



By **Stewart S. Miller**
and **Gloria Foote, CFP**

Special to *Today's Local News*

FINDING A QUALIFIED FINANCIAL ADVISER

Most of us at one time or another will feel the need to seek professional financial advice. How do you know whom you can trust with something as personal and as important as your finances?

It almost goes without saying that the financial adviser you choose must put your best interest at heart. He or she must be a credentialed, trained professional. So how can you ensure that the financial adviser is on the up and up? Here are six steps to help you evaluate a financial adviser.

1. Choose carefully. Start by asking family, friends and other professionals whom they would recommend for personal financial advice. Then set interviews with your top candidates. Make sure you're comfortable with his or her method of doing business for a long and productive relationship.

2. Remember who is in charge. Never forget that you are the one who hired the financial consultant. This is your money; it is your future. You have to take responsibility for making sure your directions are being followed and your money is being handled in a way that is consistent with your risk tolerance.

3. Communicate. If you don't understand what you're being told, ask questions until you understand. Don't be intimidated. If you feel the adviser is making assumptions rather than discussing your situation with you, the investment strategy could be inappropriate.

4. Do a background check. It's a good idea to check the disciplinary record of your adviser. This is fairly easy to do on the Internet. Start by checking the National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) Web site. It will tell you whether the broker or adviser has had any "conduct" problems. Once you've made the decision to work with a financial adviser, consider those with the Certified Financial Planner or Chartered Financial Consultant designation.

5. You're in control. Don't give discretionary power over your assets and don't invest until you fully understand all of the risks and costs involved. Be sure to ask how the planner is paid. Is it fees or commissions? You shouldn't be rushed into making important decisions.

6. Monitor your progress. Have regular meetings with your adviser, at least once a year. Ask for updates on the overall condition of your portfolio. How will your adviser keep you informed of necessary changes?

In today's complex world of finances, professional assistance is becoming a necessity. Be wary of "opportunists" who may try to engage in unsavory practices.

Guard against potential fraud and possible financial losses by taking the time to get to know the financial adviser before you begin a relationship, and be sure to stay in close contact. You should always decide as a team how best to handle your money.

Barbara Williams and Gloria Foote, Certified Financial Planner practitioners, are partners in Financial Focus of Carlsbad. Phone 760-431-3040. Web site www.fifol.com.