



# PE Operating Partners: What Keeps Them Going

By: PierceGray Staff

The PE Ops Partner role is challenging, and not just from a business building point of view. They have a “full-contact” travel schedule, because they understand driving change means being forward deployed, present with portfolio companies.

The concept of pace is also very real. Private equity has a cadence: once the money is in, returns are measured against time. To get ahead of the curve, Ops Partner engagement is front-end loaded in the deal cycle. They have to ramp quickly—on an industry, a company, a set of stakeholders, a value creation plan—and just when they’ve turned the corner with one PC, they get to start over again with the next one.

And they do all this in lean environments, with limited leverage, serially

## Sound like fun?

The answer to this question is, it turns out, key to finding great Ops Partners—and ones who will last.

While there are many experiences and qualities that contribute to Ops Partner effectiveness—industry leadership repetitions, pattern recognition, transformation experience, a consultative toolkit, numeracy, the ability to become a chameleon, and C-Suite/Board influencing skills, to name a few—the focus of this post is less *what* it takes to perform well, and more *why* Ops Partners keep going in these demanding jobs.

## And this comes down to motivation.

While Ops Partner pay can be attractive, the people qualified to be Ops Partners already command attractive compensation packages. The money certainly has to be there (and typically is), but it’s not necessarily why people choose to get into—or decide to stay in—PE Ops.

For many Ops Partners, what keeps them going is the extent to which the essence of the role aligns with what motivates them intrinsically.

Business journalist [Dan Pink](#) could have been describing PE Ops Partners in *Drive*, his bestselling book on human motivation, when he writes about the concepts of Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose.

- PE Ops Partners thrive in environments that demand *autonomy*. They show up at a PC, often as a solo operator. And while they are accountable to the PE fund and deal team, they operate with significant latitude against a broad performance improvement mandate.
- It’s rare that an Ops Partner does not value their own journey to *mastery* in PE. Many come into the sector with a history of success in line leadership, but less experience in advisory roles. Becoming a master of change via influence is something Ops Partners embrace.
- Ops Partners live their *purpose*: driving impact. “Moving the needle” is their job description, and it’s what fundamentally energizes them. They have swapped out tradition metrics of success—organizational headcount, title—to become a fulcrum for business change.

## This last one can be a bit tricky.

To be an effective PE Ops Partner, it’s very helpful to have well-established track record of leadership in industry, where achievement is often recognized or described by *size* of responsibility: “I oversaw a \$1 billion P&L and 2,500 people. Then I picked up another business unit, so my organization grew to approximately 3,000 people.”

While PE funds certainly need Ops Partners who have “been there” in terms of scale of responsibility, the best Ops Partners aren’t focused on management mass or trappings of a corner office. Instead, they are instinctively—relentlessly—motivated by impact: they want to get close to the challenges, and they thrive on driving change and effecting results.

A Sales Effectiveness Ops Partner who made the transition from industry to private equity said: “I was leading fairly large organizations prior to coming over ... now as an Ops Partner I’m helping a \$400 million company re-work territories and comp plans and hire some key commercial execs and team members. Some of this is work I might have done 10-15 years ago, but we are changing the trajectory of the company, and I love it.”