

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and
Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-
Roesler



**NEW
PLANNER
PODCAST**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Caleb Brown

[New Planner Podcast](#) with Caleb Brown

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

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 209th episode of the New Planner Podcast. This is Caleb Brown, your host. My guest today is Connor Barbella, who is an associate financial advisor at Tupler Financial. Connor joins the show today to share how he became interested in financial planning and what led him to change his major in college.

He shared how he started off in a good-fit firm after graduation and took the CFP exam just a few months after starting at the firm. Listen to the middle as he shares specifics about how he prepared for the CFP exam—which helped him pass the first time—how he added value to the firm early on in his career when his skills were limited, and what he is doing to work his way up in the firm.

Stay tuned to the end for tips for candidates who are also contemplating a career in the operations side of the business, as well as insight into what his firm looks for in job-seekers, and how firms can retain and cultivate their culture virtually.

I hope you enjoy this episode with Connor Barbella.

Hi, Connor. Welcome to the new planner podcast.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: How you doing?

Caleb Brown: I'm doing great. Just got back from the CFP Board Connections Conference in D.C. So just a lot of energy, a lot of buzz. So, but I'm excited to talk with you. Thanks for agreeing to do this and cool story. So we placed you in a firm. You've

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

been there I think a little over three years and just take us back to where did the journey in financial planning start for you?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Absolutely. Yeah. So where it really started for me was at the University of Delaware. I had the finance major selected. And as I was going through my classes, I really liked the number aspect, but I had a history of working for CVS as a cashier. And I really liked the personable aspect of being a cashier, being able to talk to people, help them with their issues, get them to the end solution that they needed.

And I wanted to transfer that into whatever future that I had in front of me and bringing that in with finance, my college advisor was like, "Hey, we have a financial planning program here at University of Delaware that CFP accredited that you add maybe six classes, four to six classes on top of your schedule, and you get to graduate with a double major in finance and financial planning."

And I said, "Absolutely," because that allowed me to drop my econ double major and avoided me having to take any economics calculus-related classes. So I was, I jumped right on that. I started really jumping into the world of financial planning when I found your podcast here, laying in my college bed.

And I knew that financial advisory meant a lot of different things. I knew that it could be anywhere from an insurance salesman to a full fee-only financial planner. And I knew which side of this I wanted to be on and which side I didn't want to be on. And with the use of your podcast as well, helping me direct, I knew that I wanted to look for a hybrid fee schedule or fee-only broker-dealer, RIA combo of some sort. And luckily you guys have posted something for Tupler Financial and it worked out from there.

Caleb Brown: That's amazing. Thanks for the podcast plug. How did you find out about it? I mean, did you just, did someone refer you to it? I'm just curious on how people find us.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: So, in my Intro to Financial Planning class, the Financial Advisor Success Podcast with Michael Kitsis, not to plug a competitor here, or I'm sure you're colleagues, and from there I believe he mentioned the New Planner Podcast at some point, either on his website or in one of his podcasts.

I was able to direct me right there. And because quite honestly, as a college student, the Financial Advisor Success Podcast is great, but it is a little advanced for what you are trying to learn in so that you can be attractive to get hired by these financial planning firms, whereas the New Planner podcast is exactly what it says. It's gearing you up

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

specifically so that you are ready to sit down in front of that financial planning firm as an entry-level.

Caleb Brown: Okay, so you didn't know about financial planning. You were in finance and it sounded like the academic advisor said, "Hey, we have..."

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, finance and econ and yeah, that econ class with calculus really knocked some worry. Thank God, because I was able to pivot into financial planning, which brought in that personable aspect that I really needed to see with the numbers that is finance.

Caleb Brown: And I've mentioned this several times, but I'm hoping eventually the profession will get to where the majority of people are not having to fall into the major and they either know in high school or middle school, or I don't know.

I didn't know what I wanted to do when I was in middle school. That's maybe two-bit to ask, but like coming in and looking at the major saying, "Yep, financial planning. That's the one I want." Versus, "Whoop." Just like me, I did completed three years and fell into it so I would love to see that before the end of my career, and a lot of people working on it.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, no, there's a ton of people working on it. You're working on it. I think you will see by definitely by the end of your career that things will change as simply as it is the fact of how much wealth is changing hands getting passed down through the generations, not only on the client side, but these aging advisors that are getting to the point where they need to pass their books of business down as well.

So there's going to be a lot of movement. I think there's going to be a lot of increased interest in the industry.

Caleb Brown: So you got, you completed the degree in the end. You started right at Tupler. Is that the way?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah. So I graduated in May of 2021, and I started at Tupler in June of 2021. And as soon as I started, because I graduated from a CFP-accredited program, I was able to skip the CFP education requirements, and I started studying for the CFP exam right away.

And so kind of doing it a little bit of a backwards approach, but Andy wanted me to tackle the hardest exam first to get that beast out of the way. And I was going to say luckily, but I don't think it was luck. I think it was hard work, dedication, determination. I

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

was able to sit and pass in November of 2021. And because I'm under Andy Tupler, Josh Murray, who are CFPs, that expedited my experience requirement, I was able to call myself a 24, now 26-year-old CFP.

Caleb Brown: That's amazing. Yeah. You're on the accelerated path, right? That's amazing. I mean, and we were just talking about this in D.C. at this, I mean, a lot of people are like, "Well, I'm not going to take the CFP exam 'cause I got to have two to three years of experience anyways." No, you need to take it as soon as possible, and I've got lots of content out there about why, but it sounded like that worked out for you. Any tips, I mean, just putting in the time other than putting in the time, what else worked for you?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, putting in the time is a big one there, of course. But like you just said, if you're going to go out and get the experience, unfortunately, your real-world experience is not going to directly carry into a passing result on the CFP exam. My biggest tip here, I'm going to give a couple shout outs throughout, but shout out to Brett Danko because he was an amazing CFP prep program who focuses on teaching you how do you pass the exam.

Listen, you're going to go, you're going to really internalize and retain the information you're learning when you're on the job and doing it actively every day. But how do you go about really passing that exam? What strategies are you looking at per question? Can you see that there's a category of questions that you have to answer a certain way?

It's just really helpful to break it down that way so that you're not sitting in the exam, coming across a question that you may not know how to answer, shaking, feeling like you're going to fail.

Caleb Brown: Okay, so you, that's great. Graduated, started, passed the CFP, what kind of value were you adding right when you started? Or were you adding any value at all? I mean, from—

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Well, that's tough, right? You just one big expense. No, what I wanted to start on here is really, I thought that was the question I had asked myself, where do I provide value? And I had to go find that. And luckily the places that I provide value lined up with the things that I like to do.

So a lot of things that I was able to provide value with early and upfront is vetting technology, implementing new technology for the firm, just because a lot of people my age and younger, we grew up with technology in our hands. So it's very, it feels very natural. And then the second thing that I was able to help with was bring our marketing

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

to a base level. My goal was not to revolutionize our marketing campaigns, to drive referrals, to increase referrals 200%. That would be all awesome and everything. But ultimately, all I wanted to do was get our digital presence up to a standard that our current client base could feel like, “Hey, I'm connected with them on a digital landscape.”

Caleb Brown: Those are amazing. I mean, just those two by themselves. And I know you did other stuff too, and maybe you can talk about that. So look, you started off, what was your title and what was your, outside of this technology and the marketing, what were you doing for like the, to serve the clients?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah. So I was, I was, I came in as a financial planning analyst or a financial analyst where I was sitting in on client meetings, helping take notes, helping close out meetings, helping complete follow-up items, helping clients with data collection, document collection, really anywhere that I could help. That's what I was doing as an analyst. And this was the point where I really, I fell in love with not just the client service side of things, but really the business operations side of things as well.

And just as an analyst, I tried to eat as much as I can in order to really pinpoint, “Hey, this is where I could provide value.” And so as I've progressed out of the analyst role, passing the CFP exam, going through the two years, becoming a CFP, transitioning through associate advisor to now kind of in this ambiguous space here. But, all with trying to be the operations manager end goal.

Caleb Brown: Okay, so that's what you're trying to do. You're trying to go the operations route, not the lead planner route.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Correct, yes. Now that doesn't mean I'm throwing away advisory completely, but at this moment I think that I can provide the most value on the operations side of things.

Caleb Brown: Do you envision like you running the operation of the firm, but also having some clients that you—it's maybe that's what you just said—

Connor Barbella-Roesler: That would be really awesome. If a perfect world can, yeah, if I could get towards that perfect world, that'd be great. If it's not feasible, then fine, it's not feasible.

But that's a bridge to be crossed in the future, but I just, any time where I can take an existing process and make it more efficient, more effective, and make everyone's lives

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

easier on the team, not just the advisor's lives easier, but the client service lives easier then it's a win, win, win. And it feels really good to do.

Caleb Brown: I mean, does that role exist at your firm? Or is that something you guys are just going to have to create?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: I kind of created it. I feel like I've clawed my way up a little bit. Andy and Josh were always looking for an operations manager, but they were really looking for the right fit.

And they saw the opportunity, that, hey, maybe I can grow into that fit. Maybe they can build me into that fit. And Andy has put his money where his mouth is, and I can't be more grateful, but I am now a part of a COO mastermind group where, although I'm not officially operations manager, I am in a group of other advisory COOs in the challenges they face, where we're all networking together and I'm just seeping it up like a sponge.

Caleb Brown: Man, what a great learning environment. Yeah, that's amazing. And it's also really cool that you have a mentor and a boss. He's like, "Look, let's yeah. Do you want to go this route? Let's do it." Versus, "No, that doesn't fit in our work chart. Yeah. Can't do that." Versus being very rigid and not trying to be open to things.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: No, and it really, I pinch myself sometimes, I'm like, "Mm I dreaming here?" Because I really have, I can't express how lucky I am to find someone like Andy who has consistently invested in my personal development. Because a lot of places out here that are quote-unquote hiring for financial advisors, they want to pull you into the firm and they want to use you for everything they can use you for. And then if you don't work, you don't hit your numbers, they want to spit you out. And I just feel like I have gotten into a completely different type of culture and atmosphere here at Tupler.

Caleb Brown: So what are some of the challenges that you're facing right now? I mean, you've kind of moved or, I mean, you're still working with some clients right now?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Correct. Yeah.

Caleb Brown: What are some of the challenges that you have with the clients? I mean, just talk through a newer planner and then what are some of the challenges you have on the business management side you're trying to solve?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, so on the client side, challenges I'm trying to solve on the client side, a challenge there would be, I'm working with a lot of older folks and

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

younger folks. So because of the age range that I'm working with, I have to consistently tweak how I use technology from a planning perspective in the actual interaction.

Because obviously, an 80-year-old client is going to find far less value in the budgeting tool of Write Capital than a 25-year-old. So that is a unique challenge in itself. I have a toolbox in front of me, but how do I use the toolbox per person? Then on the practice management side of things, we have 11 team members on the team.

Five of the 11 have been added in the last year. And so one of the big responsibilities I've had is the initial onboarding and training of the new team members that come into the firm. And one, how do you make a remote office experience feel like there's company culture? How do you bring our values of desiring to help others, striving to improve the power of teamwork?

How do you bring those core values into a virtual landscape? That's a big challenge. I think a lot of people are asking that question. And then another challenge, how do I know I'm effectively training the people that are coming into the firm, and that I'm there for them on a personal and professional level.

Caleb Brown: So do you have any answers to any of those? Are they all great challenges? Especially the virtual, the culture thing, like hiring people virtually and retaining the culture. I mean, that's a tough one.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, it's a tough—I personally, I just like having all the questions. No, I think so we just had, with the five new team members, we had four of the new team members in the office last week on Monday and Tuesday.

And so we have PA team members, Georgia team members. So we're flying team members out, but we want to have a focus on having, even though we're remote, we have set Times where the whole team comes together and we're reviewing Colby scores to see how we interact with each other from that personal professional aspect, and it was just really valuable.

It really made you feel like the person that you call on teams is a real person. They have legs and they're standing in front of you and you get to talk to them about more personal stuff and not just work-related stuff. So it's great

Caleb Brown: Yeah, I think you said 20, 26. Is that what you said? 25, 26 something like that earlier. Is that where you are age-wise, career-wise?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yes, yeah.

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

Caleb Brown: Okay, so here you are mid-twenties, sort of running operations for an 11-person firm. I mean, that's a lot of responsibility. I mean, how do you feel about that?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Caveat, helping run operations of a firm because that's the main focus, how can I help Andy and Josh?

But it feels awesome. I'm not going to—is there stress that comes with that? Yes, of course. But I feel like I have purpose when I wake up in the morning, that I'm actively helping the lives of other people. And it just feels really good to do it. And everything that I learn on a day to day basis is personally beneficial to myself, friends, and family because this knowledge is so important. For some reason, this is a whole different conversation. For some reason, it's not focused on in middle school and high school as much as it really should be.

Caleb Brown: Talk to us more about the, I mean, so it looks like you were six people a year ago. Now, I mean, five, I mean, that's a lot of people to absorb for a small firm. I mean, is it just new client, you just gotten a bunch of new clients? Is that what's going on here?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, there were some movements internally of people finding positions that are better suited for them and we wish them the best in their future. So it was a little bit of, “Hey, business growth has been great and we have lost some internal team members. So if we're going to focus on recruiting, let's really heavily focus on recruiting now so we could find those A players to pull into the firm so that we can have an awesome trajectory forward towards our goals.”

Caleb Brown: And I think that's something that smaller RIAs struggle with. Like let's try to get ahead of the curve. Most of them are more reactive. So kudos to you on trying to do this. Like, “Well, we don't need someone right now.” “Well, if we get like five or six more new clients, I mean, whatever it is, we're going to need somebody like start the process now.” A lot of them are just reactive, which is exact opposite of what they're telling their clients, right? Makes me want to pull my hair out.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah, no, that makes sense. And thankfully, Andy and Josh are really forward-looking. And one of their mottos, one of their personal mottos is always been higher ahead of the need because you never want to lose a client because you're scrambling or lose multiple clients because you were not anticipating the growth and we're not staffing appropriately.

Caleb Brown: Well, this has really been interesting, Connor. I mean, the transition. So what's next for you? What are you working on? What are you trying to hope to move up to? And where do you see the firm going in the next few years?

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

Connor Barbella-Roesler: So in the immediate future, you'll catch me at a Commonwealth Nationals in Orlando, Florida, but it's my first national conference with Commonwealth. So I'm very excited for that. But my future is how can I become operations manager effectively? How can I save the partner's time here? And eventually, how can I move into that COO role down the road as long as Andy permits.

Caleb Brown: Yeah. And is that, I mean, do you do guys talk about the goals? I mean, is the goal to build some big RIA, like huge RIA firm? 'Cause I mean, I'm just saying like COO, usually that's associated with a lot larger firms, right?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yeah. So we have growth goals for sure. And there is, I can't remember the timeline off the top of my head, but we want to reach a billion dollars in assets under management. And once we hit that goal, which we will. I don't anticipate that we would stop there. I think we would, you know, what's 1.5 or 2?

Caleb Brown: Yeah. What do you want to tell that person who may be sitting on the sidelines like, "Look, I want to join financial planning profession." Or, "I'm in the, and I'm thinking about the op side." But I mean, just talk a little bit more about that if you would on just what advice you might give them on trying to figure out their path.

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Yes, so I would say it's rare. I would say that there are not many positions like the one that I am in currently. So I manage expectations, I think is really important. And the second piece is do your research, listen to as many of the New Planner Podcast episodes as you can to get a gauge as to what you actually really want to do.

And if it is the operation side of things, focus on building core competencies around the technology or around improving operational efficiencies so that even if you got hired entry-level as an analyst, you could come in and show, "Hey, I can provide this value and you could show a proof of concept." And maybe that'll allow you to move into more operational-related activities because you've shown proof of competency.

Caleb Brown: Yeah, just a thought I had, but listening to the, I mean, I teach the practice management class at UGA. So this is very sort of close. And I think it's more programs, more CFP programs offer that class because it's not required to take this to, for the education, take the exam, but it's—I'm just wondering, are more people going to be interested in taking kind of this path that you have taken when they get early exposure to the practice manager? Because some of my students are really jazzed. I mean, they're jazzed about the client side, right? But they're also jazzed about trying to figure out some of this business stuff.

Ep #209: Starting on the Advisor Career Track and Pivoting to a COO Career Track with Connor Barbella-Roesler

And it's just interesting to me, so I'm glad to see you do this and have success. Connor, you've just shared that you have hired, you guys have hired a lot recently. I mean, what are characteristics you look for in new hires?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: I think an ever-increasing skill that is needed to hire in our industry is technology literacy because technology is only going to become more and more useful. It's only going to take more and more items off of our plates.

So, I think that if anyone wants to be truly successful in the industry, they want to make sure that their technical skills are up to snuff. And it might sound silly, but that they know how to convert a picture, a JPEG to a PDF, or you know how to rotate a document, or you know how to connect your computer to a printer. All those things, they might sound silly, but ultimately having that knowledge will save you hours in the back end.

Caleb Brown: Got it. Love it. Connor, this has been great. Again, thanks for coming on, sharing some of your journey. Anything else, any final comments before we close out?

Connor Barbella-Roesler: Good luck to all of those in the CFP programs in college. You guys are going to kill it and good luck to anyone sitting and studying for the CFP exam.

Caleb Brown: Thanks for coming on, Connor.

Connor Barbella: Thank you.

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.