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5 Answers with Rising Star Rob Copeland, WSJ

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) August 11, 2017



The Wall Street Journal's Rob Copeland had far-reaching impact in 2016. First, he took readers inside the world's largest hedge fund, Bridgewater Associates, which increasingly resembles a cult. Later, he uncovered a massive fraud at Platinum Partners, a hedge fund that targeted the Jewish community. More than six months after he first began to unspool the story, federal prosecutors charged Platinum's executives with perpetrating a Ponzi-like fraud.

In an era fraught with challenges to reporting on institutions both public and private, his reporting stands as an example of thought-provoking, independent journalism—the type that readers crave. Read his 5 Answers below.

1. What led you to this industry?

I worked for more than two years at *Absolute Return*, a trade publication covering hedge funds. *Absolute Return* placed a high bar on original reporting which gave me time to develop a deep network of contacts in the space before joining the *Wall Street Journal*. Since then, I've had opportunities to cover other industries, but hedge funds are so secretive and the stakes are so high that there continue to be new stories to tell.

2. How do you tackle a large story, like the massive fraud at Platinum Partners, both in terms of investigative reporting and making sure you don't burn out on the topic?

I am fortunate that my superiors at the *Journal* allow me the time to chase impactful stories without worrying about a daily hole to fill in the newspaper. I worked on Platinum for months until we had something concrete to tell readers. Once we did, it was like hitting into a deep vein, because the most interesting part wasn't only the alleged fraud, but how it all fit into an ecosystem of deep-pocketed Orthodox Jewish businesspeople with varying degrees of respect for the law. Even though I am the hedge-fund beat reporter, this reporting crossed into a more mainstream area, and that kept it fresh.

3. What is your favorite part of your job?

I remember last year sitting with my editors at a table, surrounded by papers like a crazy person, trying to explain an investigative thread I'd only half begun to understand. One month later, we published the story, and it was even nuttier than we could have imagined at the start. That will never stop being fun.

4. What advice do you have for budding reporters?

1. Get off Twitter.
2. Do original reporting, on anything. Be the best reporter covering the wastewater management industry, if that is the job available. The ability to convince strangers to tell you things they shouldn't is a transferrable skill.
3. Keep your opinions on the people you cover to yourself. Punditry is cheap and common.
4. See #1

5. Where do you see the future of news media going?

If I wanted to worry about selling a low-margin product to a wide audience, I'd work at Pret A Manger. As a reporter, I spend my time talking to sources to sniff out the next great story. I let my editors debate whether we should push that story out in writing, video, a collection of charts or a Snapchat. I have no idea what the future of media will look like, but I'm positive it will require talented and aggressive reporters.



Kirsten Ballard



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