

HIRE AUTHORITY

Here's how **On Wall Street's Top 10 Branch Managers** land the best talent and help shape the industry's future.

Branch managers wear many hats. It's not uncommon to hear the heads of a branch or complex discuss simultaneously serving as recruiters, mentors, coaches and risk managers. And that's on a slow day.

It's not a job for everyone, and those who do it the best will tell you that they are deeply invested in the success of their advisors.

"In our recruiting, we emphasize that ours is an advisor-centric culture. If our advisors are not successful, the parent company won't be successful," says Christopher D. Davidson, who heads an Ameriprise branch in Clearwater, Fla.

Davidson's efforts to recruit and nurture top producers elevated him to be one of our latest Top 10 Branch Managers. Besides being one of the industry's leading bosses, Davidson is a skydiver. Also on the list is a former Home Depot employee and a self-described "physical fitness fanatic."

These elite bosses were nominated by advisors and chosen by a panel of industry experts, who judged the finalists based on qualitative and quantitative data to settle on the top 10.

Read the following bios to learn more about why these managers made the final cut, and how they've made an impact on both their employee advisors and firms.



BRIAN W. KURTZ

FIRM ROBERT W. BAIRD
TITLE MANAGING DIRECTOR, BRANCH MANAGER
LOCATION CLEVELAND
YEARS IN INDUSTRY 26
ADVISORS MANAGED 35
BRANCH AUM \$4 BILLION
EDUCATION JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY

At Baird, Brian Kurtz began as a branch manager — with almost no advisors to manage.

“I started the Cleveland branch from scratch,” he says. “I was an assistant manager at another firm, which was being acquired, so I wanted to leave. When I was approached by Baird about opening a Cleveland branch, I didn’t even know who they were.”

At the time, Kurtz recalls, “I was told that there were four or five advisors who were ready to

come to Baird; they just want to meet the manager.”

Kurtz joined Baird in late 2001; in January 2002, the firm opened a 10,000-square-foot office in Cleveland. “As it turns out,” he says, “the person who told me about those four or five advisors embellished a little. Those advisors were nowhere near ready to come. We opened the branch with myself and one other advisor.”

So it was up to Kurtz, who sought advisors by cold calling

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and mailing 10 letters a week.

Fast forward 14 years. Not only does Kurtz now have some 20 advisors to manage in Cleveland, but he is also responsible for another dozen in two older Baird branches, in Columbus and Dayton, Ohio.

Beyond the office, Kurtz, who played football at nearby John Carroll University, coaches youth football. He’s also on the board at St. Martin de Porres High School in Cleveland, which sends students to the branch to do clerical work.

Kurtz believes standards of leadership have changed over the past 10 years. “You still need strength and vision,” he says, “but different concerns will affect how you make decisions. In my view, today’s leader should have humility, openness, collaborativeness, honesty and vulnerability.”

Vulnerability? “In order to build loyalty and trust from your employees,” Kurtz says, “a leader should be comfortable saying, in the right spot, ‘I messed up.’”

Some of Kurtz’ other views

might also raise eyebrows.

“Most teams need a female financial advisor and a generation skipper,” which is how he refers to millennials, a group that includes workers in their mid-30s or younger.

“When you were growing up,” Kurtz asks, “how often did you get to decide where the family was going for dinner? Or what color your room would be painted? For many people, the answer is never.

“But millennials have been involved in such decisions since about the age of 10. They want to be included in everything; that’s how they were raised. It’s helpful to have someone on the team who can relate to that way of thinking.”

As for having women advisors, he notes that husbands generally die before their wives. “Often, the widow will take the assets to another advisor,” he says. “Those assets are more likely to be retained if the widow can relate to a female advisor on the team.”

BY DONALD JAY KORN