

**McGuireWoods**

A C C E S S I N G T H E  
**PIPELINE**

A BLACK PROFESSIONALS IN PRIVATE EQUITY & FINANCE PODCAST

March 30, 2026

## At the Intersection of Purpose and Profit, with Garrison Jones

Voice Over ([00:00](#)):

This is Accessing the Pipeline, a podcast for Black professionals in private equity and finance, brought to you by McGuireWoods. Each episode features special guests offering insights into accessing capital, developing and expanding relationships, opportunities, and driving growth for Black-owned businesses. Tune in to access the possibilities.

Abdul Lediju ([00:24](#)):

Welcome to a new episode of Accessing the Pipeline. My name's Abdul Lediju. I'm a partner in the corporate and private equity department at McGuireWoods, where I advise sponsors and investors on fund formation and investment management matters. Please join me and my fellow McGuireWoods partner, Dan Howell, and welcoming to the podcast Mr. Garrison Jones, the founder and CEO of Wailes Capital. Before we get started, I'm going to give my co-host a moment to introduce himself and his practice.

Dan Howell ([00:52](#)):

Thanks, Abdul, and good afternoon to Garrison and to our listeners. My name is Dan Howell and I'm a partner here at McGuireWoods, focused on M&A and private equity transactions.

([01:00](#)):

Garrison, we're honored to have you on the podcast and are looking forward to our conversation. First and foremost, I want to give you a chance to introduce yourself to our audience.

Garrison Jones ([01:08](#)):

Great. Well, first of all, can't thank you both enough, not only for the invitation on the podcast, but frankly, for the partnership as we've ramped up Wailes and WCM. True partnership, right? I think we talk about that a lot, and just appreciate the invitation. I'm honored and humbled to be here.

([01:21](#)):

Again, Garrison, founder and CEO of Wailes Capital, where we invest in people first businesses, position for the next phase of growth. Professionally, we manage about a hundred million capital today, focused in three couriers and strategies. B2B software and services, education, and healthcare. On the personal side, great upbringing, really, really fortunate to talk about the personal side today. Great parents, older brother who's my hero, as grandson of four educators from Southern Heights, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And that place means a lot to me. I'm a husband, my wife is

probably the most supportive person on the earth. Two young daughters who keep me running around and in a shape, I guess.

Dan Howell ([01:54](#)):

I know all about that. Yes.

Garrison Jones ([01:56](#)):

Exactly. Yeah, you both know about that.

Abdul Lediju ([01:57](#)):

All too well.

Garrison Jones ([01:58](#)):

Exactly. And so I think maybe the punchline is just feel really fortunate for the life and upbringing I've had and that intersection of a purpose and profit has meant a lot to me, and tried to craft a career at that intersection. So again, thank you enough for the invitation and honor to be here.

Dan Howell ([02:11](#)):

That's awesome. The honor's ours. The honor is ours.

([02:13](#)):

Wanted to congratulate you on the recent launch of WCM Holdings, Wells's nonprofit fundraising and administrative software and services platform, and the platform's inaugural acquisition, the transaction of Abdul and I and the team in McGuire Woods were honored to play a role in.

([02:29](#)):

I want to give you a moment to talk about that platform and the opportunities Well's seized in companies providing tech-enabled services to the nonprofit sector.

Garrison Jones ([02:36](#)):

Yeah, and a great question. Maybe to start off, we're theme-based investors. So we always start with theme, very thematic in the approach. One theme we developed was around nonprofit fundraising, administrative software and services. A ton of tailwinds in the space that we find really attractive. You talk about a lot of the headwinds with fundraising and the nonprofit ecosystem in the last few years. The model has moved away from, do we have a few large donors who kind of keep the lights on every single year, to a transition of let's not have all our eggs in one basket, let's kind of spread, diversify the fundraising base. High volume, small dollar donations is a trend that we're excited about and we're seeing in the market.

([03:11](#)):

And frankly, the feedback we've gotten from talking to a lot of folks in the ecosystem, and especially around what technologies, softwares and services allow that process to be more efficient, more effective, and frankly empower these organizations to do what they do best, which is provide services based on whatever cause they're proponents of. So the industry we just feel really excited about and feel like we're writing a really exciting tailwind right now.

[\(03:35\)](#):

Obviously the business side, we're pretty disciplined investors. We have our scorecards, but a lot to like in this space, especially WCM. High recurring revenue business, high growth, it's a tech enabled services and software platform, high revenue retention. And so really, really exciting just kind of bone to the business that we're investing behind.

[\(03:54\)](#):

Honestly, at the end of the day it starts with the people. And I can't tell you how lucky I feel to be partnered with the folks at WCM. We've all heard the horror stories around post close, founder dynamics, seller dynamics, all those kind of stuff. And I'm honored and lucky to be extremely aligned with the organization and the folks running the day-to-day, CEO, C-suite, et cetera. So really, really fortunate. And that's kind of how we're seeing the ecosystem, frankly, why we made the investment, why we're excited about the future.

Abdul Lediju [\(04:23\)](#):

That's awesome. Thank you so much, Garrison. So let's talk about Whales itself. What differentiates Whales from other firms that may be investing in this space? And then connected to that, can you talk a bit about how you source and developed the right relationships with industry experts, with operators, and also with investors to launch this platform?

Garrison Jones [\(04:45\)](#):

Yeah, that's a great question. I was thinking about this question because it's so interesting, you ask this question a lot and folks talk about how we're lower middle market, we differentiate in the ecosystem. It feels like everybody kind of has the same answer, but for us, I think it really goes back to this is very, very entrepreneurial. I'm sure kind of a bit of the background a little bit later, just the professional journey, but one thing that was really near and dear to me when taking the leap was still having that entrepreneurial feel. And again, it all starts with the people. And so I want to keep a very entrepreneurial environment. Our partners and stakeholders that bet on us and backed us, they've given us a pretty exciting and wide mandate for investing behind certain themes.

[\(05:26\)](#):

And so we can be differentiated in the market for obviously size of businesses. WCM has a lot of scale and pretty excited about the growth potential. But if we have an investment theme where it makes sense to sort of invest in the platform and do additional organic or M&A, that's one strategy we can have.

[\(05:41\)](#):

Alternatively, if we say, look, this is a space we're really excited about, we can start small and scale it from there and be very, very organic and blocking and tackling with the green field. And so I think the wider mandate in the entrepreneurial field is something that differentiates us in the ecosystem. It's kind of big number one.

[\(05:56\)](#):

I think number two, very operationally focused. Even the investors that have backed us are mostly, if not all, former CEOs and operators themselves. And so we have that perspective, we bring sort of the blocking and tackling around like not only, hey, raise revenue cut costs, but how do you actually go about doing that? How do you build a sales and marketing organization? What are the blocking and tackling for go to market? How do you professionalize financial controls organization? These are operational playbooks that we're excited to sort of bring to the table for a lot of the partnerships that we have.

[\(06:25\)](#):

And then lastly, we're focused, right? We focus in industries and these are spaces that we've played in before. These are industries where operators have actually built businesses, serial entrepreneurs in the space. And then I'm a big believer of compounding learnings in these space. So if you're focused, if you know the right ecosystem, you have the great players, you invested and build businesses in this space, you just compound those learnings to get bigger, better, faster, stronger every time you do it.

Abdul Lediju ([06:47](#)):

Yeah. That's great. And sorry, just to touch on the question again. So in terms of the relationships you did source and develop, what's the bit there? How did you source and develop the right relationships needed for this platform?

Garrison Jones ([06:58](#)):

Yeah, and a great question. I think for us, I'm counting myself lucky to have been in some pretty exciting firms and areas that I've been able to develop relationships over time and big relationship developer in the long term. So lucky enough to sort of build upon the foundation I've had prior to taking the entrepreneurial leap.

([07:16](#)):

And it's funny because you get in this ecosystem, this game, you think, "Oh, my job is to invest in businesses." It's like, no, your job is to manage stakeholders. And that's across investors, that's across folks who are on your team, talent development, operating partners, third party folks, sellers, founders, et cetera. And so that's why I always say it starts with the people involved, because that's the job and that's what I get a ton of energy behind. And frankly where I've been lucky enough to folks who have kind of poured into me who've kind of taught me the resist apprenticeship model like anything. So partly I think it's been lucky enough to be in these ecosystems that folks have invested in me and I can kind of take that, and like a lot of relationships I've had have brought along from past journeys.

([07:58](#)):

And then the other exciting thing about putting yourself out there is people that are gravitated towards the entrepreneurial journey. And so just really, really fortunate about the partners that we have in the ecosystem who've been able to join the team and help us build something fun.

Abdul Lediju ([08:10](#)):

Love it. That's great.

Dan Howell ([08:11](#)):

Yeah. And you've hinted a few times about your personal journey, so why don't we take a step back and have you tell us a little bit about how you got to this point. I know you've had some experience both investment banking and private equity and operating roles. Just tell us about those experiences and how they led you to operating and establishing your own firm.

Garrison Jones ([08:30](#)):

Yeah, no, happy to. So born and raised in Houston, really, really lucky. Had no idea what I wanted to do professionally, went to U Chicago undergrad, public policy and econ major. Again, that was kind of like the early innings of that intersection of purpose and profit, public entities, private markets. So it's always been like a core to me in the space.

([08:49](#)):

Got really lucky. My first job out of school was at Accenture. I was on the M&A team. And again, that was sort of like an early learning around just surrounding yourself with good people and I ended up getting on the international team. And so probably 80% of my time at Accenture was outside the US, all M&A, from early innings of target screening, growth strategy to big integrations, big carve-outs, post-merger growth strategy, all across sector, all across country, Southeast Asia, Europe, and Latin America. It's the best job ever at a school. I'm like 24, traveling the world. It was awesome. It was great.

[\(09:20\)](#):

And it was taught me a good learning because my first project was in Houston and that group ended up being the same group I did every international project with. And so that kind of just set the tone and just another example of like these relationships really matter. And first really, really early mentors who kind of just took that team and pivoted all around the world. So really, really fortunate for that experience. One of the bit more technical in my foundation building, learning sort of the modeling, the financial analysis, M&A, buy side, sell side process, back to Chicago, look enough to be at William Blair and the investment banking group, what was then called the Services and Industrial Group. Now it's like 10 different groups because the firm has grown so much and great place to cut your teeth, had a ton of deal experience, all M&A, middle market experience, and then joined both sides of the brain together from my Accenture, my Blair days to go to the Vistrier group in Chicago. And that was where really cut my teeth in the private equity world. There we went from two to 20 billion of AUM only in a couple years.

Voice Over [\(10:22\)](#):

Wow.

Garrison Jones [\(10:23\)](#):

I felt like a startup at times, and there really the mentorship thing came to huge fruition, like Marty and Kip and Phil and Inan and folks like that who have been foundational to my own track record and investment experience. So great time to be there, great environment, got to see a fund strategy really go from the early innings to where it is today, which is one of the top performing funds period.

[\(10:46\)](#):

And then lucky enough to go to Harvard Business School, and there I kind of incubated the idea for Wailes. Wanted to take the entrepreneurial leap, wasn't exactly sure how to do that, worked at some great firms, Pacific Lake partners where spent some time at the fund and operating at one of the portfolio companies called Spanish Schoolhouse, and then spent some time at another firm called Granite Point Partners, a guy named Kent Weaver, who's been like a mentor, an Obi Wan Kenobi for me throughout my own journey. And other folks like Kevin Oxendine at Pacific Lake who've been supportive for me. And so there, just took the leap of faith right after business school. Again, lucky enough to surround myself in the ecosystem to be successful because it's team support at the end of the day.

Voice Over [\(11:23\)](#):

Yeah.

Garrison Jones [\(11:24\)](#):

And that was kind of the early innings of what we're doing at Wailes.

Abdul Lediju ([11:27](#)):

I love it. Love it. All right, Garrison. So you have this platform, you've raised capital, you've established this platform, you've done a deal, completely got that all under your belt.

Dan Howell ([11:37](#)):

No small feat.

Abdul Lediju ([11:38](#)):

No small feat, right? No small feat at all. Can you sort of take a reflective position for us? If you could go back to the beginning of your journey, knowing what you know now, what lessons would you share with yourself from the outset? Now looking backward, what advice would you share with others who are considering doing what you've done and what you'll continue to do?

Garrison Jones ([12:01](#)):

Yeah. Man, that's a question. Great question.

([12:05](#)):

So I think maybe the first reaction would be it's a team sport. If you're like myself, kind of doing a solo journey or you have an investment partner, whatever you do, you got to build an ecosystem around you that allow you to be successful. And not only try to ... We talk about stakeholder management, et cetera, and not only try to invest in businesses or buy business or whatever, but how do you create an ecosystem where you can best position yourself to set yourself up for success? Because it's a hard journey, right? It's hard to do this.

([12:35](#)):

Everybody works hard, right? Everybody's working hard. And so it's not a matter of work harder than others or whatever, but there's a little bit of serendipity in there, and the more you can sort of prepare yourself for the opportunity, the luckier you'll get. And so for us, it was all about, okay, how do I create an ecosystem of success professionally around going back to the operating partners, the investment banks, brokers, third party advisors, having a great law firm like McGuire Woods, true partners in the journey, other diligence providers who help you kick the tires and check the boxes on some of this stuff. So you really have to set up the foundation before taking the leap, and that's why I'm so thankful to have the experiences that I've had prior to launching Whales.

([13:15](#)):

And so professionally, you got to get the team going, you got to build the ecosystem. But I'd also say personally too, it's a hard personal journey. And so I'm so thankful for my wife Courtney and the support, especially with having two young kids, two young girls running around. And so you got to have the personal stuff lined up too, where ... It's a journey. They call it an entrepreneurial journey for a reason, not just like A to B race. Personally, you got to have the foundation set up too, which is so important.

([13:43](#)):

And I guess if I'm telling myself anything, or anyone who's listening who might want to follow similar path, any advice there, definitely have to ... I don't know. It always comes back to the people.

([13:56](#)):

For me, we were able to have a successful raise and acquisition, frankly, because a lot of other people that were involved in this. Our board members, our investors, this definitely feels like an ironclad and iron environment for this stuff and just extremely thankful and grateful for the folks that have kind of joined us on the journey. If you take the fund path or if you're doing like a search fund or an independent sponsor or whatever model that you follow, just know it's going to be a difficult one. It's never a straight line. It's never a straight line, right? And I think if you can be resilient and just roll through the punches and you know the old saying, everybody has a plane to get punched in the face? The resilient thing, and that's the advice I've always gotten from folks like Marty, and David Grant, and Vern and folks like that who just said, "Look, if you can stay resilient and roll through the punches on this stuff, that is a huge difference maker between whether you're going to do it or not."

Abdul Lediju ([14:50](#)):

Absolutely. And just in my seat and having the pleasure of working alongside Dan and you to get this platform set up, I think there's also levels of resiliency.

Garrison Jones ([15:04](#)):

Yeah.

Abdul Lediju ([15:04](#)):

I think-

Dan Howell ([15:05](#)):

Well said.

Abdul Lediju ([15:07](#)):

A lot of people that work hard, that are in positions that may be thinking about taking the path of establishing a Wailes Capital, they think they're resilient, but like you just said, once you actually have to be in the trenches and roll with some serious punches, there's a lot you need to learn about yourself, and just staying in that seat and weathering the course, it's a skill. It's a skill. You definitely should be prepared to have the stomach for that, and then kudos to you and your firm for demonstrating that.

Dan Howell ([15:36](#)):

Well said, well said.

Garrison Jones ([15:37](#)):

Really appreciate that. And it's funny, kind of full circle moment for me being here, just listening to other folks who have been even so foundational from my own journey like Bruce and Omar and Chelsea, and a bunch of other folks who have also been on the podcast. And so I think you're exactly right. It's like if you can roll through the punches on this stuff, a lot can happen, good, bad, and ugly, but at the end of the day, if you get it done, that's the only thing that matters. And so just extremely fortunate and lucky and can't thank you all enough for all the support on this.

Dan Howell ([16:05](#)):

That's awesome. Well said. And you were so fortunate to help you on this still. Really, really appreciated that opportunity. You've shouted out a number of folks in some of the other answers. Marty, Kent, Kevin, and others. Want to give you a moment to talk about them and other mentors in your journey and what you're doing for the folks coming up after you.

Garrison Jones ([16:26](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. Been extremely fortunate for every milestone in my own personal professional career. I've had great mentors and sponsors. Go back to the MLT days in college and business school. And so mentioned a bunch of those names like Mike Aubrey from Shore has been another godfather like figure in my own professional career. And I think the big lessons learned for me, and frankly, even on our fundraise, I feel like we had a lot of success fundraising based on who was involved. On a governance level, on ecosystem level, on our board. So what people don't tell you when you're fundraising, a lot of it is whether or not you obviously have a good deal, like your track record, et cetera, but a lot of it is frankly who else is involved and how much do people trust that this is a successful team to get it done, not just betting on us, our strategy, whatever, but who else is involved here and how much do we trust those other people?

Abdul Lediju ([17:18](#)):

Absolutely.

Garrison Jones ([17:19](#)):

And so that may be another piece of advice is like, that's why the ecosystem is so helpful. This is a team sport. You got to get it done with a group of folks. And so it's funny, Marty, you gave me some advice around like when you're doing this journey, you're going to get told no way more than you're going to get told yes. And the people you think you're going to say no say no, and the people you think you're going to say yes also say no. And then you keep going down the list and then finally you get a yes, and then the yes's just compile and compile and then some fall out the last minute and this, that and the other. So it is never a straight line on this, but that's why it kind of comes back to the mentorship piece and just who's involved in this. I probably said this a million times on this and continue to say, but just so thankful for the partners that have backed us on this.

([18:03](#)):

And so for us about kind of paying it forward and some of the things that we're doing, that's core to what we do. We invest in people, and we internship program that we do once a year for college students and MBA students. We're sponsored the Metcalf program at U Chicago program that I came through when I was in undergrad, and also big proponents of HBCUs. I'm the only person in my family not to go to HBCU, including my wife, went to Spelman, my brother went to Morehouse, my whole family went to Southern. So we sponsor a golf scholarship at Southern and I try to give back. We live pretty close to TSU in Houston and Prairie View. And so try to really invest in the HBCU ecosystem, Spelman Morehouse especially.

([18:39](#)):

And frankly, big believer in talent is evenly distributed, but access and opportunities are not. And so the more that ... And frankly, that's the approach we take for investments too, right? How do we look deeper? How do we find opportunities where others are not finding them and how can we create an investment strategy where others have not found the value here?

([19:00](#)):

So that's our approach, huge believer in investing in the next generation of folks who are trying to do something similar or frankly just trying to learn the ropes because we talked about this at lunch today, but like this is an apprenticeship model. So you've got to be in these ecosystems and learn. Basically spent the first decade of my career just learning, and then Leo lucky enough to kind of take the loop of faith once ... And you're never ready, right? You're never ready to do it, but you just got to do it. But you got to build the foundation first, and just lucky to have folks that invested in me in our firm.

Abdul Lediju ([19:30](#)):

Maybe a follow-up on Dan's question. These relationships, the mentors you shouted out, how much effort do you continue to put in terms of ensuring that you are staying connected to these folks? So some people think of mentorship and take a transactional approach, versus a true organic relationship. Can you give us a view under the hood a bit in terms of how you approach mentorship a bit more mechanically?

Garrison Jones ([19:54](#)):

That's a great ... And you hit the nail on the head. It's just not a transactional thing. It has to happen organically. So maybe first thing I would suggest folks as they think about mentorship is to be proactive. All the mentors and sponsors that I've had professionally have been ones where some of it's maybe organic, but a lot of it is like me seeking out either via projects, or you're on a deal team or somebody with something, you just develop that relationship organically. And so I think one, just remove the hat or thinking of like, "Hey, this is a transactional thing." It has to happen organically, but you have to be proactive about it.

([20:26](#)):

Second thing I would say is don't be afraid to ask for help. Anybody who's done this before has had people help them. Anyone who says they did all themselves is lying to you and themselves about it if they believe that.

Abdul Lediju ([20:36](#)):

Exactly.

Dan Howell ([20:36](#)):

It is so true.

Garrison Jones ([20:38](#)):

And so I would definitely ask for advice, help. Folks appreciate that. And I think it means something where you go to someone and say, "Have really respected your career trajectory. Honestly, would love to learn from you." People take positively to that. And so I guess the second piece of advice would be proactive about it. And then frankly, maybe the third piece is, there's ... What's the saying? There's a reason to season and eternity on this stuff. I've got some mentors I've had my entire life, some mentors that have been at respective firms and sometimes we keep in touch once a year, once a quarter, something like that. Other times don't really keep in touch that often, but I would highly encourage you or anyone listening to take a longer term view on some of this stuff and just realize sometimes these relationships will last you a lifetime. People in my life I've known for 25 years. And so that's been really core to me, like a long-term perspective on a lot of this stuff. And again, you'd be surprised about how willing people are to help you if you just ask. So I count myself lucky to be in some of these spaces and rooms and people that have invested in me a ton. And so that's why I'm so excited to kind of pay it forward and pass the baton down too.

Abdul Lediju ([21:44](#)):

Well Garrison, thank you for your time today. I think Dan and I really appreciated the time, and I know our audience would really ... They're going to get a lot from this. So we really appreciate that. On these episodes, we always like to end with a question that helps our listeners appreciate our guests beyond who you are professionally. And so to that end, what are some hobbies or activities that you turn to when you're looking to escape the day-to-day grind?

Dan Howell ([22:11](#)):

If you can.

Garrison Jones ([22:12](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Abdul Lediju ([22:13](#)):

That's why I smile. Right, right, right. Tongue in cheek.

Garrison Jones ([22:17](#)):

It's a great question. It's so funny. I need to do a better job at this, to be honest. Yeah.

Abdul Lediju ([22:22](#)):

Don't we all. Don't we all.

Garrison Jones ([22:22](#)):

Yeah. Honestly, most of the way, and this is what I love about the entrepreneurial journey is working hard, of course, but that drive for autonomy and captain of my own ship. Everybody's working hard. Working hard, of course, that's like table stakes, but if I can control my life, that's why I take the leap of faith. This inner just burning about having control and autonomy over my own life has been a big factor for my own entrepreneurial leap here. So I say that because most of my time outside of work is with family.

([22:52](#)):

And frankly, while we're based out of Houston, closer to family, two young kids, I'm able to take my old start of the swim class once a week and spend time with my brother and his family, both parents, my wife's parents and my parents. So frankly, if I'm not working, I'm probably spending time with family. Just want to be super present as a father of two girls, and have a nephew. So just that means a lot. And so most of my time is spent with family outside of work.

([23:19](#)):

Huge sports fan, grew up playing sports. Try to watch. Painful as it is to say, Houston and Chicago sports fan, I guess. But no, hometown kid when it comes to the sports teams for sure. And then lastly, big reader. I try to absorb as much information either through articles or books or podcasts, that type of stuff. So I do a lot of listening and a lot of reading, and that's about it, I guess. So I don't know. You guys give me some advice for hobbies I should be having.

Abdul Lediju ([23:46](#)):

I can take that offline, but any good books or articles or podcasts that have come across recently?

Garrison Jones ([23:52](#)):

Well, of course you got to start with the McGuireWoods podcast. That's top of the list.

([23:56](#)):

No, I listen to a lot of New York Times, The Daily. I try to read a ton of news articles like Wall Street Journal, Financial Times. I've got my three or four different ones I wake up and read every day. I probably spend the first hour of the day just reading every morning. So big articles, perspective. My wife is the reader. She loves novels and that type of stuff. I'm like, short and sweet, give it to me in an article. So yeah, but I do a lot of podcasts, do a lot of listening, do a lot of reading of more financial news and kind of what's happening in the world, that type of stuff.

Abdul Lediju ([24:22](#)):

That's awesome. Well, no, Garrison, on that note, again, we really appreciate your time. We really appreciate your partnership. So Dan and I are excited to connect live and do this with you. And we have a lot of gratitude for the Whales Capital and what you've built and what you'll continue to do. So thank you.

Dan Howell ([24:41](#)):

Yes, thank you. Thank you and we're looking forward to seeing where Whales goes.

Garrison Jones ([24:45](#)):

You and me both. I appreciate it. Thank you for the opportunity. It's awesome. I'm honored. It's quite the pleasure to be here and can't thank you enough for the opportunity.

Abdul Lediju ([24:52](#)):

Excellent. Excellent. Thank you, Garrison.

Dan Howell ([24:54](#)):

Thank you.

Voice Over ([25:00](#)):

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