

An inspired player

Graham Cleveland's commitment to Christianity is both spiritual and practical and founding Trinity Wealth Management has enabled him to offer a successful brand of holistic financial planning that works for many people on many levels. Mark Battersby reports.

Whack! The ball sails cleanly off the stick and rockets into the corner of the net. It takes skill, vision and considerable drive to weave your way through a hockey pitch and nip one past the goalie.

Enter Graham Cleveland, former star of St Albans town hockey team, who unsurprisingly comes across as a focused and driven individual. Whatever he decides to do he gives it his all and this quality has had profound implications for the way he has developed his career.

When Cleveland committed to the Christian faith, he later started applying biblical principles to the way he conducted his business life including giving a portion of his profits to charity and encouraging clients to do the same.

Two thirds of his company's client base are Christians but all the firm's customers appreciate the spiritual dimension that underpins Trinity Wealth Management's financial advice.

'They all know where we are coming from. We will pray with our Christian clients and pray for our non Christian ones. This is all about looking after our clients. We want to show them Christian compassion,' says Cleveland.

He goes to a Church of England church but he was brought up in a Baptist Church 'and to me that's irrelevant. It is all about being a Christian, that's the core. As a Christian you are trying to be like Christ – that's the true walk,' he says.

He adds that his faith provides firm foundations with principles for living and running businesses, which his co-director John Cobb also adheres to. 'It's about having your feet on the ground, it's a rock I stand on not a crutch I lean on,' says Cleveland.

The formative years

Trinity Wealth Management is certainly in an appropriate location – the town of St Albans has a fine cathedral at its heart. Cleveland grew up in nearby Luton, an area with a very different feel to it.

Following the family tradition, he completed a four-year technical apprenticeship at Luton's Vauxhall plant where his dad had spent much of his working life.

Cleveland learned about mechanical engineering and business studies there and believes this has contributed to his practical mind and his ability to think logically.

After working two years beyond the apprenticeship he decided he did not want to 'stay in a box for 30 years like my Dad' at which point he also became a Christian.

He was 22 then and he prayed for an opportunity to get out. Two areas he really enjoyed were dealing with people and working

with figures so when he saw an advert in a paper for Financial Planning Service (FPS), he decided to join up. 'It was an interesting training. I met Trevor Deaves and I put him right on a few things!' he laughs.

The hard sales environment of FPS does not sound as though it easily squares with the Christian world but Cleveland says it was a great learning experience, even though they wanted him to tap into his church contacts, to which he responded with a clear 'no'.

He still did loads of cold calling and he experienced the worst end of financial services. 'It was in at the deep end and you learnt your sales skills really well.'

Cleveland says cold calling is not about pushing people but more about asking the right questions to get the right answers.

'It was a case of God will provide, and God did provide. And I did really well. And one month I came in the top 10 out of the whole sales team which was pretty hot,' he says.

But somewhat inevitably he was not happy with the ethics of it all and moved to Prudential in 1987 where he also shone.

One year he won a Caribbean cruise as one of the top 400 salesman in the country out of around 9,000. This was an ideal opportunity to impress his wife-to-be but there was one slight hitch: 'We had only been going out for eight weeks and I phoned up and said we can't share a cabin, is there another Christian?'

Fortunately there was – a man who was due to be married and Cleveland shared with him. They later went to each others' weddings and are still friends today.

Cleveland enjoyed his work at the Pru but when he was offered promotion to become an area manager he was unprepared to move to the new location they suggested.

A lesson from God and the act of giving

So based in Luton he joined Merchant Investors as a tied agent and commuted to Bletchley for about three years until 'the guy who ran the company messed it up and I left there with money owing to me'.

Cleveland was as good as bankrupt because his boss did not pay him for months and he found himself saddled with overdrafts and negative equity.

The year was 1990 and Cleveland was

young, married and wanting to start a family 'It was a nightmare,' he says, 'but I stuck firm.'

He remembers walking across the road and saying: 'God, I want to go independent if I'm going to go anywhere.' Then about an hour later he got a phone call from one of his friends who ran an independent firm who said why don't you try going down the independent route. 'It was incredible,' he says.

Around this time he also came to the conclusion that he needed to tithe, even though he was in a sorry state of debt.

With whatever came in he started giving 10% away and he kept a log book of every penny that came in. 'I have not stopped to this day,' he says.

The money came in from places that he just did not expect and 10 years later he had paid off everything. 'I moved from Luton to Chorleywood, bought a house, got out of negative equity and I've never looked back. It's been amazing.'

The lesson he drew from this experience was that God was teaching him about money and the value of it and what it means.

He found the more he gave the more kept coming back in.

A fairly brief stint as a self-employed commission-based adviser selling car contents and life cover with broker ECI Financial Services in 1991 ended when he did not see eye to eye with a co-worker there and another opportunity arose at The Investment Practice in New Malden.

A Christian business

This next move was very significant as Barry Horner, a *New Model Adviser*® Cover Star in Issue 4, interviewed Cleveland for the job. The firm's boss was David Flowers and his secretary was married to a good friend of Cleveland's and that's how the introduction came.

Horner told him afterwards that he had had an appalling interview, but Cleveland says he was just honest.

Nevertheless something special must have shone through and they gave him a chance on a self-employed basis to work there.

'We were all Christians together and we specialised in the doctor's market,' he says.

Over nearly a decade there he experienced



Graham Cleveland says:

- 1 You have to make a profit! Watch your bottom line. Profit is for dough, turnover is for show.
- 2 Never forget who provides you with income and recommendations. Providing excellent service and deepening your relationship with your clients must always be your first priority.
- 3 Enjoy your work, have some fun! Laughter should never be too far away.
- 4 Put your family first.
- 5 Embrace external wisdom, it comes in many forms. We don't know it all, so don't be afraid to ask.

Trinity Wealth Management business figures			
Year	2004	2005	2006
Turnover	£231,000	£295,000	£350,000
% of recurring income	60%	60%	60%
Funds under advice	£13m	£17m	£21m
Total number of employees	4	3	3
Total number of clients	120	130	140
Total number of active clients	80	90	100

'There is more on materialism and money in the Bible than there is on prayer, faith and a lot of other subjects'



A fine balance: Part of Cleveland's business model is to give a proportion of his profits to charity but he is careful to ensure that his family and business costs are already provided for

some tough as well as good times and has no regrets at all. However, he always had a desire to set up his own business.

After about four years at The Investment Practice he met Jon Cobb, now a director at Trinity, who was then working at Lloyd's of London as a claims broker.

He tells me a story about how one day Cobb looked smarter than usual and was on his way for a final interview at what he thought was going to be the perfect job.

'And as I walked away I felt God say: "Tell him he's going to work with you." This feeling just would not go away and so I went up to him and said: "I believe God is telling me you are going to work with me."'

But Cobb was convinced that he was on his way to clinch a great deal elsewhere, so Cleveland said: 'Alright, if what I feel is right I'll pray that you don't get that job tomorrow.'

Cobb did not get the job and 'I dare say he was cursing me,' says Cleveland. 'However, he felt maybe there was something in this and he took the exams, passed them and joined and we have not looked back. And apart from my faith the best part of the business is my relationship with Jon,' says Cleveland.

Meanwhile, Cleveland became sales manager with The Investment Practice and then when the Americans arrived in the form of Ronald Blue as the new owners, they became fee-based, in 1998.

'It was scary, we used to charge £750 for a day's work and we lost a few clients. We didn't manage it right, but you live and learn and we carried on. I was confident that it was the right way to go,' he says.

Biblical principles in financial planning

When Ronald Blue entered the frame the company had been practising 'biblical' financial planning for years. By this time Cleveland had moved to Chorleywood, an affluent

area with a big church following and started to add value by looking at how the bible says one should handle finances.

'There are 1,500 verses to do with money and possessions. There is more on materialism and money than there is on prayer, faith and a lot of other subjects in the bible. Jesus had a lot to say about wealth because for many people greed is a stronger part of their life,' says Cleveland.

Translated into Trinity's financial planning Cleveland explains the five biblical principles he now applies.

First, understand that God owns it all, you can't take it with you. This influences your whole approach to financial planning.

Second, spend less than you earn. Cleveland elaborates: 'Try and live debt free, that's the principle. Pay off all short-term debt first and then eliminate long-term debt.'

The third principle covers goal setting and making dreams a reality. Cleveland sometimes spends five or six hours talking to clients about where they are heading. 'Most people go through life and never stop to discover the ladder is up against the wrong wall,' he says.

The fourth principle is to look ahead and that involves writing a financial plan, and the fifth principle is to give generously.

Most of Trinity's clients give 10% to 20% and a central element of estate planning is how much the clients are going to give to particular causes. 'It brings people out,' says Cleveland. 'People with particular passions can leave a legacy that has far more influence than they may have had in their lifetime and it can give them a sense of peace.'

Up and running with Trinity

'When we set up Trinity it was amazing,' says Cleveland. 'One night I could not sleep and I just felt that God was saying "I want you to go on your own."'

CV: Graham Cleveland

1980	Vauxhall four-year technical apprenticeship
1985	Financial Planning Service Direct sales adviser
1987	Prudential agent/adviser
1989	Merchant Investors Tied agent/adviser
1991	EIC Financial Services IFA adviser
1992	The Investment Practice/Ronald Blue Adviser/national sales manager
July 2001 to present	Trinity Wealth Management Director (founder)

Qualifications

ONC & HNC in Business Studies & Mechanical Engineering
Financial Planning Certificates 1, 2 & 3
Advanced Financial Planning Certificates in Taxation & Trusts, Pension Planning, Holistic Financial Planning

Interests

Sport: Badminton, golf, hockey, football
Encouraging others and organising events.
Being part of a lively Church.

'God gave me this verse but it seemed totally irrelevant. I went to someone's house to chat through setting up my own business. I had never spoken to him before and I went into the room and he had one poster on the wall with one verse and it was that exact verse that I was given – it was affirmation that was so right,' he says.

The name Trinity Wealth Management was Cleveland's wife's idea and it encapsulated what they wanted to convey namely 'Us, the client and God.' They also had a handy

contact in the form of a Christian designer, who having already knocked up logos for the likes of BT and Orange, turned his talent to Trinity.

The logo on the business card is meant to be three pebbles on top of each other and then on the back around a bigger version of the logo they have put the following words: 'Prepare, listen, smile, love, choose, focus, believe, relax, act, forgive, pray, trust, change, persist, accept, risk, wait.'

'If you are ever in a situation and you don't know what to do, ask God and one of those words will jump out at you. We've used it and it works so we share that with anyone who comes along,' says Cleveland.

For the first six months both Cleveland and Cobb worked from home and then they moved to the centre of St Albans with a shop front and their name above it.

The two men played to their strengths. Cleveland's own specific role in the practice includes doing the whole holistic financial package, for which he has the relevant qualifications. Cobb, meanwhile, focuses on the investment side where his experience and qualifications can be used to the full.

Later, the opportunity came along to buy a freehold office in a new development outside the centre and they now have four times as much space, covering two floors.

They paid a cool £360,000 for this which was borrowed through their Sipp. 'So actually Trinity still does not owe a penny. It's the Sipp that's borrowed it. It's a 75% mortgage,' says Cleveland.

However, if they let out upstairs they will be better off than renting and they have plenty of parking – a real plus for St Albans.

A year after setting up the business they established a five-year giving plan. What they give is out of profits, so they provide for their families first and they also cover all their costs. 'It says a lot in the Bible about managing



Man on a mission: Jon Cobb in the Dominican Republic

what we have and if I can't manage, how can I tell my clients to?' he says.

Chronic fatigue syndrome strikes

It was all going so well but out of the blue came an unexpected development.

'The hardest thing for us over the past three years has been my illness. I've had chronic fatigue syndrome, ME. We have still been able to buy this place and survive because we are fee-based. We would have caved in if we'd relied on commission,' says Cleveland.

At the start of year two Cobb had said he thought it was going to be quite a tough year and it was then that Cleveland started to feel ill. By the end of June he collapsed and had to take four months off work. 'It took me an hour to write one small line on an email,' he says.

Cobb stepped into the breach. 'He has been brilliant, absolutely brilliant,' says Cleveland. Cobb's sister Jenny also works at the firm as an administrator. Cleveland mentions here the difficulty of finding a good paraplanner: 'That's hard enough but finding a Christian paraplanner is really difficult.'

The good news is that Cleveland is able to manage his illness much better now even though sometimes it gets to three or four o'clock in the afternoon and he decides that he has got to go home.

Since becoming ill he has stopped making evening appointments and never works at weekends.

'I start work between 9.30 and 9.40 and finish at 5.30pm. I know the hours I've got to be focused and efficient because my family come first, before my business, and that's one of our main goals.'

The firm has 100 clients. 'We charge £1,100 a day or £165 an hour. The production of a full financial plan usually takes between three and six days and it is presented in a quality suede type binder. The plan can also be delivered electronically,' says Cleveland.

The plan contains all the client's goals and they will pay a set fee for Trinity to review them each year, ranging from between £2,000 and £4,000 depending on what is involved.

One of their clients, a top surgeon, has a lot of private income: 'We do loads for him and we charge between three and four days' financial planning but then we manage all his assets for which we charge 1% for up to £500,000 and then it's tiered down from there,' says Cleveland.

When it comes to asset allocation there is a verse in the Bible which describes diversification. It can be found in Ecclesiastes 11 v 2 and says: 'Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.'

Cobb, who is responsible for this area, says the verse is attributed to King Solomon, 'and his advice to spread your risk certainly predates any efficient frontier theories'.

The advice is not applied to the letter and all portfolios

have three asset classes: equities, fixed interest and property. Larger clients can also have hedge funds included as an option.

Further diversification is then achieved through geography and to a lesser extent 'themes' such as technology and healthcare.

There are five risk profiles and a set asset allocation for each. 'The asset allocation is tinkered with, but we do not look to get seduced by short-term gain through going too overweight in any particular sector,' says Cobb.

Given the biblical element to Trinity's advice you might think that there would be a strong focus on ethical investments but in fact they take a broad view here. 'Socially responsible investing is admirable but we feel our responsibility lies with how the individual client stewards his resources, rather than the world as a whole,' says Cobb.

What Cobb does do is to go on mission work and he spent time in the Dominican Republic this September on a project to build houses for Haitian refugees.

He uses it as holiday but any Trinity employee gets a week to go and do mission work.

The future for Trinity certainly looks exciting. They have just set up a charitable trust called Trinity Ministries. 'A lot of clients want to give but are not sure where they want the money to go. In the meantime it might be good to give it in that tax year but you need a holding trust so we'll hold clients' money within the trust and then they can give it from there,' says Cleveland.

They have also managed to get a commercial website called financialadvisers.com. 'We've got a specialist who buys web names and that's how he got us that name.'

You can imagine the number of Google hits the company could attract with this but as Cleveland cautions: 'I need to be in a position where I can cope. I need to be 100% physically fit. Our prayer is that we only have the business that is right for us, that we can manage and look after really well.'

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Paul Willans, chief executive of Mazars Financial Planning, on professionalism and aiming high.



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