

Leadership Under Pressure

An Interview with Jon Henes, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, C Street Advisory Group

EDITORS' NOTE Jon Henes is the Founder and CEO of C Street Advisory Group. He is widely regarded as one of the leading restructuring, corporate governance, and crisis advisors in the country. Before founding C Street, Henes was a senior partner in the Restructuring Group at Kirkland & Ellis, where he spent two decades advising on some of the most high-profile and innovative restructurings in the U.S. and globally. When Henes joined Kirkland, the firm



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had only 120 lawyers in New York and fewer than 20 restructuring lawyers worldwide. Over the years, Henes played a key role in building both – the New York office grew to nearly 1,000 lawyers, and the restructuring group expanded to over 200 professionals around the globe – becoming a dominant force in the industry. Throughout his career, Henes has advised boards of directors, companies, and financial sponsors across nearly every sector of the economy – from crypto and retail to energy, airlines, and media. He is known for his client-first mindset and creative problem-solving, including pioneering the first one-day Chapter 11 case in history. Henes is also deeply involved in civic and philanthropic work. He was appointed as the Chair of the Board of the Vice President's Residence Foundation by Vice President Kamala Harris and is Co-Founder of the Foundation for Education in Honduras (FEIH). He serves on the Advisory Board of the Black Economic Alliance and the Boards of FEIH and CaringKind, the Heart of Alzheimer's Caregiving. He is a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy. Politically, he served as National Finance Chair for Kamala Harris' 2020 Presidential Campaign and as a finance chair for Ray McGuire's 2021 New York City Mayoral Campaign. A frequent media commentator, Henes has appeared on CNBC, Bloomberg, CNN, and Yahoo Finance, and has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Financial Times, Bloomberg, and USA Today. He has lectured at Harvard Business School, University of Pennsylvania Law School, and NYU. Henes earned a BA degree from Union College and a JD from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, where he was Managing Editor of the Law Review, and he served as an adjunct professor.

FIRM BRIEF C Street Advisory Group (thecstreet.com) was built to redefine how companies communicate and lead in complex special situations by combining decades of legal insight with strategic communications expertise in a single, integrated firm. In 2025, C Street launched C Street Optimization, a dedicated practice helping professional services firms and corporations enhance performance, strengthen positioning, and prepare for the future. The practice provides strategic guidance on branding, communications, operational efficiency, business development, and AI integration – helping clients not just adapt to change, but lead it. Today, C Street is pioneering a new model for strategic advisory by helping clients navigate high-stakes moments, engage stakeholders, and position their organizations for long-term success.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career has always been shaped by moments of consequence. I spent the first 25 years of my career as a restructuring lawyer, with the last 20 at Kirkland & Ellis, helping to build both the New York office and the global Restructuring Group. As a professional, I advised on many of the largest and most complex restructurings. These were situations where every decision mattered, where one wrong move could destroy value, and where leadership was tested in real time.

During that period, I also became deeply involved in politics at a very senior level. I had a front row seat to leadership under pressure, the importance of having a foundation, the discipline required to stay true to your values, and the power of authenticity and personality. I also saw how quickly narratives can take shape, how the media fills any vacuum, and how the definition of media has expanded to include every individual with a social media platform.

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These combined experiences taught me how leaders behave when the stakes rise, what separates great leadership from struggling leadership, and how communications can change the trajectory of an outcome. Communications is not words on a page. Communications is a business strategy. Yet companies often had world class advisors but lacked an integrated approach to stakeholders, reputation, and communications. That gap created unnecessary risk. I launched C Street to fill that gap and to become the firm that leaders call when things matter most.

What was your vision for creating C Street, and how do you define its mission?

My vision was to build the most trusted strategic advisory firm in the country; the team leaders rely on when the stakes are highest. To do that, we needed two things: a great culture and unparalleled client service.

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C Street was built for complexity, trusted in crisis, and relied on to turn pressure into clarity and risk into opportunity. Our job is to ensure leaders make the right decisions when they have no margin for error.

Will you provide an overview of C Street's services and capabilities?

C Street is a strategic communications and advisory firm that brings clarity and control to high stakes situations. We operate across five core areas:

Special Situations – Restructurings, reorganizations, turnarounds, distressed acquisitions, liability management. This is where our roots are and where our judgment is battle tested.

Transactions – M&A, divestitures, integrations. We help clients control the narrative across the entire deal timeline.

Investor Relations – Earnings support, roadshows, investor days, sentiment analysis, positioning. We help companies speak with clarity to the markets.

Issues and Reputation Management – Litigation, regulatory matters, cyber incidents, executive transitions, and corporate crises. These are the moments when communications is not about messaging. It is about consequence.

Professional Services Optimization – Our newest offering. We help law firms and professional services organizations modernize operations, strengthen brand, enhance culture, and prepare for the future.

C Street has grown from a restructuring focused firm into a premier strategic advisory platform, helping companies, boards, and institutions navigate complexity with confidence.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for C Street?

Our greatest opportunities lie where complexity, transformation, and leadership converge. The world is moving faster than ever. Companies face unprecedented pressure from

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markets, regulators, technology, geopolitics, stakeholders, and the media. The need for strategic clarity has never been greater. One of the most significant opportunities is in professional services. Law firms, financial advisory firms, and other people-driven organizations are undergoing fundamental change. The rise of firm-wide business management and partner free agency has reshaped the industry. Optimization is no longer optional. C Street is one of the few firms that understands both the business and human dynamics of that evolution. Beyond that, we continue to grow in restructurings, M&A, investor relations, proactive reputation work, and crisis communications. Across all of it, the common threads are leadership under pressure and complexity, and that is where we excel.

How critical has it been to build the C Street Advisory team?

Everything begins and ends with the team. Our strength comes from people who care about each other and who understand complexity. Our team has led major restructurings, navigated regulatory scrutiny, guided high stakes transactions, and managed reputational risk. Each person brings a unique superpower, and what makes C Street extraordinary is how those superpowers combine into trust, judgment, discipline, collaboration, and purpose.

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How do you focus your efforts leading C Street Advisory?

My role centers on three commitments:

Vision – Ensuring C Street stays ahead of the market and anticipates complexity before it arrives.

Clients – Remaining deeply involved in our most consequential client matters, when leaders need judgment and not just advice.

Culture – Cultivating a team built on trust, excellence, and relentless client service.

I also spend time shaping the broader conversation around leadership, reputation, and the role of communications in high stakes environments. Today, leadership requires empathy, decisiveness, and clarity. My goal is to model all three.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit?

I have always loved building teams, developing talent, and creating something larger than myself. When I think about what it takes to build a business, I think of a piece of advice I received from my grandfather. My grandfather was a visionary in Hollywood and one of the founders of Lorimar Productions. When I was in college, I told him I wanted to run a movie studio and asked for advice. He said: “You want to run a movie studio, run a movie studio.” Meaning, if you want to do something, do it. Do not wait. Do not ask. Do not talk. Act.

Founding C Street was different from anything I had done before. We started with no infrastructure, no clients, and no guarantees. It was humbling and energizing. Rather than drafting and redrafting a business plan, I just got started. I just started running. Four years later, we have grown more than 500 percent and have served more than 150 clients. But the numbers matter less than the impact, the outcomes we have shaped, the value we have protected, and the opportunities we have unlocked.

Entrepreneurship is about belief, resilience, and continuous improvement. I am proud of what we have built and, most of all, I am proud of our team. We have the most incredible group of people. ●