



Janneke's
STORY

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My name is Janneke Bennen, and I am an Associate at Gimv, a pan-European investment firm listed on the Euronext Brussels. I am based in the Dutch office and focus on minority and majority stake investments in the Dutch SME market. Gimv is sector-agnostic but is structured in 4 sector teams, including Consumer, Health & Care, Smart Industries, and Sustainable Cities.

I live in Amsterdam and have a wide range of interests, including tennis, hockey, cooking and spending time with friends and family. One of my other passions is spending time in nature and further developing my knowledge of Africa's wildlife.

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I grew up in Amsterdam but studied in a small student town in the north of the Netherlands called Groningen. I completed my BSc there and chose two very different fields: Economics and Human Movement Sciences. It might seem like an odd combination, but I really enjoyed the balance between macroeconomics and mathematics on one side, and the more medical, physics-based subjects on the other. With a tax specialist as a father and a nurse as a mother, that mix actually makes perfect sense in hindsight...

Groningen is quite isolated from the major business hubs in the Netherlands (i.e. Amsterdam, Rotterdam), and therefore students like myself had very little exposure to the corporate world. Only a few friends or fellow students talked about internships or career opportunities.

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The only business-orientated activities at Groningen were small, student-led consultancy projects that supported local sustainable companies. I knew I enjoyed these, and they triggered me to think about my future career, but private equity remained something I had only heard of in passing.

Things changed when I started my MSc. in Finance in Rotterdam, which is a city which is far more finance-orientated, and the contrast was immediately clear; students were talking about internships, job opportunities, and actively encouraging each other to explore different paths, with the main focus on Investment Banking and PE. I even had a course in private equity, worth 20% of my total MSc credits!

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At first, the idea of internships honestly felt a bit intimidating. But I quickly realised they are the best way to understand the kind of environment you actually enjoy working in. I started doing an internship in investment banking at a Dutch bank, and I loved the fast-paced, energetic and structured way of working at that time. But when I later joined a PE firm as an intern, something actually clicked.

I enjoyed the responsibility you are given early on, the direct interaction with management teams and advisers, and the balance between strategic thinking and financial analysis. Within this environment, your judgement really matters since you are deciding whether to invest money into a firm you believe in or not.

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When I started in private equity, I was the first woman at the firm. The industry is still male-dominated, and that absolutely needs to improve. But instead of letting that deter me, it also motivated me. Being the first felt meaningful, because it gave me the chance to help shift things from within and hopefully make it easier for more women to follow.

My advice is not to be afraid to apply for an internship or full-time role in private equity, even in a male-dominated environment. What truly matters is to find out whether you enjoy the work and feel a connection with your (future) colleagues.

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Work-life balance is much better than I expected. Working in PE is not a typical 9-to-5 job, but on average I work about two hours in the evening. One of the key aspects of working in PE is time management since you have a lot of flexibility in how you organise your day which also allows you to balance work with personal time.

While there are deadlines, I am almost never rushed to complete tasks in a very short timeframe. A core part of this job is taking the time to think things through and give well considered input. In addition, PE firms are generally somewhat in control of deal processes, so you can anticipate busier or quieter periods and plan your schedule accordingly.

For me, maintaining this flexibility is essential. Activities like going to the gym or cooking at home help me clear my head, which allows me to focus better.

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Before starting in private equity, I would advise people to take time to explore and reach out to your network. Arrange coffees with people and firms you feel comfortable with, and do not hesitate to reach out as most professionals enjoy talking about their work and sharing their experiences. Each conversation will help you towards taking the next step.

Above all, be yourself. Be curious, ask questions, share your thoughts, and bring both your social and analytical skills to the table. Remember, every contribution, big or small, is valuable, and every experience is a step forward in learning and growing.