

A Pillar of the Practice



Andres Saenz, partner and volean of private equity at Parthenon Group

Andres Saenz has been foundational to the growth and development of Parthenon Group's private equity practice

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By **Evan La Ruffa**

Andres Saenz's rise within the Parthenon Group has been meteoric. Having grown up in Costa Rica, the pura vida social culture is emblematic of Saenz's skills and awareness. Valuing family, friends, and community as well as knowing how to listen to people, understand their needs, and understand what fundamentally drives them has served him well since he began working in professional services. Analytics, expertise, and content matter a lot in consulting, but the personal aspect matters the most. That awareness, and being able to keep things light and fun, especially in high-stress environments, has been a valuable resource Saenz has been able to draw upon.

He began at Parthenon as a summer intern between his junior and senior years at Harvard University. The type of longevity Saenz has enjoyed at Parthenon is a rarity these days, and he feels fortunate to have developed his career within one organization thus far. He says the pace of learning has been so dynamic throughout his more-than-15-year tenure, it's as if he's had 10 different jobs.

One of his first assignments was to help a Fortune 500 firm optimize its pricing processes. The client had very complex pricing schemes, and Saenz spent two weeks finding and photocopying each contract and entering data, so he could then spend the rest of the summer analyzing what was going on. Truly loving that ground-floor view of a consultant's impact, he decided to come back to Parthenon after graduating from college.

He worked for two years as an associate, becoming a senior associate in his third. Most of his clients were corporations, but they ranged from Fortune 500 giants to middle-market firms to entrepreneurial ventures (this was the dot-com era). He saw how using rigorous analytics and proven processes to define a company's strategy generates insight and buy-in within an organization and makes it stronger.

He returned to Harvard, this time to the business school, sponsored by Parthenon. Saenz was then offered the opportunity to do a rotation in the private equity group. That is, serving private equity clients with strategic due diligence of potential transactions, and providing strategic advice on the growth of their portfolio companies. He had enjoyed working directly with corporations, so he wasn't sure about going down this path. He found the work suited him, though, and has been doing it ever since. It's the essence of strategy: discovering and delivering on what makes a market attractive and what makes a company win within that market. In these types of projects, he and his teams have to deliver solutions within the timing of a deal negotiation. He doesn't have three years or three months, he has three weeks. It's a very exciting pace, and he relishes it.

Parthenon's founder and CEO asked Saenz to colead the private equity group after spending years in the private equity practice. It was an exciting challenge. Perhaps what he's most proud of professionally is what Parthenon has achieved in the private equity sector since he took leadership of it. To put it simply, Saenz has helped quadruple the business in five years. Parthenon has built a significant private equity presence within each of its six worldwide offices as the leading advisor to middle-market private equity firms, serving more than 200 private equity firms ranging from the mega-cap firms to smaller growth funds. Saenz credits his top-notch team with its successes and takes great pride in the advice they give their clients.

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As the head of recruiting and cohead of the diversity group, Saenz has further been able to assist in a structural and cultural capacity. Knowing that employees want to join an organization they can take pride in, Parthenon emphasizes the firm's strengths as well as the opportunities for growth it poses for new hires. "More importantly," says Saenz, "we've learned how to take that message to folks of different backgrounds." That adaptability is critical for Parthenon, especially since its clients come from every background imaginable—not only in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, but also their professional backgrounds. Having teams that reflect that richness helps the business not only understand and relate to clients better, but ultimately provide them with the best advice.

With the ever-dynamic state of the consulting industry, the larger, strategy-consulting firms are bolstering their operational capabilities as they pursue further growth. At the same time, the traditional accounting houses that have established operational capabilities are acquiring firms in the strategy space. All the while, new boutiques are carving out important niches and putting those stakes in the ground.

That said, Saenz believes Parthenon is in a fantastic position to leverage its strengths, continue to grow, and take its share of the market. Under his steady supervision, Parthenon will emphasize developing capabilities, growing sectors, and expanding into new regions, ultimately aiming to serve its clients' needs better.

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