



## Defining Professionalism in Financial Planning

What makes a person a professional? Is it her appearance, behavior, attitude or knowledge? Most definitions of the word “professional” include one or more of those concepts, and also include meeting technical and ethical standards related to a specific livelihood. The combined effort of individuals committed to professional behavior supports the emergence of a profession, but it only becomes established when society recognizes and values the profession and its practitioners.

When we deal with doctors, lawyers and accountants, we expect a certain level of respect, courtesy and professional conduct. Consumers have a right to expect the same level of professional conduct from their financial advisors.

Financial Planning Standards Board Ltd. (FPSB), the preeminent international financial planning standards authority for competent and ethical financial planners, includes professionalism as a principle in its *Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility*. In addition to demonstrating exemplary professional conduct when dealing with clients and others in business-related activities, FPSB encourages financial planners to conduct themselves in ways that enhance and maintain the financial planning profession’s public image and ability to serve the public interest.”

“People should expect the same responsible, ethical treatment and professional conduct from financial planners as they do from their doctor or their lawyer,” said Stephen O’Connor, a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER professional from New Zealand. “Regardless of the client’s financial situation or needs, my firm and I treat each client with respect and courtesy, and at every stage of the financial planning process, I communicate through my words and my actions that we are involved in a professional engagement.”

“It isn’t enough for each financial planner in isolation to say he or she is a professional, financial planners need to work together to build public respect for financial planning as a profession,” said Prem Govender, a South Africa-based CFP professional. “As professionals, we have an obligation to uphold our own standards and behave in a way that not only protects our image, but also serves the public interest. And that means always working to raise our level of performance and commitment, and taking action against financial planners who fail to live up to our profession’s expectations.”

### **Principle 5 – Professionalism** ***Act in a manner that demonstrates exemplary professional conduct.***

Professionalism requires behaving with dignity and showing respect and courtesy to clients, fellow professionals, and others in business-related activities and complying with appropriate rules, regulations and professional requirements. Professionalism requires the financial planning professional, individually and in cooperation with peers, to enhance and maintain the profession’s public image and its ability to serve the public interest.

Financial planning has emerged as a professional practice worldwide – enhancing the image and reputation of the profession and serving the public interest are a hallmark of financial planners’ professional commitment. But not everyone who calls himself a financial planner behaves with appropriate professionalism – advisors who have earned the CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER certification have committed to exemplary professional conduct. To learn more about your rights as a financial planning client, visit [www.fpsb.org](http://www.fpsb.org).