

TOP

RANKING THE BEST FINANCIAL ADVISERS

Top GUNS

As shocking as it may seem given the nature of the job, there are no standardized employment qualifications for personal financial advisers. There is no licensing requirement; advisers must only be registered with the State of Connecticut.

As a result, personal financial advisers range from highly experienced investment specialists employed by international financial institutions to individuals who allege to be market savvy. And with Connecticut among the wealthiest states in the nation in both personal wealth and per capita income, the number of those offering investment advice and products continues to grow, as does the array of investment options.

Faced with this ever-expanding uncertainty, where do you turn to find a reliable, trustworthy and successful personal financial adviser to handle your money?

Enter R.J. Shook, author of *The Winner's Circle* series of books, who has been analyzing the practices of the country's top financial advisers for more than a decade. "I first started out as an adviser in the business, and I wasn't able to find a mentor to help guide me in the right direction, and I was real frustrated," says Shook. "I decided to write a book, in order to document the best practices in the industry. And then I wrote a whole series of these books—*The Winner's Circle*—and then decided to start the Winner's Circle organization, made up of outstanding advisers and industry leaders. The industry leaders are my advisory board—presidents, CEOs and a mix from all the big and small firms out there. Our mission is to assess the practices in the industry and to promote the value of advice to investors."

Shook also compiles a semiannual ranking of the top advisers in the country, based on factors including customer satisfaction, ability to service clients and revenue and total assets. Although some advisers listed do represent investors with investable assets less than \$1 million, many of them work exclusively with clients rated as having high net worth (\$1 to \$10 million) as well as ultra-high net worth (\$10 million plus).

"What we do is promote some of the great role models out there—and there are a lot of them," says Shook. "We find them, show what they're doing, what they're doing right and what they're doing with their clients, and it helps everyone better serve their clients, better advise them."

Shook and his team take thousands of nominations from across the country, then rigorously investigate each nominee. Qualifications are independently checked, and supervisors, peers and clients are interviewed. Following that, each nominee is put through an array of quantitative and qualitative criteria. Client portfolio performance is not included since it's "impossible to com-

pare," according to Shook, as very few of the top advisers are audited and no two clients have the same portfolios. Instead, customer satisfaction and client retention are evaluated. Finally, advisers are ranked accordingly, with the top ones from Connecticut taken from the overall list.

"There's lots of great similar traits among the top-rated advisers," suggests Shook. "One thing more than any other is that they are absolutely passionate. Not just passionate about the business, but passionate about serving their clients and always acting in their best interests, no matter what."

"When you care, you truly have a passion for what you're doing," agrees Robert J. Reby, a top adviser and author of *Retire Without Worry* (2004). "You give people direct advice—'This is what I would do if I were you'—and there are no blurred lines there. Top advisers are also pretty good communicators. They can get as complex as you want, like if they're in front of a board of directors or a CPA who wants to 'go under the hood.' But most people don't want to go under the hood. They just want to know what to do.

"One of the mistakes people make in selecting an adviser is that they go through the interview process, and they walk out of the meeting not understanding. And that's because the adviser didn't communicate effectively," Reby adds. "A lot of people say, 'I guess I'm not smart enough to understand it.' Wrong! Everyone is smart enough to understand it. A good adviser is going to make sure you understand it all, and if not, they're going to say, 'Let's slow down a bit. Are you sure you got that?' That, to me, is the way it should work."

Indeed, good communication with clients is seen as critical among the better advisers. "You want to look for a personal financial adviser who is available to answer a variety of

questions," says Robert Brokamp, editor of The Motley Fool's *Rule Your Retirement* newsletter. "If you call and say, 'I have a tax question,' 'I have an estate-planning question,' 'I have a question about taking money out of my IRA,' they're available and willing to take the time to answer. Nobody knows everything, but at least they should say, 'Well, I can get the answer for you.'"

Shook agrees that open dialogue is important. "The advisers that you want to look for are the ones who let you do the talking versus those who do all the talking. The ones who want to learn about you and really want to build that personal relationship, rather than focusing on selling something," he says. "You know you can then trust someone because they're looking out for your best interests. But it's also important because these people tend to build customized asset-allocation strategies and they need to know what your risk-tolerance levels are, and that's very personal. They have to understand what

your goals are, your objectives, what your dreams are for the future, and to do that, the adviser not only has to know you, but people in your family, your professionals, your CPA, your attorneys. He really wants to be familiar with the people who keep your best interests at heart."

Brokamp also warns investors to be wary of advisers making big promises. "If someone tells you that they earn their clients spectacular returns, and it's all returns, returns, returns—how much they can get you—that's a bad sign," he says. "No adviser can do that consistently. Not even Warren Buffett has a great year every year. People have to be realistic about their expectations. A good adviser will say 'we're not going to beat the market every year, but over the long term, I think we can provide you market or exceeding terms.' Someone that tries to wow you with all they can provide you is probably more sizzle than steak."

Still, without a personal recommendation, it can be daunting to find a good adviser. Certification within the field exists, such as the Certified Financial Planner credential (CFP) issued by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards Inc., which requires relevant education and experience, passage of a comprehensive exam and adherence to an ethics code. The Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC) designation, issued by American College in Bryn Mawr, Pa., requires completion of an eight-

course program. On the other hand, there are less-than-reputable individuals who manufacture their own alphabet soup of credentials. To check if an adviser is registered with the state, or if there has been any disciplinary action against him or her, contact the Department of Banking at (800) 831-7225 or visit ct.gov/dob.

Although the top advisers all have experience and

integrity, another consideration, Reby says, is whether they have experience "solving the problems of the person who is interviewing them. If you're a United Airlines pilot, your planner should be comfortable with United Airlines medical insurance, so you don't have to educate him. Find someone who works within your niche," he says. "That way you don't have to spend time getting up to speed. They're ready to deal with your challenges."

And with the Department of Labor projecting the number of advisers to increase faster than the average occupation through 2012, there will be challenges in finding the one best suited to you, which makes resources such as the list on page 42 and The Winner's Circle even more useful.

One more note: Although the financial advisers on this list are among the best, it's ultimately up to you to do your own research when choosing someone to handle your investments. Consider this list as a place to start your search, not the final word.

**"YOU GIVE PEOPLE
DIRECT ADVICE—
'THIS IS WHAT I'D
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Photography by Peter Tepper



**RANKING
THE TOP
PERSONAL
FINANCIAL
ADVISERS**

High Net Worth Name	Years Experience	Firm	Typical City	Typical Account Size ³	Team Total Net Worth ²	Assets ²	Retail (<\$1m) ¹	HNW (\$1m-\$10m) ¹	UHNW (>\$10m) ¹	Foundations	Endowments	Corporations	Small Business
1 John F. Erdmann III	22	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Greenwich	\$5-\$50m	\$25m-\$70m	\$2.5b		•	•				
2 John W. Rafal	31	Essex Financial Services, Inc.	Essex	\$2m	\$3m-\$10m	\$1.4b	•	•				•	•
3 Thomas D. Lips	25	UBS Financial Services Inc.	Hartford	\$1m-\$20m	\$5m-\$50m	\$700m	•	•	•				
4 Ronald Weiner	32	RDM Financial Group, Inc.	Westport	\$1m-\$5m+	\$2m-\$6m+	n/a		•					
5 William J. Greco	20	UBS Financial Services	Hartford	\$4m-\$6m	\$8m-\$12m	\$1.77b		•	•	•			•
6 Brian Hetherington	20	Merrill Lynch & Co.	New Canaan	\$10m+	\$10m+	\$2.7b		•	•				
7 John Mahon	15	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Stamford	\$3m-\$7m+	\$5m-\$15m+	\$1.05b		•	•		•		
8 Harold Trischman	21	Smith Barney	Greenwich	\$800k	\$4m	\$930m	•	•	•				
9 Thomas Vacheron	23	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Fairfield	\$2-\$10m	\$5m	\$850m		•	•				
10 Barry Coutant	31	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Greenwich	\$2m-\$10m	\$5m-\$20m	\$740m	•	•	•				
11 Robert Reby	21	Robert J. Reby & Co., Inc.	Danbury	\$500k-\$1.5m	\$1.5m-\$3m	\$302m	•	•					
12 Dodd Koeckert	23	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Stamford	\$2m-\$4m+	\$5m-\$10m	\$631m	•	•	•				
13 Jeffrey Castle	20	Morgan Stanley	Greenwich	\$500k-\$2m	\$3-\$5m	\$785m	•	•	•				•
14 Elise Shartsis	17	Smith Barney	Greenwich	\$2.5m-\$3m	\$8m-\$12m	\$300m	•	•	•				
15 Earl Winthrop	21	Linsco/Private Ledger	Avon	\$1m-\$3m+	\$3m-\$10m+	\$415m		•	•	•	•	•	•
16 Jack Barnes	17	Smith Barney	Hartford	\$2m	\$5m	\$500m	•		•				
17 Thomas Forma	24	Merrill Lynch & Co.	Farmington	\$2m	\$3m	\$268m	•	•				•	•
18 Mark Wetzel	16	UBS Financial Services	Hartford	\$10m-\$15m	\$25m-\$35m	\$6b			•	•	•	•	•
19 Robert Brody	18	Morgan Stanley	Wilton	\$5m-\$1m	\$1m-\$5m	\$200m	•	•					
20 John Barnes	28	RBC Dain Rauscher	Stamford	\$1m-\$2m	\$4m-\$6m	\$400m	•	•	•				
21 Gerald Dubey	35	Smith Barney	Hartford	\$1m-\$5m	\$2m-\$10m	\$817.4m	•	•	•				
22 Allan Jay	30	Smith Barney	Stamford	\$1m-\$5m	\$3m-\$10m	\$425m	•	•	•	•			•
23 Karen Blanchard	20	RBC Dain Rauscher	Hartford	\$500k-\$1m	\$2.5m-\$5m	\$252m	•	•				•	
24 Patrick Duff	23	Smith Barney	New Haven	n/a	n/a	\$1.2b		•	•			•	•
25 Carl Zuckerberg	15	Relyea Zuckerberg Hanson/ Commonwealth Financial	Stamford	\$4m-\$7m+	\$7m-\$20m	\$561m		•	•				
Retail													
1 Alison Scavone	25	Smith Barney	Westport	\$500k	\$1m	\$255m	•	•					
2 Mary-Ann Bunting	27	Ameriprise Financial	Westport	\$500k-\$3m	\$1m-\$5m+	\$120m	•	•					
3 Lori Price	21	Price Financial Group/ Securities America	Wilton	\$750k+	\$1m	\$140m	•	•					
4 Scott Mather	23	Ameriprise Financial	East Hartford	\$500k	\$1.5m	\$100m	•	•					
5 Marilyn Steinmetz	21	Mutual Service Associates	Avon	\$300k	\$750k	\$110m	•	•	•				

Ranking algorithm includes revenues produced, but is not published.

1. Investable assets, excluding primary residence
2. Total team assets include custodied and noncustodied assets that adviser and team advise. Adviser is ranked on individual assets, or percentage of contribution to team. Different weightings are assigned to different types of assets: e.g., Mahon, Wetzel and Duff received smaller weightings for their institutional assets.
3. Account size and net worth refer to individual business, not institutional.

Ranking Criteria: The Winner's Circle® is an advocacy organization independent of the firms involved and does not receive compensation from the over one

hundred participating firms or its affiliates, financial advisers or the media in exchange for ranking purposes. Each adviser on this year's Connecticut Winner's Circle® list was filtered down from a national list of over 7,000 nominations from securities firms, banks, independent firms and more. The Winner's Circle team vetted each adviser through a host of quantitative and qualitative criteria, including assets managed, revenues, experience levels, acceptable compliance records and U4 forms, discussions with management and more. Client portfolio performance is not a criterion. The Winner's Circle is a registered trademark of Shookbook LLC. For more information about The Winner's Circle or to nominate an adviser, visit www.wcorg.com.