own. I know some questions are not the most comfortable to talk about, especially with finances. So for the harder questions, I do let them do that on their own. And then when we come back to it, I'm I ask, you know, how did that go? Like, is there anything that you want to talk about? If there's not, that's okay because they may not be ready to talk about it. So just continuing to meet them where they're at, leading with empathy, but also encouraging change and empowering them to build their self-efficacy of like, oh, I can do this. You know, Jane said a budget is not the most important thing, which I don't think it is either. I think it's that self-efficacy and that belief that they can do things differently than they have done them before, um, which a lot of times is the hardest part.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

19:15

Okay. So you said I use reflection questions. And I don't want to take for granted that everyone just knows what that means. Can you give us an example or two of the type of reflection questions that you use with your clients?

Alicia Lawrence:

19:29

Yeah. So what it could be is, you know, as simple as, you know, how does my current spending reflect my goals and, you know, values currently, but how does it reflect it for the future if they have debt or if they, you know, have a savings number that they're working on? It can be, you know, what do I need to do to get there? Because a lot of times, you know, like we've talked about this whole podcast, it's like we we know what we need to do. We know the things are there that we need to change, but how do we do it? So I think it's, you know, just kind of figuring out with them what their capacity is to do things, and you know, just throwing out different examples of things that they could do and seeing what's going to work best for them. So it's like, you know, I have this debt. How did I get here? What can I do to change it? And then creating a plan from there together.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

20:24

Okay. Well, I don't know if you remember or not, but our show is real money, real expert. And so we love to get the story behind the story. And one of the things we also try to do here is build this bank of knowledge. And so I'm gonna bounce it to, let's see, Jane or Alicia, maybe Alicia first, and then we'll bounce it to Jane. We'd like to ask, what would be your two cents that you would want to add to our knowledge bank?

Alicia Lawrence:

20:52

Ooh, that's a great question. Um, I would say that we can't ignore the discomfort in financial success. Um it needs to be there because you know, things great things don't happen overnight um or without friction. And also things don't happen linearly. I think a lot of times we expect things just to go as smooth as possible because we have a plan, which if you have lived any sort of life, you do not, or you know that that doesn't happen. Um, because you know, things happen, kids need new shoes, you have an event you have to go to, you know, you're you have a water leak, all the different things can happen and can derail the plan. But being able to adjust when needed and create a realistic, sustainable plan with those habits and working on them to ensure that they are sustainable long term is foundational to financial well being and you know, creating a plan for success.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

21:52

Great. Thank you so much. Jane, what about you? What would you add to our knowledge bank? Your two sets.

Jayne Larson:

21:59

You know, I think. As just consumers in general, but also as financial professionals, we're like, okay, we're gonna put together this plan and this is what we need. But the reality is that budgets and financial plans were never meant to be a one and done tied planning experience. Your life changes, it evolves, new things come, things go, and your plan should also change. And so, you know, stay flexible and pivot when needed because that's what's going to ensure your success again, both now and in the future.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

22:31

That's good. Thank you. Where can our audience connect with the two of you? Um, Jane, you go first. Tell us how they can connect with you.

Jayne Larson:

22:38

Yeah, people can connect with us on LinkedIn. That's probably the easiest way to get directly to Alicia and I. Um, and we are always happy to connect. Actually, we love connecting with other professionals. I think, you know, we're all so spread out sometimes that it's really fun to be able to connect and um, you know, just build community in that way.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

22:58

Excellent. Alicia, would you like to add anything?

Alicia Lawrence:

23:01

No, LinkedIn is great. And um, if you do have questions or you know, have anything that you want to share, we're always happy to hear and happy to, you know, connect and share knowledge.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

23:14

Yes, for sure on the sharing the knowledge. Well, thank you, ladies both. And if you are interested in learning more about Jane or Alicia and the work that they're doing, we encourage you to connect with them on LinkedIn. And you can always subscribe to our

channel to know more about the experts that we have in our community. Thanks again, Jane and Alicia, for being on the show.

Alicia Lawrence:

23:34

Thanks so much for having us.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

23:38

Well, friends, that is another episode. And like I stated at the beginning, I'm running solo today, but that's because Rachel is out being the amazing executive director that she is, really pushing the organization forward. And I'm just happy to stand in and interview these two great guests. If you took anything away from this session, you probably took away the importance of empathetic conversation. Less about the numbers and more about the person, connecting to what's important to them, their values, um, their beliefs, and helping them even to remember and recognize when outside messaging is causing them to use language like I need to do this or I need to have this, but really slowing down and pausing and figuring out where is this coming from? And as we walk with our clients through change, maybe we need to remind them that the budget is not necessarily the thing that's going to make the change. It's the mindset. What they think, what they feel, what they believe about their money, their money habits, and the access to resources can make a world of difference. So I enjoyed this episode. I hope you do too, and we look forward to connecting with you again at our very next episode.

Rachael DeLeon:

24:52

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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.