



Rainmaker
PODCAST

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STEVE DUNN
ABRDN

Welcome to the Rainmaker Podcast with your host, Gui Costin. The goal of this podcast is to give listeners a unique look into sales strategies from top industry executives. We introduce you to the heads of sales and heads of distribution who will help you understand the inner workings of the successful sales organizations from philosophy to execution. This podcast is essential for sales professionals seeking wisdom from the best in the field. If you're not familiar with Dakota and their Dakota Rainmaker content, please check out Dakota.com to learn more about their services.

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What is up, everybody? It's Gui Costin, CEO and founder of Dakota. Welcome to the latest edition of the Rainmaker Podcast. I'm thrilled to be joined by Steve Dunn, head of US distribution and exchange traded funds from Abrdn. Steve, welcome.

Steve Dunn: Good afternoon. Thanks, Gui.

Gui Costin: Steve Dunn, CIMA, is the head of US Wealth distribution and exchange traded funds at Abrdn. Steve guides the firm's strategic direction and distribution strategy for mutual funds, SMAs, and ETFs. Prior to Abrdn, Steve was an executive director at ETF securities, overseeing its US ETF business, which was acquired by Abrdn in 2018. Previously, Steve was a director with Deutsche asset and wealth management, in charge of managing relationships with US ETF strategists and overseeing the eastern division sales team. Prior to that, Steve held sales and distribution strategy positions at iShares, BlackRock, and Vanguard. Steve holds a BA degree in public administration from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania and has completed his MBA at Pennsylvania State University. Steve holds a series 7, 24, and 63 registrations, as well as the certified investment management analyst. So, as you all know, our whole ambition of this podcast is to talk to distribution leaders just like yourself. We're

trying to create a venue for where people are trying to grow their careers, learn best practices, learn how other people do it. And that's really the intent of today. So, we're so thrilled to have you. And could you just give us a little background on yourself? Kind of go back to the beginning. And then walk us through to your current role at Abrdn?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, I think most people in our space probably got there a little bit accidentally, right? I don't... it's very rare that you actually meet folks that are in the distribution world that went to college with the expectation of being in distribution. So, I have very similar background as most folks. So, I entered into the industry through Vanguard here locally. And so, as a 22-year-old that knew nothing about the financial markets, got my start at Vanguard, and recognized it was what I loved, a combination of working from a client perspective and the investment components. And just continued to leverage that from a career perspective. Interesting story... and I always tell this story because I think it's great for other people to hear. And it's flat out true. And so, I was actually visiting a client, registered investment advisor in Florida. And this was circa 1999, something along those lines. He was throwing out some things that he was using from a portfolio perspective. And one of the things that he threw out there was SPY. So, everyone at this point in time knows SPY is one of the larger ETFs that are out there. It's been around for a long time. I had no idea what SPY was. Felt a little embarrassed. Came home. Looked it up. I was like, wow, this is a really interesting thing, coming from Vanguard. It's pretty consistent with some of the things that we were doing. I went to a conference the next month. Happened to be sitting next to a woman who basically threw out there, does anyone know anything about exchange traded funds? I was like, ah, I know a little bit about exchange traded funds. In fact, I did some research in that kind of stuff. Three months later she was my boss at iShares.

Gui Costin: Oh, my gosh.

Steve Dunn: So, from that standpoint, it was a client interaction where I was a little bit embarrassed that I didn't know what the client was talking to. Did a little bit of research. Just so happened to be sitting next to the person who was actually doing most of the hiring for iShares at the time. And so, this was pre 2000 before the products even launched. Ended up going to work for iShares. Clearly didn't have any expectation of what iShares was going to become. In fact, had every expectation that six months later I would come back

home to Pennsylvania tail between my legs, and say, wow, that was a terrible mistake. But the reality is it was probably the best situation, at least from my perspective, professionally, to allow me to get to where I am today.

Gui Costin: In the ETF business.

Steve Dunn: In the ETF business. So, for the most part, for the past 24, 25 years, I've almost exclusively been in the ETF business.

Gui Costin: OK, at iShares. And then '08 hits. And then BlackRock buys it, right?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, and so it was an interesting... certainly an interesting partner. And so, I think, it's funny, because I was on the Barclays global investors side of it. And so, you had this sort of very sophisticated, very strong culture at BlackRock. And BGI had what I would consider as this sort of California cool kind of culture kind of things, different cultures, both equally good, both equally strong. But you knew at some point in time, obviously some of those things collide as far as what the new culture was going to be. I ended up leaving iShares in 2012 and ended up joining with a couple ex iShares colleagues. We went to work for Deutsche and helped build out their ETF business at Deutsche. So it was that opportunity for us to start something new and put a little bit of a stamp on it from that perspective, and so another great opportunity to work with really great folks, build some really cool products, build out a business from that perspective. Yeah.

Gui Costin: That's amazing. So, tell us what happened. So how long were you at Deutsche for?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, so I was with Deutsche up until 2015. And I had done a couple different tours with iShares on the west coast, ended up coming back to the east coast. And so, I was with Deutsche until 2015. And then I got tapped on the shoulder by a British firm that owned these sorts of funky little products that were trading here in the US that were mainly commodity focused. And they asked if I would be interested in leading their distribution efforts here in the US, said yes. Started in September of 2015. That company then was later purchased by Abrdn, which is how I ended up at Abrdn. So Abrdn acquired the ETF business in 2018, and subsequently continued to be there, leading that effort.

Gui Costin: That's great. So, as we're thinking about distribution and structure, right? So, we have so many distribution leaders listening to this podcast. Walk us through just so we can get the foundational elements of how you're structured, how your team is structured.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, yeah. And so, through that ETF experience you'll learn a lot, right? Of what works, what doesn't work, look at things a little bit differently from that perspective. On the ETF business, we've always had a relatively small, what I would consider nimble team. And while we had sort of specialists, we also need everyone... we needed everyone to sort of understand everyone else's world to a certain extent so that we could step in, and we could fill in. We could do those types of things. And so, on any given day, as the leader of that group... I was talking to clients. I was doing marketing opportunities. I was running the team itself, writing reviews, doing things from a standpoint of looking at sort of directionally where we're going, all those other types of aspects. So, it allowed you to be pretty nimble. And from my perspective, I know that everyone likes something a little bit different. From my perspective, I love the aspect of everyday looking a little bit different. I love the aspect of walking into the office and not quite sure what's going to happen. I know some people that creates some challenges for. But from my perspective, it was a great opportunity for me. There are other firms at that point in time... some of the other firms that I had worked with, they started to get to the point where the size forced them to be sort of specialists, right? So, people had very specific roles or specialists, what I always refer to as left shoe tires, right? So, they have people that work there. That's all they do is tie left shoes. From my perspective and what I was looking for... for my career, and what sort of I got my energy from was I love that aspect of not necessarily knowing what's going to happen tomorrow. But being prepared, and being intentional, and being all those other types of aspects. And so, we've always created the team that had that level of flexibility to be able to address what was going on, and so allow some of those things to drive our behaviors as it relates to that. As we got into Abrdn we had a little bit more resources. We had the ability to fill out the team a little bit more. And so, our distribution structure probably looks a little bit more consistent to what we see from an industry perspective. So, we do have people that are in territory. And we do have national accounts covered. So just to give you some sort of details, we have six people that are out in the field, sort of working their own territories. We have two on the national account side. We have an internal desk that's based here in Philadelphia supporting those efforts. We do not channelize. And so being a little—

Gui Costin: Let's talk about why. Because I'm a big believer in non-channelization. We're not channelized at all.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, so from my perspective, I've always looked at it... and I grew up supporting the IRA space. IRAs is sort of my core and what I know.

Gui Costin: So, me too.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: OK, so tell me, what is it that you like about the IRAs so much?

Steve Dunn: I love the flexibility of the IRAs. And obviously there's really great people throughout the industry. And so, there's nothing wrong for whatever firm you work for, and things along those lines.

Gui Costin: Sure.

Steve Dunn: I love the autonomy of IRAs to make decisions based upon what they believe is the best decisions to make, and being unconstrained as it relates to those types of aspects.

Gui Costin: Yeah, and then, OK, cool. I mean, that's a big deal.

Steve Dunn: A big deal.

Gui Costin: Because I like them too because they're so entrepreneurial.

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: So, kind of saying the same thing, independent business owners and everything. Let's just take one more step to talk about... because a lot of people don't get that IRAs are killing squirrels.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: Right? And it takes a lot of effort, because there's a lot of them.

Steve Dunn: Sure.

Gui Costin: Right? So, do you just want to, just for a couple secs, address that, and how you've kind of gone about that personally?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, and even back into the way that we structure things. So, I'm a much bigger believer in following opportunities, rather than structures or looking at firms from a standpoint of where they are and things like that. The way that we talk about it from our sales team perspective is, what is the best opportunity? And who's the best... who's the best person to close that opportunity? To me, that drives our behaviors, right, from that standpoint. And in some situations, we have people on our team that might be able to close a deal better because of the type of client in those situations. I don't think we should be limited to territories. Yes, we do have some structure. And yes, there is sort of a core group that we have. But to me, it's all about who is the best... who is in the best position to face off against that client, and make sure that that client serves and ultimately chooses us as their provider for that aspect.

Gui Costin: And that takes incredible leadership.

Steve Dunn: Listen—

Gui Costin: I really believe that. Because I'm the same way.

Steve Dunn: It creates challenges. It creates challenges for folks. Not everyone is willing to buy into that aspect. I just don't believe in... I just don't believe in zip codes. I don't believe in creating territories based on zip codes, from that perspective.

Gui Costin: Yeah, and by the way, if you have a leadership approach where you know, and that everyone on your team knows that you're going to take care of them, but we are going to be able to... so if somebody is traveling to LA with one of our PMs, and they're calling on account that somebody already has covered, the job of that person says, I'll set up a meeting, it's all good. And they all at the end of the day, because it's so hard to close any business, that we'll take care of them. But the best interest of the company is to be able to act in that way.

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: The worst interest of the company is saying, no, no, no, that's my territory. You can't take that PM in there.

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: I mean, the loser is the PM.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, I've worked at organizations where you show up in a building, and you're going up in the elevator. And you see a colleague that's in the same building that you didn't know... right, you had no... going to see a different client.

Gui Costin: I hear you.

Steve Dunn: But you didn't know that they were there, what they were doing there, those types of... and those things... granted, if you have a big enough team, you can probably... but it still doesn't make sense.

Gui Costin: It's still inefficient.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, it's highly inefficient.

Gui Costin: I'm hearing more and more people go in the direction... the generalist direction.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: Because the reason I like the generalist direction so much is because you have to play at the highest level, versus the lowest, right?

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: So, we always say Cincinnati is one of our favorites. It's like, you have to be able to go to Cincinnati and call in the corner office UBS team.

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: You have to go on Thor, you know, Jim Gorr, Thor. You have to be able to call on the CIO of Fifth Third, Ted Finlay.

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: Right? And FEG, right, Fund Evaluation Group?

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: So, your game has to be the highest, but you cover the whole market. And that's such a benefit to the salespeople.

Steve Dunn: And from my perspective, I mean, those are the type of salespeople that we're looking for. Those are harder to find, recognizing that. But when you do find it, you recognize pretty quickly you have gold, right? If someone that can have those four different conversations with those four people, but at a high level, that's really special from that standpoint. But I've always believed that that's a much better solution. We're a smaller team. We don't have the ability to set out wide coverage. We have to be very deliberate in what we do. We have to be very intentional in sort of everything that we do. And that stems all the way down to the types of clients that we're calling on. And to be quite honest, in some situations, which we are all facing is it's also who you're not calling on, right? And who you're choosing just not to, because it doesn't make sense. And so, 20 years ago did we have all the information to be able to do that? Maybe not, right? There's no excuse for it today, because we have so much more information available to us about who's buying what, and what they look like, and what their behaviors are, and how they want to be sold to, and all those other types of facts. We have way too much information for us not to be absolutely intentional in everything that we're doing from a sales perspective.

Gui Costin: That's great. So, let's talk about communication.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: And it's my favorite topic as it relates to running an organization and running a team.

Steve Dunn: Sure.

Gui Costin: And for you, to oversimplify it, right... and I want to talk about the internal communication with your team, and then how you communicate up. Let's start with the team. And the reason I want to bring this up, because to the audience... and not everybody listening works for a big distribution firm. A lot of people listening might be a single salesperson, right? Two or three people on their team... And I always say the key at the end of the day is, even though you might be small, you got to act big. And you have to have the same

processes, procedures, communication, sales plans that you would if you were at a bigger firm. But it takes discipline, because no one's really holding you to account. You don't have to hold yourself accountable. That's why we do our Rainmaker training to go through that and explain it. Communication is a big part of it. Can you talk about how you communicate with your team on a daily, weekly basis?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, and so, I mean, the interesting thing from... to use a sports reference, I think Jimmy Johnson... they always asked Jimmy Johnson when he was coaching the Cowboys, not that I'm a huge fan of Cowboys sitting here in Philadelphia, but nonetheless they would talk to him about how he treats players, right? And so, they would say... I think Jimmy would say something along the lines of, I treat them all fairly. I don't treat them all equally, right, kind of aspect. And I look at it the same way from our distribution team. Everyone on my team needs something a little bit different, right? Understanding what they are. I have folks on my team that are like, Steve, I'm locked in, right? I'm more than happy to talk to you, but I'm good, kind of aspect.

Gui Costin: Right.

Steve Dunn: And there's other folks that I have on my team, and even some of the better folks that just want to bounce things off of me. Hey, Steve, am I thinking about this the right way? Or this is the pushback that I'm getting from clients. Can you think about, am I approaching it the right way and those types of aspects? So, I've always been a huge believer in transparency as it relates to sort of who I am, what I want, what I believe in, those types of aspects. We can... I'm certainly open to agree to disagree. But at the end of the day, I think ultimately what it comes down to is alignment, right? As long as we're aligned on what the common goals are as it relates to expectations, anything along those lines, compensation, all those other kind of stuff... if we're aligned, we'll get through any of the challenges. Because there will be challenges, right? There will be disagreements. There will be change that takes place. But that aspect of them having some level of transparency, of knowing who I am, what my expectations are, how I support them through these types of situations, how I advocate for them internally within the organization, a lot of that stuff will start to fade away, to be quite honest, if you're consistent in your behaviors and doing those types of things. And so,

from my perspective, it's about it's about consistency. It's about transparency. It's about those types of aspects.

Gui Costin: Right.

Steve Dunn: And that allows me to get away with some of the things that we do from a sales perspective, to be quite honest. When I need to lean in, and when I need to ask them to do some things that might be slightly uncomfortable, I already have their buy in because they know.

Gui Costin: No, that's great. That is great. So, let's move to the external communication-- or sorry, up to the executive committee.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: Is it structured? Is it consistent. How do... and I'm really looking for some guidance and advice to our listeners for how you go about your best practices of communicating progress against your plan.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, clearly, I think it's always the most important. You have to understand what the folks, especially those folks that you're reporting into, what their goals are, right? How are they being evaluated? How are they being compensated? How are those things? And what am I doing to make progress towards helping them in those types of situations.

Gui Costin: Right.

Steve Dunn: And so, we have an interesting situation at Abrdn, obviously, because being a UK based firm, my direct boss sits in the UK, right?

Gui Costin: Right.

Steve Dunn: Doesn't create any challenges from my perspective. I know exactly what he's looking for. I know what his KTOs are. I know how he's going to be evaluated at the end of the year. I know how I participate, and how I add into those types of things. Those are the things that we clearly communicate about. We have frequency in those conversations. In fact, I think I have one on Friday that I probably need to do some preparation for. But nonetheless... but yeah, I mean, from my perspective, I think I've worked for a couple

different entities now that have been non-US based organizations. You do need... there are some local nuances that you sort of need to understand as it relates to that. It just helps that relationship feel a little bit better. There are certain things in the US that we do that, yeah, right? Yeah, there's certain things that we say that we probably shouldn't say, right, that aren't those types of things. But to me, it's always been around alignment and understanding of what my boss's goals are, right? How are they being compensated? How are they being rewarded? How are they being judged? What are the common goals that they're doing to drive that organization? And my goal is how do I participate in that? And how do I make it as easy for them, at least my contribution as part of that? And that is overcommunication, as it relates. We also have local report ins. So, CEO of Americas, he's terribly important to what I'm doing on a daily basis, even though I may not report directly into him. He and I have weekly conversations. In fact, most of the time we're in early. And so, we'll have our best conversations at 7:15 in the morning when no one else is there, right? And in some of those situations it's about, hey, Steve, what are you seeing? What are you hearing? Jim, what are you hearing? What are you seeing, from that perspective? Are there things that we should be driving? What are the growth areas? What are we thinking about those types of aspects? So, yeah, I mean, it's—

Gui Costin: So, it's constant communication.

Steve Dunn: I think... I don't know that there's any other way, to be quite honest, as it relates to that. Our world is fluid. It's not that our goals should change on a day-to-day basis. It's not like we should be rewriting business plans on a quarterly basis, or anything along those lines. But yeah, there's events that do take place that, one, we have to be prepared for. Obviously, having a response to some of the activities that took place Friday and over the weekend, yeah, right? Clients expect those types of things. And we need to be prepared and sort of out in front of some of those types of aspects. I think the expectation around clients is higher of all of us. And so, they reward those folks that they feel like they can get that sort of response from. So yeah, I mean, the communication is high, and it has to be.

Gui Costin: Yeah, couldn't agree more. All right, let's transition into one of my favorite topics, which is the use of a CRM.

Steve Dunn: Ooh, yeah.

Gui Costin: Yeah, we happen to use Salesforce.

Steve Dunn: Yep, likewise.

Gui Costin: Could you just give us your opinion, and how you characterize the use of it, and your whole process?

Steve Dunn: Critical, right? I mean, the reality is I don't know how... I don't know how you run a modern-day distribution business without the support of something along those lines. I think every organization would probably stress that we'd like to find better ways, right? We need to... there's always work that can be done as it relates to that. But the activity and the information that we're getting out of that drives most of our activity, right? And if it's not driving most of your activity, at least it's reinforcing some of the decisions that you're making.

Gui Costin: And when you say getting information out of it, tell me what you mean by that.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, so, like I said, we try to be really intentional in the types of clients that we're targeting. We don't have a huge team. So therefore, the analogy that I brought to the distribution team when I took over the distribution team is we got to swing at strikes, right? The reality is when we start swinging at pitches out of the strike zone, we're just not effective, right? And so, the reality is bigger organizations have the ability to swing more often and get some things wrong. As a smaller organization, you don't have the ability to get as many wrong, right? And so, the reality from our perspective, CRM is our guiding light. The information that we extract out of it, we use it a lot from a marketing perspective. So, all of our marketing driven activity sort of funnels through sort of our CRM activity. It leads to any sort of lead generation that we're working on with our internal desk. So, there's so much information that flows through there. And I would argue, we still have work to do in the way that we utilize it. We don't use its full capacity. We don't integrate it enough. But I'm just not so sure how organizations get by without really leaning in.

Gui Costin: Yeah, because I always tell our team and anyone who's willing to listen that there's a few leverage points that salespeople have. And I characterize them with three things. But one of them is a CRM. And I think it's the only way to 10X your leverage. And what I mean by that is if you're a good salesperson and you're getting lots of meetings, you're creating a lot of content around who you've met

with, and then information on who you've met with. And if the meetings scheduled don't go into CRM, and then eventually some semblance of the meeting notes, right, you have no ability to go back and quickly look at who you've met with so you can do a quick follow up. You can trigger sales actions, right? And then as every month grows, you meet with more and more people. And if it's all spread around, and there's no way to look at it, then you can't go back and say, oh, I have to call this, right?

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: And so, it's just such an amazing leverage point. And a lot of people... I know you believe in it, but I'm going to tell you, a lot of people can be a little suspect of it or what have you. And I guess the reason we do these to hear from the pros, right, is just you have to force yourself.

Steve Dunn: It's no longer an option.

Gui Costin: Yeah, yeah.

Steve Dunn: Right, there is... so from my perspective, if you talk to... when I talk to my team, the reality is there are some things that I am willing to negotiate on. And then there's non-negotiables.

Gui Costin: So well said.

Steve Dunn: The reality is, I think, from that perspective, that falls into one of those non-negotiables, because it's so important, because it drives so much other activity, not even just for the sale... completely leverages the salesperson. But there's so many other downstream things that it impacts. Like I said, we incorporate all of these things into sort of our marketing, and our marketing efforts, and things along those lines, around being more precise with our marketing. If that information doesn't exist—

Gui Costin: Well, think about it for one minute. And I know you know this, but I want the audience to hear this, because even if you didn't have turnover... OK, let's say you have a six-person team. And you're like, you know what? We want to move Susan to here and Jim to there, like move into each other's territories. So, let's say Susan goes into the CRM, and she goes, all right, hey, Jim, for the past year I've seen you've done 120 meetings. Or I've seen you've done only 10 meetings? Like where are all the meetings? He goes, yeah, I didn't

really get those in. And then the call notes aren't in there. But they're all in Outlook. And you're like, what?

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: So now... and I call that information bars of gold to a company.

Steve Dunn: Agreed.

Gui Costin: Right? And I think it's fair if a company's paying a salesperson, you should get the bars of gold.

Steve Dunn: Yep.

Gui Costin: So, if I'm paying you to set up a meeting with somebody, you do that meeting, put in the meeting you scheduled in, and the notes are a bar of gold. That's an exchange, right? And you're telling me... because I've had people tell me, no, no, no, no, those are my meetings.

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: Right? I mean, how are they your meetings?

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: But I mean... but I think it's really important. I believe it's in such the best interest of the salesperson to behave in this way. And I love when you say non-negotiable. Because you're not only doing yourself a favor. You're actually really helping the salespeople.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, and I think two points will relate that. I had an old sales manager that used to say all the time of show me a salesperson who's unwilling to show me his territory, meaning notes and things along those lines, and I'll show you a bad salesperson, right? Like the reality is—

Gui Costin: Or an open position.

Steve Dunn: Right. If you're a good salesperson you're more than happy to say, right, completely, look at my notes. Look at the territory. Look at it the way that it's managed, all those other types of—

Gui Costin: But they're developing good habits. That's what I'm saying. It's like you're not doing this to hurt someone. And I think everyone feels like, oh, my god, the CRM. I got to put this in. It's like, no, we're developing good habits. And I know it can be tough. Now, we just had a podcast. And I thought it was pretty cool what Ryan Robertson said from FS. He's like, look, we give everybody all the resources to do it in like five different ways. Right, you have an internal who can do it. You can do the recording on your phone. You can send it in. You can transcribe it. We're giving you... we're going to work with you to make sure whatever works for you. But I strongly don't recommend waiting until Friday night or Saturday morning to do a week's... right? You should do it right after the meeting. Take your notes. Transcribe them, whatever. Get them in. Go to your next meeting.

Steve Dunn: Even with us, I mean, obviously as a manager we prefer not to have turnover on the team, but it happens, right?

Gui Costin: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Steve Dunn: It always is going to happen. But it is pretty amazing. We recently had a little bit of turnover on our team, just one turnover. But it was amazing for me to be able to sort of run and see what the challenge is, right? And so, when my boss comes and says, hey, Steve, obviously good person. We hate to lose good people. But from a territory standpoint, what does the territory look like? And I'm able to pretty quickly assess that and say, OK, this is what we need to do immediately in order to triage that situation until we can backfill the position. It gives a lot of people comfort, right, of, yeah, to be able to do that pretty quickly, as opposed to saying, yeah, I'm not sure what's going to happen over the next couple weeks, and we're going to be scrambling. I'm just not a big fan of that.

Gui Costin: Yeah, and I want to move on to the next question, but I did have one guy do this to me after nine months. And I just asked our CRO... I said, hey, can you just... our Chief Revenue Officer... can you just look at his meetings, the meetings that he's scheduled and everything so I can get a sense of it. He goes, zero.

Steve Dunn: Not the answer you're looking for.

Gui Costin: Zero.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: And I asked him about it. He goes, well, those are mine.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: I'm like, wow, we definitely have a massive disconnect.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, yeah.

Gui Costin: Because we are a team.

Steve Dunn: Fortunately, you ended up where you were, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Gui Costin: Exactly. All right, so talking leadership is our next topic. You come across as a very compassionate leader.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: So, talk to me about how you would characterize your leadership style.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, I think anyone who's in a leadership role, you sort of... you learn a little bit through the years. And I always like to say is you take a little bit from everybody. Right, you try to repeat those things that you really liked yourself, right? Hey, that felt really good, right, when I was in that situation. And I liked my manager when they did these types of things. You know, there's a pretty good chance that they feel good for me. They probably feel good for most folks. You try to sort of store those types of things and say, yeah, that's going to be part of my manager style.

Gui Costin: So, do you want to hear a crazy story about that? I started working with Edgewood Management in 2006. Allen Breed is the president, by far and away mentor, guiding light. I'd have no career if it weren't for him. I noticed something. Because now I don't see email, people responding with long emails anymore, angry, whatever you want to call those things. But in '06, that time frame, that still was a thing.

Steve Dunn: Sure.

Gui Costin: You know what I mean? I never saw him ever reply to an email and do any of that. Like never even commented it. And I just paid attention, and I was kind of just watching. He never had that. And then just like you just said, you learn. I watched that. I said, I'm never doing that. And he's an amazing leader. I don't see him getting involved in that email stuff and responding to people, anything via email. And that's... you just take it by osmosis. You're like, that's what a rock star does. I'm going to emulate that.

Steve Dunn: Yeah, no, I think that's exactly it. And I think also in those same situations, I think you learn as much from those things that you see, and you're like, ooph, that didn't feel good. And clearly it didn't get a response, or the right response from folks. And you sort of log that one away and say, ooh, yeah, no, that's probably not going to be part of my arsenal sort of moving forward. And so, I'd like to believe that my management style is 25 years in the... sort of growing from things that I've watched, things that I've seen, and things along those lines. And you sort of have these full circle moments, right, kind of aspect? There're times where we all sort of want to jump into things. But I think you quickly realize everyone's got something going on in their life. And they're not always willing to share that with you. But I think if you ask the right questions and you show a little compassion, what you'll actually get from them is you'll probably get some honesty and say, hey, Steve, I'm struggling with X. OK, that's great for me to know, because now I can help you, right, kind of aspect. Now I can create something that works for you, because I really value you as a person and as an employee. And so therefore, I think you probably see it in your everyday aspect. I'm just a big believer is the more flexibility I can give you, you'll pay me back 2X or 3X. And so that aspect of understanding and having some trust in the people, you got to hire really well kind of aspect. We all make mistakes at times, but from my perspective is you go out of your way to hire really well so that you can trust that person just to do what they're supposed to be doing. And so, my British colleagues have... just get on with it, right, kind of thing is one of the things that they say all the time. And I'm just a big... I'm a big fan of that, right, kind of aspect. Because my job as a manager is to clear obstacles. My job is to get stuff out of your way. So that you can be the most effective person that you can do, and be happy doing it, right? Feel like you're making a contribution, and all those other types of aspects. So yeah, I think there's a certain amount of compassion in the things that I do. I'd like to provide flexibility, just because I think employees value it and will pay it back, and much more than the flexibility that I'm giving them.

Gui Costin: Yeah, and I think... and I'm agreeing with you 100%. Because somebody asked me this question, like, hey, wait a second. So, you're telling me that a fire-able offense is missing a family kid event because you have a business meeting? I said 100%. OK, you're making your family stuff. And I said, we have no T&E policy, no vacation policy. Just act like an adult.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: I never thought of it like this, but people are like, that means you show a lot of trust. I'm like, yeah. And frankly... and they're like, oh, I bet they're going to work harder for you. No, that's not what I want. That's fine. But really what I want is... I want them to be the best version of themselves. And I'm going to treat them like an adult. And my assumption is they're going to also be here to be a total pro and act professionally.

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: But we also don't... I don't want to create a business where people are working 12, 14-hour days. That's not healthy for anybody.

Steve Dunn: Right.

Gui Costin: And you should be able to get your job done in eight hours. And it doesn't have to be working eight straight hours, right? You should go exercise during the day. You know what I mean?

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: We send everybody... or go walk around the block. You know what I mean?

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: It's not like you're chained to your desk. And what ends up happening is we've seen kind of people fill the void, and stay, and like rise. You know, the cream kind of rises.

Steve Dunn: Right.

Gui Costin: And then the people over time that just weren't into that quietly leave. And that's fine. It's just not a good fit, you what I mean?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, but I mean, I think ultimately, if you create a good team environment, everyone recognizes that there's going to be times where they have to step up. And there's also going to be... you also have to have the confidence that someone is willing to step up when you're the one that needs a little bit of help kind of aspect, right? It will come. It just may not be your day yet, as it relates to that. And so, I think everybody has got to feel comfortable with that aspect. And so, we try to create that environment where there's going to be a day where I may need the helping hand. I may need the help from that perspective. And I'm fairly confident one of my teammates will step up accordingly, as it relates to that. Likewise, I will do that same thing for them.

Gui Costin: Yeah.

Steve Dunn: I think in our world, in the distribution aspect, it's sometimes a little harder to find, depending on how people are rewarded, and compensated, and things along those lines. But from my perspective, yeah, it's got to be about something bigger. It's got to be something a little bit more sort of the greater good. We spend way too much time doing what we're doing as it relates to those types of things. So, there's got to be a little bit more to it. And I think it's the same thing that you sort of preach from your organization and perspective. It's got to be a little bit more than just me. The me part has to be taken care of, but it's got to be more than just about me.

Gui Costin: I couldn't agree more. So that being said, two last questions.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: One, what advice would you give a young person coming into our industry today?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, so it's a really good question. Obviously, our industry has changed quite drastically over the last 25 years. But I think there are some things that are absolutely, absolutely consistent. And what I would tell everyone is, go out of your way even early in your career to find mentors, advocates, whatever you want to refer to them as within your own organization. You need people within the

organization that will look after your best interests, support you when you're not there. You also need someone within that group that will be honest with you and tell you when you're not, right? So, I think we all have the tendency to go to someone when we're maybe not happy with the way that something's going. You need someone within that group that will tell you, now you're wrong in that situation. And you need to adjust, and those types of things. Surround yourself with those... find that advocacy group early, whether it's within your own organization, or even outside the organization. I think one of the things that we talked about, one of the consistent things that you hear across these podcasts is the best information that I get is from a colleague that works at a different place, right? There's no incentive necessarily for us to exchange ideas. But it works really well, because they benefit from my insight that might be a little bit different than their insight, right? And so, you have to create that network. I know it's sometimes overused and a little bit cheesy, but it absolutely is the case. I worked for iShares. I have this tremendous iShares network. And I always tell people it's a little bit like the CIA. I'm like, you know that... I can make two phone calls and find out pretty much anything about anyone. Because those people are located across the industry at this point in time. And so tremendous... I think it's just underserved, underutilized from that perspective. You have to find people that are willing to advocate on your behalf and those types of [INAUDIBLE]. The second thing I would tell them is there are going to be sometimes in your life where you're going to have to make a bet on yourself. Have the confidence to be willing to bet on yourself, as it relates to those types of things. So, I think everyone has had a situation in their past, from an employment perspective of big change here, right? I don't want to walk myself into. I have a pretty good situation here. Sometimes you have to have the confidence in yourself. You say, you know what? Even if it doesn't work, I'm good, right? I trust in myself. I trust in my skill set. I trust in those types of things. Because you're going to have to... at some point in time in your career, you're going to have a choice to make. And I always tell people like, be confident in yourself, right?

Gui Costin: Love that.

Steve Dunn: You have to own that part of it.

Gui Costin: Yeah, I love that. So, before you answer the next question, just one comment somebody told me yesterday. I thought. It was neat. Because you're talking about networking for a young

person, first job, networking, inside the company, outside the company, right? And I love that. I guess John D. Rockefeller was so into networking that even back then he had one assistant. And that's all she was responsible for is managing his network, people, information, getting everything. So that's how the richest man in the world, right—

Steve Dunn: Absolutely.

Gui Costin: Had one dedicated person just to help him network and manage all the people. OK, so to close, because this is always interesting, what's your biggest distribution challenge today? And how are you going about solving for it?

Steve Dunn: Yeah, I mean, I think... and this is one of the things that I do talk to a lot of my colleagues. And I talk to a lot of the folks that are in this world. The data... the data is the biggest challenge that I have. The good news is... and so it's one of those good news, bad news things. The good news is we have a ton of data. The bad news is we have a ton of data, right? And so, in some of those situations, and some of the worlds, depending on where you live, sometimes you have to pay for that data, right? So, there's a real cost associated with some of those types of things. Can you extract what you need from that data and make it actionable, I think is the biggest challenge that we have. Many of us in the distribution world, it almost feels like we've gone from distribution to actually being in sort of the data science world, right? We get so much information, but that information is only valuable if we can extract it, right, if we can take it, and dice it, and do those types of things. And so, you probably have had other folks on the podcast talk a little bit about, in my world, sort of the data pack world, right? So, you have the ability to buy, get this information from you, fantastic information, invaluable information. I think where people struggle with it is, OK, now that I have it, what do I do with it? How do I pull it apart? How do I... I have to almost have a different set of skills within the team to be able to do that. Fortunately, some of the larger organizations have people that's all they do is they focus on that data management, that data science component. But I've heard from big firms and small firms across the board. And they all have put that as one of the biggest challenges is, OK, now that we have all this information, what do we do with it?

Gui Costin: Yeah, so what you're... it's one of the banes of my existence as a leader of a business is that... and I've asked... and I'm

not one to complain about the team. But we do gather a lot of information. And you're hitting the nail so on the head, because the ability to drive insights from what's happening and then look at trends to then make decisions, right? So, we just had one thing where they presented me some information on inside Dakota Marketplace and Dakota Content, which is this show, and Dakota Live, and everything. Year to date we've had 11,100 views. And then we have something called Marketplace Academy where were somewhat outdated videos on the how to guide. It had 54.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: Easiest decision in the world to shut that down.

Steve Dunn: Yeah.

Gui Costin: You know what I mean? But once you had the data. So, drawing insights. And it's not--

Steve Dunn: Correct.

Gui Costin: It's not natural. And so, I try to force everyone, even when we get updates, everyone's always updating me. But can I get some insight into the update? And so that critical thinking skill... and I always try to encourage everybody to think, OK, what would someone really want to know from this information? I know we get the facts, but can you tell me kind of the story around the facts? And what should my—

Steve Dunn: That's exactly it.

Gui Costin: Yeah, what should the key takeaways as you look at that data? And that's hard to find that skill set.

Steve Dunn: That is the hard part, right? Because I mean, anybody can create a pivot table to sort of have numbers spinning, and things along those lines. But it's what you extract out of that, right? Our world has changed so much from a distribution standpoint. Gone are the days of you would have distribution agreements with certain firms. And you would just go after it in those particular firms. That's just not... that's just not the situation. That's not the scenario that we're in any longer. And I do think that data is the key, right? That is what allows us as a smaller organization to be more efficient. We have to continue to find ways to use that information for us to be

better. If that's not the case, then it becomes increasingly more challenging for us as it relates to that. But like I said, I talked to the biggest of the bigs that sort of do these types of things. And they struggle with it to a certain extent as well.

Gui Costin: Yeah, I really encourage our team. And I've worked really, really hard. And in fact, you have Genevieve over here. She's done an excellent job. I asked, don't... please, don't... let's not do the updates. Just tell me a story of the update. Let's talk about a story. And has done such a spectacular job at that. So, I always encourage the team to do that, because when you tell a story it's so much easier to remember and kind of get into the insights. It goes back to 1988, my mom started an interior decorating firm. She had a bookkeeper. And she looked at me one day. She goes, Gui, all she does is tell me about the numbers. She goes, I don't the story behind the numbers, right?

Steve Dunn: No, that's exactly it. And I do think it is one of those things where, as we're talking about careers and careers for young folks moving forward... and I think this is the challenge, right, is extracting the numbers and showing the numbers is just one part of the equation. The real money, the real value is someone who can interpret it, somebody that can interpret that and say, Gui, this is what it's telling you. This is what you need to do to get out in front of these issues. Or this is an early indication. This is a leading indication of what's going on. Someone who can understand those numbers and interpret it, that's value, right? That's really a special set of skills that are going to be tough to find.

Gui Costin: So, I hope everyone who just heard this obviously has listened to the end. Because this is of such value for someone's career. So, Steve, cannot thank you enough for being on. So insightful. You're such a compassionate leader and a thoughtful guy. I really appreciate you being on the show.

Steve Dunn: Thanks, Gui.

Gui Costin: You got it. You're welcome. All right, everybody. That's another wrap of The Rainmaker Podcast. Thanks so much for joining. And we can't wait to see you on the next Rainmaker Podcast.

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you're hearing and seeing, please be sure to like, follow, and share these episodes. We welcome all your feedback as well. Thank you for investing your time with Dakota.

Gui Costin: Hey, thanks so much for joining Rainmaker Podcast. I hope you enjoyed the show, enjoyed the interview. I know I loved it. And hey, if you wake up in the morning, and you raise money for an investment firm, you do cold outreach, whether you're a sales leader or salesperson and you don't about Dakota Marketplace, we would love to show it to you. It's world class. It's used by over 880 investment firms, and over 3,600 individual salespeople. To learn more, go to Dakota.com and click on a free trial.