



SEC

OFFICE of INVESTOR
EDUCATION and ADVOCACY

“Senior” Specialists and Advisors: What You Should Know About Professional Designations

Some financial professionals use designations that imply that they are experts at helping seniors with financial issues. Many seniors, however, don't understand the sets of initials that may follow the names of these financial professionals or the meaning of the titles - such as “senior specialist” or “retirement advisor” - they use to market themselves.

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The education, experience, and other requirements for receiving and maintaining a “senior” designation vary greatly. In some cases, a financial professional may need to study and pass several rigorous exams - after working in a designated field for several years - to receive a particular designation. In other cases, it may be relatively easy in terms of time and effort to receive a “senior” designation, even for an individual with no relevant experience.

If you want to find out more about a particular professional designation, check out the “Understanding Investment Professional Designations” page on the FINRA’s website (www.finra.org). The page provides

the education and experience requirements for many professional designations. In addition, you can find out whether the granting organization for a particular designation requires continuing education, offers a public disciplinary or investor complaint process, or provides a way to check the status of a financial professional. Keep in mind that neither FINRA nor the SEC endorses any professional designation.

Even after doing some research, it may not be clear to you whether a professional designation represents legitimate expertise, a marketing tool, or something in between. That’s one reason you should always look beyond a financial professional’s designation and determine whether he or she can provide the type of financial services or product you need.

We encourage you to thoroughly evaluate the background of anyone with whom you intend to do business - before you hand over your hard-earned cash. You also should ask questions - that’s the best advice we can give you about how to invest wisely. We see too many investors who might have avoided trouble and losses if they had asked basic questions from the start.

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You can learn more about the questions you should ask about investments and financial professionals by reading our [Ask Questions](#) brochure. Our [Check Out Brokers and Advisers](#) brochure tells you how to get background information on a financial professional, including prior employment history and disciplinary actions.

The Office of Investor Education and Advocacy has provided this information as a service to investors. It is neither a legal interpretation nor a statement of SEC policy. If you have questions concerning the meaning or application of a particular law or rule, please consult with an attorney who specializes in securities law.

