



Third-Party Advisor Offers First-Class Advice To Financial Professionals, Individuals

Introduction

In my three decades as a financial writer, I have interviewed thousands of advisors within the financial services industry. Occasionally I meet someone able to think outside the box from a marketing perspective. I met such an advisor in Phoenix, AZ recently: [Keith Gapusan](#), managing principal of Arizona Wealth Management, LLC. Keith has carved out a unique — and successful — niche in the financial services universe. In the process, he's making life a little easier for CPAs and estate planning attorneys.

Let me start at the beginning, a few months back. While interviewing an estate planning attorney for an article I was writing on wealth transfer issues, our discussion turned to the amount of financial and investment advice available to consumers nowadays. "Information overload" the attorney called it. "I have clients that come in and tell me they were watching 'Mad Money' on TV and heard about some hot stock or they were online and read about some new overseas fund and now they are excited and ready to take the plunge. They want me to tell them it's a good idea."

I asked the attorney what he tells clients when that happens. He said, "I advise my clients to get a second opinion before buying any investment product. Then I set up a three-way conference with my financial advisory consultant."

"You have a financial consultant on staff?" I asked.

"No. That wouldn't be cost effective; I outsource with a financial advisor. I call him in when my clients need an objective opinion about a financial or investment strategy, or when I run into a situation that calls for specialized knowledge. He provides the same service for the CPA firm in the next building."

This sounded like an interesting professional relationship, one I had not encountered previously. I asked the attorney for the advisor's name. I was curious how this new approach worked and how others were using his consulting services to help their clients.

That's how I came to meet Keith Gapusan. Our conversation turned out to be time well spent.

The Interview

MM: Tell me about Arizona Wealth Advisors.

KG: AWA is an independent financial planning and investment management advocacy. We provide objective advice and analysis for the clients of estate planning attorneys, CPAs and other financial professionals.

MM: How is that different from you and another advisor simply referring clients one another?

KG: It's a completely different relationship. We do not solicit business from the clients of other advisors. We are called in when a professional provider needs specialized knowledge, has a unique client service challenge or wants an unbiased second opinion on a planning or investment strategy.

MM: Why wouldn't CPAs or estate planning attorneys have a full-time financial advisor on staff?

KG: Some of the larger firms do. But for most professional providers, the cost of having a knowledgeable, experienced financial advisor on staff can be prohibitive. Then too, advisors with the level of expertise needed to evaluate complicated financial situations and make appropriate suggestions are hard to find. Most of them hold highly compensated, senior positions at major financial firms or have thriving independent practices. As an outsource consultancy, professional providers pay for our help only when they need us.

MM: Can you describe a situation where you were called in to help?

KG: A CPA asked for our help with a client who was recently widowed. She and her husband owned a business and had been clients of the CPA for many years, but the husband always handled the finances. He died suddenly and his widow had only a vague idea of what assets the couple had, where they were located, how their retirement portfolio was being invested and so on. She didn't even know how much life insurance her husband carried.

The CPA wanted to help his client, of course, but there were a hundred details to attend to and it was the middle of tax season, his busiest time of year. Also, he felt uncomfortable pressing her to locate vital records and fill out necessary forms while she was still distraught. Being aware of the time constraints involved, he realized it would be easier for someone outside the situation to come in and make sure things were done promptly and properly.

In meeting with the woman, I learned she had already been approached by the couple's insurance agent who wanted to help her "reallocate her portfolio assets." I knew there would be plenty of volunteers — offering a variety of commissioned financial products — for that lucrative chore. One of the first things we did was to take an inventory of all her assets. She confided that she was uncomfortable with the overall level of risk in her investment portfolio. Suddenly being alone, she was concerned about how to convert the couple's business into investable assets. Once she was able to focus on what had to be done, she had a hundred questions. Based on her new circumstances, I made some suggestions which she was able to discuss with her CPA and attorney. Together, we got her through a really difficult period.

MM: So you offer similar services for the estate planning attorneys you work with?

KG: Yes. I am available to fill in the information gaps regarding almost any client service situation. It may involve offering an independent opinion regarding a planning or wealth management strategy, asset allocation strategy, investment or portfolio analysis, tax, retirement or estate planning issues, etc.

MM: Can you give me an example?

KG: An attorney who frequently calls me in for a second opinion asked me to sit in on a conference with her client, a business owner nearing retirement. The fellow had three children — two sons and a daughter. One son had joined him in business and was the logical choice to take over the company when the father retired. The other son was an architect with no interest in the business. The daughter was married with two children of her own and living on the other side of the country.

The father wanted to provide equally for his three children but was uncertain how to do so. Naturally, he wanted to ensure a comfortable retirement for himself and his wife. He also had a couple of key employees that he wanted to take care of and hopefully retain. The fellow had no succession plan for his business, no formal instructions as to the resolution of his estate should he die prematurely, no clear idea of how much money he would need to retire, and no handle on how to make sure his children were all treated fairly while minimizing estate taxes. Despite the complexity, that's the kind of situation I enjoy helping resolve.

We can help business owners with exit strategies, buy-sell agreements, key man insurance, asset protection strategies, succession plans, programs that shelter business assets from creditors and other issues.

MM: You mentioned you typically meet with professional providers and their clients together. What about the client-attorney privilege?

KG: We have a confidentiality agreement with our provider clients to maintain their client-attorney privilege when we are called in to consult with their clients.

MM: Your AWA letterhead says "Advocating Prudent Investment." Tell me about that.

KG: We make certain the clients we are called in to help are well informed and educated so they and their advisors can make good decisions regarding their financial futures. As you know, many financial advisors are product-driven. That may be appropriate in some situations, but where we help is when a professional provider needs an independent, objective source of investment advice.

MM: I see you manage a significant amount of assets; do you work with individual clients as well as professionals?

KG: Yes. In addition to third-party consulting with professionals, I have a separate practice advising individual investors. They rely on me not only for asset management, but for retirement planning and life planning as well.

MM: I imagine your experience helping estate planning attorneys and CPAs with their clients provides you with some unique insight when it comes to your own client relationships.

KG: It does. Every client, every situation is unique, but I approach advising individuals the same way I do advising other professionals, that is, advocating prudent investing. I adhere to the same principals, establish a close working relationship, and try to provide the best available solution for each client. My work with professionals has provided me with opportunities to help solve some complex problems and broadened my perspective. The problem-solving experience I've gained helping professionals and their clients enhanced my knowledge and is often useful in helping my individual clients as well.

MM: That's a nice advantage for you and your clients. By the way, how do people get in touch with you?

KG: They can email me at keith.gapusan@lpl.com or phone 602.224.0002. Our website is www.arizonawealthadvisors.com.

Michael Mitchell is an independent financial writer based in San Diego.