

Financial advice proves complex, demanding role

By Don Mecoy
Business Writer

Brian Puckett graduated from the University of Oklahoma's law school at the tail end of the state's oil and real estate bust, but foreclosures and bankruptcies didn't interest him.

He took a job with a Florida law firm that allowed him to practice the business law he aspired to. Over six years of legal practice, Puckett found himself more interested in providing investment advice than legal advice — even when that conflicted with his firm's policy.

Puckett, who also earned an accounting degree from OU, returned to Oklahoma City and obtained professional financial adviser training and hung out his shingle in 1994. But the business was not an overnight success.

"I would say that I was a bit naïve thinking that it would be easier than it really was," Puckett said. "Just because I felt like I had a good handle on how to put together a solid financial strategy for somebody didn't necessarily mean I was going to have people walking in the door all the time just handing me their life savings."

A "slow build" over time has created Puckett Financial Advisors LLC, a company that employs five people and handles more than \$80 million in assets.

Puckett, 43, talked about his business and his life during a conversation last week with *The Oklahoman*. This is an edited version of that discussion.

Q: What is your role as a financial adviser?

A: In the beginning of a relationship, I think the financial adviser's most important role is to give solid unbiased financial advice. People don't come here at first to be

EXECUTIVE Q&A

Brian Puckett

- Position: Founder, Puckett Financial Advisors.
- Age: 43.
- Family: Divorced, son Jay, 13.
- Hometown: Edmond.
- Educational background: Bachelor's degree in accounting and law degree from the University of Oklahoma. Puckett also is a Certified Public Accountant.
- Most admired living person: Bono.
- Philosophy: "Always make your future better than your past."
- Biggest extravagance: Ski boat.
- Hero: Jesus Christ.
- One thing would change about self: Not to expect perfection.
- Recently read: "Our Brave New World" by Charles Gave.

your friend. Over time the relationship grows sometimes into more than just an adviser; I've become good friends with a lot of clients.

One of the most important things I do is just put everything aside and just listen to what somebody is trying to accomplish and how can we add value to that or not. I think that a financial adviser will do a disservice to his or her client if they listen and just give the client what they want because it's not always what's in the client's best interest. I'm not really



Investment adviser Brian Puckett is shown Wednesday in his office.

interested in what sells, I'm interested in what works. I think that that's what most people come here for and that's the way our business has been built. People want the whole unvarnished truth, even if it's not pretty. And sometimes it's not, oftentimes it's not.

Q: Have you changed the way you do your job since 1994?

A: Yeah. I would say we've changed a lot about the way that we do it. When I first started back in '94, one of the things that attracted me to financial planning was that it seemed so logical. I mean, here you are at Point A and you're trying to get to Point B. Here's a black-and-white strategy that will get you from Point A to Point B and you can get on your computer and use a 9 percent rate of return and a 3 percent inflation rate and 25 percent tax rate.

Those look great, but they never were true. And that's because the world we live in is such a messy world and everything's changing all the time.

It's kind of funny. In the beginning it was a financial calculator, a yellow pad and a pen and that was the way

we did financial planning. And to tell you the truth, we're pretty much back to that model now.

Q: Let's say I'm looking for a financial adviser. What's a question I should ask them?

A: I'm real biased with this question. I think that a financial adviser, at a minimum, should go in writing and be a fiduciary to their client. And that is that all the time, no matter what, they put the client's interests first. You have this kind of interesting rule that the SEC has promulgated that allows a lot of big brokerage firms to call themselves financial advisers when they, by law, are not fiduciaries to their clients. I personally would not hire a financial adviser unless they were willing to (do that). I would expect any financial adviser that I would hire and pay good money to put my interests first no matter what — and to put that in writing to me. I think that is such a basic — to me that is not a high standard. It's just what an ordinary, prudent person would do in the circumstances. And many of the financial advisers, or people who call themselves financial advisers, won't do that basic thing.

I think there are a lot of good

people at a lot of national firms, but think that a lot of their hands are tied because the managements of those big firms say "No. We're not going to allow you to put in writing that you're a fiduciary for the client. I think it's a liability issue they are concerned with."

Q: Do you have a goal for your business in the coming years?

A: I have really been on a path of quality more than quantity. Our growth rate this year was about 18 percent, not including market gains. I like, I really enjoy the one-on-one personal financial planning side. I don't have a goal of having a whole bunch of junior financial advisers.

I have been on a path of what I would call measured growth, trying to maintain quality. Quite honestly, I've been trying to see how small I can stay and still grow the business. But we're busting at the seams. So we are going to relocate. In the first half of 2007, we are going to be building a new building just because we need more space.

Don Mecoy: 475-3942, dmeoy@oklahoman.com