



SEASON 3 EPISODE #24

DEAN KANTOR
COREGRO

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Dean Kantor: Thank you.

Gui Costin: Dean, welcome.

Dean Kantor: Amazing to be here.

Gui Costin: Yeah. So thrilled to have you here. I know it's been a long time coming. So much fun. Well, let's dig right into it. Dean Kantor is the CEO of CoreGro, a real estate private equity firm focused on generating long-term value through strategic acquisitions and structured investments. With over 20 years of experience spanning financial services, real estate, and private equity, Dean is recognized for his deep industry expertise, strategic foresight, and unwavering commitment to excellence. A seasoned entrepreneur and capital market specialist, Dean has built and led businesses that have grown into platforms with substantial assets under management. His ability to identify high-impact investment opportunities, structure complex, cross-border transactions, and create long-term value for ultra-high-net-worth investors has positioned him as a trusted advisor to prominent family offices and institutions globally. Dean's meticulous approach, combined with his relentless pursuit of innovation and growth, has resulted in the successful execution of numerous transactions across multiple jurisdictions. His ventures are a testament to his passion for creating scalable investment platforms and delivering tailored

wealth-building strategies that generate exceptional returns. Tell us about your personal journey and how you came to found CoreGro.

Dean Kantor: So, my journey starts from humble beginnings. I started out in wealth management for many, many years. Built the foundation of my business that way. Really looked after family offices, ultra-high-net-worth individuals. And I like to always start there because what that does is it kind of builds the foundation of what is today CoreGro. My focus, really, within that business was, I guess, to just do good. Help people structure correctly. And then to create legacies, and I think that's really important. I've got a background in finance. And I love tax structuring; it's something that's always resonated with me.

Gui Costin: But you grew up in South Africa.

Dean Kantor: In South Africa.

Gui Costin: Yeah. So, give us a sense. Where do you live now--

Dean Kantor: Still live in South Africa.

Gui Costin: You do? So where? What town?

Dean Kantor: I live in Johannesburg, in South Africa. A lot of traveling between US, UK. Really, look after a lot of investors globally. And the idea is to continue to expand the footprint.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: So, background in wealth management. And really, helping people structure correctly, whether it was estate or tax planning. And the reason, as I said, I lead with this is because when you do that and you do it properly for people, you know where everything is. You know where all their wealth is, whether it was in South Africa or globally. And it gives you that platform in order to be able to build what I love, being pretty entrepreneurial, the alternative investment platform, which is CoreGro today.

Gui Costin: Nice.

Dean Kantor: In the early stages, when we were starting to build out the business, I come from a real estate family in South Africa, so it's always been in my blood. My grandfather was in real estate, very successful in South Africa. And I always used to look for these great angles. The biggest challenge was doing a cross-border. And I like a challenge, so the idea was like, OK, let's come to the US, I came on a bit of an exploratory trip, looked at quite a lot of private equity deals, and landed on real estate.

Gui Costin: That's great. Any type of real estate?

Dean Kantor: Yeah, sure. So, in the early stages, I looked at industrial, and I looked at health care. I love health care; I love what it stands for. I love that at the basis of health care, once again, you're doing good for people. So, if you build great facilities or you own great facilities, that really, I think, resonates with our why, why we do what we do. So focused on health, we really play in the mid-market space. So, we're buying properties that are just over \$3 to \$5 million, in between-- well, \$3 to \$5 million and above. So above where the retail investors generally would be able to do it on their own. And under the institutions, which is arguably anywhere between \$15 and \$20 million. So, in that little mid-market range is where we operate. And the idea for us is to look for value-add opportunities. So, at the core of what our business does is downside protection, risk protection. So capital preservation sits at the forefront of everything. And based on that, it really has given us this ability to deliver very strong upside returns, strong IRRs for our investors, while maintaining downside risk protection.

Gui Costin: Well, tell me, as a CEO, how have you structured the firm and lead a firm like CoreGro?

Dean Kantor: So, I think, we started small, we built a lot of trust. And we've really refined our strategy over many, many years. Today, we've pretty much scaled this up as a vertically integrated platform. We got on the one side, acquisitions, a very strong acquisitions team, and built a property management business together with that.

Gui Costin: Right.

Dean Kantor: And we believe that that's very important for us because the idea is to be able to put that beautiful bow on the building and then be able to on sell it with absolute confidence. So really, that's been at the forefront of what we're doing. I think that over the next five years, one of the things that I'd like to see happening within this business is to continue to deepen those relationships with our investor base. And then obviously couple that with strong institutional partners.

Gui Costin: Well, that's great. So, we talk a lot about strategic alignment and accountability. So how do you do that across your executive team and the broader organization within CoreGro?

Dean Kantor: So, I think something that's important is being incredibly disciplined in our buying. I think that it's important to have a very strong vision within a business. I think it's important to ensure that you have the right people

in place. And that everybody is aligned. I think that goals are important. But I think at the crux of everything is culture within an organization.

Gui Costin: Yeah. Well, that's amazing. And obviously, culture relates to your strong investor relationships. And could you talk about building trust and consistency with those investors and how you go about doing that?

Dean Kantor: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think what's important is nurturing relationships when it comes to these things. So generally, what I find is that it's a longer process, I think, when it comes to selling to people or people like the sales side. But I like to always believe that somebody has got to close the deal for themselves. You have to empower them with the right amount of information. And if you give the right amount of information to somebody, that will really give the ability for them to make the right decisions.

Gui Costin: That's great. We always-- I'm a big fan of CRM, and being able to track all the information that's going on, even as simple as it is for a single salesperson to be able to enter the meetings they've scheduled and make sure you get the call notes in. Could you talk to us about your feelings about a CRM and the importance of a CRM as it relates to your overall business?

Dean Kantor: Yeah. So, I think what's important also-- and I'm going to jump into two areas. So obviously, I think CRM is incredibly important for client relations. We take that very seriously because at the core of what we do is transparency, being able to report correctly, and being able to show our investors everything. So, we really utilize a CRM in that way, and it's always creating that touch point. But I think more than that, it's as a team. So, the one thing I didn't touch on, is obviously myself being South African and having a very strong US presence and South African presence, we utilize a lot of skills globally. So, you need a very strong platform in order to be able to communicate as a team efficiently. So, one of the unique factors of what we do at CoreGro is having this ability to employ these highly skilled people globally. We can run a 24-hour workday cycle and have no language barrier.

Gui Costin: Wow.

Dean Kantor: And that's really given us the ability to scale this business up pretty quickly.

Gui Costin: Yeah. And how many countries globally will you invest in?

Dean Kantor: Only the US.

Gui Costin: Only the US?

Dean Kantor: Yeah. Are we strictly focused here on the US.

Gui Costin: NA? US and health care. What parts of the US?

Dean Kantor: So predominantly the North and Southeast. We're pretty opportunistic. As I mentioned, value-add strategy with a bit of opportunistic built into that. So really, wherever the opportunity generally presents, the idea, really, is to be able to get somebody in the US within my team, on a plane, in the car within a couple of hours from our properties.

Gui Costin: I love it. And then the CRM, for you, ties everything together globally because you have teammates around the world?

Dean Kantor: When the US is going to sleep and South Africa's waking up, we have this ability to pick up seamlessly and vice versa. So really, we track everything within it, within a CRM. One of the things we do, really, as a team is for many years we communicated on email, and we moved away from that, which was quite a challenge, it's quite different.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: And all communication happens within the platform. So, everybody can see with transparency where things are tracking within a deal process.

Gui Costin: That's incredible. And talk to me about feedback, because you talk a lot about culture of feedback across the organization. How does that factor into the growth?

Dean Kantor: So, I think what's important is as a team, we have weekly check-in meetings on a Monday morning. All the executives get together; we talk about what the plan is for the week ahead. We do the same thing on a Thursday, coming back saying, listen, have we achieved what we needed to achieve? I create touch points with everybody within the team just to say, everybody running on track. And I think one of the things that is really unique to what we do is we'll post-mortem a deal once the deal is obviously closed, but also deals that haven't closed, I think, is important. To understand why they didn't close. Not that we just killed them, it's saying, how did it come to be that we just decided that we didn't want to do that?

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: So really one of the things we do is look very seriously at all elements of a deal. And I think collaboration is key within an organization like us. Everybody needs the platform to be able to be heard. And I think as an executive team and how we operate really does breed that. Everybody feels safe in the space to be able to just have a conversation with each other and

try and look for the best possible angle to make the deal as successful as it possibly can be.

Gui Costin: Right. And so that-- that makes a ton of sense. And so that feedback loop really enhances the investment process. And so, you have a lot of institutional and family office capital. What would you say has been the key to that distribution success?

Dean Kantor: So, I think three things, Gui. Number one is credibility. I think the other one is structure and consistency. I think it's incredibly important that you build strong performance. You really have to create credibility with these people. And doing what we say we're going to do, that's always pretty important to me. And then from a structuring point of view, when you're operating on a global scale and you've got family offices or high-net-worth investors or institutions, for that matter, coming in globally, you want to be able to make sure that the structures and the foundation of that are incredibly strong. Because one wrong move there, and it's pretty catastrophic to a business from a tax point of view or a state point of view. So really, structuring sits as a cornerstone of what we do. And then consistency. I think delivering results is incredibly important. And once again, staying consistent within our strategy. Staying focused.

Gui Costin: Yeah. So, I have two questions on leadership. So, number one, how would you characterize your leadership style?

Dean Kantor: Pretty much setting the vision for the business. I generally look at business as a long game. I see it as a sport.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: The idea for me is the more you play, the better you get. So, every day, it's just coming in. I guess in South Africa, I would say coming to bat. I guess here also. But really, just coming in and blocking and blocking and blocking, and you just get better and better. I think it's a bit of a management side. It's managing short-term execution while maintaining the long-term strategy, the long-term vision within the business is incredibly important. And one of the things for me is that I've had to learn to let go. To trust in my team.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: I'm an A-type personality, so I generally like to be in control of everything. Really, I believe that if you put the right people in the right place, the right positions, you get the best results.

Gui Costin: Yeah. And how do you go about managing? Because that's a lot of pressure, managing the team, investors, investor expectations. How do you handle the pressure as a leader?

Dean Kantor: So, I think it's important to obviously surround yourself with the smartest people. If I look at each person within our team, each person's got their unique skills. And I think that when you put yourself in that position to let people be able to drive their decisions and be accountable for their decisions, you get the best results. I think what's important is being the CEO of the business and setting the vision for the business, it's about imparting that to the team. And obviously, maintaining that vision, that long game.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: And then as much as you're having the long game, it's maintaining that the culture within the team is always aligned.

Gui Costin: So, when you think of CoreGro, and you think of every business has its challenges, you know what I mean? There are different challenges, whether it's hiring, deal-sourcing, raising capital. Is there any one challenge that you're a bigger challenge you're faced with today? And then the audience would love to how are you overcoming that challenge.

Dean Kantor: So, I think probably the biggest challenge is raising capital today.

Gui Costin: OK.

Dean Kantor: I think these family offices have got so many options. And with the world being global, that optionality increases exponentially.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: I think it's about relationships. I think you've got to drive relationships with investors and building on that. Once again, coming back to those points that I made, credibility, structure, and consistency, just maintaining the ability to stay on top of mind with them and showing them what you're doing.

Gui Costin: Love it.

Dean Kantor: But within time, I guess you start to get guys looking and more interested in what you're doing, but it really is-- it takes a lot of time today, and I think capital-raising is tough.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: Tough environment.

Gui Costin: And just maintaining that consistency of outreach. Getting your story in front of all those different family offices would be paramount, right?

Dean Kantor: Yeah, absolutely. I think our vision within what we're doing and within the health care space is what's actually driving a lot of our success. I think the fact that what we're seeing from-- and the feedback we're receiving from the family offices is the defensive nature of health care. I think that has really been key to the discussion points. People are looking to de-risk their portfolios these days.

And if you think of health care, health care is probably that one asset class which is not going away. It's very difficult for the doctor to be able to do a procedure online. It's just not going to happen.

Gui Costin: Of course.

Dean Kantor: At least, I can't see it happening. So, as I say, that creates this defensiveness. The thing that excited me in the early stages when I was building the business and why I picked health care is-- especially the families that I had involved in the early stages, they were looking for this defensiveness. They were looking for capital preservation. They were looking for long-term growth. And as I mentioned earlier that exploratory trip here in the US, the idea for me was what can we find that ticks all those boxes? The other thing which I found within health is that you're seeing a consolidation happening within the industry. So, the rising cost of health care is creating this pressure from inpatient facilities to outpatient facilities. So, what you're finding is that you've got these health care hubs or health care nodes, which are forming around these hospitals, and the thing that I liked and what I was seeing was this consolidation of private equity coming into the OpCo side, into the operator side, the provider side. And that created strong tenant bases with strong credit, strong corporate guarantees. And that really was the foundation between capital preservation.

Gui Costin: There's no doubt that the focus on health care is a brilliant strategic move. Is there anything that comes to mind that I haven't asked you? Because I do believe where you're focused in health care, the defensive nature of the growth of it, I mean, it's really fascinating what's going on. All the concierge doctors especially, it might not be, but you're seeing that, too. So, you're just seeing so much evolution within health care, especially in the US with Obamacare, et cetera. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to comment on?

Dean Kantor: So, I think one of the things from a Dakota point of view, operating a global business, being able to utilize Dakota as a platform has

been amazing because we have this ability to tap into this international network.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: And then having the tax strategies coupled with that in order to have these international investors coming into the US, I think, has been incredibly beneficial to the capital-raising efforts.

Gui Costin: That's amazing.

Dean Kantor: And what we're doing.

Gui Costin: Yeah. That's great because I know a question is, if you were to advise a CEO building a real estate investment platform, what are the most critical decisions they need to get right early?

Dean Kantor: So, I think what's really important is structure and being incredibly intentional about values. I think it's important not to chase scale before you've built trust. I think what's super important, Gui, is to always surround yourself with people that are incredibly smart, smarter than yourself.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: And culture is the key to success or failure. So really, if you're rowing in the same direction as your team, you'll obviously have this ability to keep growing, but if you're paddling against each other, you're going to fail.

Gui Costin: Yeah. And we always talk about culture as the number one factor in keeping your best people. So, you've got to treat your best people in a world-class manner. Do you want to comment on that? Because that really, to me, is how you treat people, is your culture.

Dean Kantor: Yeah.

Gui Costin: And you want to keep your best people forever, effectively.

Dean Kantor: Absolutely. I think, to answer that question, sharing is incredibly important. Whether it's sharing knowledge, or sharing in the upside, in the growth of the business, or sharing in the profits, I think that's really what's important to keeping good people and keeping people motivated. I think that's important. Maintaining the vision, making sure that you're on track, that you're staying positive. And within business, that you're going to have good days, you're going to have bad days, but positivity really does rule when it comes to that.

Gui Costin: That's great. Now, to close out, as you look out the next three to five years, any thoughts on where you see CoreGro going?

Dean Kantor: I'd like to see it-- its investor base growing dramatically, both from a family office and institutional point of view. I think that's where Dakota plays an incredible role. I think that's where strong CRM platform plays an incredible role.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Dean Kantor: The idea for me would be obviously to continue to tap into this international market. We like the international investor. We've built the right structures for those international investors to come into the US, and that really is the idea for building out this platform. Health care is going nowhere. The ability to buy is going nowhere. And you've got economies of scale in the US, which I just have never seen. And really, that pretty much, for me, would be what I'd like to see over the next three to five years. Just growing out the platform, growing out the relationships. And then plugging into that, which I think has been critical to what we've been doing, is building out this network of these health providers. These groups that are looking to expand their portfolios. So, as I mentioned earlier, you have private equity coming into the market. They're looking to expand these doctors or physicians, and we want to be the real estate partner for them in order to obviously be able-- for them to be able to grow their vision.

Gui Costin: Yeah. Makes a lot of sense. Well, Dean, I can't thank you so much for being on the show. I've really enjoyed it. Thanks for joining us.

Dean Kantor: Thank you.

Gui Costin: You got it.

Dean Kantor: Appreciate the time.

Gui Costin: Everyone, that is a wrap of another Rainmaker Podcast. Thanks so much for joining us, and we can't wait to see you on the next Rainmaker Podcast.

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Gui Costin: Hello, everyone. Just wanted to say thanks for watching. Hope you enjoyed the show. One thing that I think you do know is all of this information that we covered exists in Dakota Marketplace, our institutional investor database. Even this show that we just cut will end up in Dakota Marketplace, so you can view it. And if you're not a member, we would love to show you the platform. Just simply go to our website and get a free trial of Dakota Marketplace.