

Ep #182: Transitioning From The Insurance Channel  
to an RIA with Christian Martinez



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## Ep #182: Transitioning From The Insurance Channel to an RIA with Christian Martinez

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 182nd episode of the New Planner Podcast. This is Caleb Brown, your host. My guest today is Christian Martinez, a financial planner at Wela Financial Advisory in San Antonio, Texas. Christian stops by the show today to share his story of entering the financial planning profession, when he originally set out to become an architect. Check out the middle where he talks about how a career-ending injury while playing basketball in college helped him gain clarity on what he wanted to focus on professionally.

Also how he leveraged a personal connection to get his foot in the door to start his career in the insurance channel. Listen to the end to where he shares why he chose to transition out of the insurance channel and into an RIA firm, what attracted him to his current firm, what his role entails, his biggest challenges and what his future plans are. Plus some tips for new planners. If you're looking to transition into an RIA from another channel, then this episode is for you.

**Caleb Brown:** Hi Christian. Welcome to the New Planner Podcast.

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**Christian Martinez:** Hey Caleb. Thank you so much for having me.

**Caleb Brown:** Yes, sir. Great to chat with you. So we actually connected on LinkedIn and you had been a listener of the podcast. So I'm interested to hear more about that. But before we go there, can you just tell us what you're doing right now in your career, what your role is and what you're doing right now, every day?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah, Caleb, I'd be happy to share that. So currently right now I am a financial planner and what that means at Wela is I build and monitor all of our client financial plans. I show them to our client advisors, get the final stamp of approval as well as client review prep. So I'm prepping the notes. I'm reviewing our recommendations. Have they implemented that? Where are they at in the processes? And then lastly I've also started recently to, we've been more on the the social media grind and Google searches, like trying to get that up.

So we're beginning an influx of new prospect reach out. I will also scan those client prospects. So depending on where their income and asset range is at, I will take that initial conversation and then push it to the appropriate client advisor. Or if they're above an income threshold or asset threshold, that will go directly to one of our partners who is the prioritized client advisor.

**Caleb Brown:** Yeah, gotcha. Okay, very cool. So it sounds like you got a lot going on. What's the funnest part of that role?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah, I would say it's just our average client relationship I want to say is about 12 or 13 years. And so a lot of them have seen where we are now to where we were years ago. So we're not a newer firm.

We have a long track history. And so hearing the stories and hearing how they were introduced to our firm, I just think that's the best part for me is just getting to, I'm still learning and they're well aware of that, but

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they're more than happy to share their life experiences with me and just learning all of our clients. And that's what I would say is the most fulfilling and rewarding part.

**Caleb Brown:** Yeah, I mean, just learning about these people. I mean, I remember when I got out of Texas Tech a long time ago and just seeing their information and just like where they worked and how much money they made and what their job was. I mean, just super interesting. I mean, it was just, I don't know. I just, it sounds like you're kind of saying the same thing.

**Christian Martinez:** It is. Yeah. It's cool hearing their background. You know, I've only met them. I've been in my firm for about two years, so I only know two years of their life. But hearing what brought you to our firm, what prior life experiences do you have that you can share with me?

And I mean, we have awesome clients, but we have an awesome client group and they're just so welcoming to me since I've been here, so you know. I'm never afraid to ask questions to them.

**Caleb Brown:** How did you get started in..? Sounds like you're new to this firm, but how did you get started in financial planning?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. So you know, a quick background about me is I was a student-athlete in college, so I played basketball. And I went into college not knowing what I wanted to do with my life. I originally was thinking about architecture, and then quickly pivoted off of that to business administration at the end of my freshman year.

And then post summertime, I was thinking maybe I want to really just specify an area that I want to work in and specialize in. And so that led me to accounting. So my initial background was accounting and around my sophomore year while I was playing basketball was when I

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actually I suffered a season-ending, which then later turned out to be a career-ending injury.

I tore my ACL, MCL, meniscus, like everything. And so that period of time where I was just rehabbing was also a big wake-up call for me with a, what do I really want to do with my life? And so I had a teammate who worked at Northwestern Mutual, heard me in, and that was my initial entry into the financial services industry.

So I was an intern at Northwestern Mutual from sophomore year until I graduated actually. And so that was out in Kansas. And I moved back home. I'm born and raised here in San Antonio, Texas. I decided to go full-time here. And the full-time career choice was when I really realized that the commission based side of the industry wasn't for me.

So I've ended up being an associate advisor to a senior advisor at Northwestern Mutual. I moved to Austin, worked for him for about six months. I was only there for a really brief stint before my current firm. I saw the posting on LinkedIn, applied and I moved right back home. It was a perfect fit for me. All my family's here in San Antonio. So it was a no-brainer for me just to move back home.

**Caleb Brown:** Gotcha. Thanks for sharing that. Lots of unpack there. Let's see if we can go through it. But first I've got to ask: who did you have winning? Who was in your bracket?

**Christian Martinez:** Oh, I mean, through the run, I didn't have Yukon winning it because I-

**Caleb Brown:** No, no, no. Not talking about men. I'm talking about women. It's all about Kaylin Clark. Did you have her winning?

**Christian Martinez:** I did. I just didn't think that she was going to be, I didn't think she was going to be able to be stopped, but you know, South Carolina just had - the length was just, it was overbearing.

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**Caleb Brown:** Okay, awesome. And in what position did you play? What was your role in the basketball?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah, I was a shooting guard, but I was more of like the three and D guy. I wasn't going to pull out any fancy moves or while the crowd, was going to kind of do the little things.

**Caleb Brown:** Gotcha. Okay. So it sounds like you had the epiphany sort of when you were sitting there trying to rehab like up, sort of my identity is an athlete is over. I gotta get serious about this. I gotta figure out what I'm gonna do. And you kind of bounce around and found accounting. And then I think you said one of your friends was working at Northwestern mutual. They kind of got you started there. But you were there for, what, about three years or so? I mean, you were there for a while.

**Christian Martinez:** I would say three years college experience and then probably a total of a year post-grad experience when you factor in being the associate as the full-time. I did forget to mention, being introduced to the financial services industry, I decided to pick up a double major in finance as well. A lot of the classes were overlapping for me, so it was kind of a no-brainer. So yes, it was a teammate that introduced me.

**Caleb Brown:** And so you went from Texas to Kansas to play basketball at school.

**Christian Martinez:** Yes, I did.

**Caleb Brown:** Okay. All right. And then came, okay, that makes sense. And then you said you had a short stint with somebody in Austin, but the commission side, just what I heard was, that wasn't what you wanted for the rest of your career.

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. You know, everybody's experiences are different, you know? And so for me, I just felt like given where I had seen a lot of

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the upper level of advisors at Northwestern Mutual. To me, I didn't feel like I was doing full-scale financial planning. For a while, I really thought like, is this career for me? But yeah, that's why I, and then being when commissioned, the income is so sporadic, It just didn't really sit well with me, which is why I ended up transitioning to an associate level for a senior advisor and just learning from him while also having the stable source of income early on post-graduation.

**Caleb Brown:** And then you saw the opening with your current firm and what made you, other than it being back in your hometown, what made you apply? What made you interested in that role?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah, so I realized when I was working as an associate to the advisor in Austin that a lot of the philosophies that I thought I would shake in our San Antonio office, like they kind of followed me and I just realized that like culturally, it wasn't the best fit for me. I mean, there was a lot of great experiences that I had never really had. Being a full-time advisor, I didn't have to worry about filling out account opening paperwork or applications, but as an associate, all of a sudden I had to do that stuff for him and I had to learn that.

And so it was a six-month period full of like learning, like, how do I do this or that? And so the reason why I probably say back home was a big plus for me, but seeing the family environment that our current office has. And cause you know, they had me out, they let me tour the office. It was just to me, it felt like I was walking into a home. It didn't really feel like a job setting. I felt like it was just a perfect match for me.

**Caleb Brown:** Are you in the same role now that you came in at, or were you at something else?

**Christian Martinez:** No. So when I started, my official title was an associate financial planner. And so, I mean, there's still a lot of overlap with currently what I'm doing to what I was doing when I started, but they've loosened the leash a little bit with me.

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**Caleb Brown:** So you had, let's just call it one year of experience out of school, but you also had some internships or the college representative stuff. So about three years total of experience, you move to the RIA, you start as an associate planner. And what were your primary responsibilities in that role? You just said there was some overlap, but what were your primary responsibilities?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. So primary responsibilities were really making sure the client notes are ready to go prepping all of that stuff I was learning early on our planning software - I'd never been introduced to a planning software before, we used RightCapital.

So that it was a lot of just learning our softwares with the RIA space, there was just a level of planning that I was never familiar with, so there was a lot of growing pains, like early on. Like I let them know, like, this is all fully foreign to me. I'm working with a completely different client demographic.

**Caleb Brown:** And you can't call home office. You can't call Milwaukee. You gotta figure it out. You are Milwaukee.

**Christian Martinez:** Exactly. Exactly. And you know, that was really what early on. It was just, I would say growing pains, like if I could sum up my first two quarters of my title here, it was just really just growing pains and credit to my supervisors. They were really patient with me.

**Caleb Brown:** Yeah. I mean, it's a different channel, different roles, different personalities, different client. I mean, that's a lot of change.

**Christian Martinez:** It is.

**Caleb Brown:** So, and then maybe just talk just about your role. I mean, are you required to bring in any business, or is this just a strictly a support? And are you just more back office? Are you client-facing as well?



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**Christian Martinez:** So I would say like my current position, it's hybrid. Whereas I'm not expected to bring on new business, but - you know, given our change in leadership. So we recently went through the succession plan that finished at the end of 2023.

So our two new managing partners, we're starting to implement the growth phase of, "Where do we want to see our firm in the next five to ten years?" And so that starts with a lot of more social media activity and I'm not expected to produce, but I'm helping in that process.

**Caleb Brown:** Yeah. The social media stuff, right? I mean, you're helping, are you, are you putting the content together and kind of running all that stuff through Hootsuite or whatever you're using?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. So that's more of our operations managers, but I'll say, like we recently launched a financial planning newsletter that we send out to our clients.

I run that. I basically write that newsletter every month and then we completely remodeled our website. And so I've been trying to just help out where I can with improvements to the website, things like that.

**Caleb Brown:** Gotcha. All right. So are you in the meetings with the advised? I like there were some advisors and some partners that maybe were ahead of you on the career track. Are you in there with the client meetings or are you doing other stuff while they're meeting with the clients?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. So that was honestly what really was a key factor in me deciding to come on board here at Wela. was in my previous role: I was calling all my advisors clients to schedule them for reviews, but I didn't get to sit in the meeting. And so I was never really able to you know, what are those conversations like that are going on those meetings and, and how are you navigating these difficult conversations? I wasn't hearing any of that. And so when I was being

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interviewed for my current position, they were very, very open with like, we want you in every single client meeting.

That's the only way that you're going to learn. That's the only way you're just going to get game-like reps. And so I am in every single client meeting and then, every prospect meeting, I'm in those. And then now it's to the point where if they feel comfortable, if there's a recommendation that I've built out, they'll let me present it.

**Caleb Brown:** How fun is that? I mean, you're in every single client meeting. I mean, someone did that with me a long time ago and it ended up working out for me and worked out for him. But man, ain't that cool just to see the stuff that you learn and to see the different styles and the different approaches and how they navigate that, your senior people?

**Christian Martinez:** Exactly. Yeah, that's what I would say been key to just me stepping out of my level of comfortability. I'm naturally introverted, but you know, being in those client conversations, my client advisors, they're always encouraging me ask questions: small, small talk, ask questions, small talk with the clients.

That's the only way they're going to get to know you. And they were very hard on me at that early on. Like we want you to be talking. And so you know, looking back on it, that was great advice and it's helped me a lot.

**Caleb Brown:** And to be fair, talking to another introvert here - I mean, it can be hard when you're early in your career. You're kind of lacking confidence and you're in there with someone who's very experienced. They know exactly what to say every single time. It's just beautiful. It's seamless. And they're usually extroverted and it's like, sometimes it's hard to get a word in.

**Christian Martinez:** It is. Yeah. So it's like, early on, I would cause we have internal meetings, I would voice my frustrations in our attorneys. I'm

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trying to find the right time to step into this conversation and not interrupt you, but also not interrupt the flow of the conversation. Like I was just in over my head thinking about it too much.

**Caleb Brown:** Good conscientiousness, but don't overthink it right? And I think what they would tell you is like, just get in there. Just get in there and, and look, if you make a mistake, we can fix it. We can smooth it over. And then I'll give you the feedback later on after the client left. It sounds like you're getting a, you got a good spot there and you're getting a lot of good mentoring and you're growing. I mean, what's been the hardest part making this transition in doing your job now?

**Christian Martinez:** For me personally, the thing that I've struggled with and I still struggle with now is just that imposter syndrome where there's just so much to this industry, a sort of planning that I want to provide, that sometimes I'm like, I don't know anything. And you know, I'm also very hard on myself. So that's where I would say the hardest transition for me is like learning that I'm not going to, it's okay to not know everything. I want to, I want to get there, but that's what I would say right now. That's what my hardest struggle is.

**Caleb Brown:** Everybody deals with that. We've talked about that on this podcast and there's a lot of other podcasts that talk about it. There's even podcasts that just focus exclusively on that. And I've mentioned this before, but Gap in the Game.

Read that if you haven't by Ben Hardy, Dr. Ben Hardy and Dan Sullivan - talks about the gap in the game. Great sort of just straightforward, simplistic idea to help you stay out of that imposter syndrome. Really cool tool that they came up with. So Gap in the Game, we'll link to that in the show notes. This is amazing, Christian. So what are you working on right now? Where are you trying to go?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. So for me, it's being a lifelong learner in this industry. So coming into this channel, I had, I didn't have my series 65.

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They were very clear on what they wanted from me in terms of licensing. And so get your 65, get your CFP.

And then now it's like, I'm at a point where it's continuing to learn, figuring out where I can be, provide more value for our clients. So we work with a lot of retirees, widows, and then we're starting to grow a working professional environment. And so post-CFP, that was really where the last license that they required me to have.

They said, everybody who's gonna be planning here is going to have their CFP. So once I got that, I realized there's more that I want. And so now I'm currently going after my EA. Just because I feel like that help with the tax plan for a lot of these retirees and the figuring out how to just help them with that overall tax liability.

**Caleb Brown:** So no one told you to do that. Is that what I just heard?

**Christian Martinez:** Yeah. No one told me to do it there, but they're very supportive. They're like, "Hey, any designation you want, go after it - you have our full support." And so that's another blessing there for me.

**Caleb Brown:** Well, that's the whole point. And that's what I want to highlight. And I want others to hear this. Like you weren't waiting around for someone to come say, Hey, Christian, you need to go get that enrolled agent. You need to get - you just did it. You're just, you're plunging. I mean, that's what, that's what firm owners, if you're looking for a job or if you're in a job, you're an employee, that's what firm owners are looking for.

And that's going to be a big driver for your future growth and success. So kudos for kind of getting in there and just kind of seeing a need, but also something maybe you're interested in. And it's really cool. It's how they get a great culture and they're supportive of all that.

I mean, well, let me ask you one more, cause you said you're in every client meeting. What, is there anything right now that would, if you

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could just design anything you wanted to, to help you in client meetings, what would it be?

**Christian Martinez:** Something that I would probably say for me is, we have a healthy mix of clients in our book who are very analytical, like, okay, I want to know every detail on what's in my portfolio.

How's this certain holding performing relative to an index? And then we have some clients who are just like, I don't care at all about this. Like I'm coming in more so as like a social event. And so we have clients all over the spectrum, but to answer your question, I would just say like having like a one-pager - like that's something that we've thought about, like, how can we create a one-pager for every client to walk out with that in consolidate if it's somebody that like is super analytical, let's give them a one-pager that shows them every single position.

What's their their returns looking like compared to what, what relative index for them, if it's visually appealing to them and they understand what's going on, and that gives them comfort, then how can we do that? And we've worked on some of those things inside of RightCapital building out templates, but that's something that we can always improve on because it's so hard to consolidate so much important information into a one-pager. So that's something that I would say that I'm always open to looking at and see what other firms are doing.

**Caleb Brown:** I think it was Carl Richards, wrote a book about that or has it or maybe the Kitsis, Carl podcast somewhere. He's got some stuff on that.

So I would encourage you and others to check that out, but yeah, love that - the simplicity piece, but also you have to be able to adjust it for the people. It's like, where'd that number come from? You know, the, the engineer analytical types that everybody just loves working with. There's some firm's tongue in cheek.

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Some firms love those people. My mother and father are engineers. So I'm making fun of them too. Well, this has been, this has been great. Christian, I really appreciate you coming on very, I mean, you're sounds like you're doing great. Any final tips or words of wisdom that you'd like to leave the audience with.

**Christian Martinez:** I think I want to end with this, Caleb: is just like finding a firm that believes in you as much as you - you might not believe in yourself, actually, because for me, I didn't have the belief in myself early on, this was something that I was capable of doing. You know, I had a lot of that imposter syndrome that we mentioned earlier, but I had my leadership really combating that, like saying, Hey, we were in your shoes at one point. This is how we overcame it.

Just having that constant feedback and then also like having a firm that is just completely open to whatever you want to grow into and your role. So for me, it was like, I want to help our client book. I think tax planning is a big focus for us. So they said, go get your yay. And we'll completely support you on that. So like having a firm that just really understands what you want to achieve and then how can they help you achieve that? I think that's been something that I didn't even anticipate, but it's probably been one of the biggest contributors to the small amount of success I've had at my firm, is just having someone who believes in you and pushing you to be your best. Like, that's the one thing I would say.

**Caleb Brown:** So glad you're in the profession, Christian. Thanks for coming on the show.

**Christian Martinez:** So much for having me.

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.

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