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Where a Financial Adviser Goes for Advice

Raine Group Managing Director Chris Donini turns to colleagues, business partners and former clients when looking for guidance

By Corrie Driebusch
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CHRIS DONINI

- Age: 35 years old
- Grew up: Clifton, N.J.
- Education: B.S. and M.B.A. from Cornell University
- Family: Married to Alyson Goldstein, whom he met at Cornell. Children Kayla (3) and Landon (6 months)
- First job: Waiter for a catering company
- Time alarm goes off: 7:45 a.m. to take Kayla to school, unless Landon has other ideas
- Currently reading: “The Bully Pulpit” by Doris Kearns Goodwin
- Worst advice ever received: “Stick to the way it’s always been done”

In Personal Board of Directors, top business leaders talk about the people they turn to for advice, and how those people have shaped their perspective and helped them succeed. Previous installments from the series are [here](#).

Chris Donini is a man some of the biggest companies in the world turn to when they need help.

In September, Donini advised Arm Holdings and its owner, Japanese investment firm SoftBank Group, in the chip designer’s blockbuster initial public offering. He also advised Sprint on its multibillion-dollar merger with T-Mobile and World Wrestling Entertainment on its merger with Ultimate Fighting Championship.

Donini was born and raised in northern New Jersey in a close-knit family before attending Cornell University and earning a bachelor’s degree from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations. He started his career as an investment banker working in technology, media and telecommunications before moving in 2014 to Raine Group, a boutique bank focused on those same industries, as both an adviser and an investor.

His days may be spent doling out advice to some of the biggest titans of media, but when Donini needs guidance here’s who he calls.

Ari Emanuel

CEO, Endeavor Group Holdings and TKO Group Holdings

Donini met Emanuel nearly a decade ago, after Raine advised WME on its acquisition of rival talent agency IMG. In 2017, the parent company was rebranded as Endeavor. Over the years, he said, the relationship grew to be symbiotic.

“I look to him for his unique perspective on the future of media and the critical importance of sports in media,” Donini said. When Raine was considering putting money in TelevisaUnivision, Donini said he turned to Emanuel for advice on whether it was a smart investment. Raine ultimately participated in the \$1 billion investment by a consortium led by SoftBank in 2021.

Donini added that he tries to channel Emanuel’s confidence in big merger-and-acquisition meetings, too.

“He acts with conviction,” said Donini.

Vikas Parekh

Managing partner, SoftBank Investment Advisers

Donini and Vikas Parekh are both around the same age and both have young kids. While Donini said he leans on Parekh for technology insights, he said some of the best advice Parekh has provided revolves around juggling family and career.

The day before Halloween this year, Donini met with Parekh in San Francisco. Parekh told him he wanted to make sure Donini made it home to Hoboken, N.J., to be with his kids for trick-or-treating the next day.

“It’s easy to get caught up in the importance of whatever megadeal we’re working on,” said Donini.

Donini made it home in time, and he and his family dressed up in “Beauty and the Beast”-themed costumes.

Jeff Sine

Co-founder, Raine Group

Donini said he’s learned most of how to do his job from watching Raine co-founder Jeff Sine operate.

When Sprint and T-Mobile were negotiating their merger, Donini said, he realized he wanted to emulate Sine’s attitude and how he handled himself.

“He was always coming up with another idea,” said Donini.

Another skill Donini is trying to learn from Sine is his savvy approach to deal negotiations.

Donini said he remembers once seeking advice from Sine on bidding strategy during an auction. The other side was encouraging Donini’s client to raise its bid, but Sine suggested Donini and his client stick to the existing offer.

Donini’s client ultimately won the deal at the price it wanted.

Steve Bornstein

Former CEO, NFL Network and ESPN

Donini said he and Steve Bornstein, former chief executive of NFL Network and ESPN, first bonded over their upbringings in northern New Jersey.

Among the large companies Bornstein has led is the NFL Network, which he launched. “He has operational know-how and knows what a company is actually able to accomplish,” he said.

Donini said he relies on Bornstein for gut checks on whether his plans for his clients or Raine’s portfolio companies are practical. For instance, he once approached Bornstein with an idea of how he could move an international company to the U.S. The idea looked great on paper, but after talking to Bornstein, he realized it wasn’t a viable option and might have been too difficult to achieve.