Dr. Brandy Baxter:

00:11

Hey Rachael, how are you?

Rachael DeLeon:

00:14

Hey, Brandy. Good to see you. I'm doing fantastic. Super excited about our guest today.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

00:22

As am I. These are my favorite interviews when I get to have a chat with someone that I already know, like off-screen, if you will. And so I'm really excited about our guest today.

Rachael DeLeon:

00:33

Me too. And for a lot of our listeners who are really ingrained within our community, this name may be familiar to you. Today's guest is Jarod Taylor. Jarod is an AFC who's spent more than 15 years in the financial well-being space. He got started in the wake of the 2008 housing crisis working in homeowner education. Jared's worked in community-based financial education, tax assistance, and program management, helping families and individuals navigate real life decisions. Jarod's been with AFCPE for more than eight years, and during most of his time at the organization, his work has been focused on supporting AFC candidates and professionals along their certification journey. Jarod recently transitioned to a new role. His new title is Director of Education and Community Engagement, where he is excited to continue his work in bringing financial well-being to all. Fun fact about Jarod, Jarod is trying to say yes to more experiences and has recently joined a Curling Learners League, attended a bonsai for beginners class, and is committed to attending more live theater in 2006. So many of us are trying to say no. And Jarod is starting this year off saying yes. For all of our listeners, he's open to suggestions for what to try next. Let's welcome Jarod. Hey Jarod. Absolutely, Jarod. I feel like I hear so many people out there, you know, kind of overextended and saying no, but wow, what an abundance when you can start to lean into new things and say yes. So tell us what's been the most interesting thing that you've done this year that you were not expecting.

Jarod Taylor:

02:34

Um, definitely joining the Learn to Curl League. Um, I was one of the many people who got caught up in the curling enthusiasm watching the Olympics. And um, you know, the more I watched it, the more I thought this is something I I could do. I this looks fun. And um, I also made the mistake of thinking this looks easy. I did a little research. There's a curling club here in Columbus, Ohio, and they were were having a learner's league for all of these people watching the Olympics. And um, I signed up, went for six weeks. Um, it is not easy. Uh being on the ice uh, you know, at all is is not easy. But um, it was such a great, enriching experience. There were so many people there, like different types of people. Um, and just to put yourself in a situation where you're not comfortable, I think that's really important to keep pushing ourselves, and that's how we grow and we have um, you know, these experiences that that make life so much fun.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

03:39

You know, thinking about experiences and how they have shaped us, Jared, you actually kind of got your introduction into financial well-being around the time of the 2008 housing crisis. I'm curious, how did that kind of shape your perspective and influence your ideas around financial counseling?

Jarod Taylor:

03:59

We'll go in like the way back machine and I'll I'll take you all the way back. Um, I when I was in college, I took a couple of nonprofit management courses. Um, they just sounded fun to me. It was something that was uh appealing to me. And so I, you know, kind of as I was wrapping up my degree, I had this idea that I wanted to work in nonprofit, but I didn't really know what that meant. And there didn't really seem to be a guide to, you know, like a nonprofit career. I'm sure there is now. Um, I didn't know anyone in nonprofit. Um, but I ended up getting hired as a grant writer at a rural nonprofit organization, like client-serving nonprofit organization. And I had no idea what I was doing. I had never written a grant or anything like that. Um, and shortly after I started that job, you know, the the world just changed overnight with the 2008 housing crisis. And there was a program in in Pennsylvania where I was working that could help uh people facing foreclosure, but there was no, there were no certified providers in the county that I was working in. Um so the leadership asked me if I wanted to go through this training and get certified to do this. And I said yes. Um, sure, why not? And, you know, one thing led to another. And, you know, I'm doing these foreclosure prevention applications. The next thing you know, I'm teaching these eight-hour first-time homeowner workshops. I'm doing taxes at Vita sites, you know, I'm just like all in on personal finance. And I really don't know if that would have happened if, you know, these events going on outside the world just kind of um nudged me in that direction.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

05:49

What do you think are some lessons that you took from then that you still hold on to today, like things that influenced you from back then to today?

Jarod Taylor:

05:57

Yeah, I'll say it's it's really interesting because, you know, as I was kind of starting this new professional career and and learning all of these things about personal finance in my professional life, I was young, 20-something, had just graduated. So I was kind of also going through my own personal finance awakening. Um, you know, I graduated college with way too much debt. Um, I had some credit card debt coming out of college that at the time felt like a lot. Um, and you know, you missed some payments and it's very scary. You don't know what's going to happen to you. You're afraid to ask these questions. You don't know where to get the information. So, you know, I'm learning all of this stuff in my professional life, and I'm also kind of having this um awakening in in my personal life. So I'm able to like apply this knowledge um, you know, to my own experience, which which was great. Um, you know, I kind of grew up um in, we'll say like a not thriving area uh of Pennsylvania. Um first generation college student. Um my parents gave us a lot of great money values, you know, like we we didn't waste anything. Um my parents put a ton of sweat equity into their home and I saw the value of that and um you know, saw all of their hard work turn into you know their home equity. Um so I had these um like concrete money values, but you know, didn't know a lot, didn't have anyone to ask about college financing, um, you know, those types of things were just kind of figuring it out as I I went along. Um, and so that's something that I keep in mind in the work that we do is how can we help people learn these lessons not the hard way? Um, you know, not everybody has to go through that experience. What can we do to get that knowledge out there um, you know, before people are in that situation?

Rachael DeLeon:

08:05

Yeah, I love that. Karen, I think one of the most unique things, you know, when you came to AFCPE, you bring this wealth of knowledge and experience from a variety of different areas, you know, homeowner education, tax assistance, you know, working in the nonprofit space. So transitioning to AFC, CPE, you know, working in the nonprofit space. Um, you really can relate to a lot of the candidates that uh come through our program. And you're a really astute listener. So really understanding the needs of our candidates and helping them think about their next step through the certification process. Um, you've spent eight years on our certification team before moving over to the education side of the house. I'm curious along the way, like what have been some rewarding transformations you've witnessed amongst some of our professionals earning the designation?

Jarod Taylor:

08:59

Yeah, one of my favorite parts of working at AFCPE and working in certification are the conversations you get to have with people who are considering this as a next step for them. Um, you know, they may be a career changer, like mid-career, and they're looking to give up everything and start something new. Um, it may be a new student who's just kind of getting their feet wet. Um, but the diversity of people that you get to talk to, I mean, people from all over the country, um, you know, firefighters, real estate agents, attorneys, marketing executives, um, all bonded by this um, you know, like interest uh in personal finance and this like drive to help people. Um, you know, that's really what's behind it is people are wanting to get in there and help people out with their finances and make their life better. Um and I've had you know hundreds of of these conversations over the years and met people at conferences. Um, and I remember I had a woman come up to me at one of our recent symposiums and she said, You you don't remember me. I know you don't remember me, and that's okay. But we talked at the HEFWA conference three years ago, and that conversation changed my life. After that, I enrolled in the AFC. I completely changed careers, and I'm so excited to be here today and and thank you for that. Um, and it's just it's an honor to, you know, have touched someone in in that way and to have an impact and to be able to talk through, you know. Sometimes when you're talking to someone on the phone, these are really difficult conversations, and you can tell, um, you know, maybe they don't have someone to to ask these questions. Um, so it's you know something that I take really seriously and have that's been a real pleasure.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

11:01

So, Derek, you've been in this really client-facing role for the past eight years, and I just appreciate you sharing these stories. It's you know, of how the diversity of the people that you get to talk to and hearing their experiences. So now you're shifting to a new role. And this role, I just want to say the title because it's so cool. I'm so proud of you. You know, just knowing you these eight years, I'm like, oh, Jared. So your new role is a director of education and community engagement. And so, what makes this opportunity exciting for you when you look at what you'll be able to do?

Jarod Taylor:

11:41

Yeah, so thank you for that, Brandy. Thank you. I appreciate that. Um, I'm excited to take, you know, these years, my my years doing financial education as a practitioner, um, you know, that home ownership education, taxes, financial counseling, um, and then the years working with our professionals, um, talking to our customers, getting to know our customers, um, seeing, you know, how many different ways AFCs are are out there working in the world. Um, you know, it's not just one-on-one counseling. There are so many um cool projects and initiatives that that people are um investing their time in. Um, so I'm really excited to take all of that knowledge and all of that energy and you know put it into this new role. Um, I think community engagement is such a powerful term. And I think it's so core to what AFCPE and the AFC credential is. Um, you know, as part of my old role, I used to do these monthly information sessions called Wanna Be an AFC, and we would talk about the AFC credential and all of the nuts and bolts. Um, but I would also talk about the AFC as, you know, it's more than a credential. You're joining a network, you're joining a family. Um, so you have people to ask questions to, you have people to help you out, you have people to encourage you. Um and I think you see this, you know, in our online membership forum and you know at our annual conference. Um, it's just the coolest group of people, all of these money geeks coming together and you know, hugging and laughing and sharing stories and successes. And that's what it is. You know, that's the movement. Uh, you know, that's the financial counseling movement that will really provide that financial wellness to people.

Rachael DeLeon:

13:43

Dared shared a mission moment at our all-staff meeting last week. This is the first year that he's been, you know, over the symposium task force and looking at all the reviews that are coming in for our symposium breakouts and just seeing the the breadth and the depth of the presentations that are coming in. It's like the hardest job in the world. You know, we have enough content to have two amazing symposiums, but that kind of energy that is coming from this community just starts to open our eyes and get us excited about, you know, while we only have a finite amount of sessions, how do we continue to engage and utilize all of this great content in so many other ways? Because yeah, it's just really amazing.

Jarod Taylor:

14:32

It was so difficult. I spent hours and hours, and I was like, I want to say yes to all of them. They're so good. But it's true. It's we just have such an amazing community of talented people.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

14:45

Well, speaking of talented people, um, I'm thinking about how the world of education is being affected by AI. So, Jared, what what do you think about when we look at digital financial tools? Everyone has access to FinTech nowadays. And as an organization, we provide education for those who want to become financial counselors. What do you think makes human-centered financial counseling more valuable than ever?

Jarod Taylor:

15:17

Yeah, so I think we're in a really interesting time. You know, AI is still very new, it's very fresh. Um, I don't even think we we fully understand it and its capabilities yet. Um, and that can be exciting and and scary. Uh, I think, you know, it's going to provide a lot of great opportunities for people to take that first step and engage with personal finance. Um, it can be really hard to ask for help. Um, it can be really hard to even just acknowledge your financial situation. Um, sometimes people have a lot of anxiety about that and they just push it aside, push it aside because it's easier than than facing it. Um, so I think AI might provide an opportunity for some people to take that first step and maybe start to engage or start to learn some things through an app that's maybe personalized to them. Um I think where counseling and coaching is going to continue to play a huge role is that that human touch, those deeper connections and deeper conversations. Um, you know, when I think back to my time working with tax clients or, you know, going over someone's credit report with them, those conversations can be deeply emotional and can, you know, really um help someone open up and and really have their aha moment. But when you think about AI, you know, AI doesn't know that someone's starting to cry as they're they're talking to you or you know, they're trembling when they're telling you a story. It's not going to pick up on that um body language or or somebody's tone. And um, you know, when you're talking about counseling and coaching, that's what it's about. It's about the emotions, it's about the feelings, what's behind the numbers, and how can we get you to your goals. Um so yeah, I think there's certainly uh there's going to be a place for AI. I think it's gonna make a lot of things more efficient. Um, I think counseling and coaching is gonna continue to be really important. Um, I read a report recently that there's um kind of this looming gap in the financial planning world about 10 years out. Um, a bunch of planners are going to be retiring and the the market just hasn't kept up. So I think in the next 10 years, there's like a hundred thousand financial planning jobs um that are going to be empty. And I see this as an opportunity for counselors and coaches to step in and fill that gap. Um, part of this report also said, you know, people are willing to pay for a human connection. Um they're willing to pay for that extra and have those money conversations. Um and, you know, you see these financial planning firms are starting to offer um a larger suite of services. They're opening up to financial education or working with families on their um, you know, like interfamily money management.

So I think there's a lot of opportunities over the next decade for the counselors and coaches to be working with people um that may not be ready to see a planner or may not have access to a planner and to team up with planning firms to um offer a holistic suite of services.

Rachael DeLeon:

18:53

Yeah, I think that's so true. There's such a need out there for this profession, and we're seeing it start to evolve and pop up in different areas. Workforce wellness is becoming more of a conversation. You know, years ago they'd talk about 401k or you'd have your mental health, you know, services, but now I think more than ever, this financial health is really at the forefront of our conversation and what is the role that employers play in that? So um couldn't agree more, Jared. I think now is the time. Um, I'm curious, you know, thinking about the need in this field, and maybe there are some listeners out there that, you know, are listening because they're considering a career in this space. What would be some advice you'd give to someone who's starting to think about becoming a financial counselor or coach?

Jarod Taylor:

19:46

Yeah, I think if this is something that you're passionate about, you know, follow your your passion. Um there are so many ways to do this. Um, and it also doesn't have to be like an all or nothing. You could start doing this part-time. You could start to kind of build your own practice if that's something that that interests you. Um, volunteering is a great way to start to understand what counseling and coaching is about. There's a lot of opportunities. I talked about the Vita program earlier, the volunteer income tax assistance program. That's available all over the country every year. That's a great way to dip your toes into this world. Um, or just starting to connect with your local community and seeing who is doing financial education, um, who are the um, you know, like the home home ownership agencies. They're always doing workshops and stuff. And how can you get involved or even just attend them to get a sense for what this world might be for you? Um and then a really easy way to get started is to become an AFCPE member and you can get to know other people who are doing this work, and you can start to network and have those real conversations and understand what your path is. Um, because everybody's path is a little bit different.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

21:10

Speaking of different paths, Jared, you shared with us uh that this is your year of yes. And so you are open to trying new things and new experiences. Rachel talked about your curling, and you even shared how you thought it was gonna be easy and then it turned out to be hard. I'm just kind of curious myself, as you're embracing these new experiences and these new opportunities. What are you learning on this side of your life in your personal life that has influenced curiosity in your professional life?

Jarod Taylor:

21:44

Oh, what a good question. So, I a couple of weekends ago, my partner and I went to it's two weekends in a row. We did this bonsai for beginners class, um, which was very fun and very quirky. And um the big thing in Bonsai that um struck me because it's the same in personal finance is the answer to every question is it depends. Um everything in bonsai it it depends on the type of tree or your climate. And you know, there's no clear answer for everything. And I'm sitting there and I'm like, oh my God, this is exactly what personal finance is. There's no answer. You know, everything is it depends. Um, you know, how do I save my money? Where do I save my money? It depends. Um, so it's funny how, you know, when you look at all of these different disciplines, there are similarities um between them and how we can make those connections um between different things.

Rachael DeLeon:

22:42

I love the visual of it too. And I think it just opens us up to be more curious and not be so A or B black or white type thinking. It's like there is beauty in that gray and understanding your desires, your needs, your ones. So I really love that. Jared, at the end of every interview, we like to collect our guests' two cents. And so we think of it as building this piggy bank of knowledge. And how can all of our guests contribute something to leave uh with our listeners and our viewers today? If you had to say two cents, what would your two cents be?

Jarod Taylor:

23:21

Yeah, my two cents. Um, I I've been thinking a lot about this um information age that we're living in and how it can be incredibly overwhelming. Uh, you know, you can answer any question with a few taps on your phone. You can watch a hundred videos, you can read a hundred articles. There's, in my opinion, we have access to too much information. And it can lead to this analysis paralysis or this constant um comparison to others. Um, and so my two sense is if you're thinking about you know, like starting a budget or starting to clean up your credit, like just start. It doesn't have to be the perfect start. You don't have to find the perfect budget tool or the perfect budget app. Um, maybe you're just gonna start with a few envelopes in a dresser drawer, and that's your, you know, your envelope budget, because that's better than not starting at all. And when I think back to my days of, you know, like a counseling, um, you would see this where people wanted to find the perfect solution or um they wanted to know how how do I get my credit score perfect? And it's like, let's just start here. Let's we'll just start and we'll go from there. We'll build it as we go.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

24:37

Great, great advice. Thank you so much, Jared, for being on our show. And I know you probably feel like everyone already knows how to connect with you, but for those who may not know you, how can our audience connect with you?

Jarod Taylor:

24:51

Yes, um, you can find me on LinkedIn. I love connecting with new folks on LinkedIn. So find me there, send me a message, add me. Um, I'd love to chat.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

25:01

Excellent. Thank you again, Jared. See, Rachel, I knew this one was gonna be fun. Just I even learned some things about Jarrett that I didn't know. I'm super excited about his year of yes. Looking forward to seeing how that unfolds for him. Um, I think my biggest takeaway from this episode was just hearing the way he started out on one trajectory, Grant writing, and then circumstances change and the world around him, and he found himself really identifying an area of interest and passion for him. And I bet there are those listening to the show who can really relate to that, where you think your life is going in one direction, and then all of a sudden the thing that you enjoy starts just revealing itself, and you find yourself moving in a space where you are making a difference. And so if you're considering personal finance as your next space, we would love to talk with you here at AOCPE so you can learn more about getting connected with us. But what was your takeaway from this uh episode, Rachel?

Rachael DeLeon:

26:01

Yeah, I kind of love the thread that we threw out, you know, from his fun fact of the year of yes to his final two cents that, you know, just uh to just start. And I think that's so applicable in so many areas of of all of our lives. And so I agree. For you know, we often hear, I think we spoke with a guest a few weeks ago who, you know, kind of just said yes to the designation too. She wasn't working directly within personal finance at the time. It was sort of a passion, and she leaned in and said yes. And it's been this incredibly fulfilling journey for her. So for all of the people that know Jared, uh, like I do and like you do, um, you know, I think his energy and passion for this space and his um just innate connection and ability to listen to others is what is going to make him such an incredible leader in this new role. And, you know, he spoke a little bit about what the director of education and community engagement does, but you know, he's really behind the scenes, really helping build our pathways and professional development programs and delivering them to new audiences and building that accessibility. And uh, he's gonna be phenomenal and he already is hitting the ground running. For those who are interested in the AFC, I think this episode's coming out in July. And um, we are celebrating our one year of the AFC learning system. So a year ago, we really leaned in and listened to what our learners need to be successful and how do we offer different pathways that meet people where they are, and the learning system is one of those tools. Um, and so this month we're actually offering 50% off that learning system. So if you've been thinking about saying yes and leaning in, this is the month to do it.

Dr. Brandy Baxter:

27:53

Yes, indeed. That is so exciting. I remember when that learning system came on board and I heard a lot of people talking about how easy it was and how it made everything uh more succinct and a better experience. So if you're listening, take advantage of that discount that Rachel just mentioned. And also make sure you subscribe and like our channel so you can stay up to date on all of our amazing guests and their experiences and learn about great opportunities for you to get involved in our community.

Rachael DeLeon:

28:22

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