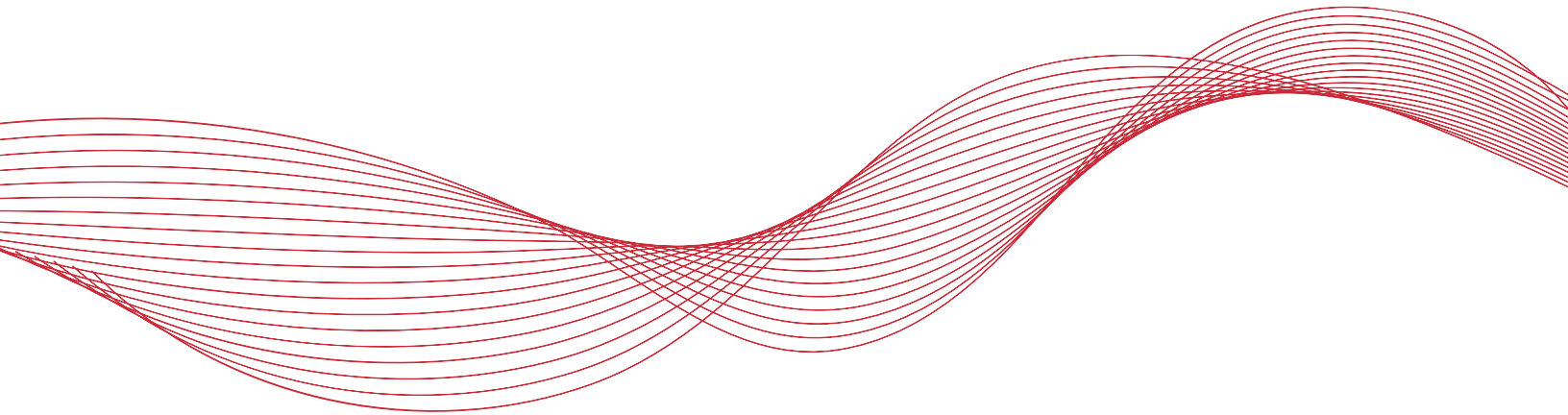


Li Costi

Building a Culture of Kindness and High Performance: Leadership Lessons from Dakota

WITH GUI COSTIN

Imagining Bridges to Better Leadership Podcast



Building a Culture of Kindness and High Performance: Leadership Lessons from Dakota

In this episode of *Imagining Bridges to Better Leadership*, Gui Costin, founder and CEO of Dakota, joins host Dr. Kevin Neal to share his journey of leading with empathy, grit, and intentional culture.

Gui reflects on founding Dakota in 2006 after working 13 different jobs, and how those experiences shaped his mission to build a company where people can grow, stay, and thrive. Dakota has become a standout in the finance and technology space by focusing not just on performance, but on people.

Gui and Kevin dive into the mindset that drives leadership excellence — one rooted in problem-solving, emotional self-awareness, and what Gui calls “getting to yes.” He discusses how trauma and upbringing shape leadership tendencies and highlights the importance of healing, kindness, and clarity in how leaders treat others. Through Dakota’s unique core values — known as “Dakotaisms” — like “Don’t go cowboy,” “Throw your hat over the wall,” and “Ask,” Gui has cultivated a culture where creativity, honesty, and hard work are non-negotiable.

Throughout the conversation, Gui shares personal stories, including the bold risk he took in launching Dakota after being fired for pitching an idea — a decision that ultimately led to his biggest breakthrough. He explains how building a culture of kindness and high standards isn’t just a philosophy — it’s a daily practice. At Dakota, culture is upheld through clear communication, mutual respect, and surrounding the team with high-performing “A players” who align with the company’s values.

Gui also speaks candidly about the responsibility leaders have to create opportunities for their people and why upward mobility should be a core principle, not an exception. He emphasizes that great leadership requires both high expectations and deep compassion, and that success comes from helping others get what they want out of life.

He concludes by offering listeners a free signed copy of his book, *The Dakota Way*, and shares that his upcoming book, *Be Kind*, will further explore the intersection of leadership, culture, and service. His message to leaders is simple yet powerful: when you lead with clarity and kindness, you don’t just build a company — you build a legacy.

