

Don't let your lack of funds stop you from seeking help from a financial adviser

401(k) ADVISER

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Stories about the impending retirement income "crisis" for many Americans are everywhere. Yet a recent survey conducted for CNBC and Acorns determined that fewer than 5% of Americans seek the guidance of a financial adviser. So why are so many people who need help with their finances not getting it?

The CNBC survey reveals that some feel too intimidated to talk with anyone about something they know so little about. To them, sitting down with a financial adviser feels like stepping into the ring with a 25-year-old Mike Tyson.

Others think, why talk with someone about how to manage something I don't have? It's easy to understand why so many feel this way given the financial service industry's strong marketing push for its "wealth management" services.

In my experience, it's the people with the least financial wealth who are often the ones that benefit the most from even a few minutes spent with an expert who can explain how the financial game is played. Someone who can point out behaviors, some of which may be subconscious, that undermine your ability to accumulate assets. Behaviors that, with a little coaching and practical advice, can be changed into habits that help instead of hurt.

Here are a few topics to consider discussing with a financial adviser when you're getting started:

- **Spending tips:** Control monthly spending by creating a simple budget you can live with.
- **Saving priorities:** Where to stash whatever extra cash you have left over each month.
- **Dealing with debt:** Prioritizing which debts to pay first and fitting these payments into your budget.
- **Buying your first home:** Often your best next move after you've got control of your spending, saving and debt.

Mastering these issues leads to financial independence at retirement and should be a priority for everyone. But finding an expert willing to have these conversations can be difficult.

Finding an adviser

The financial services industry is huge and highly profitable. Tens of thousands of representatives from banks, insurance companies, brokerage firms, mutual fund companies, accounting firms and wealth managers all compete fiercely to help the wealthy get wealthier.

But for the other 95% of the population without meaningful accumulated wealth, these advisers are generally not available. That's because most advisers are compensated based on the products and services they sell.

If you're just getting started, or have been less than successful accumulating assets to invest, here are your best options for finding help.

Employer provided advisers

The good news is that employers are finally beginning to recognize two undeniable facts: first, that American workers are poorly prepared to make important financial decisions, and second, that financially stressed people make less effective employees.

As more and more employers wake up to this reality, they are increasingly sponsoring programs designed to boost their employees' financial well-being. This a huge advancement in the battle to get professional financial advice to the people who need it most, but who often cannot afford to pay for it.

If you are fortunate to work for an organization that makes financial wellness or financial counseling services available, be sure to take full advantage. Professional financial advice from an objective financial adviser — avoid those shilling products — can add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the retirement savings of the average American worker.

Financial planners who charge by the hour

If you don't have access to free financial advice at work, your next best option is to seek help from an adviser who charges by the hour for basic budgeting and financial planning advice. For advisers, this business model is not nearly as lucrative as one that involves selling insurance or mutual funds, so these folks are harder to find. But seeking a paid-by-the-hour adviser is worth it so you don't have to worry about the advice you receive being driven by the adviser's personal profit motive.

To locate an hourly fee only financial planner near you, try these websites: <https://garrettplanningnetwork.com> or <https://www.xyplanningnetwork.com>.

Online tools

For self-starters, there is a tremendous amount of financial planning resources and tools online. Some of our favorites include: www.bankrate.com; www.consumerfinance.gov; www.investopedia.com; and www.saveandinvest.org.

Don't wait any longer

If you need help getting your financial house in order, don't let your lack of accumulated wealth stop you from taking the important first step of sitting down with a financial adviser. My suggestion is that you make this a priority in the new year. You will be amazed the difference a few adjustments can make.

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