

**Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a
Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff**

NEW PLANNER PODCAST



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Caleb Brown

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

Welcome to the *New Planner Podcast*, where it's all about helping you successfully enter the financial planning profession and accelerate your financial planning career.

This podcast will help you understand the profession, become familiar with the various career paths available to you, and avoid the mistakes that limit your success.

Join your host, Caleb Brown, to explore the human side of creating a successful planning career through interviews, personal experience, and insights from the trenches.

Let's get started.

Caleb Brown: Welcome to the 154th episode of the New Planner Podcast. This is Caleb Brown, your host. My guest today is Makemma Cockrell Wolff, an Associate Relationship Manager at Avion Wealth Houston, Texas.

Makemma stops by the show today to discuss her path into the financial planning profession, beginning with thinking she wanted to be a lawyer at first, but realized that career did not align with her future life goals and how an assessment at the University Career Center pointed her to the financial planning major.

She shares her experience with the TTU Financial Planning program, including her thoughts on the most difficult courses.

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

Stay tuned in the middle, where she talks about how she secured three internships her last year in school, how she navigated a difficult job market when she graduated due to recent poor performance by the stock market, what tools she used, how she connected with firms, expanded her network, and landed a position with her current firm.

Check out the end too where she talks about what her role entails, what she's learning, her biggest struggles, and why she's happy with her career and firm choice very early in her career.

She also shares how job seekers can better prepare themselves, become more hireable for smaller RIAs who are hesitant to hire out of school.

If you're feeling frustrated at the job search and are thinking about giving up, then this episode is for you.

Makemma, welcome to the New Planner Podcast.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Thank you so much for having me, Caleb.

Caleb Brown: Yes, and thank you for hosting me when I was out presenting and visiting in Lubbock at Texas Tech a while ... what was that, a year ago or something?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Oh, gosh, probably two now.

Caleb Brown: Two, okay. Yeah. Time flies when you're old like me, you've got a really cool story. Just enjoyed hanging with you when you were driving me around when I was out there, and I just wanted to have you on and have you talk about it.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

So, why don't you just start with how you ended up at Texas Tech and got started on the financial planning path.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Thank you, Caleb. So, I started at Texas Tech in the summer of 2019, and it had always been my dream to be a lawyer. So, I started out Texas Tech, political science, pre-law, doing that track, and then life threw me a curve ball that first semester at Texas Tech and I met my now husband of almost two years. And at that point, I decided-

Caleb Brown: Congrats. That's great. Congratulations.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Thank you, thank you. I decided that maybe law school wasn't going to be suitable for me to have the family that I wanted one day in the career. So, at that point I started evaluating like, "Oh my gosh, what could I possibly do? I've wanted to do this for so long," now my head's in other places.

So, I went to the Tech Career Center, and I took this two-hour long career aptitude test and at the end, I got the results and I kind of chuckled because my number one match was lawyer, and then the number two match below it was financial advisor. And so, I was like, "Okay, I wholeheartedly trust this test, let's see what this is all about."

So, that next semester, I took the intro to financial planning class that they have in, which is now the College of Financial Planning at Texas Tech. And I was like, "Wow, this is pretty cool."

So, at that point, I changed my major and got involved in the Texas Tech PFP program, and was so lucky to have found the friends that I did, the mentorship that I had, and excellent education.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

So, we met whenever I was a treasurer for the Texas Tech PFPA branch. You came into town for opportunity days, and we had a blast. So, I was able to do so much good networking through the Tech PFP program.

Caleb Brown: Got it. So, you were at Texas Tech a lot like me. Like for a couple a semester or two I think is what you said before you even — like you didn't even realize financial planning was a major.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Yeah, and I absolutely had no idea that they had the top program in the nation. Like that wasn't even on my radar until I got submersed in the program and everyone was going on about, "Oh, we're the best. Oh, we're the best." And I was like, "Oh really? I kind of snuck under the rug here then because I had no idea."

Caleb Brown: So, what was your ... maybe just hit the highlights for us. I mean, you did four years there, you said some networking and the friendships, but maybe the coursework. What did you enjoy the most and maybe what was the toughest for you?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Yeah, absolutely. You ask any Texas Tech alumni and they're going to say the toughest thing they ever did was their capstone course. They really put you through the ringer on that one and keep you on your toes, give you some last-minute information to squeeze into your plan.

So, that capstone course was extremely valuable, extremely tough, but extremely thankful that I had that experience under my belt coming into the workforce. I'm able to apply so many more things now.

But some of my favorite things would definitely have had to have been the comradery that exists within the PFP program,

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

especially how the alumni feel in regards to the program, how they always want to come back, spend time, spend money on growing the next generation of planners like myself. That was huge for me.

Made some really good friendships, some lifelong friendships with classmates that I can still reach out to and say, “Hey, have you experienced this in the workforce? How's that going for you?” It's great.

I know a lot of people, for example, people from Tech who graduated from the rows, had so many more kids in their class that they weren't able to form those good bonds and having the same kids in class every year. I'm super thankful for the size of the program.

Caleb Brown: I started a lot earlier than you did, but I remember my first corporate finance class, there was like 1,200 people in there or something. I mean, it was nuts. And you're just a number and you can't really develop relationships.

So, you're going through the coursework, looked like you had some part-time jobs and then maybe some internships. So, talk to us about that.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Yes, so I was able to have three different internships my last calendar year of school. I feel like that was super valuable. Each of them were at very different size firms, type firms, and it really helped me kind of narrow in on what I wanted and what I prefer to not have in a firm. But all were extremely valuable learning experiences.

I would definitely recommend that to anyone who was in their last year of college to try to get experience at different firms, if possible. Help you realize what's a good fit for you.

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

Because as much as they can preach certain things in the program and in the education, at the end of the day, that's just not what's going to work for everyone and their lifestyle and their strength.

So, I'm super grateful that I had those three different internship opportunities where I was able to find my fit.

Caleb Brown: And how did you get the internship? And it wasn't just over the summer, it sounds like, because you had three in one year.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: No, sir. So, I did one my spring semester at a small firm in Lubbock. And that one I found by ... I knew I wanted to do something in the springtime. I knew I wanted to work or do an internship of some sort.

And so, actually, I went through, I don't remember if it was BrokerCheck or FINRA or even the CFP board website. And I emailed basically every firm in Lubbock that I thought I would be willing to work at.

And I was like, "Hey, this is who I am. I'm a student at Texas Tech, this is my resume. I really want to get some experience under my belt before I graduate, and have to go into the real world."

And I only had a few responses and a couple of interviews, but I was able to secure an internship for that spring, and that was from about January until April. And then I got married in April, and then in May, I started my internship with Willis Johnson & Associates out of Houston.

That one I found through the Texas Tech Alumni Network, one of their partners, Alexis Long is a tech alum. And I was able to

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

do that internship remotely, which I thought was also a differentiating factor that gave me some better experience of what I do now. I'm working from home today, but that's not always the case. So, it was nice to have that remote experience.

And then in the fall, I interned for another very small firm based out of the Woodlands, but I was fully remote. The entire company was fully remote. And so, there was just the three of us working together.

And so, that was a whole different experience and I got to learn more about what it takes to be a business owner with that one. And the duties that you have to go through if you don't have a full CMO, CFO team.

Caleb Brown: Your role and responsibilities, was it similar across all three of these firms or did you have different roles?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: That's another thing that was interesting is because each of these firms were very different, their needs were very different.

And so, for the first firm, the small firm in Lubbock, I was kind of more of an office assistant role and getting to do a little bit of planning on the side or sitting in on that stuff like that.

When I interned for Willis Johnson, it consisted a lot more of assembling the plan, helping out the associate planners with whatever their needs were. And it was more critical thinking and a lot of operations but still some planning.

And then the last internship I had, they were, like I said, a smaller firm and so they needed a lot more across the board. So, I helped them with some of their podcast stuff, the

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

marketing stuff, some stuff in Money Guide Pro. It was kind of all over the board.

And so, I'm grateful that I was at small-ish firms each time so I could get exposed to a lot more in a shorter amount of time.

Caleb Brown: Man, that's amazing. I mean, one, just the effort that you put in, I mean, especially to get that first one, like you're going to broker check and emailing everybody but to squeeze three in and it might be a little easier to do that now because I think people are more open to the virtual thing versus actually having to go there.

But it sounds like you had a lot of experiences, you got to see a lot of different stuff which then helped you prepare you for the role that you're in now. So, talk to us about the transition, you're in your last semester. Talk to us about your full-time job search.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: So, the full-time job search was extremely difficult. It was for me and a lot of my classmates graduating in December. As we know, last year was an absolutely terrible year for the market and the economy. So, a lot of places simply weren't hiring.

So, I know some classmates who graduated back in December when I did that, still haven't been able to find good jobs, which you think coming out of the top program in the country would never happen.

So, whenever I was coming out, I did kind of the same thing. I reached out to a ton of people. I made hundreds of connections on LinkedIn, and I would get on LinkedIn, and I would just search CFP and I would location filter it down to Houston. I knew I wanted to move to Houston.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

My husband's from here and his family's here. So, I knew that was at least the target area that I wanted. So, I would search on LinkedIn, and I would research each of these firms that I would find a CFP employed at.

Obviously, my end goal is to get my CFP, so I wanted there to be the groundwork there, and that kind of a firm. I did tons of research, LinkedIn connection, messaging, emailing resumes, applying for every job.

And I did probably a dozen interviews over the course of September, October, November, leading up to my December graduation, trying to find a good fit for myself.

And it was rough. I didn't get an offer that I was happy with until the end of October, and I was kind of hoping to have already had something lined up by then. About two months before graduation was the time I was hoping to have something lined up.

I found my job now at Avion by messaging one of the associate wealth managers on LinkedIn. And then at that time they weren't hiring. And later on, they were, and I was the first one to be reached out to. And so, I was super thankful for that.

But it was a very difficult time coming out in a recessionary environment. People were scared after last year. They weren't sure they were going to have the extra capital to hire a new employee, especially someone right out of college. That was another issue that I ran into, was finding good entry level roles.

There seems to be a lot of open roles for those with 2, 3, 5 years of experience. But for a lot of the roles, especially with the education I had out of Texas Tech, I didn't necessarily just

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

want to be in client operations or just want to be in client admin for the first couple of years.

And so, I was really struggling to find somewhere that I felt I could use my talent, my skills, and my knowledge right off the bat. So, at Avion, I'm an associate relationship manager and that means that manager, I'm in every client meeting, zoom meetings, in-person meetings, go meet with the state attorneys, with clients.

I get to do lots of financial planning and have a great time doing it. So, I'm extremely thankful for the opportunity that I have here.

Caleb Brown: All those other firms missed out. I mean, I'm looking at it as like you had a year of experience and this is why we were working with you and trying to help you. Yeah, with the internships, I mean, let's just call it a year, 9 to 12 months of experience and you've changed it.

But I wanted to point this out. I mean, your LinkedIn profile is awesome now and was awesome then. It said something like exactly what I tell those students. Like, "Here's who I am, graduating with a CFP program. I'm looking to move to Houston, I'm looking for a family firm."

I mean, super clear, I saw you on there like every day. I mean, you were all over LinkedIn, and just commenting, messaging, reaching out to people and now, I even — I mean, it says like, "Here's what I am, I'm pursuing the CFP," making it very clear what you're doing.

I mean, that's a powerful tool and you leveraged it, and it was really awesome. You mentioned, it took you until October to get

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

an offer that you'd like, that implied that you had received a prior offer. Did I read that right? And then maybe-

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Yes.

Caleb Brown: What was wrong with it?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: The other offer that I had received was a company that really, really wanted me and they didn't want to lose me, but they weren't able to offer a full-time role at that time.

It would've been more of like an as needed planning basis. As you know, coming out of college, you're broke. I needed a real job; I needed a salary and a dependable paycheck.

And I think that the best of that company and they do great work, but unfortunately, it just wasn't what was going to be best for the both of us. And they knew that when they offered it to me, they're like, "We regret this, but this is the best we can do after this past year."

And it's been really interesting to see ... I've been in my current role for about nine months now. I started in January very shortly after graduation. And I've had a couple of those other firms that weren't able to offer me at the time but just really wanted to, they've reached out and they said, "Due to the market recovery, we are now once again hiring for this position, we'd love to talk to you."

No hard feelings to those companies, but I'm extremely happy where I am now and I'm grateful that Avion bit the hook when they had the opportunity.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

Caleb Brown: You're right, they took a chance on you. Why are you happy there?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: I actually just had this talk with them last week and I've been watching Suits. Not sure if you've watched Suits or any of the listeners have-

Caleb Brown: Harvey Specter, yeah.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: So, I'm watching Suits right now for the first time and one thing that he said in a couple episodes ago really resonated with me. It was, "I started to think about not where I wanted to be in 10 years, but who I wanted to be working with."

I can't say enough great things about the people at Avion, the way they have cared about me. The service they do for their clients is beyond anything I saw in the interview process or in the other three internships that I had. It's an extremely welcoming place to be.

I am the only person really, they've hired out of college, straight out of college for the reasons of you worry about their work ethic, how structural they're going to be, how dependable they're going to be.

I'm so glad they took a chance on me and the mentorship that they offer and the education they offer. I feel like I've grown immensely in the nine months that I've been there.

Caleb Brown: What advice would you give to other career changers or new college grads to get some of these smaller RIAs? They've got their heart set on going to smaller — I mean, look you go to a big company like Vanguard, I mean, they don't have really any risk because they're so big, but it doesn't work out. They just kind of move on.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

But an eight-person firm or two-person firm, if they bring you on, it doesn't work out, boy, that's devastating to them. So, how would you coach and mentor and counsel sort of these newer planners, what should they be doing to convince these people to take a chance on them?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: That's an excellent question and it's something that I struggled with, and I know a lot of my classmates struggled with also. You have to understand that at such a small firm, they already have their culture and usually their methods of what's going to work for them. You have to be willing to drink the Kool-Aid per se and be willing to be bought into that.

As far as trying to get in with the smaller RIAs, I think the connections are huge. Not necessarily just going to the hiring manager, but if you can connect with one of the employees and have a conversation with them, find a common interest of maybe they like sports also.

You notice that on their profile, they share the Houston Astros stuff, find a connection. Building a rapport was huge for me when I was trying to get hired, and then it'll lead to you having an easier transition into that firm.

Caleb Brown: Got it. Yeah, no, I'm with you. Well, this is awesome. And maybe if you could just — you've been there nine months, and you said your role's Associate Wealth Manager. What does that mean? I mean, what are you doing?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: So, in my role as Associate Relationship Manager, I basically get to do monthly rebalancing for clients with wealth manager's approval before any trades are actually placed.

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

But I get a lot of kind of creative realm there to see and view what I think is best for that client. So, I get to use a lot of parts of my brain in this job. I sit in on every client meeting, I prep a good amount of the meeting.

That means I'm looking at, are they due for a Roth conversion? Is that possible? Doing tax analysis, reviewing a state document. I'm basically doing everything a wealth manager does with the wealth manager checking over my work.

So, something as simple as yesterday, I prepped a journal form for Schwab, or sometimes I might read through a 80-page estate plan. Getting to do a whole variety of things is exactly what I wanted in a job, and it really helps you figure out your strengths.

Caleb Brown: What's been different than you thought it would be now that you're out of school and you're actually doing the job. Is there anything that's been like, "Oh, okay, I didn't think it would be like this, but hey I really like ..." I mean, is there anything like that that you think of?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Oh, God, yes. Probably any young alumni will tell you that the learning curve, you come out of college, especially tech top program thinking that you know so much, and we do, we have great education coming out. And then you get into the real world and it kind of hits you that you don't know anything.

You've read some books, you've taken some tests, you know what these big words mean. But when it comes time for application, I'm like, "Oh, crap, I need to look up the new wealth management textbook that I have sitting right here on my desk. I need to look up this chapter of this to refresh my memory."

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

And there's just so much that varies firm to firm on what you need to know and what they really hone in on. Like we do a lot of backdoor Roths, but we call them Roth two-steps.

And so, somebody in my first couple weeks said, "Roth two-step," and I was like, "Is that a backdoor Roth? Like is that what you're talking about?" Having to learn the lingo of what everyone's talking about.

But then there's things like a 1031 exchange that we never learned about in college. Those are things you don't learn about until you study for your CFP really. So, definitely, the humbling effect of coming out of college thinking you know it all, and then realizing that you don't, and that's okay. It's okay that you don't know it all.

Caleb Brown: And this is also why it's important to find a firm that has reasonable expectations to know that you're having to learn a lot and not like, "Okay, well ..." and I've dealt with some firm owners in the past that have kind of had this approach like, "Well, they came out of the top program, they should know everything and they should be like on my level after a few months."

It's like, "Okay, hold on a second here, you've been doing this 20 ..." I mean, so I have to have that talk with them. But firms know that it just takes long. This is a relationship business. This is a soft skills.

We were talking about on one of the prior episodes when I got started, it's all about the investments. And I'm like, "Man, am I even in the right business? I don't know if I like this."

And it's moved away from that, and it's going to continue to move away from that, I feel like. So, it's not the relationship, the

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

soft side, you don't learn this stuff in two weeks or two months. It takes a while.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: I think that's a piece of advice that I would have for anyone who's going through the interview process, is to really focus on your soft skills. People can read your resume and know your education, where you've worked, but if you can't interview well, you're doomed.

I attribute a lot of the amount of interviews that I had and the recurring interviews that I had, getting to the third or fourth step being that I was able to hold a conversation well, and had good source skills. And I think that's something that you absolutely can learn and fine tune.

I'm in a class right now, it's called The Art of the Question by a man named Ken Proctor out of Houston. And he really gets into asking the right questions, forming your answers the correct way. It's super interesting.

And then I also learned in the psychology of financial planning class that every word that you say inherently affects the way that that person is viewing you.

Caleb Brown: Right. And I feel like the candidate, the job seekers that ... I mean, a lot like you that come across as confident, passionate about what they're doing, they know where they want to go or at least have an idea, they can articulate that, they have the higher energy level and speak louder and maybe even a little faster — they just do better in interviews.

I mean, just that clicks, that just clicks. I mean, we get ... sometimes candidates go on job, they're like, "Yeah, well, we didn't think they were very interested." That's the feedback we

Ep #154: Getting Hired from a CFP Program During a Down Market with Makemma Cockrell Wolff

get from the firms. And it was just really poor interviewing from the job seeker, and they didn't realize that.

So, all good stuff. Thanks for coming on and sharing this. This is amazing. Is there any final comments or anything else that you'd like to share before we close out?

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: I would just say to anybody out there, don't give up. The right job will come along for you and don't settle for a job just to have a job. You'd rather wait a little bit longer and find somewhere you're going to be truly happy. I'm glad that I did.

Caleb Brown: Excellent advice. Thanks so much for coming on.

Makemma Cockrell Wolff: Thank you so much, Caleb.

Thanks for joining us for this episode of the New Planner Podcast. If you are ready to discover the top career paths for financial planners and see which track is best for you, we created a free guide to help you.

Grab your copy of the Financial Planner Career Roadmap at newplannerrecruiting.com/roadmap.

There, you'll also find more tools and resources all created to help you build a successful financial planning career.

Tune back in next week for another episode, and until then, we are here to help you succeed.