Taking Stock: That alphabet soup doesn't spell success

by Malcolm_Berko

Dear Mr. Berko: While my wife and I were visiting friends in Delray Beach, Fla., recently, we attended a financial seminar run by two young men who were very persuasive speakers. Each man's card says CIS (certified insurance specialist), CSA (certified senior specialist), CAS (certified annuity specialist), CTA (certified tax specialist) and BCES (board-certified estate-planning specialist). The younger one is also a CSC (certified senior consultant) and a CTS (certified tax specialist). Those men are so young and my wife and I wonder how they can earn all those titles and retain all that information. Their specialty is taking over all a person's assets and putting together a growth plan, a tax plan, a retirement income plan, an estate plan, an insurance plan and "using our knowledge, expertise, experience we coordinate all these areas to generate maximum effectiveness while saving you tens of thousands of dollars each year." I've sent you their corporate brochure and would like to have your comments on their expertise. Also, would you tell us what you think of a company called PacificHealth Laboratories, which one of these gentlemen told us that one of their largest stock positions and that he believes it can be a $30 stock in two to three years.

F. and C.R.

Wilmington, N.C.

Dear F. and C.R.: To the best of my knowledge, those abbreviations are tripe and pure, unmitigated, pretentious nonsense.

Placing those numerous initials on a business card or letterhead make as much sense as putting perfume on a hog. In fact, not a single one of those silly designations is worth the price of an overripe banana! Now any dope with fifth-grade reading skills and the ability to write a check for $500 to the Institute of Business & Finance is given one of those silly designations. And the young lads who wear those cockamamie initials like a cocked hat probably spent a total of a week's time collecting them from the IBF.

A CSC or a CSA or a CSFP or a CFS or a CTS has as much value as last month's garbage. The young lions who proudly display them like neon lights use those designations to obscure their youth, their limited experience and knowledge. If you need tax advice please visit a certified professional accountant, not some juvenile delinquents who in three days' time got themselves a bunch of dippy initials. And if you need help in estate planning, for heaven's sake see an attorney not a doe-like child who paid $350 to become a board-certified estate-planning specialist in three days. Those initials do not - and I repeat, "do not" - confer on the bearer the expertise necessary to give you knowledgeable and dependable advice. Rather, they camouflage the bearer's ignorance and impress the gullible prospects who attend their seminars.

If you're going to have surgery, you want to use a surgeon who has had years of experience and has completed thousands of those procedures. You certainly don't want to use a surgeon who is a couple years out

of surgery school and has only done 30 or 40 of those procedures. And so it is with a financial adviser. Young lads in their 30s or 40s with a little more than five years' experience are still novices in this business. When you need financial advice seek a professional who has at least 20 years of wisdom and experience as well as a sizable personal portfolio, too.

I'm surprised that one of those lads admitted to owning PacificHealth Laboratories Inc. (PHLI.OB-$2.10), which isn't located in California but rather New Jersey. This is a $6 million revenue company that peddles nutritional products that are supposed to cure bromidosis, halitosis, osmosis, snoring, type 11 diabetes, increase muscle mass, promote weight-loss and eliminate the common cold. This is certainly a "wonder" elixir.

Frankly, I'm impressed that PHLI.OB is this lad's largest position. In fact, I'm impressed enough to recognize that this kid has gangrene on the brain. So you might consider getting a restraining order on the basis that his advice may be hazardous to your wealth.

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