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FINANCE

2025's Rising Stars of Wall Street



RICARDO SANTOS FOR BI

By Alex Morrell, Alex Nicoll, Alice Tecoyzky, Bradley Saacks, Daniel Geiger, Emmalyse Brownstein, Michelle Abrego, Rebecca Torrence and Reed Alexander

They're still in the early innings of their careers, but these dealmakers and investors are already setting the agenda for the next era of finance.

Each year, Business Insider spotlights up-and-coming Wall Streeters who are making an outsized impact in investing, trading, and dealmaking. The process starts with nominations from bosses, colleagues, recruiters, and other industry insiders. To be considered, nominees must be US-based, 35 or younger, and stand out among their peers. Business Insider's editors make the final selections.

This year's class reflects some of the hottest areas of the industry, from private credit to advising on multibillion-dollar data center deals. They come from powerhouse firms like JPMorgan, Apollo, Citadel, and Bridgewater. One was recently promoted to chief of staff to BlackRock CEO [Larry Fink](#).

Meet the 25 newest inductees to [Business Insider's annual list](#) of young people who exemplify the drive and creativity needed to succeed in one of the most competitive industries in the world.

Masters of macro

Reading the tea leaves of [geopolitics](#), [policy](#), and markets has never been more important. These rising [macro](#) minds spend their days researching and understanding global risks and opportunities — whether to arm clients with insights for critical decisions or to pull the trigger on trades themselves.

Nikunj Jain

Bridgewater Associates, 27

A decade ago, while living in New Delhi and before he had ever set foot in the US, Nikunj Jain spent his free time Googling which colleges offered the

best computer science programs.

Now, after graduating from the University of California-Berkeley in two and a half years, he's the head of Asia research for Bridgewater, the world's largest hedge fund with \$98 billion. Jain credits his rapid journey to the upper echelon of finance to a mix of persistence, strong familial support, and internal mentors, including the firm's co-chief investment officer, Karen Karniol-Tambour.

From New York, Jain helps Bridgewater steer its coverage of all things Asia, where its flagship fund trades securities and its China-based funds have become a [go-to investment](#) for the country's elite.

It's the type of day-to-day excitement and challenge that drew the 27-year-old to finance in the first place.

After graduating, he studied machine learning, taught undergraduates math, interned for Apple, and worked for the Department of Defense, but found the Bay Area "a little slower than I would have liked."

A friend suggested quantitative finance, leading him to apply to Bridgewater, the systematic investment manager founded 50 years ago by billionaire Ray Dalio, which has returned 26.4% in its flagship fund through September this year.

He spent time focused on equities and fixed income, but in his current role, geography is the only boundary. His 15- to 20-person team, depending on the subject matter of the day, synthesizes activities across Asia into trading signals for Bridgewater's strategies. Jain sees macro investing as the culmination of answering "one of the toughest intellectual challenges." Asian markets, in particular, can be a puzzle thanks to relatively less reliable economic data.

Jain's team stays on top of the latest shifts with a blend of quantitative know-how and "old-school macro investing practices," such as on-the-ground research and knowledge. Bridgewater has offices in Singapore and China, and Jain tries to visit the continent often.

Seven years in, Jain says he has found a home in the industry: "I love the world of investing."

Adam Theriault-Shay Citadel, 28

Citadel portfolio manager Adam Theriault-Shay's obsession with digging into obscure corners of global markets and conducting on-the-ground research to get satisfying answers sets him apart in a world fixated on data and artificial intelligence. It has also helped him earn a rates-and-currencies trading book of more than \$1 billion before the age of 30, managing risk in line with that of macro hedge fund veterans.

As a math student at MIT, Theriault-Shay was thorough and never took the easy way out, according to professor Bjorn Poonen. Theriault-Shay once encountered a confusing passage in the class textbook, written by one of the world's most renowned mathematicians. Poonen said that while most students might have skipped over it, he flagged it — and with good reason, it turned out: "There was an error in the book!"

He applied to intern at quant hedge fund [D.E. Shaw](#) and stood out among an "extremely competitive applicant pool," one person who interviewed him said. After graduating in 2019, he started at Shaw full-time in its macro unit, researching and trading currencies and emerging-market rates, especially in Asia.

"He has this inner, deep desire to figure out the truth and figure out what's really going on in markets," a former colleague said, adding that Theriault-Shay would get almost "giddy" about esoteric aspects of the market.

Theriault-Shay had a penchant for disappearing down rabbit holes in individual countries and companies and resurfacing with insights sharp enough to nudge the group's thinking on some of its currency positions — an impressive feat for a junior, they said.

Theriault-Shay was poached in 2021 by Citadel, joining as an associate PM in the group run by vaunted bond basis trader Jon Tipermas. Within two years, he was promoted to portfolio manager and now runs a small team.

Theriault-Shay thrives on shoe-leather research, traveling to Asia multiple

times a year to inform his trades.

“He loves being on the ground and getting a sense of the local flavor and talking to people in Asia about markets,” the former colleague said.

Citadel declined to comment or make Theriault-Shay available for an interview.

Catherine Kress BlackRock, 34

Just days into her new role as chief of staff to Larry Fink, Catherine Kress is already feeling the faster pace, she told Business Insider. The post puts her at the center of the world’s largest asset manager — gatekeeper to BlackRock’s cofounder and CEO, and offers what excites her most: “unparalleled exposure” to global business leaders and policymakers.

Kress long knew she wanted a career at the “intersection of geopolitics, policy, economics, and markets.” Until recently, she was BlackRock’s head of geopolitics and research, unpacking issues from the AI race to trade protectionism and sharing them at conferences, boardrooms, and in meetings with major C-suite leaders.

She helped turn the \$12.5 trillion firm’s first geopolitics team, led by former US national security advisor [Tom Donilon](#), into a permanent fixture within the BlackRock Investment Institute. When she applied to be Donilon’s advisor, she called it a “dream job” — even asking her husband to confirm the posting was real.

Demand for her team’s insights surged after the COVID pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, as clients “realized national security and resilience concerns were increasingly taking priority or at least on par with pure cost efficiency and market objectives,” she said.

A psychology and anthropology major at the University of Notre Dame, she conducted fieldwork in Sierra Leone and pursued graduate research in Angola’s energy sector at Oxford as a Clarendon scholar. She thought she might pursue a Ph.D. until a mentor urged her to apply her work in the private sector. Before joining BlackRock in 2018, she worked closely with [Ian Bremmer](#), the political scientist and the founder of Eurasia Group, where she led training sessions on integrating geopolitical risk thinking with investing.

She credits academia with teaching her to ground every view in facts, “never shooting from the hip,” and for instilling in her the confidence to brief everyone from investors to world leaders. Now, as Fink’s chief of staff and a mother to two young boys, she’s entering what she calls the “culmination” of her career.

Dealmakers of the future

After a slow start to the year amid uncertainty over tariffs, geopolitical risks, and recession fears, [dealmaking is regaining momentum](#). Bankers and private-equity investors are finding their stride, driving [major IPOs](#), carve-outs, and buyouts. Here are some top dealmakers to watch.

Jack Levendoski JPMorgan Chase, 35

Jack Levendoski is riding the rebound in M&A after a rocky start to the year. An executive director in [JPMorgan’s M&A](#) group, he has worked on some of 2025’s largest technology transactions, including Palo Alto Networks’ \$25 billion acquisition of CyberArk and Xero’s \$2.5 billion purchase of Melio. After a choppy first half marked by rate uncertainty and geopolitical risk, he says the market now “feels extremely busy.”

He’s used to big-ticket transactions: In 2022, Levendoski was part of [Twitter’s \\$44 billion sale](#) to Elon Musk, a transaction that unfolded under global scrutiny. “The pace at which that all happened, the level of public scrutiny, it was pretty amazing,” he told Business Insider. He also worked on Square-space’s \$6.9 billion take-private with Permira in 2024, Savvy Gaming Group’s \$4.9 billion acquisition of Scopely in 2023, and the merger of World Wrestling Entertainment and UFC, valued at about \$21 billion.

Levendoski’s father worked in oil and gas, and the family moved often, living in Louisiana, London, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Australia. “Growing up where the environment was always changing and kind of always finding your feet and figuring it out,” he says, adding that it also gave him an appreciation for different viewpoints and the ability to adapt quickly. That flexibility has been essential across more than \$300 billion in deal value he has advised on.

[Artificial intelligence](#) has been a recurring theme in recent deals, in how companies are valued and in how bankers operate. Being an early adopter has given Levendoski “quick answers to hard questions that perhaps before required significant research,” he said.

After starting his career at Chevron, where he worked as a facilities engineering project manager, Levendoski joined JPMorgan in 2016, supporting capital projects and offshore oil and gas projects in the Gulf of Mexico. Having benefited from mentors early on, he now tries to do the same for others: “I saw the value that it created for me, and so I’ve tried to play that forward.”

Mary-Grace Papatheodorou Morgan Stanley, 35

Mary-Grace Papatheodorou worked on her first IPO in 2012, as an analyst on Jefferies’ equity capital markets desk. She remembers watching in awe as

the woman running [Manchester United](#)’s equity syndicate negotiated prices and stake sizes with hungry investors.

“I remember thinking to myself at the time, wow, that’s the coolest job I’ve ever seen,” Papatheodorou told Business Insider.

She went right up and asked if she could join the equity syndicate team. Years later, she thinks that directness was a secret weapon that has helped propel her up the ranks. Today, she’s a managing director on Morgan Stanley’s global capital markets’ equity syndicate desk.

“I have to ask investors to step on price or to accept smaller or larger allocations to move the demand. You have to ask — the worst that can happen is someone says no, and at least then you know your answer,” she said. “It’s tough to put yourself out there, but it’s a lot worse not to.”

Papatheodorou spent nearly 10 years at Jefferies before joining Morgan Stanley in 2021. She managed the equity syndicates of some of this year’s highest-profile IPOs, including [Figma](#), [Chime](#), and [CoreWeave](#).

Her role, she admits, is “incredibly high pressure.” Her calls on price, sizing, and risk can dictate how a stock trades the very next day. Making those calls is also part of the fun, she said. Like the markets, her job is always evolving.

She doesn’t get a lot of sleep when IPO season is in full swing. Now on maternity leave after giving birth to her first child in August, she’s embraced a similar routine. “Having a child is a little bit of a different animal, but equally as demanding as some of our clients,” she joked.

Lamar Cardinez Blue Owl, 34

As a principal investing in sports teams for Blue Owl, Lamar Cardinez is living a version of his dreams he didn’t know was possible.

Cardinez had ambitions to play professional football, but when that didn’t happen, he pivoted to working in sports — interning at Madison Square Garden and joining the 2014 Super Bowl host committee.

That led him to the National Football League’s rotational program, where he worked in media, business development, and strategy. He planned to climb the ladder there, then realized that the work he was most interested in was reserved for those with finance backgrounds.

Encouraged by longtime NFL executive and ex-Goldman Sachs banker Eric Grubman, Cardinez pursued an MBA at Cornell before landing in investment banking at Guggenheim Securities.

Then came a fateful call from Dyal Capital Partners (soon to become Blue Owl). The firm had just launched [HomeCourt Partners](#), a fund partnership with the National Basketball Association, to buy minority stakes in teams. It was a “no-brainer” for him, he said.

Cardinez joined in 2021, shortly after the fund’s first investment in the Phoenix Suns, then valued at \$1.55 billion. He later worked on the franchise’s \$4 billion sale to mortgage magnate Mat Ishbia in 2022 and has since contributed to four more NBA deals — a period during which the average value of an NBA team nearly doubled, according to Blue Owl.

He sources potential deals by “hanging around the hoop” and getting to know the league’s hundreds of minority investors and would-be buyers. His team spent two years engaging with Alex Rodriguez’s consortium before striking a 2024 deal for the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Cardinez’s skill in underwriting sports teams as they turn from “vanity and trophy assets” to money-makers is built on his operational knowledge of sports and his financial expertise. His blueprint for valuation has since been replicated across sports leagues and geographies, the firm said.

Jackie Shepherd Morgan Stanley, 34

Golf was Jackie Shepherd’s training for Wall Street. She was a competitive player from age 7 through college, where she earned a full-ride scholarship and was a two-time captain of the University of Minnesota team. Though she dreamed of turning pro, Shepherd carried over her patience and precision to a career advising companies on breaking out parts of their business.

“Golf is all about strategy,” she said. “I think a lot of that really translated over to the separations work that I do, where it’s very detailed, you really have to get into the weeds, it’s hyper strategy focused — and these are really long lead time transactions.”

Shepherd is a vice president in Morgan Stanley’s Separations and Structured Solutions group, which specializes in helping companies transform subsidiaries into standalone entities.

She has advised on about \$250 billion worth of corporate spin-offs, including [Comcast](#)’s pending carve-out of its cable networks into [Versant Media Group](#). She says it’s a “unique way” for Comcast to become more focused on where the future of media is going. The goal with the deals she works on is to “disentangle” businesses that don’t make sense together but are strong and “have agendas that they want to do on their own.”

Shepherd started her career in accounting on EY’s international tax team, where she first saw the work of investment bankers up close. “I didn’t realize that there was an intersection between the two,” she said. “I wanted to be the person coming up with more of the cool ideas.”

She restarted her career in M&A and was recruited as an analyst by Gold-

man, where she found her mentor, Michael Kagan; she later followed him to Citi and Morgan Stanley, which she joined in 2023.

Shepherd still plays golf, and her goal is to play on all seven continents. Asia was checked off last summer: “My golf clubs have seen a lot of airline miles.”

Florian Plath **JPMorgan, 34**

In 2023, Florian Plath got a call from one of his bosses at JPMorgan Chase with an assignment: Join the deal team on Broadcom’s \$90 billion acquisition of [VMware](#), one of the largest tech acquisitions in history.

It was a pivotal and fast-moving experience for the banker, who’s since advised on other multibillion-dollar transactions, including Altair’s \$10.6 billion sale to [Siemens](#) and Altium’s \$6 billion sale to Renesas. Earlier in his career, he worked on Maxim Integrated’s \$29 billion all-stock merger with Analog Devices — one of the largest semiconductor transactions on record.

Plath started at JPMorgan as an intern in the London office. Today, he is an executive director and top advisor in its mergers and acquisitions group, working with leading technology clients. Reflecting on these deals, Plath said the constant across them is how quickly teams must mobilize and solve problems in dynamic markets — especially those as ever-changing as the tech sector. He has observed that strategic corporate buyers, after a quieter stretch, have recently begun revving the engine of dealmaking activity again — especially around AI and software — while private equity sponsors continue to search for bargain buys.

Plath is based in San Francisco, and the native of Germany has studied in Asia and lived in London, so he’s formed a global worldview. He moved to California in 2018. “Right from the start, I knew I wanted to, at some point if the opportunity arose, to live and work in the US,” he said, pointing to its position as the leading capital market. His international upbringing, he added, “further sparked my interest in global markets.”

At JPMorgan, he has also served as a staffer — the linchpin for team coordination — for the North America analyst and associate program, working hand-in-hand with junior bankers on the front lines of deal teams. An avid runner who also enjoys golf and tennis, he credits sports with keeping him grounded in a high-pressure business.

“For me, it has always been a team sport,” he said, “doing what’s right for our clients, the firm, and the employees.”

Natalie Lamberton **GTCR, 33**

From working as a Radio Disney DJ through middle and high school to graduating in the top 5% of her Harvard Business School MBA class as a Baker Scholar, Natalie Lamberton has long been a high achiever with an entrepreneurial streak.

It makes sense she’s found success at GTCR, the Chicago-based private equity firm where she became one of its youngest directors. “I can chase whatever opportunities I like, which is motivating,” she told Business Insider.

As an associate in 2016, she played a key role in GTCR’s \$500 million investment in Lytx, a global leader in video telematics, together with a firm partner. Two years later, GTCR sold a stake in the company, whose valuation had more than tripled to \$1.7 billion, to a Clearlake Capital-led investor group.

Lamberton joined GTCR after starting her career at Goldman Sachs in leveraged finance. She’s since worked on over a dozen deals, including the [2023 acquisition of Once For All](#), a construction supply chain platform. She helped bring on a new CEO — a key part of GTCR’s playbook — and later spearheaded its 2024 expansion into Spain with the acquisition of Nalanda.

Returning from parental leave after the birth of her first child in March, Lamberton is focused on vertical software across [government technology](#), supply chain, and workforce tools — and how AI can help portfolio companies achieve their goals more efficiently. “It helps us accelerate our development road map materially,” she said.

Her father, a salesman in the industrial sector, taught her to approach challenges with curiosity rather than a fear of failure. That has allowed her to walk into situations with the mindset of “why not try to apply myself and see what happens.”

Lamberton nearly pursued theater before choosing Wharton for undergrad. The “calculated risk taker” in her decided a career onstage wasn’t the right fit. She’d love to get back into it at some point, but right now her performances are reserved for her 6-month-old daughter in their kitchen.

Infrastructure influencers

Infrastructure has become one of Wall Street’s hottest bets. Investors are pouring billions into everything from [power grids](#) and [data centers](#) to roads and airports, fueling the AI boom and energy transition while upgrading aging assets. Investor assets in private infrastructure funds have soared to \$1.5 trillion in 2024 from \$500 billion in 2016, according to McKinsey. Meet some of the names you should know as the space continues to gain momentum.

Aman Mittal **Moelis & Company, 35**

The [data center industry](#) has become a multi-trillion-dollar opportunity

that has transfixed Wall Street.

Aman Mittal, a managing director at Moelis & Company, is helping the storied advisory firm establish itself as a leading player in the mergers and acquisitions, investments, and debt deals that are fast shaping the sector.

The 35-year-old advised the data center company Core Scientific on its announced [\\$9 billion sale to CoreWeave](#) and worked with Apollo on its deal to buy a majority stake in the data center developer and operator Stream Data Centers. He also helped another large data center platform, Prime Data Centers, arrange the sale of an undisclosed ownership stake in it to institutional investors Snowhawk and Nuveen.

And that was just over the summer. In the past three years, Mittal has worked on more than 15 data center-related transactions with a total deal value exceeding \$25 billion.

Mittal got his start studying electronics and communications engineering in his home country of India before getting an MBA at the NYU Stern School of Business. He began as an analyst at Bain & Company in technology, media, and telecom, before moving to Evercore to advise in those sectors.

In 2022, he joined Moelis to help lead its growing practice in the booming digital infrastructure space, particularly [data center](#) deals.

Mittal said that he keeps his focus straightforward: knowing his clients and anticipating the solutions that match their business needs.

“The idea is that you need to know what is important to the company and the company needs to feel comfortable about sharing their constantly changing objectives with you,” Mittal said. “My position is like: this is what you’re doing, and this could become better if you do this also.”

Mittal starts his day by jotting down three Post-it notes outlining his priorities. He ends every day with a call, “that is not related to my immediate tasks.”

“I’ll just reach out to someone I have not talked to in three months or six months,” Mittal said. “To reconnect with potential possibilities.”

Arting Chang **Advent International, 34**

A demanding career on Wall Street requires resilience, a quality that Arting Chang had mastered before she landed in the industry.

As an eighth grader, her father’s investment banking job moved her and her family from Taiwan to California. Before that, her family had lived in Shanghai and Tokyo. The frequent moves taught her to be adaptable in a way that helped her career. “I think I have a way of talking to myself very kindly and giving myself encouragement to be like — you know how to do this, you’ve done this, you’ve been in more chaotic environments,” she said.

Now a vice president at Advent International, a private equity firm that manages \$94 billion, Chang has emerged as a young star in its industrials team. She helped lead Advent’s [\\$1 billion acquisition of LayerZero Power Systems](#), a producer of data-center power equipment, earlier this year.

Chang launched Advent’s first dedicated data-center sourcing effort. The team built a bottom-up model of how growth would unfold, assembled a bench of executives, and networked with regional, niche bankers so that they’d come to her when deals arose. The introduction to LayerZero came through a relationship at Citizens Bank, months before a formal sale process began.

Chen said she’s a “big proponent of always getting on the ground.” At AEA Investors, where she worked before Advent, she spent a year in Dallas helping prepare retailer At Home for its IPO. While digging into LayerZero, time at the Ohio headquarters revealed an opportunity for an expansion that became central to the deal. She still visits monthly for board meetings.

Off the clock, Chang is a regular at Barry’s Bootcamp, a restaurant lover, and a proud collector of 50-plus statement blazers. She sits on the steering committee for Advent’s LGBTQ+ employee resource group and is the youngest board member of Out for Undergrad, a nonprofit that helps LGBTQ+ college students explore careers in finance and other competitive industries.

Mohini Chakravorty **Blackstone, 29**

When Mohini Chakravorty joined [Blackstone Infrastructure](#) in 2019, the team had around \$5 billion in assets and only a handful of staff. Five years later, a team of around 100 manages \$64 billion — and she’s had a front-row seat to explosive growth that has shaped her career.

“It’s been just a wild ride. It’s really rare to see that kind of growth and that kind of rapid evolution,” Chakravorty said.

Chakravorty’s first stop after Wharton was Bank of America, where she followed her older brother into investment banking. It wasn’t surprising to anyone, as he’d always been a role model, she said, but she quickly found herself drawn more to private equity.

Since joining Blackstone, Chakravorty has contributed to more than \$16 billion in transactions across the [infrastructure sector](#). One key moment came when she helped acquire a stake in Phoenix Tower International in 2022, the biggest private cellphone tower platform in Europe and the Americas.

Chakravorty credits much of her success to keeping a positive attitude, even when making rapid and stressful judgment calls. She remembers when, minutes before a key meeting, her team identified a downside scenario they needed to review. Even with the time crunch, Chakravorty helped create a

straightforward analytical approach to quantify the potential problem, which became the focus of the discussion.

The same composure came into play when she helped acquire the largest yacht and marina servicing company, Safe Harbor Marinas, for \$5.6 billion on a “very accelerated” timeline earlier this year. Much of Chakravorty’s job involves relationship-building, which comes easily since she’s a natural extrovert.

Chakravorty also focuses on showing other young women who are interested in investing that there’s room for them in the profession.

“The advice that I tell myself and give to young women is to run towards what scares you. Facing challenges head-on helps you break down some of those roadblocks,” she said.

Benson Kane TPG, 29

Benson Kane was in seventh grade in Weston, Connecticut, when the 2008 financial crisis hit, and he remembers being fascinated by the underpinnings of the unfolding calamity.

“All of a sudden, this big event happened and I was interested in understanding what this was and how it had such a massive impact on the broader world,” Kane said.

Throughout middle and high school, his interest in debt and credit persisted. He avidly followed Elliott Investment Management’s efforts in the news to collect on its investment in Argentine bonds that the country had defaulted on.

After studying finance at Brigham Young University, Kane joined Angelo Gordon in 2020, which became part of TPG in 2023. He’s now a vice president on its credit solutions team.

The group focuses on extending debt and providing other capital solutions to companies that often face financial distress or complex business challenges. Kane focuses on companies in the chemicals and materials manufacturing sectors, as well as those involved in energy infrastructure, including power plants and pipelines.

“I love complex problems, trying to figure them out,” Kane said.

In 2023, for instance, Kane, 29, worked on a \$1 billion-plus loan provided to Trinseo, a materials company, funded by TPG, Oaktree Capital, and Apollo.

“We were able to provide liquidity to a company in need of it and that wasn’t able to get it from other sources, and we were able to preserve the business,” Kane said, explaining that the company and others like it in the materials and chemicals industries had been hit by a downturn in demand post-pandemic.

Kane is excelling in a newer world of distressed credit where, he said, there is often a more congenial relationship between lenders and borrowers.

“We’re working in a much more collaborative fashion, trying to be solutions providers, a little bit less sharp-elbowed maybe than the past,” Kane said. “Relationships matter, reputations matter. People want to work with people that are good to work with in terms of company.”

Powering the private markets boom

The growth of private markets has reshaped Wall Street, turning private equity, [credit](#), and [secondaries](#) into some of the most dynamic parts of finance. Behind the growth is a new generation of talent driving major buyouts, capital raises, and fund innovations. Meet the rising stars helping define the strategies and structures that will shape how trillions of dollars flow through global markets.

Madelaine O’Connell HPS, a part of BlackRock, 35

Private credit’s first iteration was all about lending to companies that do not have access to traditional bank financing. Now, private credit 2.0 — the shift to customizing loans for investment-grade companies — is on the rise, and Madelaine O’Connell is helping write the playbook.

O’Connell is a managing director in HPS’ \$25 billion private high-grade business. Her team designs creative alternatives to issuing a plain-vanilla bond, such as helping a Fortune 500 company finance a new project through a joint venture — keeping the debt off its balance sheet while giving investors, like insurers, a steady return. She thinks the industry has “just scratched the surface” of structuring bespoke deals that can’t be found in the public bond market, she told Business Insider.

“Every transaction we work on has nuances that have definitely pushed me personally to think outside the box,” she said.

O’Connell began her career at Citi in the securitized products division before Goldman Sachs tapped her and her then-boss to help rebuild its private placement franchise, which had been dormant since the 1990s. She said the effort was like a “de-risked startup,” integrating with investment-banking teams, winning trust deal by deal, and building relationships on the buy side. She led the team from 2020, and by the time she left in 2024, it was lending to fund managers and lending against esoteric assets like media rights. They were also early to financing data centers — something that was cutting-edge at the time, she said.

The explosive growth in private credit was “very much the thesis” behind her move to HPS, which the \$12.5 trillion asset manager [BlackRock ac-](#)

[quired](#) in July, giving her team even more firepower.

A lifelong dancer, O’Connell began teaching fitness classes at Boston College and even led 6 a.m. Pilates sessions while working as an investment banker. She still teaches online occasionally when travel allows.

“Working out is just as important to my mental health as it is to my physical health,” she said.

Knut Kirchhoff Blackstone, 34

In Knut Kirchhoff’s nine years of working in private credit, the segment has grown to become one of the [hottest places for young job seekers in finance](#). As a leader of the analyst and associate recruiting efforts for Blackstone’s Credit and Insurance team, he’s seen this transformation firsthand.

At a Georgetown recruiting event that drew more than 100 students, Kirchhoff had nonstop conversations about private credit and “lost my voice by the end of the night,” he said.

A Norwegian who attended Boston University for college, Kirchhoff began his career on Citi’s leveraged finance team. He quickly became fascinated with the world of debt, and after two years, he realized he wanted to move to the buy side. His interest was piqued by a few successful deals that [Blackstone Credit](#) (then GSO) did with Citi during a period of energy price volatility in 2015.

When he joined Blackstone in 2016, the firm’s credit unit had roughly \$80 billion in assets. It has since swelled to over \$400 billion, becoming the firm’s largest and fastest-growing business.

“The first deal I did was \$125 million,” Kirchhoff said. “Now we’re doing billion-dollar deals almost every single week.”

Last year, Kirchhoff helped create the professional services vertical, lending to consulting and accounting firms. The team, which Kirchhoff now leads, has made over \$10 billion in credit investments.

The deal that catapulted his career occurred early in the COVID-19 pandemic, when Kirchhoff was tapped to work on lending to cruise lines. As some deals were launching, the leading managing director went on paternity leave, leaving Kirchhoff to step into a leadership position.

“I had been promoted four months earlier and was working from home, and now had the responsibility of a team under me,” Kirchhoff said.

He led diligence on the deal and brought it through the investment committee. Blackstone’s purchase of the cruise line debt “ended up being a really good transaction for the firm,” Kirchhoff said.

Patrick Kearney Apollo, 33

Patrick Kearney has developed a specialty for buying airlines and packaging companies during his eight years at [Apollo](#). It’s a product of Apollo’s “generalist” model, the principal told Business Insider, which has new hires rotate through different business units and industries.

His first deal was the 2018 acquisition of Sun Country Airlines, and aviation has been a constant since. Airline ownership allows Kearney to flex his business-building muscles — [navigating Trump’s tariffs](#), investing in more aircraft, and modernizing operations at a portfolio company, Atlas Air.

“There’s never a dull day when you own an airline in terms of the problems that you have to solve,” he said.

And even though he’s based in the firm’s flagship private equity arm, he still works closely with Apollo’s ground-breaking credit team. “We don’t have any walls at Apollo,” he said about the firm he joined in 2017 after spending two years at Moelis & Company. Credit and equity teams share research, insights, expertise, and even deals. The credit side can help make equity investments possible when financing is tight, such as with the firm’s 2022 \$5.2 billion take-private of cargo airline Atlas Air, Kearney said.

“We financed Atlas when the financing markets, frankly, were not open,” Kearney said.

Kearney’s work on the 2022 acquisition of Novolex and the 2025 combination with Pactiv, both food packaging businesses, is another example of his ability to grow companies. When Kearney and his team initially considered Novolex, they evaluated what the combined business would look like with Pactiv, given their complementary products. It didn’t pan out, but at the end of last year, Novolex announced it would acquire Pactiv, with the deal expected to close this year.

“It’s rare to have something like that in your original investment committee dialogue and actually have it come to fruition,” Kearney said.

Alex Park Thoma Bravo, 34

The first deal of Alex Park’s career was far from the sleek software buyouts he’s versed in now — it was a Chapter 11 bankruptcy for a school bus company that he happened to use as a kid. “Buses were stolen out of the parking lot in Staten Island, and I actually had to work with the local police force to try and locate these buses,” he laughed. That experience sparked his interest in working in credit: “I wanted to see what a healthy and growing company looked like.”

That realization carried Park from restructuring at Rothschild to Ares Man-



agement, and ultimately to Thoma Bravo, where he joined the credit team shortly after its inception in 2019. Now a principal, he's helped the credit team invest more than \$8 billion across about 100 transactions.

Miami-based Park is "incredibly proud" of sourcing and leading financing for Blackstone's acquisition of Irth Solutions in 2021 and Warburg Pincus' financing of Softeon in 2023 — two "best in class" SaaS companies, he said. "Everyone wants to lead deals for these sponsors," Park said. While Thoma Bravo's credit team has been well established, it's "still relatively new" compared to some players, he noted.

Outside of investing, Park has played a key role in fundraising, including helping to complete the \$3.6 billion Credit Fund III, the platform's largest pool of capital to date, in early 2025. He credits his career success to a "chip on my shoulder" work ethic, a love of building relationships, and especially a commitment to mentorship.

In fact, a banker from Rothschild, Brendan Fox, who took him "under his wing," is on his team at Thoma. He said a number of colleagues "played such a formative role in shaping me that I always wanted to pay that forward going forward." Today, Park leads recruiting for the credit team, creating an "open-door" culture for juniors: "I want you to feel comfortable asking me anything and everything — no dumb questions."

Joe Slevin Jefferies, 34

When Joe Slevin started specializing in the resale market of private equity stakes in 2015, it was a niche that "barely existed," he told Business Insider.

Now, [secondary deals](#) are on the rise — with a record \$103 billion worth of activity completed globally in the first six months of 2025, [according to Jefferies](#).

UK-native Slevin started his career as a JPMorgan investment banker in London, then sought "an area of finance where there was huge growth potential," that was "off the beaten path."

He joined Collier Capital, a pioneer in what was then the nascent secondaries industry. After three years on the buy side, Slevin returned to banking to advise investors on secondary transactions at PJT Partners and Guggenheim Partners because, he said, he preferred being "at the center of things between all the stakeholders in a transaction."

He said his time on the buy side made him a better advisor since he had to bring "extremely nuanced" deals through investment committees.

In 2021, he joined Jefferies to cofound their Private Capital Advisory team, which now has more than 120 members and advises investors on selling some of their private portfolios to other investors and fund operators on spinning out select assets into new funds.

In the first half of this year, the PCA team advised on over \$31 billion in secondary transactions. Slevin focuses on deals led by private equity or credit operators, recently working with ONCAP, Gryphon Partners, and Trinity Ventures. The most well-known version of this is a continuation fund, which is set up to buy one or more assets they already own — giving liquidity to investors who need it while continuing to wring returns out of assets.

This segment of the industry has experienced a surge in popularity in recent years, as private equity distributions have fallen short of expectations.

Earlier this year, Slevin moved to Los Angeles from New York to expand his team's geographic reach, focusing on West Coast private equity and venture capital operators.

Josef Menasche Goldman Sachs, 34

About four years ago, Josef Menasche was working at a boutique secondaries firm on a deal alongside Goldman Sachs bankers. He came away convinced that his industry, which deals in sales of private fund stakes, was headed for change.

"My whole thesis was big banks are going to dominate this space eventually," he said.

So he called Goldman and said, "Hey, you should just hire me because we already had a great working dynamic on this deal. Wouldn't it be better if we were actually working together?"

He joined the bank's secondaries business at the end of 2021 and today is a [managing director](#) and global cohead of secondaries advisory. He said 2025 has been a turning point, following several years of caution among investors regarding capital commitments. "The level of creativity that we've seen in 2025 has been really, really exciting to work with," he said — a sign that the market is picking up.

His team has executed transactions across infrastructure, real estate, private equity, and venture capital. The highlights include a \$3.1 billion single-asset continuation vehicle — allowing a private equity firm to extend its investment in a company — with New Mountain Capital for Real Chemistry. "Half of it was providing the distribution to original investors, half was actually primary capital for future M&A, which is pretty unusual," he said. "The fact that they're willing to put so much fresh money into the new M&A through another business is pretty unusual. It's a general sign of people feeling good about the world."

His team has just over a dozen bankers, compared with about 150 at its largest competitor, he said. Clients often tell him: "You give us very different advice to other bankers, and it seems to work out well for us."

Menasche studied chemistry at Cambridge. He found the lab environment too slow and shifted into finance. Early experience at secondaries-focused boutique Campbell Lutyens gave him a foothold in the industry.

"I think fundamentally, if you just pick what you're interested in, you will do well," he said.

Hedge fund and trading hotshots

From running multibillion-dollar books to navigating volatile markets, these young standouts are central to how their firms make money and manage risk. At hedge funds specifically, the [battle for talent](#) remains fierce. Some declined to make their stars available for interviews.

Jake Woodson Goldman Sachs, 33

When COVID shut down the world in 2020 and Manhattan offices emptied as workers isolated at home, distressed credit trader Jake Woodson was on a skeleton crew that never left Goldman Sachs' trading floor. It felt unusual at the time, but having the opportunity to navigate once-in-a-lifetime swings in airlines, retailers, and car-rental companies was "a blessing in disguise," says Woodson.

"You can end up learning in a few weeks, or a couple months, more than in certain years," Woodson said.

A couple of years later, he was promoted to his current role as head of US distressed credit trading. Shortly after, he navigated the 2023 banking crisis, generating tens of millions in profits for the firm — a seminal moment in his career.

Woodson's unlikely path started at the University of British Columbia — hardly a recruiting target for US investment banks. There, he pulled off an impressive feat: he became the first varsity football player — and second athlete ever — admitted to the school's Portfolio Management Foundation, an intensive training program founded in the 1980s, in which a select group of students help manage a multimillion-dollar endowment.

He started full-time at Goldman in 2014 in investment-grade credit, though he knew he eventually wanted to trade riskier securities. A year later, he jumped at an opportunity to work in junk bonds under [Thomas Malafronte](#), who's now a PM at Millennium.

Woodson earned a reputation as a reliable, insightful, and generous trading partner. He's "trustworthy and honest" and "people love working for and with him," one buy-side client said.

"You'd rather be respected than liked, but he does things the right way and is in a special category where he's both," said Malafronte.

Woodson presses his team of around 10, including traders and researchers, not just to identify mispricings, but to figure out what's behind the inefficiency — a forced seller or herd bias against a business model or company? (Goldman declined to comment on team head count.)

"When things seem too obvious, they probably are," he added.

Under his leadership, Goldman's US distressed team has ranked third in industry league tables for the past two years and is ranked No. 2 so far in 2025, according to Vali Analytics.

Ilya Katz Citadel, 19

Ilya Katz, the new portfolio manager for Citadel's Ashler Capital unit, has spent his short career investing for several billionaires.

Katz, who has two degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, started at Steve Cohen's Point72 in 2016. He worked as an analyst for a team trading healthcare stocks — including companies that manufacture medical devices — that managed a book of more than \$2 billion, according to his LinkedIn profile.

He joined Cowen as the firm's head of healthcare data in 2019, prior to TD Bank's acquisition of the New York-based financial services company. He then rejoined the buy side, trading for London billionaires Ian Wace and Paul Marshall at their self-named megafund.

There, Katz worked under healthcare portfolio manager Vijay Shankaran, who managed money for the firm's [Eureka](#) fund, a person familiar with the asset manager told Business Insider. He started as an analyst, blending quantitative tools with fundamental research to find opportunities in therapeutics and medical technology companies.

He was given his own sleeve of capital to run under Shankaran, this person said, managing some of Marshall Wace's billions before being poached by Ken Griffin at the end of last year.

Now at Ashler, Citadel's equities unit, his pod naturally focuses on the healthcare space, where he's been able to lean on his science background: He has a master's in biotechnology and an undergraduate degree from Penn's competitive Wharton program in economics.

Even in the ultra-competitive world of multistrategy hedge funds, where every portfolio manager and analyst seemingly has an Ivy League degree and a sterling résumé, Katz stands out. One word an Ashler colleague used to describe the under-30 trader: savant.

Christian Woo Bank of America, 31

Christian Woo likens his work to building a Formula 1 car engine: The technology team provides the raw materials, the traders are the drivers, and his job is designing the machinery that makes everything run faster. At Bank of America, Woo is a managing director and who leads the credit systematic trading strategies team. They conduct quantitative research and develop a credit market-making algorithm, which handles smaller electronic inquiries and spreads risk from big client orders.

Since joining in 2019, Woo has helped grow the bank's algorithm-based electronic trading volume in investment-grade credit fivefold. He said that it's been gratifying to see everyone's work "compound" as it continues to expand, especially since he was involved from the very beginning.

Woo's team designs the algorithms that enable traders to quote bonds autonomously, manage risk after large portfolio trades, and process thousands of trades simultaneously — a leap from just a few years ago. That progress also reflects a broader market trend as Woo points out: Today, more than half of all corporate bond trading is done electronically, up from roughly 20% a decade ago.

Honolulu isn't a traditional Wall Street launchpad, but his father, a wealth manager, exposed Woo to markets early, bringing him along to meet with clients across the Hawaiian islands. After starting on Citi's credit trading desk in 2015 in New York City, where he's based, he moved to Bank of America in 2019 and dove into electronic credit trading.

He credits his drive to his mother, a nurse and healthcare worker who threw herself into every endeavor — including her passions such as pickleball and her stint in entrepreneurship. "She goes all in on things and commits very hard, and it's something I find that I do, as well," he said.

He approaches his work the same way: tackling problems with curiosity and persistence. A mantra from Einstein has guided his career: "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."

John Huh Schonfeld, 35

In the cutthroat world of hedge funds, [especially at the multistrategy giants](#) that have come to rule the industry, there's not much upside for portfolio managers to be a sounding board for others.

Colleagues, much less people at rival funds, can be slow to share wisdom or hacks for fear of losing their own edge. Everyone is, more or less, competing against everyone else at all times.

It's one of the reasons John Huh stands out.

Huh, a portfolio manager at \$14 billion [Schonfeld Strategic Advisors](#), is a talented investor and a strong mentor for younger colleagues, according to those who know him.

After graduating from New York University's Stern School of Business in 2012, he worked at Wells Fargo in equity research and then moved to the buy side in 2015. He joined Point72 in 2016, when it was trading its founder's cash

and before it officially reopened to outside investors.

He worked as an analyst covering stocks in the telecommunications, media, technology, and internet sectors through the firm's 2018 relaunch, and left the following year to join Schonfeld.

Huh worked under Simon Silverston as an associate portfolio manager before being promoted at the end of last year to run his own team. Still specializing in technology, media, and telecommunications, Huh is a go-to source for many young stockpickers at the firm with questions or problems, according to one individual who works at the New York-based manager.

Innovators

Wall Street is constantly looking for an edge, which means firms are always racing to create new products and tools that give them — and their clients — an advantage. Whether it's reimagining how bonds are traded or bringing complex products like CLOs and tokenized funds to a broader investor base, these rising stars show how fresh ideas can quickly scale into breakthroughs that reshape markets.

Sarah Naylor Citadel Securities, 31

Sarah Naylor wanted to be in the room where decisions were made. After six years in investment-grade bond sales at big banks, she knew that room was usually reserved for senior staff. So when [Citadel Securities](#) tapped her in 2024 to help launch its corporate bond trading business, she jumped at what she called a "once-in-a-career" opportunity.

Her readiness for that leap traces back to a turning point a few years in at Citigroup, which she joined in 2016 after graduating from Colgate. A senior salesman covering a major asset manager departed, and Naylor was asked to temporarily oversee the account. Lacking experience, she compensated with preparation — studying the client's portfolio and grilling traders for insights. Citi's standing improved, and she kept the account permanently.

The episode shaped her philosophy to be an "internal expert" on her client.

"I try to hold myself to the standard that anytime anyone internally has a question pertaining to my client, I should have the answer," Naylor said.

One of her mentors at Citi, [Sam Berberian](#), recruited her to Citadel Securities after he joined as head of credit trading in 2023. She joined the buildout in early 2024 and quickly found herself "in the room," weighing in on key decisions.

One objective for the team has been tackling the "gray market," the window when newly announced bonds trade before official issuance. Citadel Securities views that period as critical for clients, but historically inefficient, since banks can't immediately resell the bonds they've issued, and pricing is often fragmented and handled over the phone. Naylor pitched Berberian an idea: a tool that would stream live data and pricing from Citadel Securities.

Working across teams, Naylor helped propel that idea to reality this September with the launch of the "Gray Trading Panel" on Bloomberg terminals.

The impact has been swift, she said. A large asset manager executed its first gray market trade, block trades increased, and market share ticked up. "I have learned more in the last 18 months than I had in my entire career combined," Naylor said.

Jessica Shill Janus Henderson, 30

Jessica Shill didn't know she'd be working with niche CLO ETFs when she took a job with Janus Henderson in August of 2019. But shortly after she joined, that became a focus, bringing a traditionally opaque product for institutions to mainstream investors. Her team has grown to more than 20 people, and she's now a portfolio manager of three ETFs overseeing a combined \$24.3 billion in assets.

"Launching and management of the ETFs are definitely the keystone moments of my career," Shill said. She recently helped launch and develop the strategy of Janus' first [tokenized fund](#) — which has gathered nearly \$800 million in assets since its June debut — and thinks blockchain will help asset management become more efficient.

Shill credits her success to her diligence, such as rotating out of a bond as soon as she becomes uncomfortable holding it, and believes that the best choices are often the hardest ones. She's worked through "some pretty turbulent markets," like COVID, and thinks her ability to raise capital and willingness to "grind out sales" during that time helped prove her chops to management.

"I am a firm believer in measure twice, cut once. Honestly, at work, it turns into measuring three or four times and cutting once," Shill said about her process for evaluating each bond. "As long as you're never trying to cut your corners, over time, you become confident."

Shill, who didn't grow up in a family with Wall Street ties, said finance has been a good fit in part because it's "intellectually stimulating." The Maine native studied at Bryn Mawr College and spent two years at Wells Fargo before joining Janus in Denver.

Since she works market hours but lives on Mountain Time, Shill begins her days early and typically has some time after work. In the summer, she'll often go for a bike ride before cooking dinner for herself and her husband and, no matter the season, reading for a bit before going to sleep.