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# Steve Young, businessman: What's he like?

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While reporting [my cover story this week](#) on ex-49er quarterback [Steve Young](#)'s evolution into a private equity dealmaker, people kept asking, "So, what's he like?"

Answer: Normal. He comes off as a normal guy — if your definition of the word encompasses a super-athlete history, relentless competitive drive, TV-commercial-ready good looks and a stable family. (Note I said normal, not typical.)

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[Read the Business of Sports issue here.](#)

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Full disclosure: While I got a deeper look at his business career than other press outlets have had, we only spent a couple hours chatting and had some follow-up emails. But we covered the gamut of his business life and I cross-checked Young's accounts with Silicon Valley's heaviest hitters including [Larry Sonsini](#) and [Frank Quattrone](#). (Steve and his HGGC co-founder [Rich Lawson](#) facilitated those interviews.) I also talked to former HGGC employees, business associates and industry analysts as a matter of tradecraft.

As much as it might make a better story to say otherwise, the people I talked to like doing business with [Steve Young](#). That kind of good-news story makes me leery. In this case, however, the reporting supported the impression.

At our interview, which took place in the adjoining offices Young and Lawson occupy at HGGC in Palo Alto, Young showed up in the Silicon Valley investor uniform of slacks and button-up shirt. At 51, he still has Pro Bowl quarterback dimensions and relaxes into the chair. There are no power-move handshakes or odd stare downs common among intensatronic Silicon Valley execs.

During the talk, he took a few calls from family members, apologizing for the interruptions. He speaks softly and clearly. The guile sensors are not piqued. Interrupted for questions, he finishes thoughts before moving on to the next answer.

He got most animated talking about deals he's played a key role in cinching: HGGC's acquisitions of Innovative Interfaces, MyWebGrocer, iCongo, hybric and Sunquest Information Systems. That's required globe trotting from Munich to Montreal to Emeryville to Winooski, Vermont.

Young takes naturally to self-effacement, a social requirement for a Super Bowl MVP who has done better than most in business. His best story? A case of mistaken identity in which singer Sheryl Crowe looked confused when the ex-quarterback introduced himself by the name he shares with a singer-songwriter Crowe idolized.

I asked Young, "Why private equity?" His response centered less on a drive to bag deals and more on the entrepreneurs he works with. "I've come to a real understanding of the enormity of what owner entrepreneurs do in founding great businesses," he said. "They are rare and a thing of art in many ways."

That quote hints at another Young trait I noted. As an editor, I find myself analyzing peoples' thought processes by the way they use the language. Young expresses himself exactly. He's careful to nuance his speech. It shows a level of discernment that escapes many journalists.

He corrects me when I ask about work-family balance. "It's family-work balance," he says.

Where [Steve Young](#) has situated himself will tell you as much about the man as any impressions I have: He's a managing director of a private equity firm co-founded by a **Morgan Stanley** investment banker, **Huntsman Corp.** billionaire [Jon Huntsman](#), and **Bain Capital** veteran [Robert Gay](#). A portion of the firm's profits go to charitable causes, in line with Young's past commitment to philanthropy with his Forever Young Foundation.

Young says he should be thought of as a "private equity guy who used to play some ball."

Again with the self-effacement.

Greg Baumann is editor in chief at the Silicon Valley Business Journal.