

## FINDING A WAY TO BALANCE INTEGRITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Taking part in the [ASISA Academy Independent Financial Advisor \(IFA\) Internship](#) changed Aron Samuels' perception of IFAs as mere policy-pushing salespeople. Now a Financial Planner at Woodland Wealth, he continues to grapple with the paradox of his profession, where guiding clients toward a better financial future and ensuring the sustainability of the business can seem at odds.

Samuels was a member of the IFA internship in 2016. Originally drawn to the legal field, he had started a BA Law degree at the University of Stellenbosch in 2010 after finishing high school at Paul Roos Gymnasium. After completing two years of the BA Law, he moved to UWC and changed to a B Com Law, which he completed. He had begun to doubt his interest in compliance early on, but it was only during his final year of the B Com Law, when he was exposed to investments and financial planning, that he settled on a different path.

In that final year, he applied for more than 30 opportunities for work or further study, one of which was the ASISA Academy's IFA Internship. Samuels, part of the second intake of interns that year, completed an eight-month internship. He describes it as a transformative experience.

During an intense one-week induction in Johannesburg with the other interns, Samuels got his first close-up look at the profession and realised that it was not just about selling policies and managing portfolios, but guiding people through complex financial landscapes with integrity.

He realises how lucky the IFA interns were to have a thorough induction. They started work with a level of work readiness that is unusual in an environment where young people are often thrown in at the deep end.

Samuels feels very indebted to Finfoocus Financial Planners, his host employer in the IFA Internship, for everything they taught him during the internship. Also, the practice extended his contract for another year after his internship ended.

Then, he says, "after that year, the reality set in that you need to start bringing in more than you cost". This was to be Samuels' introduction to the hard reality of the profession. IFA practices are businesses, and must balance integrity with sustainability, a fine line that Samuels has spent much of his career navigating.

He makes the point that this paradox also means that practice owners must carry interns and other new starters until they become profitable, which can take years. "That is if they become profitable at all because it's not for everyone either," he adds.

Samuels says he underestimated the "other side of the coin to being an IFA", that it is a professional job with a significant sales component. "Yes, you have got all the technical knowledge, the calculations and the info on estate duty and so on, but that technical knowledge doesn't pay the bills. You still need people to sign on the dotted line."

One alternative, he says, is to decide early on that you are happy with being a para-planner, "because that is as close as you get to being a planner without the expectation of having to bring in business". He describes para planners as doing "all the behind-the-scenes technical planning work".

He certainly is not longing for that himself. "I enjoy the client time, but you can't have client time without having sales going with it."

After leaving Finfoocus Financial Planners, in April 2018, Samuels worked at Professional Provident Society (PPS), first as a Life Specialist/Broker Consultant from May 2018 to April 2021, and then as a Financial Advisor in the Graduate Division until July 2022, before he joined Woodland Wealth.



**Originally drawn to the legal field, Aron Samuels found his real passion in financial education.**

As part of PPS's Graduate Division, Samuels worked closely with post-grad students and young professionals, people earning their first pay-cheque, but often lacking knowledge of basic personal finance.

This led him to create "the Wealth Coach", a side-hustle aimed at bridging the financial knowledge gap he saw in young professionals. He did one-on-one sessions and ran workshops on personal finance. He started to build a reputation, being interviewed on podcasts and making a television appearance. All was going well, and he had built a strong social media following, but he felt he had to step away from it because of conflicts of interest and time pressure.

His enduring love of finance education is obvious to his colleagues at Woodland Wealth. "Aron enjoys the teaching part of our job and is passionate about financial education," says Andro Griessel, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and director at Woodland Wealth.

The spirit of the Wealth Coach lives on in Samuels' approach to advising. "Some people need help; others need saving," he says, reflecting on one of the core dilemmas the IFA encounters. "We try to put client interests first while still operating a profitable business. Sometimes that's difficult." His career has been characterised by this ongoing internal debate. "It's almost paradoxical," he says, "this issue of sales versus good advice, but they don't stand opposed, they can actually go together, but it is challenging."