
5 Questions to Ask Financial Advisors Before Hiring Them

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January is when many of us think about what we want to change, what we want to start, what we want to do better.

You might even be thinking about contacting a financial advisor for the first time but aren't sure what to ask. In fact, many people walk into that first meeting with a potential financial advisor feeling vulnerable, maybe even worried they'll embarrass themselves. It's important to recognize that you understand more about investing than you think you do.

If you applied to multiple colleges instead of betting everything on your dream school, you were diversifying. If you took a job with better benefits over one with higher pay, you were balancing risk and reward. If you've worn a life jacket even though you knew how to swim, you were managing risk. These are investment principles in action.

Think of this first meeting with an advisor as the beginning of what could be a decades-long partnership. You're interviewing for one of the most important positions in your life: the person who will help guide your family's financial future. Good advisors welcome questions because they know that understanding builds trust, and trust is the foundation for everything that follows. So here are some questions to consider asking:

1. "WHAT'S YOUR INVESTMENT PHILOSOPHY?"

A philosophy is a compass that guides you through turbulent times. If an advisor promises to eliminate risk or consistently beat the market, that's a red flag. Markets work precisely because uncertainty exists. Without uncertainty, there would be no opportunity for returns above what you get from a simple savings account. The kind of advisor you want to work with might say: "I can't predict the future, but I can help you prepare for it."

2. "ARE YOU A FIDUCIARY, AND HOW DO YOU GET PAID?"

These two questions go hand in hand. A fiduciary is legally required to put your interests ahead of their own. Ask directly: "Are you a fiduciary at all times when working with me?" The answer should be an immediate yes.

Then understand how they're compensated. Good advisors use different models. Some charge a percentage of assets they manage. Others use flat fees or hourly rates. What matters is alignment and transparency. The best advisors can explain every cost and why their model serves clients like you.

3. "DO YOU WORK WITH PEOPLE IN MY CIRCUMSTANCES?"

You want someone who specializes in people like you, whether you're a teacher approaching retirement, an entrepreneur building wealth, or someone who just inherited money. Ask them to walk you through how they work with someone in your situation. They should be able to show you real examples (with confidentiality protected, of course) of how they've helped similar clients navigate challenges.

4. "HOW DO YOU HELP BEYOND INVESTMENTS?"

Advisors can coordinate with tax professionals, estate attorneys, and insurance specialists. They help with college planning, retirement income strategies, and sometimes even family financial literacy.

5. "HOW ARE MY ASSETS PROTECTED?"

Your money should be held by an independent custodian that is separate from your advisor. Your advisor directs the investments according to your plan but never actually holds your money.

An advisor may spend more time listening than talking in that first meeting. They might ask: What are your goals? What keeps you up at night? What does winning look like for you? They want to know about your family, your values, your dreams. Because investing connects to what money can do for the people and causes you care about.

Chemistry matters. This is someone you'll call during the next crisis. And as I like to say, if you live long enough, there will be one. You need someone whose voice calms you down, who you trust enough to follow when every headline screams disaster.

These questions are designed to start a conversation that could transform your family's financial future. The best advisors I know would be grateful you came prepared. They know that clients who understand their approach are more likely to stay disciplined, achieve their goals, and refer their friends.

I hope that you leave that first meeting feeling heard, understood, and optimistic about the future. Not because the advisor promised unrealistic returns, but because you found someone who gets you. Someone who will be your thinking partner for life's biggest financial decisions. The right advisor becomes part educator, part strategist, part coach, and sometimes part counselor. They earn their fee by helping you capture the returns markets offer to disciplined, long-term investors.

And remember: The fact that you're taking this step and preparing for this conversation shows you're ready for one of the most important partnerships of your life.

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