These four advisors have dreamed big dreams, built successful practices and given back to their communities. With so much going for them, it was just a matter of time before they joined the ranks of Advisor Today’s Four Under Forty.
Natural Born Entrepreneur

Ambition and a never-quit attitude have helped Meredith Moore build a thriving practice.

When most undergraduate students are still searching for an identity, Meredith C. Moore, LUTCF, CLTC, knew she was born to be an entrepreneur.

As a student of industrial engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Moore was involved in several leadership roles, including raising $100,000 from major corporate sponsors for an annual festival for three years. It was like running a business every year, reminisces Moore, who’s now 35.

“When I began interviewing (after graduation), I found a lot of tech sales positions with a low base and a high commission,” says Moore, who’s been a NAIFA-Atlanta member since 2001. “I thought that if I was going to take a risk, then I will go all out. My intellect was my capital. I am very competitive and driven, and this [insurance] industry embraces that. I also liked the idea of being able to drive my own performance.”

“I am very competitive and driven, and this [insurance] industry embraces that.”

—Meredith C. Moore, LUTCF, CLTC

Staying cutting edge

In 1998, Moore started off in the health insurance industry, before joining New York Life nine months later. In 2004, she began doing business as president of Moore & Associates Wealth Management, an insurance and financial-services firm in Roswell, Ga. “I invested a lot in my own business early on,” she says. “I hired an assistant six months in, thinking that if I invested in my infrastructure more quickly, my sales would grow more exponentially.” Like every other agent, for the first three years, she just tried to keep her “head above water. I never quit and kept plugging through.”

Moore was clear on two things: Products won’t dictate her practice and she would not be pigeon-holed as a life insurance agent. “I love learning, and I always try to stay cutting edge,” she says. “A lot of people are about specialization. I get that and I appreciate that you can go either deep or wide into a market group. I just would get really bored if I went deep into a market group.”

So she focuses on three client groups, each with different needs. There are younger people (under 40) who earn between $200,000 and $1 million a year, and need help with wealth accumulation, risk management, life insurance, 401(k), etc. Then there are pre-retirees (five years away from retirement) with a need for distribution strategies, long-term-care insurance and estate planning. The third group constitutes family-owned businesses with succession-planning needs.

Surviving cancer

In June 2003, Moore was recovering from a Caesarean section six weeks after giving birth to her son when she started having massive headaches. A CT scan revealed a seven-cm “anomaly” in her brain, and the doctor, to whom Moore went for a second opinion recommended surgery (craniotomy) of the malignant tumor within a week. Although she did undergo surgery, the doctor did not remove the entire tumor, unbeknownst to Moore.

The pathology report revealed that Moore had the deadly glioblastoma multiforme—a grade 4 cancerous tumor that killed Sen. Edward Kennedy. Only one out of every four patients with GBM survives two years. That spurred Moore to get another opinion at Duke University, Durham, N.C., where she was told that she needed to undergo a second craniotomy to clean up the remaining tumor. A week after that craniotomy, she underwent a third surgery to have chemotherapy delivered to her brain.

During this grim period, Moore’s friend at New York Life handled work-related things for her. For the next six weeks, she, her husband and son moved to Durham for Moore to undergo 33 radiation treatments. At the same time, her mother was dying of breast cancer. By then, Moore, who’s been an athlete all her life, started working out and making calls to clients. Soon, her mother died and Moore got divorced. “This was all within a period of two years, and the irony of this is that my revenues more than doubled,” she says. “I was able to focus more. If you’re in a bad emotional environment, it’s a positive thing to get out of that.”

Paying it forward

Today, Moore’s business thrives on referrals from clients and centers of influence. And she has a solid referral system because she strongly believes in and practices the concept of paying it forward without expecting immediate benefits. She is constantly thinking of what she can do to help people she networks with without expectations. “It’s to help people, whether they are your clients or not,” Moore says. “It’s the reciprocity thing. Business will come back to you tenfold. Some financial professionals get caught up thinking, ‘I sent business to this person and if I haven’t gotten something back by him in a certain time period, then I need to write him off.’”

Moore, who has consistently qualified for MDRT for the last 10 years and is a top producer for New York Life, is aware that GBM is aggressive and statistically it’s going to come back. She has an MRI every three months although she can go six months without one. “You want to stay on top of it,” she says.
In Service, There Is Joy

For this advisor, success means leaving a legacy that demonstrates the value of helping others. 

Craig Lytle, CFP, MBA, is a busy man—indisputable producer, manager, instructor, industry and community volunteer, soccer coach, husband, hands-on father—the list goes on. But you won’t hear him complaining about having too much to do; in fact, he seems to thrive on activity. “If I am not busy, then there is more work to be done,” he says. “I truly find joy in helping others and providing a benefit to them. I love being relevant to people and their loved ones.”

This quest for relevance in people’s lives, together with the opportunity to control his schedule and lead a unique lifestyle, led him to the life insurance industry in 1998, when he was 26 years old. He started working as an agent and registered representative with AXA Financial, and within a year, was the No. 1 fee-based financial planner. Since then, he has never looked back.

“I identify a role model, work with a partner or mentor, but rely on no one to do your work. Personal accountability is mandatory.” —Craig Lytle, CFP, MBA

Today, he works as an associate regional sales director for Midland National Life Insurance Company, where he recruits independent agents and identifies and implements life insurance solutions for them. “This partnering process facilitates practice management,” he says.

In addition, he owns Income & Estate Planning Partners, PA, which complements his role with Midland by allowing him to offer relationships with insurance carriers for disability income and long-term-care insurance, as well as impaired risk life underwriting. To ensure the best service possible, he deliberately keeps his clientele to just 100 individuals, who, he points out, are pretty much like him. “They are self-employed, dedicated to their families and doing things for other people,” he says.

Serving the people

Keeping up with the long list of things Lytle does for other people can be exhausting. As soon as he joined the industry, he started a Business Network International chapter, which he led with confidence, ease and creativity, according to one of his BNI colleagues, businesswoman Marie Page. “Craig’s moral and ethical compass was open for all to see,” she says. “He truly cares about others and their well-being. He always cared about finding the right product for each individual, not simply plugging a person into a product line.”

Lytle was also highly instrumental in starting Providence Creek Academy, which had been a boarding school for over 70 years for less fortunate youth. Through his leadership and tireless efforts, the school was transformed into a fully functional charter school for almost 500 students.

In addition, he teaches insurance planning at the University of Delaware and conducts multiple seminars for insurance professionals throughout the year. He coaches two soccer teams in Delaware and is a platelet donor with the Blood Bank of Delmarva, where he has been consistently giving blood for the past 10 years.

With all of these activities, he still finds time to support NAIFA. He is an active YAT and is on the Board of Directors of NAIFA-New Castle, as well as on several other committees and boards.

This support for NAIFA has paid off handsomely. “Membership in NAIFA has exposed me to terrific people who have inspired me,” he says. “Leadership positions have required that I become fully accountable for my results. I have moved outside my comfort zone, juggled time-sensitive priorities, worked through adversity, struggled with setbacks and celebrated triumphant victories.”

A model for success

Over the years, Lytle has celebrated numerous victories—as manager, business owner, volunteer leader and devoted husband and father. When asked the secret for his success, his response was swift: “There is no substitute for intelligent and diligent work.” He also makes a choice each day to have a positive attitude and a commitment to do his best.

And how does he do his best each day and still maintain a successful work/life balance? He follows a model week, with blocks of time for specific tasks, complete with preset start and finish times. “My priority,” he says, “is to be an excellent husband and father. Efficient and effective use of my time to get results is critical.”

His advice for advisors new to the business is to find their passion and pursue it relentlessly. “Identify a role model, work with a partner or a mentor, but rely on no one to do your work,” he stresses. “Personal accountability is mandatory.

What is also critical for success is for newcomers and veterans alike to realize that it is not only OK to fail; failing is an important component of success, too. “The experience of a disappointment, followed by a renewed commitment to overcome adversity, forms our convictions,” he says.

“We own our experiences and decisions.” —Craig Lytle, CFP, MBA
Courage to Start Over

Hurricane Katrina destroyed Brad Maruschak’s business and drove his clients away, but he refused to give up on his dream.

I imagine establishing a financial-services practice at age 26 in a vibrant area of the country only to have winds and floodwaters literally sweep it away before you reached age 50. As if that weren’t bad enough, envision your clients scattered across the country because the storm also had destroyed their homes and livelihoods.

That’s what Hurricane Katrina did to Brad Michael Maruschak, LUTCF, in 2005. You probably watched the horrific footage with the rest of the nation and wondered how the survivors would recover from one of the nation’s worst natural disasters. Many of us would have relocated and, perhaps, found a new profession. Maruschak chose to rebuild.

“I absolutely love making a difference in the lives of my clients.”

—Brad Michael Maruschak, LUTCF

Now Maruschak, 34, is 50 percent owner of The Spectrum Financial Group in Denham Springs, La., and is an agent for Midland National Life Insurance Company in Sioux Falls, S.D. His broker-dealer is Sammons Securities of Ann Arbor, Mich. He is repaying NAIFA by continuing to hold leadership positions on his local and state boards, and by working with the National VAT Committee.

“NAIFA has helped me in more ways than I ever could have imagined it would. LILI helped me with my professional development, as well as my personal life, by teaching me to focus and prioritize what is truly important and what was just clutter in my life,” he says. “NAIFA is vital to keeping the government from legislating us out of business, and I would like to have many more years enjoying this field. NAIFA is the insurance protection that guards our industry from legislative disaster.”

Driven to succeed

Maruschak’s family encouraged him to become self-employed when he was growing up in Baton Rouge, and he followed his best friend into the insurance industry. “I knew a lot about the business because my mother-in-law had been an agent for years,” he says.

He has some 300 clients, many of whom are 55-65-year-old employees of Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics or the U.S. Postal Service. “I am an expert in their [federal] benefits and retirement, and this knowledge gives me a very unique competitive advantage in the southeastern region of the country. I believe that having a niche market is one of the best ways to be successful,” he says.

Maruschak has one agent in his office, and his wife handles communications with clients and prospects. He’s hoping to hire additional employees this year. “The drive I possess comes from a burning desire to be successful in every area of my life. I know that I am very far from where I want to be, but I will keep moving forward so that I can provide a great future for my family,” he says.

Other factors pushing him toward his full potential include his faith in God, support from his wife and other family and friends, consistent marketing, customer service and his concern for his clients, he says.

“I absolutely love making a difference in the lives of my clients. There are very few people in the world who can dramatically impact the life of someone the way we can as advisors by setting up a secure retirement and sound financial plan,” he says.

Maruschak developed a free educational seminar series for federal employees. “We do not talk about any specific investments, products or services during these meetings,” he says, but the program demonstrates an understanding of the complex federal system and financial services. Most attendees become clients.

Family time

Maruschak balances his professional efforts with time for family and community involvement. “I absolutely love spending time with my wife and kids, so I really try to do it as much as possible. This means I have to stagger my work schedule so that we have numerous vacations and that I work smartly so that I do not waste too much time in the office,” he says.

He also works in his church and volunteers with his wife at Rainbow Girls, a service organization for teen girls. “It is important to do whatever good you can do on a regular basis. It keeps your heart and mind in the right place when dealing with clients,” Maruschak says.
Competitive Edge

Working only with high-net-worth clients and serving them well led to success for this N.J. advisor.

Michael H. Olivia has built a successful financial-services practice by focusing on specific types of high-net-worth clients and developing referral-generating relationships with them.

He works with business owners, high-level executives and high-income-producing professionals who generate an income of at least $500,000 per year, or clients who otherwise have a significant net worth. “I work with people that I like and enjoy being with,” Olivia says. “I contribute to them, and the expectation is that they contribute to my organization by introducing us to others who are in a situation that is similar to theirs.”

Olivia’s father died when he was 17, and that inspired him to enter the life insurance industry at age 23. He vowed to help as many people as he possibly can to protect those who cannot speak for themselves. “His mother, who has owned a beauty salon for 35 years, also fueled his interest in business while he was growing up in diverse Lakewood, N.J.”

“I was and still am a rigorous competitor.”

—Michael H. Olivia

“Shed worked so hard when I was growing up, earning tips, to give me a wonderful life. My family grew when my three cousins came to live with us, just after my aunt and uncle’s passing. We lived in a small apartment … and she raised us all by herself. I have no idea how she did that, and I admire her courage,” he says. Watching his mother sparked an entrepreneurial spirit in Olivia and pushed him to seek “the autonomy that the financial-services business offered.”

He also developed a competitive streak. “Each day presented a new challenge. I had to navigate through what could be interpreted as tough situations and times. I would speculate that this likely led me to not give up. I was and still am a rigorous competitor,” he says.

Focused on the top

At 34, Olivia leads a practice, Cambium, that has 500 clients and 17 employees with offices in Purchase, N.Y., and Brick, N.J. He and his partner, Kenyon Lang, handle the top 20 percent of clients. “We have developed a team structure in order to provide an extremely high level of service to the other 400 or so,” Olivia says.

“We have developed a family office platform that takes care of a wide array of concerns, including estate planning, executive benefits and investment advice,” he says. “We often work with some of the highest-level estate-planning attorneys and accountants in the country, and I am amazed at the level of advice that we often access to help our clients.”

Olivia and Lang developed the Cambium Client Launch, a meeting over lunch or coffee at which they talk to new clients about their friends and relatives who may be open to discussions with the practice. This provides access to highly recommended prospects and “takes away the urge or necessity to involve ourselves in traditional marketing techniques such as seminars, which we don’t believe work in our business,” Olivia says.

What works is finding out what matters to his clients. “When we find out what their interests may be, whether it is [its] music, the arts or sports, we may send them small gifts such as tickets to an event, a book or a movie. We are very clear about what our clients’ interests are and we capture those interests inside our computer-based client-management system. This way, any member of my team will know what they are into, because it is posted within their contact record,” Olivia says.

“I see Cambium being a nationally recognized organization. We are recognized for providing planning exclusively in the top 1 percent of [adjusted gross income] and the high-net-worth marketplace. We specialize in holistic planning and take care of multiple concerns by utilizing the most knowledgeable advisors in the United States in order to craft uncommon and meaningful solutions for the successful entrepreneur. I see myself continuing to build and lead my organization to be able to provide uncommon solutions for the uncommon person,” he says.

Olivia, a NAIFA-Monmouth/Ocean (N.J.) member, recognizes the importance of NAIFA participation—for himself and others. “I have been able to … influence others to join NAIFA, and I have seen the impact they’ve made at their local agencies and firms. Knowing that people I care about are touching people they care about, and so on, has provided me with satisfaction.”

Family support

Olivia gives his wife plenty of credit for helping him succeed. “I have an amazing wife. Tara is incredibly supportive, and we are the best of friends. By supportive, I mean that she appreciates and respects the amount of time and energy that it takes to make it in this business,” he says. “It was a pretty long road before we reached some level of comfort, and now that we have it, we want to enjoy it and expand to include the people we care about.”

He and Tara “focus on creating experiences that we enjoy and are beneficial toward the creation and manifestation of ‘successful’ children,” such as putting them in good schools, traveling, and enrolling them in martial arts and swim classes. Olivia says. “We all acknowledge the financial-services business for providing this lifestyle and autonomy.”