

# Leveraging Your Former Career to Grow Your New Firm with Mike Zung, CFP®

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Maddy Roche

XYPN Radio With Maddy Roche

**Maddy Roche:** Hello, Mike. Welcome to XYPN Radio. It is so nice to have you today.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, Maddy thanks it's a surreal moment. I feel like I've arrived to be on the podcast. I've listened to so many of them.

**Maddy Roche:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Mike Zung:** Yep. I'm excited.

**Maddy Roche:** Yes. I am excited as well. And you have arrived and I must give you some credit for what you've done up until now. You have built a really impressive firm, and I would love for you to introduce it and tell us a bit about who you serve.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, sure. So yeah, Mike Zung, my firm is called Java Wealth Planning. I'm based in Kansas City and the focus is on the equity compensation, tech professionals, and I guess more recently I've kind added the progressives in tech as far as kind of the trying to niche down a little bit, more.

**Maddy Roche:** Great. We'll get to that niche in just a minute. Tell us about your professional journey to entrepreneurship. Where were you and what brought you here?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. So, like a lot of other people that join XY, I'm a career changer, so I started in software development, you know, I got a computer science degree and was in software development and architecture for almost 20 years and so yeah that's where I started. And then yeah, like I just kind of going into a little bit of the story of how I got to here, it was just one of those things where as I like this, I try not to say it's a midlife crisis, but it was right before I turned 40 that, I just kind of got to this place where I was, thinking about what I wanted to , it's like, what did I want to do and what kind of impact that I want to have and in software development, the pay is good, the people are great, I love everybody that I was working with, but just the actual work that I was doing didn't really. It wasn't something that was just like I'm excited to do X right now. and so I had that realization and just thought that okay, what is something else that I am passionate about? And then I feel like I can have a more direct impact and financial, the whole financial planning, financial world was one that had been an interest for a really long time. And so my approach is just going to start

taking steps in this direction, with no grand plan necessarily, and just see where it leads me.

**Maddy Roche:** Wow. From software development to financial planning. What had you dabbled in before when you say you were interested and passionate about it or what did that look like?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, first it was just as far as the content that I was consuming, it was, dating myself. It's back whenever iPods really first came out and they were black and white. I was listening to different podcasts, starting with Dave Ramsey and, then there's the Money Guy podcast and different ones like that, so I was just consuming that content a lot, and then actually at, kind of the first exposure to actually having that experience of talking to people about financial topics, what started at, I was doing the Financial Peace University classes at my church, right. that's the Dave Ramsey stuff. So love him or hate him, there's, I have mixed feelings, but it was a thing where like having that experience of talking to people about this is wow, this really gets me excited, and I really like the, kind of that, that, that mix of the, the technical aspect of things and the numbers, and then adding with that personal side of it, and really fitting it to their personal situation and like actually feeling like, wow, I'm, I feel like there's this direct correlation with my actions and the result, right? There's not the six degrees of separation that's within software development where you say, if I do X, then Y, then Z, then blah, blah, blah. Right?

**Maddy Roche:** Yes, I love that. And kudos for you for chasing the actual substance of work. I think so many people kind of just coast and say, yeah, I'll have a job and a paycheck, and I'll just use my extra time to do my side projects and my passion projects. But for you, you really said no I want to work, and you want to substantively enjoy it. That's a wonderful thing.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. And I mean, we didn't talk about this in pre-show, so hopefully this doesn't come out of right field, but a lot of that just, I kind of think about that kind of more existential stuff a little bit more from because both my parents have, they passed away relatively young, and so whenever I think about kind of the time that I have, that it's okay, I want to make the most, as soon as possible. yeah, so, that was definitely part of it too, of just what do I want to do? it's not all about me, but it's still, but it's like, Hey, how do I want to best, use my time.

**Maddy Roche:** Oh, thank you for sharing that. And I'm sure that, Shows up in how you show up with your clients, just, a real cognizant nature of just how long we have.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, that's one of the one of the main things that I whenever I talk to people about stuff is we actually I created this calendar view that it's like a what a seven by 12 grid where it has the months and then the next seven years, and then we actually talk about okay, what do we want this year to look like, what do we want, two to five years to look like and actually having it built out as far as months and years, not just like a straight timeline. Like you can kind of feel the time a little bit. a little bit, more realistically whenever you see it like that.

**Maddy Roche:** Talk about life planning.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**Maddy Roche:** Wonderful.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. It's fun.

**Maddy Roche:** So Mike, you had dabbled in financial planning through kind of the Dave Ramsey curriculum and working at your church, but how did you make the leap to I'm actually going to go start my own RIA?

**Mike Zung:** Right. well, I mean, part of it is I have to attribute XYPN for part of it. Cause whenever I started listening, like I was saying I was listening to different podcasts and it was a thing where, I was listening to a financial independence podcast and then Michael Kitces was on it. And then, so I started listening to Kitces stuff and which brought me to XYPN. And it was, actually a particular XYPN episode with Linden Cornett, it was like episode, I don't know, like 60 or something like that. Right. Where, whenever I was hearing her story and I was thinking like, oh, this is actually this feel I really feel like I relate to this and it feels like it's a it's something that I could kind of start, like I said just start to take steps towards this, right? Cause at the time, she was in tech and working with Intel employees and Hey, I could, kind of like just carve out this little bit, cause I wasn't going to be like, Oh, I'm going to just be everything to everybody, work with retirees and all that stuff. It's Hey, I know my lane, I know what I can do. And so maybe I'll just take small steps and do that. So. yeah, and then it was a thing where I, it was while I was still working full time that it's like, Hey, I could, I could join XYPN and just start walking down this path and just start and just, but I would still start very part time. Right. So that I still had the security of my current job, but then, making this incremental step towards Hey, what would it look like if I started a firm?

**Maddy Roche:** Great. you may just be a Linden Cornett for future listeners and right now, that is the second shout out in a row for Linden Cornett.

**Mike Zung:** Oh, really?

**Maddy Roche:** Hi Linden! Nice job. Yeah, that's wonderful. So, you did start part time. Is that right?

**Mike Zung:** So I, yeah, it was in 2018. Yeah. So I joined XY in, I think, March of 2018, and then I, so it was, a thing where I started part-time and, was still working full-time in tech, through 2018, and then also all of 2019 that I was, still working full-time.

**Maddy Roche:** Do you recommend that for folks?

**Mike Zung:** I don't know. Yes and no. I mean, there's definitely the security of having an income because my wife does work, but I wouldn't have been able to just completely quit cold turkey and I know for myself, I wouldn't be, how do I say it? My personality isn't one where that I thrive on that pressure, and like I'm going to go out and I'm going to build this business that's not the way that I roll. So yeah, I can see that, but it is definitely a challenge to where it's tough to balance everything, and so I think there gets to be a point, and for me, it was actually earlier than I was initially planning to say, Hey, I need to stop one and go, I have to go all in, in order to actually make this work.

**Maddy Roche:** Okay. Let's just stay on those first two years with me, and while you were doing this part time, I know a lot of listeners are weighing that decision, and I think for you to even just have the self-awareness to say, I don't have the personality to not have the income, is a beautiful reminder to listeners that they should really be trusting themselves as they go out to do this journey because you are solo and this is your business and you do need to be honoring yourself in that way. what weren't you expecting kind of in the first two years? what was the curve ball that changed perspective for you at times?

**Mike Zung:** I guess how difficult it would be to market to get in front of people and how difficult it was to get business. I do remember whenever I launched and thinking that it's like, Hey, I'm going to make this website live, I'm going to have my Calendly stuff and all that, that's Oh boy, I better be ready because people are going to be calling here pretty soon. Right?

**Maddy Roche:** Any minute.

**Mike Zung:** That is not how it happens even. Yeah. yeah, I was very naive as far as, how, much went into actual planning work versus how much went into the marketing sales side. And yeah, just kind of thinking like, Hey, I'm launching a financial planning business, the, planning work is maybe a fourth of what you do. It's especially early on, right? Like whenever you don't have any clients, then it's there's not a whole lot of planning work to do. And everything is about, yeah, just, trying to create activity, and it has absolutely nothing to do with how well you know retirement accounts and taxes and stuff like that.

**Maddy Roche:** I'm so glad you made that distinction because there's one thing of following the to do's of a marketing launch plan and making the website and getting your Calendly, like you say, but then you have this verb, of taking action and that's the part that I think we underestimate, and as you've just said, you underestimated yourself. So what was activity in your mind? Like how would new advisors begin to start taking action on their marketing?

**Mike Zung:** Right. Yeah. I mean, as far as what I was doing was initially just like, okay, maybe I need to try to write a blog or, and, start creating some content, yeah, creating content, right? So for me at first it was, yeah, trying to, do a blog, trying to do a newsletter,

and what I realized for myself personally is that my writing, while the end product is okay, it's fine, the process takes a really, long time for me, and so it's okay, nope, I'm not going to do that. Right. and so, what I ended up doing was, like starting to do more video type stuff and then, so I have the whiteboard behind me. So, it was a thing where, you know, coming from software development and architecture, what I was, what I felt really comfortable with and helped my mind work is to say, Hey, how do I visualize, kind of this more. ethereal concept, right? And so I was just like, Hey, I'm going to, maybe I should just start doing videos and I'll just try to explain different things through video and through a whiteboard. Right. And so, that's what my content ended up being where I would create these videos. I put it on YouTube, nobody would watch it, of course. then put it on social media and all that stuff. but yeah, but it was, so that's essentially what I was doing and I actually remember the very first XYPN Live that I went to after I started doing videos and I was still just very new and didn't really know anybody, but I remember talking with somebody that whenever I mentioned that I was starting to do videos, he like looks at me, he's I've seen these videos those are really good. I was like, Oh, wow, thanks.

**Maddy Roche:** I love that. Playing to your strengths. I think that's such a good reminder that one, you knew, nope, blogging's not going to work because it takes too much time, you feel more and slow doing videos, but then you tapped

into your strength of your background and your experience building out architecture for systems and explanations. And, that, I think is just such a crucial reminder to folks that are listening that you don't need to do everything you need to commit to the things that you're good at and, honesty and a good inventory is what you need to do before you launch

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. It's definitely, there, there are so many different ways that you could approach it and, yeah, I don't feel like you have to do everything, but that's like focus on the one thing, and I'm saying this to myself as much as anything, because I've I know right now, it's if I just focused more on YouTube right now, and I could just turn off all social media, get out of Twitter, get out of LinkedIn and all that stuff and just focus on this, then I think that like things would. Things would work better, but yeah, so it's like you don't need to do everything just pick one thing that you're strong at and feel like you can stick with and just double down on that.

**Maddy Roche:** Totally double down on it, and it's so coincidental that two episodes ago, Alan, his final episode, was with Patrick King and he talked a little about his, YouTube videos. And it was funny because as I was researching you, I saw some of Patrick King's videos on the recommended list, so tell me, I mean, it's just like writing a blog and sending a newsletter and you said it like no one's watching, you don't know how many people are reading. What was the trajectory for it? When did you start getting traction?

**Mike Zung:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, for YouTube, for me, it was, let's see, I mean, I started doing videos, I think early 2019 or something, but basically it was for the first year, it was crickets, it was nothing, right? And then, I did a video that just explained incentive stock options, and then I would go back and of course, whenever you're early on and you don't have a whole lot of clients and you're just watching all these different analytics and vanity metrics and stuff like that and I just saw that one video that's oh, hey, this is actually getting some fairly consistent views. It's okay. And then, so I did one on RSUs on restricted stock units, and then that one took off a little bit more. And I mean, and my version of taking off is like right now, I mean, I think that RSU video is my most popular and it has almost a hundred thousand views. That's But yeah, like I'm not because I met Patrick at the last XYPN and he had one, one of his videos has a couple million views on it or something like that. so yeah, it was, yeah, so as far as the trajectory goes, it was like there was nothing, but then what I, and I guess maybe another plug for the whole niche idea, once I started talking specifically about this, about equity compensation stuff, then it's oh, I've, found something here where people are looking more specifically for this, and there's not a whole lot of content that can explain it very well.

So yeah, so it's basically, once I, got into the all the equity stuff, ESPPs and talking about non-qualified stock options, then that's kind of where the traction came from. And then, so I kind of, again, doubled down on that and got more equity comp specific, I would do YouTube lives with guests and stuff like that, and so that's kind of what led that, let that grow for a while.

**Maddy Roche:** And do you know if any of your existing clients found you because of YouTube?

**Mike Zung:** Oh yeah. Yeah, for sure. And yeah, I mean, it was I remember the first one that did that, that reached out, that said Hey, I found you on YouTube. I thought it was a joke. I was like, no way. but, yeah, now it's, kind of wild where it's not necessarily a ton, but you know, it's probably one or two a month or so, and the nice thing about YouTube is that. Is that I actually haven't put out a whole lot of new content, but the evergreen stuff works well enough to where I still get people that, that reach out to say yeah, I saw your YouTube channel and so I figured I'd reach out.

**Maddy Roche:** Incredible. I underestimate the power of YouTube. It is a major player

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah. I mean, I, yeah, I guess I did. I talked at the last XYPN about doing YouTube stuff and yeah, that's some of the main messaging is that, you you, do evergreen content and yeah, you just have good approachable stuff and then whether they find people find you organically on YouTube or if they find you somewhere else and then see that you have a YouTube channel and kind of vet what you know, and your style, then that definitely makes the process a lot easier.

**Maddy Roche:** Mike, I'd love to circle back on an answer that you gave just a bit ago about your niche. Can you just describe kind of your, your evolution of your niche and how you've described it?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, I knew whenever I started that's like, okay, I'm going to work with tech professionals because, you know, that's the world that I come from. Right. You know, just being that software development, like I can literally speak the language that they speak. And I guess a little nod to the firm name Java Wealth is because I was a Java developer.

That was a programming language that I was, that I was doing. and so yeah, so, that was the initial part. And first I was thinking like, okay, it's going to be in Kansas city. but then like, as I was doing it, then I would get people that were,



you know, that had more equity compensation. Cause the equity comp side wasn't initially on my radar, it was more just the, the angle. Right. But then the equity compensation was like, okay, now this is a real tangible thing. That's more complicated, there's, you can, yeah, there can be mistakes that have a large financial impact. So it's like, okay, I found that acute pain point now. so that's kind of where I was for a good while but then more recently in trying to refine things a little bit more, thinking of like, this is the niche as far as, you know, the technical side of it, but then who are the people that I really like working with, right. And what, some of the stuff that I identified was that from a, like the perspective of like the, the dynamics for, for client couples and then just kind of like, I guess it's something that you can be afforded to do whenever you're a solo business and you're kind of having a relatively small client load, like you can be a little bit more the types of clients that you want to work with, right? And kind of their value system, to where, to where it's like, okay, I'm, you know, I'm, much more on the, kind of on that progressive side of the spectrum. There is one client where I was actually helping with the budgeting and cash flow and stuff like that. And so, like to the transaction level, right? Like, seeing what's going on in the transaction world. And then, like one of the expenses had a name on it and it's like, okay, well, I need to help categorize this. So what is it? And the only thing that came up from a Google search was like a, we'll just say somebody who was a public figure that supported, ideals that I did not align with in any way. And I was just like, Oh man I feel conflicted from a client perspective of like, okay, I'm, I have the fiduciary duty to help this client. Right. But then from an ideals perspective, it's like, Oh, wow, this is not the right fit. And so for me, it kind of holding myself out. It's like, Hey, you know, like, I'm a business that I want to be open and affirming to different types of clients to where like, okay, this wouldn't align, right? So there is, there's definitely that part. And then also just having clients that value the, the collaboration and voice of both. Partners, right? so, so I like, I, didn't want to have one where like, I was only talking to, and I, know I'm somewhat generalizing, but like the, just the, husband is like, she doesn't want to talk about investments. I'm like, I'm the only one. You don't need to talk to her. You can talk to me. I'm just like, no, that's not how this works. . So yeah. that was a little bit of the addition of like, okay, I want to get even further into like, this is the ideal client that I want to work with.

**Maddy Roche:** Beautiful. I'd love for you to tell us a little bit about your side project, Beautiful Financial Plan. Could you tell the listeners a bit about that?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, sure. So the, origin story for that, for the Beautiful Financial Plan is, like I was saying, whenever I was, whenever I first launched and I was, the most of the work that I was doing was project type work. And so, as I was doing that and just developing out what the process was and what the project would look like I wanted to have a, okay, I was thinking I need to have a

deliverable at the end of it that can succinctly spell out everything that we talked about and next steps and all that kind of stuff. And so, I, was workshopping different ideas for how to show that, created kind of this Sankey diagram cashflow, which has kind of taken off since, then just kind of in the industry at large. And a few other things like the calendar I just mentioned.

And so I did that, and one of the study groups that I was in, we would I sometimes we'd bring case studies and talk about stuff and I would show like what that plan looked like, right. Just to kind of help describe what the situation was. And then whenever it was in, I guess, the fall of 2021 that Michael Kitces went on to the XYPN message board and said, Hey, does anybody create their own planning deliverable? And somebody in my study group tagged me and said Hey, he does. And so I, created a like a template version of it and I put it out there and that got me invited onto the, to do one of the Kitces value summits. So yeah, the 2021 Kitces value summit. and so, it was just like, okay, go do that, and I did my half hour presentation or talk about Hey, this is what it is, this is how it works. cause yeah, those value summits a big part of what they, show, don't tell. Is one of the things that they say.

So I showed a little bit of behind the scenes of how it works and everything. And then, and then, also I followed Jeremy Walter, who had a one-page financial plan that he had, kind of put out there to the world. we partnered with Carl Richards with that,

and then after that value summit, then I would have advisors reaching out to me that say Hey, do you sell this as a template? And, Yeah, I was just like, no, I don't, but I guess I can. Right. and, so, it was a thing where, I talked to Jeremy a little bit afterwards too, and he was very encouraging to, to get that just Hey, yeah, this is something that is valuable that you should put out there too.

And so, yeah, so I, I worked on kind of creating the template that's, both because I use Google Suite stuff, so I had a Google version and then I like figured there's still a lot of people on PowerPoint and Excel, so I created a version there, and then I released that and, stood up the Kajabi site and, opened it up for business and just be like, all right, here it is everybody.

**Maddy Roche:** Incredible. And listeners, we will, include this in the show notes, but this is a separate website, a separate and distinct entity, in fact, from your RIA. Is that right, Mike?

**Mike Zung:** Yep. Yeah. So, so I created a whole separate business, a whole separate LLC. And that's for any sort of advisor facing type stuff, which it's

primarily this, but I've done a little bit of like consulting type work too, but yeah, but it's, gone well beyond, any expectation that I had before. I think there's almost like 150 advisors that have purchased the thing. So yeah.

**Maddy Roche:** At some point, Mike, you must have gone full time, right?

**Mike Zung:** Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I did eventually quit.

**Maddy Roche:** Let's come back to that decision.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, so that was, it was around the summer of 2019, so I'd been like working, I'd been trying to juggle both for a little over a year, and I got to this place where, you know, one of my big reasons, one of my big whys for doing this was, like, hey, I want to have some time freedom while my kids are at ages that they still want to hang out with me. Right. And, and, but with working full time and then also trying to do this other thing, part time is the opposite is happening right now. And like I was saying, I was very cognizant of the time part of it.

So it was just like, okay, we're going to, I talked to my wife, okay, let's like, what if I quit at the end of this year? Right. And so we, made that decision. So we just started saving pretty aggressively because it was, the idea of I'm going to quit at the end of 2019, and then go full time 2020 and I won't plan on making, I won't plan on making any money, like I won't take a salary for the first year, right? and, so yeah, so that's what we did and the whole time with my other employer. The nice thing about being a career changer is you can be more up front with your thoughts of leaving. Right. So from the jump, whenever I, whenever I launched the business, I told my boss that it's like, Hey, this is eventually the direction that I want to go in. Right. So yeah, so I was very upfront with them and say Hey, at the end of the year, I'm going to, I'm going to stop, and start doing it full time. And that's what I did.

**Maddy Roche:** Oh, I love that. That you worked with yourself and your family about when the right time was. But for context for our listeners, how many clients were you serving at that point? What was your revenue?

**Mike Zung:** Not very much. I mean, like I was saying, I was, it was primarily doing project type work. So I think from an ongoing client, whenever I started, I think it only had two or three ongoing, and so yeah, and then, revenue while I was part time was pretty flat. And it was, revenue and expenses almost equaled each other out, and then my first full year, even my, my revenue at the end of the year was only \$10,000-15,000 something like that.

**Maddy Roche:** Okay. And can you give a little perspective into kind of your current levels of revenue and client numbers and where you expect to be by the end of the year?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. So right now, I have, 34 clients ongoing. I've also stopped doing project work. I made that shift a little over a year ago to focus on, hey I want to focus solely on ongoing relationships. and so that's what I'm currently doing. Part of me is flirting with the idea of doing a select number of projects, but, that's TBD.

So yeah, so that's, what I, that's the number of clients right now. and then revenue, gross revenue by the end of the year I'm hoping to be around \$250,000.

**Maddy Roche:** Incredible. I would love to know about your switch from project to ongoing. A lot of people come in and feel like the value delivery of a project-based engagement is much clearer for consumers and prospective clients and that ongoing just is a harder sell. So, did you feel that? And what was your experience?

**Mike Zung:** Oh yeah. Yeah, I still feel that cause it, especially in, I guess, just to delve away from it a little bit is that especially for the tech professional world where, and especially with equity compensation stuff, a lot of times it is just I have this acute problem that I want to have solved but I don't want you to manage my money.

Right. So there's a lot of the people that I still talk to you right now, they are primarily looking for projects. Right. And so for that, just well, I don't do that right now, and so here's a list of people that are, that I know are great. And so I refer out quite a bit right now, actually.

so, yeah, that's kind of a little bit right now, as far as the, original question of what that transition was like. I mean, I guess. Kind of similar where, yeah, like I would get a decent amount of people that are just looking for projects, and I was trying to stick to my guns.

Right. and, not do that. but it was the thing where it was taking up so much time and part of it could be a pricing problem from my side too where my projects were priced too low, but it was like, it was a whole lot of work for not necessarily a whole lot of revenue. And, then also the, I felt like with ongoing clients, a big part of the value is the actual implementation and doing, the work side by side with, them and making sure that things get accomplished.

**Maddy Roche:** I've got so many questions just based on that answer, but I appreciate what you're saying around the amount of work for a project, because I imagine as a fiduciary advisor, you're going to want to give them comprehensive financial planning in that project. So you end up just kind of casting this much broader net and doing much more legwork to deliver this one off project. Was that your experience?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I mean, that's still a problem now, even with ongoing stuff too, where it's just I feel like I want to be, I want to be like comprehensive to a fault almost, like getting into all sorts of details and invite me into your YNAB and we're going to help categorize everything, that kind of stuff.

but yeah. So yeah, the projects were, it was a lot of work. there is a part of it that's also cleaner, where you can kind of define like these are the meetings that we have, whenever we're done, here's your deliverable, go, go do your thing now. So, from that perspective, it's cleaner.

And then also just from a, from that, my path from a career changer, doing a lot of projects built up my own confidence in my own process of okay, now that I'm getting more reps and I'm doing this and that it's it felt more approachable than. Like this automatic, Hey, transfer your life savings over to me and I'm going to manage it for you or something like that. Where it's like the project work was felt a lot more approachable.

**Maddy Roche:** Yeah. and there were a lot of advisors who run their businesses on project-based engagements, and you're referring folks to them. but I'm interested in, from a, from the kind of perspective client Mindset, what was it about the, I don't want you to manage my assets component? Was the price tag or were they do it yourselves or what, were you sensing from this group of people around their hesitation with ongoing?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of it is, there's definitely a big DIY component to it. and yeah, that, and right, I guess I can completely empathize with not wanting to move your money. Money is so personal. Right. And so asking someone to say, Hey, yeah, go ahead and transfer over, hundreds of thousands of dollars or millions of dollars.

And that feels that's a very personal ask. Right. so I guess all of us from the advisor planner community, like we need to not take that lightly, right. Be flippant about it. And so it's I completely understand that side of it. and there's just, kind of in the tech world, there's, a really strong DIY feeling, the FIRE

community and just like from the straight investment perspective, like I don't proclaim to be able to beat the market. I'm a Boglehead index kind of investor. So pretty vanilla from that perspective. So, yeah, so I can, completely understand that. I think it's just kind of this level of commitment thing of Hey, I don't want to I don't want to feel like I'm signing up for, a lifetime commitment or anything like that.

**Maddy Roche:** So how do you get people to sign up for lifetime commitments, Mike?

**Mike Zung:** I think I feel like it's just finding the people that do value that ongoing collaboration, because whenever I think about the client, the ongoing clients that I have right now, that especially, that kind of ideal avatar, like there are some clients that everything, we're basically saying Hey, we are in this together and if I ever have any questions, then, I can reach out and we can get this stuff done together and kind of like having that ongoing conversation and thinking partner and, also, just kind of the forcing mechanisms of, Hey, we're getting, all of us are getting together and having these financial conversations on a regular basis, to keep it somewhat top of mind.

Right. So, I think it's just that like different people are looking for different services. And so for me, it's just, it's somewhat of a game of patience of finding that group of people that are valuing that ongoing relationship and want to do that, for at least the time. And I do say that it's like, Hey, if after a year or two you feel empowered to do this on your own, then great.

**Maddy Roche:** But I'm interested in the, folks that are kind of do it yourselfers and project that you were serving in a project based capacity. Was it that they knew ongoing was an option? Or do you, did you sense that like some more education around what that real value would be and kind of a pivot towards how you sold them essentially on it, would have helped them move towards it?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, I guess going back to actually the way that I first was doing it, I actually did a project for everybody, and then where it's just hey, everyone starts with a financial plan, and then at the end of it, I would then come around to say, okay, we're done with this, you can either go do it yourself, or if you want to move to ongoing, then this, is what it would look like, right?

And so I actually, went away from that just from the perspective of my own terrible sales skill, to where like I would do projects. And even if I felt like it would be very beneficial for the client to move ongoing, it was a second friction point to where it's okay, I essentially have to do a second sale in quotes, and so

it's just yeah, I don't know if I necessarily love that. and then, but, yeah, as far as, I don't know if I would necessarily say that there people didn't know that it was an option. It's just, it, to me, it's as much as the psychology of, if you had three bottles of wine, there's a cheap one, there's an expensive one, and then there's kind of this middle one. Everyone picks that middle one. Right. And that's kind of what was happening with me, where like I had, like a one, two meeting project, full plan and ongoing. And everyone was like, okay, I'll, I'm going to do this plan.

**Maddy Roche:** Wow. Okay. Great. Yeah. We've talked a lot internally about, those same ideas of just even on websites, what's in the middle and bolded tends to be, it's our eyes go there, things like that. okay. So talk to me about your present day service model and fee structure. How have you matched it to the value you believe you deliver to these ongoing clients?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. so the fee structure that I have, it's essentially flat fees. But it's tier based on overall assets, overall portfolio value, right? So it's not just managed assets. it's okay, what's your, net worth minus your house, essentially. Right. and then it's just a flat fee, tiered based on that. And then I also have just a little bit of complexity stuff for if you have RSUs and if you have stock options because of the extra complexity that's around that, and it's, I have a, calculator on my website to where you can just play with the numbers and then you just see what the flat fee is based on that.

**Maddy Roche:** Beautiful. Now I do know you didn't start at, the flat fee that you're currently at. So why don't you give the listeners a little bit of perspective around what they can expect in terms of raising fees over the first several years.

**Mike Zung:** Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. So, whenever I launched, my minimum fee was \$1,800 a year for everything, like for all the planning and all the investment management, I think it was like, if you had less than, \$500,000. That or \$250,000, one of those, but yeah, so that's where it started. and then kind of tiered up somewhat, very gradually, from there and then now I've gotten it to where my, the, minimum is \$6,000, it kind of does similar stuff where it tiers up based on that.

**Maddy Roche:** Wow. I work with a lot of clients and I've worked with many members over the years that just continue to question the value that they're delivering on an ongoing basis to justify the \$6,000 or the \$10,000 or whatever it may be. How do you do? How do you, what gymnastics are going on in your head? How do you deliver?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. And, also, I guess another thing with the tech people, it's like they ask that question a lot too. It's just what value am I going to get for, \$6,000-8,000 whatever a year, right? and it is, it's definitely, it can be a difficult question to answer. Like it's, definitely something that I wrestle with sometimes too, right?

but like basically there's, some of the quantifiable stuff of, for, people to say Hey, I know that right now you have all of these options. And, if we, if you do this wrong, then you could mess up, from a tax perspective or from an investment perspective to the tune of like many thousands of dollars.

So just like one or two moves here will easily pay for, will justify the fee, right? So there's the quantifiable side of it. but then for as much as anything, it's kind of more the qualitative side of it too, of, I mean, I feel like I'm preaching to the choir in this podcast, but the, kind of, kind of that,

that thinking partner and just, and staying on top of things and, the, ongoing, just actually implementation, making sure things get done. Right. And just, and, clients never say it, but the peace of mind of okay, I know that we, we have this part of our world taken care of.

**Maddy Roche:** Beautiful. Yeah, I'm so glad you brought that word back up, implementation. That is the value, especially with complex financial plans. and I'm sure after, kind of the initial plan delivery, there's a whole page worth of things that they're going to need to do to move the needle forward. really beautiful kind of evolution that you've taken. If you're okay with it, I'd love to pivot a little bit, Mike.

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, sure.

**Maddy Roche:** So you described yourself as an introvert, and I bet that will come to us as a surprise to our listeners because you are, you're deeply engaging, but I think let's first just how do you define introvert?

**Mike Zung:** Well, so the way that I've heard it be defined is that like, how do you, what energizes you, right. And, doing a whole lot of talking and, socializing and all that stuff, like that is not energizing to me. Like I feel pretty beat and even client conversations, right. I have meetings like I, while I'm in it,

like I'm, I feel like I'm relatively locked in. I enjoy it. But after I'm done, then it's I'm, I feel like I need to take a nap. Right. and yeah, so, there's definitely that part. And then there's also just the part of just this level of feeling somewhat



awkward in going into a room with a lot of people. And especially if you don't, if you don't know anybody, like I am not one that can just strike up a conversation and work a room and, be able to, be able to do that very well and in a large group setting.

**Maddy Roche:** How do you think you've used that, that information about yourself to your advantage as you've navigated the past several years?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah. well, I guess one from the client part, limiting how many meetings I have in a day, that's one where I do try to do a version of a surge type meeting, but I cap it like to where three meetings a day, and then if I look at a week and there's say seven meetings and it's okay, that week, like I can't do anything else that week. Right. yeah, so, from that side, that's how it kind of informs the actual. business side of it. I guess from a sales type, marketing type perspective that, yeah, the version of marketing and, the way that I put myself out there is a much more kind of, I guess solo or personal like way to where it's, I don't try to do, like networking events and I don't try to do anything with kind of large crowds where it's instead I'm, in a room by myself making a video explaining things and then the bravery from that is just okay, I've created it now, just put it out there and then close my eyes.

**Maddy Roche:** Totally. Again, playing to your strengths and the self, the level of self-awareness, Mike, that you have is clearly a strength of yours. just, I want to recognize that for our listeners. Again, we try to do so much. The role of an entrepreneur is already by nature really broad, and you have to do so much. And so it would just be extra taxing to go into this with the expectation that all of a sudden you need to be an extrovert to succeed, cause that just isn't the case. That being said, you are a beloved member of our XYPN community and a fan favorite at XYPN Live, can you talk a bit about your engagement in our community over the years and how it's, moved you forward?

**Mike Zung:** Yeah, so XYPN, I think it is a little bit of a weird dichotomy of saying yeah, I'm really introverted, but whenever I go to the conference, I think, there's something about the safety of where everybody's kind of in that same place that, conversations flow much easier there when, whenever you know you're in this, safe place with other people that are going through very similar types of things. And so from, the beginning, like the first XYPN it was just like, wow, this is an amazing kind of vibe with this whole amazing experience. and yeah, just it's weird to look back, it's 2024. Now it's been so six years, essentially.

**Maddy Roche:** Wow.

**Mike Zung:** That like the number of people that I've met that I've still talked to, kind of, I feel like I have to give a shout out to Brian Face because he was one of the first one. Yeah. And I met him at the first XYPN Live. We still call each other. Pretty often he was one of the most, he, would probably, take more credit for the whole Beautiful Financial Plan getting launched too. Because before, even before all the Kitces stuff, he's dude, you need to, put this out there. But yeah, but just the people that I've met there, the connections and then, and how it's actually helped from a business perspective to, like marketing. It isn't just Hey, I'm, creating my blog or my video or whatever, and trying to get out to clients. It's networking with other advisors, because kind of like right now, I'm referring out people to other advisors that I've met and that I know.

And we've talked business type stuff to where okay, I know they know what they're talking about. So I have no problem sending people there that same for me. Like I would talk with people that were ahead of me and, they had a \$10,000 minimum or something like that. And I'm sitting here at an \$1,800 minimum be like, Hey, so, yeah. So, there's, I mean, just between that, the study group stuff, because learning is better for business. From the mental aspect of it, I still meet with my launcher group that we, and that, that's more the one of the kind of the softer side of it of like just celebrating wins and then also commiserating whenever there's, more kind of struggles with the business.

**Maddy Roche:** Beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. As we wrap up this incredible podcast, Mike, a couple final questions. paint the picture for the future of Java. What, do you plan to do in the next decade?

**Mike Zung:** Oh man, decade, decades too far. I can only just, like I said, my approach is I just, I look up every once in a while, to say, okay, now this is the direction I want to go in and I'll look up in another year or two. so yeah, right now, I'm primarily solo. I do have somebody that's working with me on a contract basis who's trying to move into the financial planning space, changing careers. And so I think personally I'll probably stay kind of in that primarily solo space with some, help. and then I have kicked around that a little bit of the idea of, doing kind of a residency type program too, for people that are trying to get into the space where Hey, we, come work together for a couple of years and then after that, then kind of have the understanding of, okay, you either go to another firm or you launch your own thing or do whatever there, so there's that, I still do want to have some space for the, For the, kind of advisor facing like beautiful financial plan. Keep doing stuff with that. cause that works a different side of my brain that I think needs to still happen. so, yeah, the barbell of that, a little bit of the, Beautiful Financial Plan stuff, and then to have, and then to have

some capacity still for the freer stuff, Doing more YouTube stuff and, some pro bono work and stuff like that.

**Maddy Roche:** Great. What are you most proud about over the past several years?

**Mike Zung:** Ooh, what am I most proud about? I mean, I am definitely. I'm pretty proud of just the, just the, just this journey so far. Right. the business that, I mean, I've listened to so many of these podcasts. There's, some people that like they, hit these revenue numbers in, a year or something like that.

Right. but yeah, I'm definitely proud of the fact that I did this, yeah, that I was kind of willing to do it and that it's, worked well enough for me. There's definitely a level of you still, everyone needs to run their own race, right. Where to not compare yourself too much, with where other people are and that's a continual struggle. but I think. Just, that part of it of building this and kind of feeling like I'm getting to that place of what I set out to do, where it's a business that supports my family, affords me time to I still go to all my son's soccer games and all of, and I take them to every practice and Can have that time again while they all want to still hang out with me, cause I have my 12 year old son and then I have a daughter who's a sophomore right now.

**Maddy Roche:** I'm so glad that you said that, Mike. Everyone needs to run their own race. I think that's such a beautiful piece of advice for folks to remember that as an entrepreneur, one of the most, Important things you can do is stay steady in, in who you are and where you want to go, because so quickly we can just rapidly move directions based on what we read that morning and what's on the podcast the next day. What other sage pieces of advice do you have for folks listening right now? as they approach this huge, change and shift in their lives.

**Mike Zung:** yeah. I don't know how sage it is, but, I guess the other thing that, that I think about is, is to get, the way I put it is like you hold on to clients loosely and don't take things too personally. especially for us that are building solo firms, like your business can feel very, like it's an extension of you.

And so that if, a client leaves, which like, I mean, I make no, I don't gloss over it. Like clients leave, right. Especially, and maybe that's a flat fee thing or a tech worker thing or something, but it's like that it happens. Not everyone has the 99, 98 percent attrition that you always hear. but that, or then, or if prospective clients don't sign up, right. That it's, easy to take it personally because Hey, this was like, they've rejected me or, because I built the website and I built the fee structure and I built the, the planning process and all that stuff. but yeah, just to

not, beat yourself up about that kind of stuff and that, people are just in different places and there's plenty out there that will make kind of an ideal business for you.

**Maddy Roche:** Well said. Well, Mike, we are up on time listeners. I hope you've enjoyed this dialogue, with one of XYPN's best members out there. we are so lucky to have you part of our community, Mike. Your clients are so lucky to have you and your family is so lucky to have you. and I so appreciate you being as open and as transparent and as authentic as you've been over the past hour. Thank you for being on XYPN radio.

**Mike Zung:** Alright. Thank you. Loved it.