

Gi. Costi

Sales Confidence, Culture & Connection

WITH GUI COSTIN

Transition to Sales Podcast

HEATHER JAVIER: Welcome to the Transition to Sales podcast. I'm your host, Heather Javier. I'm a top-performing sales executive, confidence coach, and former bench scientist. After a decade in the lab, I made the leap into sales to stay connected to science while building a life that felt aligned with my family and my values. Now I coach high-capacity women through life and career transitions, consult with mission-driven startups to help their sales teams grow with confidence, and share stories that blend strategy, mindset, and heart. Let's get to it. And before I introduce Gui, make sure you stay till the end because in this episode we're talking a lot about sales process for fundraising and closing deals. But I will share with you the process to transition to sales and do it in a values-driven way. So, without further ado, welcome everybody to the Transition to Sales podcast.

We have a special guest with us today. His name is Gui Costin, CEO of Dakota, sales leader, author, and someone who truly understands how to build not just a business, but a belief-driven company culture. What I love most about our conversation is how we align on our values and uplifting others in a belief-driven way. And we believe in mindset and habits and these core values to not only grow our businesses but also instill a mission that is heart-centered and values-driven, as well. Gui, thank you so much for joining the show. How are you?

GUI COSTIN: Good. How are you? Thanks for having me on.

HEATHER JAVIER: Great. I see that you're in your studio out in Philly. That's amazing. And I know every story starts with a journey. You didn't always raise \$40 billion out of nowhere for other clients. Tell us more about your journey, how you were called on this mission to inspire others and engage in fundraising and sales management changes and things like that.

GUI COSTIN: So, this Christmas, we were down in Florida with my 3 kids, who all in their 20s, early 20s. And they're like, hey, Dad, before you started Dakota in '06, how many jobs did you have before that? And I was like, oh, probably, like, 8. They're like, tell us. Walk us through. So, I did. And they're like, Dad, that's 11 in 17 years. That's 11 you counted. They're all really good jobs. I'm like, yeah, 12 to 18 months. And I said, it's not a good recipe for success, changing every 18 months. So they go, just one more favor. Just go one more time. Turns out to be 14 W-2's in 17 years, from '89 to 2006. And the reason I bring that up, you asked

about the journey. I always had it as a mission of mine. I wanted to be able to create a company where we could bring in young people, not just college grads, but bring in people, slot them in a role, and allow them to be getting a role with mentorship and grow their careers at Dakota and not have all the ups and downs that I did. So, my journey really started out of so many job changes between my first year out of college and 39 years old. It was pretty mind-numbing. And today, 19 years later, at Dakota, we've had so many long-standing employees and, really, teammates and grown their careers successfully.

HEATHER JAVIER: Awesome. What were those jobs? Straight out of college, tell us more about how it led you to sales eventually and business development.

GUI COSTIN: So, the first 4 years, I worked for real estate developer in Philly. Then I moved to San Francisco and worked as a real estate broker for 2 different firms, doing deals for Starbucks, finding Starbucks locations in Northern California. And that was a blast. And that took me, then, to... that experience took me to a job in Chicago, where I first started fundraising for a mutual fund in Chicago and met my wife. We got married, had our first child, and then moved back to Philly, where I had about 3 fundraising jobs. And that's really where I cut my teeth. But I was bouncing around. But I really learned in 1998, until 2006, how to raise capital. I had a few very good mentors... Pete Moran being one of them, really taught me the business. And then in '06 we started Dakota and started raising capital for our partners that we still raise capital for today.

HEATHER JAVIER: That's amazing. What were some of the lessons you've learned along the way that your mentors helped you with? Any challenges you can share?

GUI COSTIN: There's a couple of things, but it's easy to say now, when you're looking back. So, number 1, the entire deal is how you treat people.

HEATHER JAVIER: Totally.

GUI COSTIN: And how you treat people, in my opinion, are the words that come out of your mouth. And a lot of people give themselves too much permission as leaders to say anything they want or just say what comes into their brain. And it can be very hurtful to people. Now, that's not to say you can't have very hard conversations, because you have to. That's why we differentiated Dakota between kindness and nice. Our goal is not to be nice. Our goal is to be kind and to treat people with respect and have fun. I'm writing a third book called Be Kind right now, in leadership. My ghostwriter goes, give me an example. And I said, to tell you the truth, it's going to hurt. But I'm going to tell you that if you're a leader, you're not always going to be able to be this kind, because you probably wouldn't do this. I call it the grandmother rule. How would you talk to your grandmother? That should be the benchmark. And be cool in the office. You don't need to say weird stuff or make comments or judge people or think you're being funny and you're really not or use passive aggressive behavior or say negative things about your teammates. That's more characteristic of the classic corporate culture. And we all know it, because if you've lived there, and no one really enjoys that environment. So then, if you take it just 1 little step further, and you say to yourself, what's the true secret to success of a company, in my opinion, the true secret to success is to build and develop people and keep your best people forever and treat them like gold. So that's the ambition of Dakota is how we treat people. And we want to keep our best people forever. And the best people want to stay. Then what ends up happening is you end up getting more and more people. Then the A's just want to hang out with A's. And then, like I told you, the story from the beginning, we have so many incredible women that have joined the company in the past 6 years. And I'm just watching them all... they were just gathering, having lunch together. And I'm like watching the whole thing. I'm like, wow, that's pretty special, that many cool, intelligent, accomplished people, women, just getting it done. And it's just incredible to me because over 6 years ago, we were really just a locker room of 12 salesmen, just 1... with Tracy since '07. She's been our chief administrative officer since '07. It's how you treat people. It's the word you use. Keep your best people, and don't say weird stuff.

HEATHER JAVIER: Yes, very much. I love what you mention about developing your people and talking to them kindly, speaking to them as if that's your grandmother. And what I hear from that is respect. I loved what you said earlier is that the deal is how you treat people. I coach women that all the time who want to get into sales. A lot of the times

I'm coaching women who simply want to make more money. They don't have a masters. They don't have a PhD. But they have years and years of professional experience, and they're ready to sell products and services that they've believed in, that they've used in their career path. And one of the things that scares them sometimes is that they feel that sales could be confrontational, that it's going to be pushy, that we have to persuade. But the truth is, the deal is how you treat people. At the end of the day, when people say, be as yourself, come as you are, be authentic, that just means bringing the values of being a great listener, being a great communicator, making sure we're hearing the customers and delivering and not overpromising so we can build that trust. And that truly is not only the sales journey, but how you build the company culture, also, as a leader is making sure we can provide feedback in a constructive way but show that belief that I you're capable of so much more. And this feedback is going to set you up for success. And that's everything I'm hearing from what you're saying, so thank you so much for sharing that. Was there a time in your career path where you felt like you were the odd one out because you had these values that perhaps you didn't quite see in part of your journey, and that's what made you step away and create Dakota?

GUI COSTIN: Yeah. It's somewhat of a simple thing, is that I had a dad who loved me, died in '03. But he was a really tough guy, and tough in terms of teasing, not tough in terms of demanding discipline. And what I realized in leadership, and everything is that's really the easy way out. It's easy to be a jerk. That's the easy way out. And so, I had to learn all through years and years. Even after we started Dakota, I had to be very thoughtful because you really have to, I believe, have incredible self-awareness and be able to really get out of your own body and look at yourself and observe your behavior, observe the words you use, observe people's facial expressions as you're speaking to them, and realize that they're entrusting in you coming to work every day that you're going to take care of them, that you're going to clear the deck for them, you're going to remove obstacles, you're going to care about their career growth, you're going to be there to support them. And if you're a leader, and all of a sudden, you're not those things, and you're either mean or mean-spirited, which you don't really mean to be mean, but you're judgmental, and you bring all this baggage... because we all bring the baggage of our lives to work in leadership roles and everything. You have to be insanely self-aware and watch everything that you say and really treat every word out of your mouth like its gold

because you're playing with fire at work. I'd love to comment on something you said about women in sales and feel like they have to be confrontational. And if you read my book that we just launched called The Dakota Way, it's our 4 core sales principles. I'll send anybody a signed book... just email me gui@dakota.com... for free, gui@dakota.com. And if you look at that, it really comes down you just need a sales process. And if it's well laid out, and it's easy to follow, and there's common sense and logic... and we've done it for both investment sales and software sales, there's no confrontation at all. It's much more... most good salespeople, they're consultative, and then they're just forced to ask tough questions. But they're not going to ask for the order, right? They're going to say stuff, hey, we just spent an hour together. I really enjoyed it. Heather, could you just tell me, would you ever see yourself investing in this type of investment that I just presented to you for your clients? And if you say no, say, that's perfectly fine. I can take no for an answer. I just don't want to waste your time and everything. Or if you say, Gui, actually, yes. I see this potentially fitting. Then I say, do you see an opportunity in the next year where your firm might do a search or look for a strategy like ours? If they say, no, we're not going to do anything right now, we like who we're with. But we'll just keep you on the bench, and we'll watch you. Great, so keep you up to speed. Or if you say, yes, then it's OK, cool. What do we need to do to better familiarize yourself with the strategy. My point is that would be the most confrontation you need to get. But all you're asking for... and this is a gift... is could I just have a little direction on what you think after an hour of speaking with me about our strategy or our product? And when you do that, you eliminate the post-sale ghosting of emails, sending emails with 10 PDFs and all that stuff. And you're living in hope, whereas you had them in the meeting. Just have a conversation with them. And so, I talk a lot about that in the book, to ask the 2 toughest questions. But you're not asking for the order. You're just asking for, hey, is there an opportunity, do you think? And by the way, if not, no problem. So, you give them the full pass to say no, and you take the quick no and move on. And I found that if you can master that, that's your most confrontation you'll ever have to go through, and you'll feel more and more comfortable every single time you do it.

HEATHER JAVIER: Completely agree. I also believe that no is an opportunity to learn. So, if it's not this client or this investment firm, it's what are you looking for. Even when it comes to any product or

services, it could be no, not right now or no, because. But there's power in saying no, not right now and hearing from the customer or client for other opportunities. So, I completely agree. You also talk about selling with belief. How does that play into the sales process? What does that mean to you, and how do you teach it in your team?

GUI COSTIN: Selling with belief is you really, at the end of the day, aren't selling anything. At the end of the day, hopefully, you're demonstrating something of value to help your prospect in their job to make their job easier. So, you should never be excusing. You want to so believe that your product can add value and make their job easier and get them results. Then you're selling value. But you have to really understand where they're struggling, what their needs might be. We sell a database of, basically, qualified leads for investment firm salespeople to reach out to try to raise money for their funds. So it's a curated CRM, which is very unusual. But it adds a ton of value because they don't have to go off of our platform to a website or anything else to find information. It's all right there. So, then they can just go right to Boston. They can go right to those accounts and those contacts and start sending emails to book meetings. So, I believe you just have to have a high belief that your product... that adds value. And that's why discounting, you have to be careful, because if you discount right off the bat, you're basically saying, I don't believe in my product. So that's where you have to be really careful.

HEATHER JAVIER: Exactly. Some of the business owners I work with and some of the clients I work with are they're trying to fine-tune their products and services, their package, if you will. This is anywhere from personal training to consulting and more. And what we home in on first is, would you buy this? Who is your ideal client and customer? Who are those people that light you up that, if you got the opportunity to work with them and help them, it's 1,000% yes, your product or service would meet their need. And to your point, in believing that your product or service has the value, because a lot of the times people buy based on emotion, based on that connection. 58% of it, I think, is the body language. The other almost 40% is tonality of what you're saying. And then the rest is words. But how you connect and how you really embody that hey, I'm here to sell something, but it's actually here to solve a problem or avoid future problems or grow and make your dreams come into fruition, any transformation. When you show that

your product or service can transform, the price doesn't matter, because the value is what is at the forefront. And that becomes a more heart-centered approach to selling and making that connection. So, thank you for sharing that. But Dakota also has a no policy. Can you share how that came to be and what it means for your company culture?

GUI COSTIN: We've never had a T&E policy, and we've never had a vacation policy. And I'll say this in the nicest way because we're on the podcast. But we have a true no-jerk policy, so no jerks allowed. And so that's where everyone has to be cool. I have to love everyone I work with. And I want to have fun at work. And I trust everyone's going to get their job done. So, you're never going to hear me ever make a comment publicly or anything like, what are you doing, whatever it is. I want everyone to have fun at work, enjoy the people that they work with, but also, at the same time, set up an environment that's super hard-charging and always shooting for excellence, always playing at the highest professional level, no matter what your role at the company is, and to do that with kindness. And we're just always ever-growing, evolving, massive growth mindset, improving. And it's just easier if you treat everyone like adults. I want to treat everyone like an adult, which I do. And it's so funny. If you do that, then everyone else treats each other like adults, everyone gets their job done, and everyone wants to be part of a really kind organization. And that really has turned out to be a recipe for a lot of growth.

HEATHER JAVIER: And what I'm hearing is that the no policy is basically building the culture of trust. It's I trust you'll bring your best work. And therefore, I trust how you'll manage your time outside of work and bring that balance. And I know, specifically as women, sometimes we feel like we have to over-give to prove ourselves. We have to make sure we're holding our end of the bargain, contributing. And there's a lot of work to be done at home before we even get to work. But I know being a leader and having leaders who understand the intricacies of being a working mother, when that trust is in the culture, we always deliver. And we are very efficient with 2 hours, even if we have to pick up a child really quick and then head to an appointment and get right back to work. And that trust goes a long way. So, I love that you put that at the forefront because it really helps not only in what women could deliver, but just the growth mindset, like you said, is

that you then instill an open-door policy where we can talk. When things are hard, it's like, how do we solve this problem together as a team and grow from that? Thank you so much for sharing.

GUI COSTIN: You got it.

HEATHER JAVIER: So many listeners are breaking into sales and building their careers, at least the audience that we're speaking to today. What advice would you give someone starting fresh in this field, like mindset tweak or habits, process? What is your piece of advice to help them reach their full potential as they want to transition into sales or transition their careers for growth?

GUI COSTIN: So, find a sales process, and follow it. And it's really important. That's number 1, find a sales process and follow it. Number 2, make sure that you're very comfortable doing cold outreach to book meetings with potential customers. So just understand that those cold emails are part of the deal. And then you have to have a very tight email... subject line, meeting request, and then a really nice one-sentence email, and then a clear call to action. So, don't be sending emails saying, hey, can you meet sometime next week? Can you meet May 4 at 3:00 o'clock? And lastly, make sure that you use a CRM, whatever form that might be. If you can get it for free, get it for free. If you're paying up and you want a Salesforce, but just make sure you get the meetings you've scheduled in your database, because it's the only way you can 10x your productivity because if you end up setting up a lot of meetings as a salesperson, you need to be able to see who you've met with so you can trigger sales actions, which is through an automated past activity report. So, you can click one button and see all the meetings you've had the last 90, 180 days. So, it's really those things. Have a sales process. Get committed to cold outreach to meet new people. And make sure you track all that information in a CRM.

HEATHER JAVIER: Lovely, yes. Whenever I talk about sales, it's all about the process. It's having habits. In sales alone, there's a lot of things coming at us from different customers, different customer types, internal stakeholders even. And the way we manage our time is crucial. And that's why, to your point, Gui, in having a process to not only

manage your time and our energy, but document. So, I believe, also, if we don't write it down, or if we don't document it, it didn't happen.

GUI COSTIN: Right.

HEATHER JAVIER: And with a lot of different things coming at us, I need to look back and look at a meeting 2 weeks ago and have me... and remind myself like, what was the step I'm at with this particular sales opportunity? So, there are tools to keep track of everything to help us reach our budget. It's not like we're just being thrown into a territory with no process. If you are process-driven, and you are detail-oriented, and you care, and you bring value to people, just by being you and listening, you could do amazing in sales and in leadership. So, you've written 2 books in the past few years... Millennials are Not Aliens and The Dakota Way. Regarding Millennials Are Not Aliens, I love how you've basically embraced how this niche... this demographic has really become more savvy when it comes to technology. And what are some tips you have for leaders who are now in this space of hiring millennials? How can they keep up and grow their business?

GUI COSTIN: So, millennials were the first generation who really grew up native-digital. So, they grew up with an iPhone from day 1, and which is very rare. I grew up native analog. I was 1967-born, so 58. And everything that generation, when they go to research something, they're generally not even going to Google. They're going to YouTube to watch a video. And so that's why it's just so important to embrace video and how you display your information because that's where they're going to find information. And what I find very fascinating is that someone was telling me recently that people do Facebook ads. And then what ends up happening is people see your ad on Facebook, but then they Google you. So, it's not in your Google ad, but that you end up getting your leads from Google because that's where they find you via Facebook, because then they Google you to find out. The whole thing is very fascinating.

The whole point of the book was Millennials are the new buyers and they're the... right? And so, 70% of the work they do is before they talk to you. So, have you done the work to put your information to educate them on your strategy online, on YouTube, on your website, all the different places where they could watch a video to learn about you?

HEATHER JAVIER: Love that, yeah, keeping up with how not only to incorporate millennials in the workspace, but also how are you getting the word out there about your products and services and who you are as a business owner and having these different ways of connecting with millennials is huge. And then The Dakota Way, this is a process for fundraising, business owners. What's a key takeaway you want your readers or listeners today to know about The Dakota Way and how it can help them?

GUI COSTIN: So, the tragedy of the fundraising business is that there's no clear sales process documented anywhere. However, if you look in software sales, SaaS sales, medical device sales, there's all these sales processes. There's all documentation online. You can go find information. There's books. There's seminars. There's everything. In our business, there's 0. And so, what ends up happening is people miss a number of the key things that you need to put into place day 1, and that leads to very high turnover. So generally, salespeople have the law of 18 months. If you don't do certain things in the first couple of days, you're going to eventually hit the law of 18 months. And what I mean by that is the sales cycles are long, 9 to 36 months. So, if you don't have, number 1, a clear sales plan with very clear expectations that your boss agrees with, plus a weekly process meeting to go over the results against your plan, progress against the plan, then your boss's mind is going to wander and think you're not doing anything because you're not sharing progress. Setting expectations via sales plan with a clear reporting structure. 2, we wanted to document people you have to immediately figure out who's your number 1 buyer. What is your avatar? What is your primary target customer? And establish that and then have your cold email process set up where you're trying to book meetings on a daily basis. We always say 5 cities at any given time. So that's core principle number 2, you have to identify who you're calling on. 3, when you get in the meeting, we follow a very strict protocol of how you want to conduct the meeting. And then you can throw in your own special sauce, if you will, throughout the process. But we give you the core fundamentals of how to run a meeting. And then 4, like I said earlier, how to utilize a CRM to 10x your productivity. So, the whole goal of the book, though, was to provide a documented sales process for a fundraiser so they can avoid the law of 18 months. And what really drives that, is that weekly meeting with your boss, showing your progress against your plan, because if you show up every week with a blank sheet of paper, and you haven't made any calls or done any

meetings or don't have a pipeline, then you're going to be fired pretty quickly. However, if you know you have to do that, you're not going to show up empty-handed. And it's really a book to prevent you from hurting yourself and only helping yourself.

HEATHER JAVIER: Totally. Process is one thing. I love that you lay out the process and how to get sales and how to conduct meetings that are effective. But meeting with managers or internal stakeholders in general, having that accountability makes you show up, makes you show up for your customers, but also makes you show up to make sure we're moving opportunities forward. We always have a next step because there's so many steps. Sometimes the sales process isn't quite linear. There's a variety of different stakeholders, a variety of different personalities. And knowing how to speak to them in the way that they feel heard and valued, and we can support them... and depending on the size of the sale, too, it matters, that process and the accountability with the team. So, thank you so much for sharing that. And having that turnover in sales, it's real. If sales executives are not inspired by their leadership, and they feel like there is no direction in leadership and it's toxic, which I have seen, strong sales professionals will leave. If the company has a process, and they treat people with kindness and that trust, and it's clear what the expectations are, we have the tools to succeed, best believe we'll be around for a while and want to grow with the company. So that process, before hiring any new sales executives, it's so important to have that process. Who are you looking to serve with your product or services? And who are you looking to hire? And what does the process look like so that there's a synergy, there's this collective goals-driven mission to make the world a better place? Because that's what I believe sales does at the end of the day. We're constantly solving problems to make the world a better place. So, what's next for you and Dakota? I heard you were writing a book again. Anything exciting on the horizon? Anything else you want to share with us today?

GUI COSTIN: Sure, I'm writing a book, we are. Morgan and I are writing a book called Be Kind, which is our leadership book. And its lessons learned from a lifetime of leadership, and sharing a lot of mistakes and sharing things that we've learned along the way, and where I believe we can create some distinctions for people of lessons that I've learned to try to create an environment where you can still be incredibly

accomplished organization but do it with kindness. And we're doing some really neat things on our software database platform in terms of new data sets that are going to allow us to go after some new end markets, help organize an enormous amount of information in the whole private equity world and investment world. So yeah, just a lot of exciting things, and more fully building out a conference business where we can bring people together to network and learn and grow their careers.

HEATHER JAVIER: Awesome. Way cool. I can't wait for the book. Thank you so much for sharing that, too. Where can people connect with you? And what's one thing you'd love the listeners to do following this episode?

GUI COSTIN: Well, hey, send me an email if you want a copy of the book... gui@dakota.com. Or you can find me at dakota.com or on guicostin.com-- G-U-I-C-O-S-T-I-N dot com. And I'd be happy to talk to your team, talk to your sales team. Any counseling I can give or any advice, I'd be more than happy to do it.

HEATHER JAVIER: Thank you so much, Gui, for being on the show. It was a true pleasure and honor just to have someone like you in such a values-driven mission and how to grow other people's businesses is just amazing. So, I love that you were on the show. Thank you so much.

All right, as promised, I said I was going to share with you the process to transition to sales. Number 1 is, think about the products or services that you truly believe in and jive with. If you believe in their mission, what these products and services can do, and you look at the company mission statement, look at the Glassdoor to see the company reviews, and this is the place where you see yourself working, go for it. Make a list of those companies and products and services. Then go on the company website or even on LinkedIn and look at job postings specific to sales operations, business development, anything that's going to get your feet wet. Once you've got a hefty list, it is time to revamp your resume, revamp your cover letter and your LinkedIn profile, and then start working. Start networking. So seriously, this is all possible for you because these are the steps I have followed over 10 years ago. These are the steps that I help multiple clients within terms of landing the sales job that they believe in, that they're thriving in. So

again, make a list of those products and services that you believe in. Check out the mission statements of those companies. Check them out on Glassdoor or any platform that reviews them in terms of how the company culture is. Make a list of job postings in sales operations or business development, key account management, inside sales, executive roles, coordinators, and so much more.

Look at the job postings. Make a list. Revamp your resume. And if you need help, remember to check out the show notes for the resume revamp checklist and e-course. And you can always set up a 1-on-1 sales career strategy call with me so we can do this together, so we can work through any of your mindset blocks, and so we can land your next sales gig, because I get it.

You want to make more money. You want more time and energy balance for yourself and your family. And you want to do this in a values-driven way, where you still feel fulfilled in your career. It is totally possible and more within reach than you think. So, once we can all do this, let's start networking, applying, and boom, get your job.

If you love today's episode, please leave a review and subscribe. This is how we reach more people who want to grow their business in a values-driven way and transition into their careers. And if you're thinking you want to get into sales, and you are having some imposter syndrome, trying to figure out what's next, connect with me at [@beaboutitcoach](#) on Instagram or Heather Javier on LinkedIn.

Thank you so much. The links that Gui and I shared will be in the show notes. And until next time, continue being authentically you and making the world a better place. Thank you so much for listening.