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When you think of what matters most to you and your family, there's nothing more important than health and well-being, says Kirk Cassidy, a Registered Investment

Advisor (RIA) who emphasizes the importance of the holistic approach to personal

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engaged in a fulfilling lifestyle – all of these things can add up, and it's not greedy to want these things.”

Having a well-balanced, holistic financial plan is equally important, especially as individuals approach retirement, Cassidy says. Such a blueprint should cover guaranteed income planning, wealth management, tax minimization strategies, long-term care planning and legacy planning.

“You’ll want a model that integrates all of those criteria, but a truly holistic approach is resource-laden and hard work,” he says. “Most financial professionals are narrowly focused and aren’t interested in harmonizing the big-picture perspective. That’s why it’s worth cross-checking the qualifications of a professional who is planning your financial destiny.”

Cassidy reviews some criteria you’ll want to consider in selecting a financial advisor.

- **RIA.** This became an important acronym in 1940 with the Investment Advisers Act. An RIA is, in part, defined as a “person or firm that, for compensation, is engaged in the act of providing advice, making recommendations, issuing reports or furnishing analyses on securities, either directly or through publications.” In other words, a person or firm with the RIA designation is always guided by the best interest of the client, and not the advisor or firm itself.

- **Veiled salesperson.** “There is a huge debate going on in our industry regarding the standards that guide our practice,” he says. “Unfortunately, the bar is fairly low if you want to be a financial professional.” Currently, most financial advisors are not fiduciaries, obligated to do what is in the best interest of the client. However, there is a push to raise the bar. You’ll want an advisor who actually cares about your financial well-being, who is more than simply transactional and only selling products.

- **Education.** Unfortunately, most middle-income Americans who are 50 or older

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- **Time.** For some folks in any industry, customer service can be as shallow as a smiling face and a “Thanks, have a nice day!” Real customer service, on the other hand, involves putting in the time, utilizing professional resources and being honest about a client’s well-being.

“We’re all clients of someone, and I know how I’d like to be treated,” Cassidy says. “Putting in the time and effort is important. We put in at least 30 hours designing and implementing a holistic retirement plan.”

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