

A Trusted Partner

**An Interview with Jason DeYonker,
 Founder and Managing Partner, Forté Capital Advisors, and Managing Partner, Forté Management**

EDITORS' NOTE At Forté Management, Jason DeYonker has spent over a decade catering to the entertainment and fashion industries, advising clients on all financial business matters. Prior to Forté, he started his career in business management by co-managing a large family office that had multiple investment platforms spread across several industries and various countries. Since forming Forté Capital, DeYonker has led a multitude of investments in private companies. He began his career with Arthur Andersen and later



Jason DeYonker

joined Deloitte's Corporate Finance Group. He received a Bachelor of Business Administration, with a concentration in finance and accounting, from the University of Michigan. DeYonker currently serves as a Director on the following Boards: ACADEMI Holdings, LLC; Novitas Global Solutions, LLC; The Wall Group, Inc.; and Serge Normant Professional.

COMPANY BRIEF Forté Capital Advisors (fortecapitaladvisors.com) combines private equity with experienced and active management in the investments in which it participates. In addition to a select portfolio of investments, Forté provides transaction and financial advisory services to growing middle market companies. The Forté team has over 40 years' experience managing companies that range from start-up phase to large multinational operations. To date, the team has completed over \$2 billion in private equity and corporate finance transactions.

Forté Management (fortenyc.com) is an independent financial business management firm dedicated to simplifying clients' lives. Forté caters to a wide range of businesses, executives, entertainers, and individuals and their offices are located in New York City and Los Angeles.

How broad is the client focus for Forté?

Forté's services are not industry-specific. I have found the services we provide are relevant to almost all areas of small business and to high-net worth individuals.

Our clients have the safety of professional financial management, while often reducing the need for internal administrative staff. We essentially are their financial quarterback and help them avoid mistakes that could have an exponential effect.

Are you competing against the large firms or more niche players?

Generally, they're smaller offices. There is a level of customer service you need access to, and

clients want access to the principals and I have a good group of partners that help me.

I try to aggregate experience with a group of entrepreneurs that know the challenges of growing a business. Sometimes it can be as simple as projecting accurate financial statements, but it's not always easy for people when they are focused on establishing or growing their businesses. With financial success, clients lives generally become more complicated. Fortunately, we simplify their financial matters by managing their bookkeeping, tax compliance, estate planning, banking, and insurances. It's the value driver we offer.

What we've evolved into is Forté Capital, which operates as a boutique private equity shop. We make a handful of investments, some large and some small, with limited partners that are like-minded folks for that particular investment and manage it as their conduit.

The difference from most PE shops is that we're extremely active in the management of the platform – be it to a fault with the management teams or to our advantage, hands-on. We can only do a limited number of simultaneous investments because we are so involved and it's not worth it for me to overextend myself to make more money. You ultimately make more money and add more value by putting your energy into a handful of projects; this formula has proven successful for me.

Are you more focused on fixed entities or start-ups that need capital?

It's opportunistic. We see unbelievable deal flow – some are at the early stages or conceptual; some have gotten off the ground but have no idea how to build the infrastructure, which we can assist with.

As a leader who is so hands-on, how do you keep management in place?

Provide the proper incentives and make sure they are aligned with our goals. Strong management teams are essential for success and I'm very active in selecting them. We have several forums where we have the ability to reach in at all levels of the company and understand what is going on.

But I empower my leadership teams. You can't do it all so effective communication is critical for success.

When a company comes to you, are you more focused on the management and the people, or is it about the industry space and growth prospects?

It's about the opportunity – I look for uniqueness. Someone sells their company because it's broken or they have peaked and they don't know how to further grow their business. I will take either one of those options. I think long term, so I don't care about the exits. I want to manage for an exit but I don't worry about it – I'm very patient. This is the difference between Forté and most other VCs. A good example is our investment in Constellis Holdings, which includes operating companies, ACADEMI and Triple Canopy. There is a lot of history with these companies, much of which needed to be improved via proactive management. Today, the platform is well-positioned for growth and considered a successful turnaround, which required patience and perseverance.

How large can you grow and not lose your personal service?

As you put systems in and the checks and balances are working, you can scale. You need to have relationships with your customers and/or clients and build trust. If you become a trusted advisor, whether you're managing or deploying their capital and, on a daily basis, looking for growth opportunities, there are an unlimited number of folks who want what we provide because it's not easy to find.

So we are scalable to an extent. We will peak out at some point based on whether I can find additional partners and principals who share my values – and they are few and far between. We have a great team today with plenty of opportunities so we are in no hurry to expand beyond a few more significant platforms.

I don't want to be a massive company because we'll lose our hands-on touch. It's about finding the folks who share that core set of values. It's about getting your hands dirty – I'm knife-fighting every day.

Did you always know you would be an entrepreneur?

Yes, I've excelled at owning my own companies since I was 15 years old. I thought it was good to get business experience in other companies when I was younger, but I became an entrepreneur because I can manage the risk and enjoy doing so. You take very seriously the responsibilities your work entails.

You're the trusted advisor. People come to you with life decisions and you are not just going to impact them but the rest of their family. Consultants can come and go; I'm a partner to every one of my clients. I have to deal with my good or bad decisions. ●