

Ash Lawrence

Head of AGF Private Capital

AGF Management Limited



- Year Joined AGF: **2022**
- Firms prior to AGF: **Brookfield Asset Management**

1 Why did you join AGF as the head of their new private capital business?

AGF has a well-established public markets business that offers scale and expertise in areas like product development, distribution and marketing that is rare among independent private markets firms. The ability to leverage that foundation was very intriguing and should lead us to create one of the few truly full-service asset management platforms in the country.

2 Why is a full-service platform that includes alternatives an important objective for you and your firm?

There are several benefits, the first and most important of which relates to the changing appetite of our clients. It's no secret that investors are allocating more money to private assets than ever before. In fact, by some estimates, the split between public and private is closing in on to 50/50 among the largest institutional investors in the world. Following in those institutional footsteps, retail investors are also moving in this direction, albeit at a much slower pace due to issues related to education and product structure.

3 What is the three-year goal for your business?

Ultimately, we want to be considered an expert in private capital and strive to expand our client base and relationships with retail intermediaries by building a business that includes multiple, private market platforms run by experienced leadership teams with impressive track records of delivering outperformance. Initially, we're targeting those sectors where we see opportunity within our existing channels to allow us to play to our strengths – namely mid-market private equity, real estate and an expansion of our existing private credit business. For now, we'll avoid niche or esoteric strategies.

4 How would you describe Canada as a place to invest and build a private markets business?

There are several advantages including the country's strong democratic principles, rule of law and standing as one of the wealthiest nations in the world. We're also blessed with an abundance of capital in Canada, but it's not always easy to find opportunities to put that capital to work. The investable universe is relatively small compared to other countries and it can be especially difficult for foreign investors to navigate. You must be here, and in the flow, to make the most of it. This benefits strong Canadian asset managers who have the breadth, reach and strategies to access non-domestic capital that would otherwise have a difficult time finding a path into the Canadian private asset marketplace.

5 What advice do you have for someone wanting to launch an alternatives fund business?

The climate for fundraising is much more competitive than it was a few years ago, when capital was more free flowing. Additionally, the demands being placed on asset managers are much wider than simply a few partners hanging a sign on a door and making some great investments. There are demands around strong governance and financial controls, ESG policies and reporting, and the operational and legal burdens of increased regulation on the private markets. My advice would be to find a deep-pocketed sponsor before trying to launch your business. In doing so, you'll have some level of seed investing and can build a track record and an organization that can entice other investors to provide you with the scale of capital required for financial success in this industry.

6 Why is it important that Canada support local emerging alternative managers?

Canada has a strong history of private market investing, mostly because of the large public pension funds that have made a name for themselves as some of the top investment institutions in the world. But if we want to take advantage of that legacy, and keep that skill set in Canada, we need to support our local asset managers in addition to our asset owners or allocators. Too often, we see one of two things occurring: either talented Canadian managers end up working overseas instead of using their talents to build homegrown businesses that have the potential to become super-regional or global in scope; or we see Canadian asset owners allocating their capital to non-Canadian asset managers to access other markets.

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