



• The name of David Gardner's financial investing company is borrowed from Shakespeare-era court jesters, or fools, who could tell the king or queen the truth.

'Chief Rule Breaker'

David Gardner, co-founder of The Motley Fool, says his English degree helped him in creating financial advice that is accessible to people of all backgrounds and experience levels.

BY PAMELA BABCOCK

Motley Fool co-founder David Gardner (English and creative writing '88) got a taste of what investing meant as a kid in Washington, D.C. His father, a banking lawyer, would talk about owning — through stock — a piece of the companies that made products familiar to him, such as a favorite brand of chocolate pudding.

His father's fascination with the stock market paid off years later. He set up stock portfolios for each of his children at birth. When they turned 18, he turned the portfolios over to them to manage.

Managing a portfolio before e-Trade might seem daunting, but that experience inspired Gardner, his brother Tom, and a friend to co-found The Motley Fool, a financial investing and advice company for the amateur investor. It began as a stock-picking paper newsletter in 1993 and became one of the first online

communities for investors on AOL. Several years later, the brothers launched www.fool.com. The goal? To educate the masses with unconventional wisdom and an accessible, upbeat sense of humor.

Gardner said his English degree, along with his love of literature, the arts and his own sense of humor, led him to choose the company name, borrowed from Shakespeare. Court jesters — fools — could tell the king or queen the truth without having their heads lopped off. In the staid world of investment advice, the fool's cap logo made The Motley Fool easily identifiable and accessible. Members became known as "Fools," and the Gardners took on unconventional job titles.

As "Chief Rule Breaker," Gardner developed an approach called "Rule Breaker investing" which advises people to invest ahead of the crowd in innovative companies while holding shares well after others have sold. For 28 years, Gardner recommended stocks for a worldwide

membership. He has hosted a weekly podcast since 2015.

Over the years, Gardner made iconic picks such as buying Amazon at \$3.21 a share in 1997. But more important than picking Tesla in 2011 or Netflix in 2004 or Amazon in 1997, the key was he held on to the stocks and recommended others do the same. "When Amazon in the '90s went from \$3 to \$95, we felt like geniuses. But in 2001, when it went from \$95 to \$7, we didn't feel as great. But these days, with it up at \$3,000, we feel really great [again]."

Gardner said learning from UNC English professors such as Doris Betts, Daphne Athas and Bland Simpson helped him recognize that "language is the garment of thought. As we contemplate what our next sentence will be, we're really forced to think clearly to write clearly." Doing that in the opaque world of finance helped translate something that many feel "they could never understand and make it actually perfectly understandable and relatable."

The company, based in Alexandria, Va., has over 600 employees worldwide. Its website and podcasts provide a wealth of investment content for free; premium subscription services offer more custom financial advice. A focus on workplace culture and engagement has reaped dividends, with the company most recently being named to *Inc.* magazine's "Best Places to Work."

Gardner, who lives in Washington, D.C., met his future wife, Margaret McKinnon Gardner (English '88) in a sophomore creative writing class. Both were Morehead-Cain Scholars. In his free time, Gardner loves board, video and card games. He has more than 900 games of different kinds alphabetized on shelves in his home.

Last May, Gardner handed stock-picking duties off to analyst teams. He said he's looking forward to the next chapter and how he can add value to the world. He is serving as chairman of The Motley Fool Foundation, the company's new philanthropic arm.

"I'm a Fool for life," Gardner said with his trademark enthusiasm. "Life should be fun!"