Getting Help With Your Investments

You should match an adviser’s specialties and credentials to your particular situation who are mainly concerned about managing your investments directly for a fee. If you’re confident in your ability to make financial decisions, you may only need to consult with your local banker or your employer’s human-resources office. But the following situations often call for an outside expert:

- You’ve changed jobs and want guidance on your retirement accounts and new professional would help you make better choices.

Who’s Who Among Advisers

Just as you don’t consult an orthopedist when you have the flu, you should match an adviser’s specialties to your particular situation. Here are your choices:

Certified Financial Planners, whose background and qualifying examinations prepare them to take on a variety of assignments, from analyzing your retirement funds to setting up a schedule of cash distributions when you get a lump sum of money at retirement. Many CFPs specialize in certain groups of clients: retirees, singles, widows, small-business owners and career military.

Registered Investment Advisors, who actually manage or invest money on your behalf for a fee. You may elect to give these people discretion to make trades in your accounts and determine your investment strategy.

How to Choose an Adviser

You’re hiring someone to handle your money, so take plenty of time and be thorough and discriminating in your search. Settle on the services you need and then schedule introductory meetings with several candidates. Even in a financial emergency, such as a disabling injury or unexpected job loss, you don’t necessarily want to select the first planner you meet. Start by:

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What is your training and experience?
- What is your investment philosophy and your track record?
- Can I have a copy of your regulatory disclosure forms?
- How will our relationship work?
- How much do you charge?
What Can Go Wrong

Losing money on your investments isn’t the only potential problem. In fact, market losses aren’t necessarily anyone’s fault because markets go up and down and most advisers try hard to keep you as a satisfied client. So they shouldn’t churn your account by making excessive trades to generate more commissions. They should not sell you insurance or investments you don’t need so they can qualify for trips and other prizes. And they should not be evasive when you ask them to confirmance or investments you don’t need so they can qualify for trips and other prizes. And they should not be evasive when you ask them to confirm

How to Complain

If you suspect that something unethical or illegal is going on, you have several avenues to seek redress. These alternatives can be as simple as confronting the adviser or going to a supervisor if you’re doing business with a major financial company. But you can also get help from a number of regulatory organizations whose business it is to investigate investor complaints. These agencies include state securities regulators (members of the North American Securities Administrators Association), the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority.

More Information. To read the full-length Getting Help With Your Investments booklet, visit www.investorprotection.org or contact your State Securities Regulator’s office.

WHERE YOU STAND NOW: YOUR PERSONAL BALANCE SHEET

Use this worksheet to calculate your current assets, liabilities and net worth. When you know where your current net worth is coming from, you can see where your financial position is strong and where it is weak. This worksheet helps lay the necessary groundwork for setting your investment goals and making plans to reach them.

ASSETS

Cash in savings accounts
Cash in checking accounts
Cash on hand
Certificates of deposit
Money-market funds
U.S. savings bonds
Market value of home
Market value of other real estate
Cash value of life insurance
Surrender value of annuities
Vested equity in pension plans
Vested equity in profit sharing
401(k) or 403(b) plans
Individual retirement accounts
Keogh plans
Stocks
Bonds
Stock mutual funds & ETFs
Bond mutual funds & ETFs
Real estate investment trusts
Other investments
Collectibles

LIABILITIES

Precious metals
Estimated market value of:
Household furnishings
Automobiles and trucks
Boats, recreational vehicles
Furs and jewelry
Loans owed to you
Other assets
TOTAL ASSETS

TOTAL LIABILITIES

CURRENT NET WORTH
(A minus B)

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ASSETS

Cash in savings accounts
Cash in checking accounts
Cash on hand
Certificates of deposit
Money-market funds
U.S. savings bonds
Market value of home
Market value of other real estate
Cash value of life insurance
Surrender value of annuities
Vested equity in pension plans
Vested equity in profit sharing
401(k) or 403(b) plans
Individual retirement accounts
Keogh plans
Stocks
Bonds
Stock mutual funds & ETFs
Bond mutual funds & ETFs
Real estate investment trusts
Other investments
Collectibles

LIABILITIES

Precious metals
Estimated market value of:
Household furnishings
Automobiles and trucks
Boats, recreational vehicles
Furs and jewelry
Loans owed to you
Other assets
TOTAL ASSETS

TOTAL LIABILITIES

CURRENT NET WORTH
(A minus B)