

2018 EDITION

**PJ Solomon is ranked #13**  
*in the Vault Guide to the Top 50 Banking Employers.*  
Read the profile to get the inside scoop.

VAULT GUIDE TO THE

# TOP 50 BANKING EMPLOYERS

GET THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE BEST FIRMS TO WORK FOR IN  
THE INVESTMENT BANKING INDUSTRY

Edited by Derek Loosvelt and the staff of Vault

**vault**<sup>®</sup>  
career intelligence

# PJ Solomon

2018 TOP 50 BANKING FIRM



## #13 VAULT BANKING 50

### QUALITY OF LIFE

- #4 Promotion Policies
- #6 Relationships with Managers
- #6 Satisfaction
- #7 Ability to Challenge
- #7 Formal Training
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- #8 Vacation Policy
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- #9 Firm Leadership
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### DIVERSITY

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### FIRM INFO

#### CONTACT INFO

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#### THE STATS

**Employer Type:** Private  
**Founder & Chairman:**  
Peter J. Solomon  
**CEO:** Marc S. Cooper  
**2017 Employees:** Around 85

### THE SCOOP

Peter J. Solomon opened his eponymous Manhattan-based firm in 1989. Before striking out on his own, the Harvard-educated Solomon had spent many years at Lehman Brothers. With his new firm, Solomon built one of the most well respected investment banking boutiques on the Street. And in June 2016, the firm successfully joined forces with Natixis, the international corporate, investment, insurance, and financial services arm of Groupe BPCE based in France which had taken a 51 percent stake in PJ Solomon. The remaining 49 percent stayed in PJ Solomon partners' hands.

Today, the firm's upper management includes the founding chairman, Peter J. Solomon; Marc S. Cooper, CEO; Kenneth D. Baronoff, managing director and COO; 20 managing directors; and seven senior advisers.

PJ Solomon offers strategic and financial advice to owners, chief executives, senior management, and boards of directors of public and private companies. Recently, PJ Solomon added three new verticals: Energy Advisory Group, primarily based in PJ Solomon's new Houston, Tex. office; Food Retail & Restaurants; and Infrastructure. The firm has been extremely active in these new verticals, with its Food Retail & Restaurants practice representing Central Grocers and Marsh Supermarkets, and its Infrastructure practice representing Macquarie Atlas Roads. The firm's Media & Telecommunications practice is an active presence in the digital out-of-home space. PJ Solomon also continues to provide retail expertise through its Global Retail practice and maintains a presence in the Financing and Health Care sectors. Since its founding, PJ Solomon has completed more than 500 advisory assignments.

Business at PJ Solomon is divided into five primary divisions: mergers and acquisitions, restructurings and recapitalizations, financing advisory, the special committee practice (which provides counsel to corporate boards and renders fairness opinions), and activist defense. Its family business advisory practice continues, and don't mistake this for something out of Norman Rockwell; PJ Solomon advises families like the Fortunoffs, the Comers (who owned retail giant Lands' End), the Rabbs (former owners of the Stop & Shop grocery chain), and the Wyllys (who owned the Michaels craft supply stores and entered into a \$5.6 billion leveraged buyout agreement with Bain Capital and the Blackstone Group).

PJ Solomon is a well-known powerhouse in retail deals—it advised on Office Depot's merger with Office Max, and Phillips-Van Heusen's (PVH) acquisitions of Warnaco Group and Tommy Hilfiger. PJ Solomon continues to advise Phillips-Van Heusen (PVH), and more recently, its clients have also included Rag and Bone, Skullcandy, Chico's FAS, Sunsetter, TJX, Radio Shack, DSW, Key Foods, the London Stock Exchange, American Apparel, Under Armour, SoulCycle, SiriusXM, and American Greetings. In addition, PJ Solomon's media group, including its practice in the digital out-of-home space, has been busy recently, representing Hal Leonard, Starplex Cinemas, Searchlight Capital Partners, Christie's International, Patient Point, Rockbridge Growth Equity (on its Joint Venture with VeriFone), CBS Outdoor, and AMI Entertainment.

The firm also has a strong restructuring practice, which recently advised, with the energy group, the equity committee of Ultra Petroleum; Quiksilver; The Dolan Company, a creditor group of Energy Future Holdings (formerly known as TXU); and Overseas Shipholding Group.

### OUR SURVEY SAYS

**Vault's Verdict:** PJ Solomon is one of the top advisory boutiques on Wall Street. As such, it recruits from a select group of top schools and is looking for top-notch well-rounded candidates. Ideally, candidates are confident, intelligent, hardworking, motivated, and mature, with strong communication



and interpersonal skills and a passion for investment banking. For students, PJ Solomon offers valuable internships in which interns get live deal experience and work directly with senior bankers and clients. For its full-time junior bankers, the firm offers a vast amount of career development opportunities, including extensive formal and informal training, a high level of responsibility on live transactions, and the ability to stay on for a third-year analyst position and further rise in the firm's ranks from there. Help with exit opportunities is also offered. Meanwhile, the collegial, family-like culture at PJ Solomon receives rave reviews, with many insiders saying that the culture is the best thing about the firm and that PJ Solomon's is among the best cultures on the Street. Further, the previously unclear vacation policy has been improved; now all analysts get three weeks of vacation (15 days of PTO). The firm's compensation packages are very competitive with the Street average, and perhaps a little above the average. Benefits are standard for the Street; free late-night meals, car rides home, and subsidized gym memberships are very much appreciated, but the lack of 401(k) matching and less than great medical coverage are not. As for diversity recruiting, the firm receives average ratings. And as far as business outlook is concerned, PJ Solomon has been growing, adding new senior bankers and industry verticals. In fact, firm insiders say PJ Solomon's CEO is a very strong leader and the 2016 deal that sent 51 percent of its equity to a French financial services firm will only brighten PJ Solomon's future.

## Hiring Process

- “We do not mess around—we tell candidates very quickly whether they made it to the next process or not. Fit is very important in hiring a prospective candidate, as the analysts all work together in the same area and want to work with people they will like. Candidates need to be prepared with not only accounting and basic valuation knowledge, but also be able to be comfortable having a conversation talking about themselves and their interests.”
- “We are seeking the ‘all-rounder’—someone who is social, passionate about finance, has performed well in school, and is involved outside of the classroom. We look for cultural fit just as much as we look for strong academics.”
- “A 30-minute first-round interview on campus, followed by a Super Day in the NYC office with four to five two-on-one interviews. Immediate callback. Ideal candidate is well-rounded, top of class, involved in leadership roles of extracurricular, passionate about finance, and detail-oriented, and can hold a casual conversation well.”
- “As a boutique firm, we take a holistic view of candidates. In addition to the requisite technical skill set, we are looking for candidates who will be engaged with coworkers and have a positive impact on firm culture (which we pride ourselves on).”

## Interview Questions

- “Pitch a stock, walk me through an LBO/DCF, how do you value a company pre-earnings, best/worst part of last internship, what do you think an analyst does in a typical day.”
- “Standard valuation and accounting questions. Interview was more fit because the firm and the analysts highly value the culture and how candidates would fit into that culture.”
- “What are some of the key benefits and considerations of acquiring a company with stock vs. cash.”
- “Walk me through a DCF. Explain the key valuation methodologies. What is cash flow from operations? Why investment banking? Why PJ Solomon?”

## Intern Experience

- “Experience working on a live transaction provided me with a good perspective of my role as a full-time analyst,”
- “Live deal experience. Opportunities to model and step up. Great analyst feedback and culture. Excellent work/life balance compared to Street.”

- “Great culture, interesting hands-on experience, best learning experience of my life.”
- “Best part: working directly with high level managers and associates. Worst part: the hours.”

## Career Development

- “PJ Solomon is very open to analysts and associates moving up in the firm, but also understands the industry and is typically supportive of juniors being recruited from the buy side as long as it doesn't distract employees from their current jobs. The company quickly recognizes who can handle a tougher workload and will not hesitate to provide them with heavier responsibilities. Employees learn very quickly on the job, as there is very little handholding, but no one ever criticizes you for asking too many questions. The overall work environment is a perfect blend of intensity and teamwork and facilitates quick on-the-job adaptation.”
- “The formal training that takes place when you on-board at both the analyst and associate levels is strong. Approximately half of the training is done by analysts and associates at the firm, allowing a relaxed, judgment-free atmosphere while also giving new hires the opportunity to create relationships with other employees early on.”
- “The firm gives you the opportunity to step up in some instances and take ownership of deals/clients, which is helpful from a career development opportunity. MDs are also good at pushing associates to step up and take ownership of client relationships/calls, etc., which is helpful in gaining the necessary set of skills to progress to the VP level and beyond. With that said, the firm used to promote no ‘middle layers’ between associates and MDs; however, this has begun to shift with associates now working under a VP/senior associate in a number of scenarios.”
- “PJ Solomon has a very promotional culture where the best candidates are encouraged to stay for as long as they like. The company does not have a two-and-out program, and many analysts choose to stay due to the great culture. More than half of the second years usually stay for a third year, and there are lots of associates/VPs who have been promoted internally. PJ Solomon has a bunch of good internal mentors to help you with the career decisions, and usually associates naturally fall into a specific industry once they've spent time with a managing director.”

## Quality of Life

- “The firm has an excellent quality of life for the banking industry. Management is very receptive to analyst needs and is usually



able to work around any family/personal conflicts or days off. That said, it is still a banking environment where the expectation is that you will work on your projects even during holidays, vacation, etc., if they come up. However, senior management is usually good at working around these conflicts. In the past the vacation policy was unclear, but this year management has solidified a 15-day vacation for analysts, which is good.”

- “Great culture in the bullpen. You can really be yourself at work. You have direct interaction with managing directors on your projects as well as casual environments. ‘No jerks’ policy at the firm. People are understanding of personal events or vacation outside of work as long as you get your work done. Since being acquired by Natixis, the firm has hired more MDs and expanded into different verticals. The work/life balance isn’t like what it used to be in terms of hours, with the firm expanding and more work coming on.”
- “Extremely high quality of life with hours significantly better than Street peers. Firm has been proactive in pursuing additional hires as necessary to ensure analyst capacity remains as new industry vertical practices have been formed.”
- “Hours can be pretty tough, especially given that there were many MDs added to the firm in the last year. Some of the MDs clearly come from culturally different firms and impose their own management methods on the firm, which can be a bit frustrating, as it does not symbolize a culture that we pictured when we decided to join PJ Solomon. However, these MDs are the top of their industry and provide ample learning opportunities by working with them. Like any bank, hours ebb and flow. Depending on the project, hours can get really brutal, but all of the staffers that we have had are extremely reasonable and recognize when certain analysts are getting overworked. Other times, hours lighten up.”

## Salary and Benefits

- “The compensation package is very generous. PJ Solomon offers to meet the Street but pays an all cash bonus as opposed to stock. Salaries for analysts are consistent with the rest of the banks. Additionally, PJ Solomon covers food every night you work in the office and meals on the weekends up to \$25, which is consistent with the rest of Wall Street banks. The final best aspect is that they offer to cover half of a gym membership, which is very generous. There is no matching program for 401(k) even for longtime employees, which is not standard.”
- “Vacation policy has improved from previous years, and the stigma behind vacation has improved. Free dinner policy and expense cabs after 10 p.m. The firm pays for half your gym membership.”
- “Compensation is set at or slightly above the Street average and is received all in cash. The firm pays for half of Equinox membership. Vacation policy was recently made more generous.”
- “Pay is at the higher end of the Street. The best perks include 15 days of vacation, gym reimbursement, and Friday morning breakfasts. Unfortunately, important perks like good medical coverage and 401(k) matching are lacking.”

## Diversity, Philanthropy, and Green Initiatives

- “In fairness to PJ Solomon, it has a hard time competing against the larger banks for diversity in gender and race since it has a smaller analyst program and does not have the resources to attract prospective hires from colleges. Some of the larger banks have programs for freshman, sophomores, etc., which PJ Solomon does not participate in, as we are a smaller bank with fewer resources. However, PJ Solomon does a good job in its recruiting to try to encourage women and other groups to join the bank. PJ Solomon maintains a strong emphasis on philanthropy. Twice a year/once a quarter, PJ Solomon does a philanthropy activity as a group. Management is constantly encouraging the junior bankers to participate in giving back.”
- “We have pulled back on CSR initiatives. Historically we tried to do two to three events per year. Events were all on weekends, which resulted in lower turnout.”
- “We usually do one or two philanthropy events per year. Although PJ Solomon preaches the importance of volunteering and giving back, it is tough for the analysts to volunteer their time.”
- “The firm promotes charitable activities and community involvement, and senior management supports these. The firm has diversity in its workforce.”

## Business Outlook

- “The business outlook has grown since PJ Solomon has been bought by Natixis. The new CEO Marc Cooper has a vision for growth and adding additional verticals to complement PJ Solomon’s strength in retail and media. Already we have added an infrastructure group and an energy group. The firm’s employee size is growing quickly, and we have established an office in Houston. It is an exciting time to be at PJ Solomon.”
- “We are positioned to grow after the recent partnership with Natixis and looking to expand into new coverage areas. Do not expect the culture to change significantly as there is a lot of focus on this at the senior level.”
- “The firm has gone through a transition period over the past 12 to 18 months, after the majority purchase of the firm by Natixis. We have grown into new verticals such as infrastructure, energy, and food retail, which are positioned to continue to thrive and grow under strong senior management in the coming months and years. Retail, our traditional vertical, continues to do well in the troubled retail landscape. At the top of the firm, CEO Marc Cooper continues to be transparent with all employees with respect to the strategy and plans for the future. He is a strong leader, and I have no doubt he will continue to push PJ Solomon into a prosperous next chapter.”
- “Business is very well-positioned for the future. The company is expected to continue to add MDs, who are recognized as the top bankers in their industry groups.”