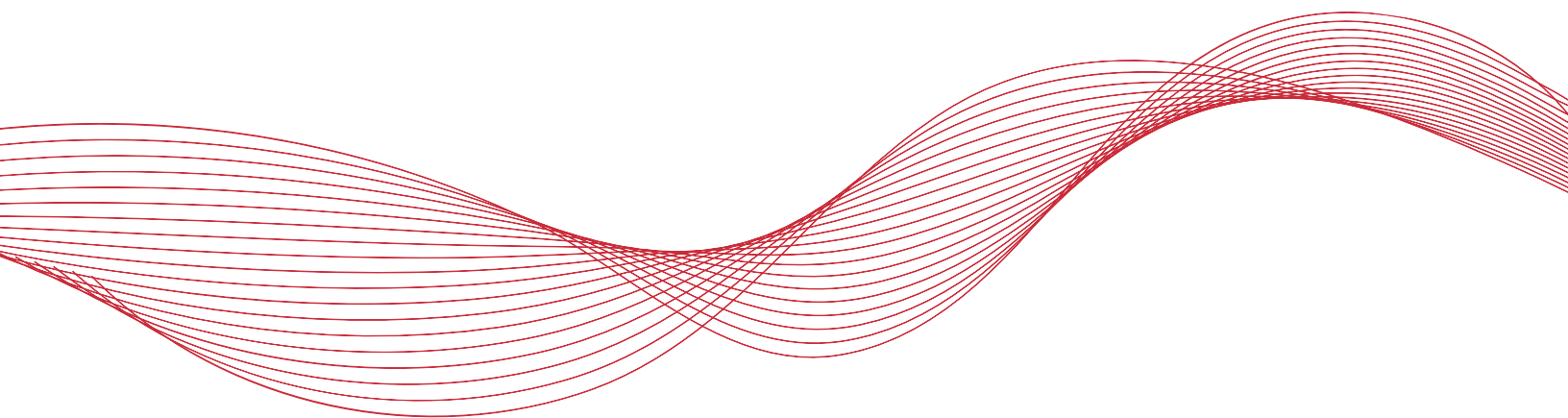


Li Costi

Words Matter: How to Build a Culture of Kindness and Excellence

WITH GUI COSTIN

Notable Leaders' Radio Podcast



Words Matter: How Gui Costin Built a Culture of Kindness and Excellence

In this episode of *Notable Leaders' Radio*, Gui Costin, founder and CEO of Dakota, offers a deeply personal and practical view of leadership, culture, and the journey of building a high-performing organization. Known for helping raise over \$40 billion for investment funds and leading one of the most respected sales organizations in finance, Gui shares insights that go far beyond the business world—centered around one principle: be kind.

Gui reflects on the early influences that shaped his character, crediting his mother—a vibrant, entrepreneurial interior designer—and his stepfather for their positivity, support, and wisdom. His mother's phrase, "When in fear, get into action," became a life mantra. Their encouragement helped Gui through a winding early career path, marked by 14 jobs in 17 years before founding Dakota in 2006.

At the heart of the conversation is Gui's belief that every organization is a people business. Leadership, he emphasizes, is about removing obstacles, creating clarity, and treating others with respect. His upcoming book, *Be Kind*, explores these lessons, drawn from personal missteps and moments of growth throughout his career.

Gui outlines the core tenets of his leadership philosophy: vulnerability, clarity, and consistency. He believes leaders should build environments that foster excellence and trust—without rigid rules. At Dakota, there's no vacation or travel expense policy. Instead, Gui trusts his team to act responsibly, a choice that requires vulnerability and reinforces mutual respect. He sees trust not as a risk, but as a leadership necessity.

Communication, Gui explains, is foundational to effective leadership. As a communications major, he values simplicity and clarity, believing that words—and how they're delivered—shape organizational culture. His internal mantra, "Words matter. Details matter," guides everything from internal conversations to how Dakota presents itself to clients.

Belinda and Gui also discuss the role of design and environment in workplace culture. Influenced by his mother and wife, both decorators, Gui has made Dakota's offices feel more like inviting hotel lobbies than traditional corporate spaces. For him, physical design signals intentionality—it tells the team: we care. And that care, he believes, ripples outward into how people treat clients and one another.

The conversation is rich with reflections on balancing excellence with compassion. Gui notes that striving for excellence isn't for everyone, but for those who buy in, it creates a culture of shared pride and purpose. He distinguishes between being "nice" and being "kind," advocating for honest, respectful feedback even when it's hard. "Sometimes," he says, "being nice actually lets people down."

He also shares how Dakota fosters innovation through monthly "W Days" ("What's Working, What's Not"), creating space for feedback and evolution. Gui encourages risk-taking and continuous questioning, helping long-tenured team members avoid stagnation.

In closing, Gui reminds leaders that being kind, clear, and intentional—with words, spaces, and systems—is not just good for business; it's good for people. He believes true leadership lies in helping others succeed, and his mission is to build a company where people thrive, grow, and feel trusted.

