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NANCY VAILAKIS

ANCRAM IRBD

Dan DiDomenico: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Rainmaker Podcast. My name is Dan DiDomenico, the President of Dakota, and I am thrilled today to be here with our special guest, which promises to be just another incredible opportunity for us to hear from one of our leaders in distribution. This conversation promises to deliver just invaluable insights for all of us from an industry veteran. Nancy Vailakis is the principal of Ancram IRBD, a boutique placement agency and investor relations and marketing firm for the private funds industry. Focused on private funds and deals in the private credit, private equity growth, equity and buyout, and real asset sectors, Nancy has over 18 years of alternative asset management industry experience as a business development, marketing, and investor relations professional and over 20 years of experience in financial services overall. Previously, she was business development director at IQEQ, a vice president of investor relations at Cerberus Capital, and a sales and client relations specialist at Blue Mountain Capital. She earned her Master of Business Administration from New York University Stern School of Business and her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Binghamton University. Nancy continues to serve the stern community as an Alumni Advisory board member of the Stern private equity club. Nancy is engaged with many non-profit and professional organizations in New York, including Women in Funds, 100 Women in Finance, and Binghamton women in business. Additionally, she is a regular speaker through conference venues like Super Return and LPGP Connect and a contributing writer to industry publications including Worth and Emerging Manager Monthly. Nancy Vailakis was the winner of the Worth Magazine's Worthy 100 award in 2022. We are going to have a fantastic conversation here, really diving into not only the firm background, all of Nancy's great experience, but then really digging into your sales process, how you go about organizing yourself, your team to stay organized around the fundraising efforts of your organization. So, Nancy, maybe you can start us off there. You can talk to us a little bit about your background, how you came to found Ancram IRBD, and just give us a little bit about the firm itself and what your mission, your objective, and really your purpose out there today in the investment world.

Nancy Vailakis: Sure. Thanks so much, Dan, and it's great to be on The Rainmaker Podcast. I'm a big fan, and of course, I'm also a fan of Dakota. So, thanks so much for having me. My name is Nancy Vailakis. I'm the founder of Ancram IRBD, a boutique placement agency and outsourced investor relations firm focused on the private funds industry, largely focused on private credit and private equity fund raises. As a result of my background, I worked internally at firms like Blue Mountain Capital and Cerberus Capital, and that's where I learned a lot of what I bring to bear in the context of the efforts that I put forward for clients at Ancram IRBD. And also, of course, there's been increased interest in deals, not just funds. Certainly, there are many fundless sponsors out there that have rolled up deals into first time funds. Family offices have increasingly been interested in deal flow. And so, I double up. I facilitate new capital for funds and new capital for deals as well, mostly, again, focusing on the private credit and private equity spaces.

Dan DiDomenico: Nancy, fantastic. That speaks directly to our legacy business as well and serving in that role of distribution. How do you bring investment strategies? How do you bring them to market? The trends that we've seen in the marketplace… private equity, private credit, those deals that you're talking about… you've had tremendous tailwinds, for sure. But it's still distribution. There's still needs to be that active effort in selling anything that we bring to market, even with those types of tailwinds, if you will, or trends that we've seen out in the marketplace in both private equity and private credit. Can you talk a little bit about your distribution team and how you organize yourselves?

Nancy Vailakis: Sure. So, I'm on a prominent broker dealer platform based in Manhattan. In fact, I'm in their office right now. And they have built up a business over 18 years, focused on pedigreed niche credit and private funds, things like co-investment funds that have spun out of famous insurance company operators, co-investment funds being more readily available in the market, or there have been a good number of launches focused on that in recent years compared to say, pre-COVID. These are often pedigreed operators that want to do one thing well. They want to do barge leasing well. They want to facilitate investments in transport leasing, for example. And they want to facilitate that without style drift. Maybe they want to build a $3 billion firm or maybe a $10 billion firm, but they're not necessarily interested in just doing whatever is trendy in the market. They want to get great at something. They've got a lot of experience doing that, and they want to take the next step and either launch a fund or facilitate the next vintage year on the existing platform that they have. So that's what my broker dealer specializes in. I tend to attract private equity clients. Right now, I'm working with the $2.4 billion industrials and business services focused private equity firm. They're on fund four. They're looking to raise $800 million. They've got $250 million in the door from re-ups. They may have additional re-ups. And I think that industrials and business services, health care,

are very defensive sectors for what has been a very unique market over the last couple of years. A lot of allocators have seen, for example, correlations between equities and bonds be quite different from what they experienced in the 25 years previously in their careers. And so, people are feeling a bit defensive, and I think those sectors match well with the vibe of that defensiveness. Of course, exit activity in the private equity sector has not been ideal. It's picked up as of Q2 this year, and there are a number of statistics and studies out there. I've been reading some of what EY has put out showing that, in fact exits have picked up. Of course, interest rates have decreased. And now the uncertainty around the election is certain. And so, I think next going into next year… not that I like to predict the future. That's never a good thing to do. I've learned over the years there are just too many factors. But I mean, the macro environment is complex. But in terms of rates decreasing… again, to reiterate the rate environment being more favorable for deal flow… cheaper, certainly, for financing… the exit activity beginning, I think frankly, next year should be a better fundraising year than this one was. And really, the blockage around fundraising is just that a lot of people have not seen liquidity from existing investments. And so, they can't go into what looks exciting to them now. As easily, anyway.

Dan DiDomenico: But to your point, we can't predict the macro. Having that lack of liquidity today moving forward, assuming that starts to free up, I tend to believe what you were saying. They're going to be looking for those allocators, something more defensive, something that's not going to be correlated, something where you can drive returns through something that's going to provide you specificity in the investment program. And it sounds like those are the types of private equity funds that you have been historically working with and currently are.

Nancy Vailakis: Yeah, and that's also what attracts me on my broker dealer platform. There are 80 reps… ex-Goldman, ex-Morgan Stanley, many very pedigreed people here, as am I. And we pair up on mandates depending on what the LPs that we're in flow with are looking for. And so not only are people on the platform helping me with my fund four private equity mandate that I mentioned earlier, but I'm helping them with there are a few private credit launches, first time funds. It's been a very interesting and dynamic environment insofar as there are more seed firms than ever. And those seed firms are more flexible than ever. They could help a firm evolve a new business line. They can get off the ground. There are a multitude of ways that seed capital can be facilitated, and increasingly, people want to be more partners rather than predatory, sort of extractive type seed firms. Gosh, we want to help you find the best fund admin, or we know LPs that could go into this main fund that you're launching, this flagship fund. So, Stable, New Catalyst, there are just a number of firms... Gatewood Capital... that are facilitating this in larger measure. And I think really frankly, the market has shifted to facilitate what is needed right now. For pedigreed operators spinning out of a firm... the team is together, the band is together... it's still tough to get that first fund off the ground. And so, there are more, say, RIA, aggregator firms like Opto Invest or Proteus, or people are chasing retail capital. So certainly, those types of service providers are meeting the needs. So, I think the market has moved to adjust to what has been a tough fundraising environment as a result of a lack of liquidity from major institutional investors in the US. Also, people are going to the Middle East and Asia. Of course, the Middle East still is an amazing place to chase capital if you never have before. And also increasingly, people are relying on third party marketers in those regions versus flying over there. Previously, everyone would say go to CIC and kiss the ring. Not that China is the most popular destination right now, but now, people are just happy enough to hire someone out of Singapore to deal with all the various Asian cultures. So, because each one has its own rules. So, I think the market is constantly evolving to meet the needs. But there's no question that this year has been the toughest fundraising environment that we've seen for most people, even folks at mega funds.

Dan DiDomenico: Yeah, so I mean, obviously, you're facilitating quite a bit. You're creating efficiencies and trying to match those... and I love that term that you use... those pedigreed operators, those managers that are launching funds into the marketplace based off of their experience, their expertise, and now bringing that in a format that's likely first-time fund or something that's smaller. We can really get at those direct exposures, those types of returns that people are going to be looking for and demanding moving forward. That's how you differentiate yourself in those strategies. But Nancy, maybe you can talk to us a little bit about how you're covering those end markets, those allocators. So maybe we can dive a little bit into your sales process.

Nancy Vailakis: Sure. So, I'm perpetually on the phone with investors. Some of these investors I've known for 20 years since I started at my first hedge fund in 2004. Some of them are newer relationships. I interview investors for Emerging Manager Monthly, and I've been a contributing writer to other publications for a good number of years now. I started that effort when COVID hit, and we were unable to travel. But now that we're largely out of the woods with COVID... I certainly don't want to say we're entirely out of the woods because there's been a bit of a bubbling up in New York summer recently. But let's be optimistic on that front. But post-COVID, you can have a 30-minute update call with an investor to see how they may have shifted their allocation process, targets their approach to see if maybe they've evolved a new sleeve, a new sector sleeve. For example, the state of New Jersey is just evolving its private credit effort, and that should come online in a bigger way next year. And then there are a good number of firms that got their fill or even, frankly, in some cases, gorged on private credit last year and are looking to balance the portfolio and perhaps pick up a little private equity exposure because they do see that the exit environment is at least increasingly more favorable, although I don't think we're out of the woods on that yet.

Dan DiDomenico: So, I think quite a unique model that you employ... you talked a little about the sales reps that you work with, the network that you've created. How do you communicate with that team, right? I mean, obviously, that team is going to be very diverse in terms of background, location. How do you all stay in contact and collaborate around what the mission is and what your objective is for each of those mandates?

Nancy Vailakis: There are a number of tools that the broker dealer has put in place. So Paper Flight is in place. You can log into Paper Flight and look at new materials that have been uploaded to a portal to see if there's anything that sort of resonates with the types of mandates that you like to promote and distribute to LPs that you've known. There are distribution lists internally where people float deals and funds. There are pitch processes where everyone on the BD platform is allowed to come on to a digital call and listen to a manager pitch or a deal maker pitch. And then, of course, I like to frankly come into the Manhattan office and just hear what's going on. That's what I'm doing today. So often, you can gather things from people who are... I like being in the office. Some people don't like it. Having frankly grown up on trading floors, I learned a lot more about the markets than I would know now if I was just in a virtual environment in my house all the time. I'm a big fan of in-person. But I do a lot to try to engage with my platform with people who, for example, like to sell private equity funds if that's their bailiwick by jumping on board to help out with their mandates and then involving them in my process when I bring something on board. So, there are a lot of tools. There are definitely... I love the broker dealer approach because you can be very independent about what you want to sell. If nobody's buying long short equity, hedge funds focused on consumer for a period of time in the market, you can work on other mandates. If you work internally at a firm, you are selling their product, and if their product is out of favor, it's a Sisyphean task to push that boulder up the mountain to get people to buy anything. And of course, your reward is less for that heavier effort. So why not pivot to the things that people are asking for? And a robust broker dealer platform like mine provides freedom from maybe unnecessary bureaucracy and allows you to just serve LPs that you have built up relationships with over time. I do think that knowing people for a long time has been much more critical in the last couple of years. Especially during COVID lockdown, if you were trying to facilitate relationships with new investors, that could be a little challenging. Of course, they're just going to be meeting you digitally in some cases when we weren't allowed to fly. But also, people are flying less as a result of leaning on digital methods. So, I do a lot of 30-minute update calls with LPs, and I'm consistently cultivating new relationships with LPs through conference efforts. I do a lot of public speaking, events like Super Return and LPGP connect and interviewing LPs and just engaging with my platform broadly. So let me if I might clarify something.

Dan DiDomenico: No, that's fantastic because, I mean, what I'm hearing, everything that you're sharing in terms of your independence, your ability to be free to analyze, assess, to understand what's available on the platform, engaging in those conversations, that allows you to be very consultative. So, I'm sure they look at you as a great resource to find those more nuanced strategies, maybe those off the run names that maybe they don't have as much direct exposure to. So, they're looking at you as that point of access to those very nuanced mandates out there that, again, these aren't going to be brand names, or they don't have the direct point of contact into those fund managers just to be aware of what it is that they're offering.

Nancy Vailakis: Yeah, definitely. I'm also hearing from prominent CIOs, especially this year, that the unsolicited email inbox clog is historically high. One large California pension plan CIO told me that he receives between 300 and 400 unsolicited investment opportunities per day, which, of course, is aside from any kind of internal communications. And so, if in my position, my success is tied not to hard selling something that an institutional investor can't take a bite of. It's about listening to them, what they want to engage with, what their allocation requirements are, how they may have shifted their allocation plan in recent years as a result of different market dynamics. And if I can match up what they're looking for, also taking into account what I've learned over the years matches an institutional investor's requirements and profile. I mean, if you've had too many partner turnovers, you're going to have a really hard time selling to a massive institutional pension plan, especially if you're in the early stages of your firm. If you don't have the performance, you're going to have a hard time. If you don't have a solid infrastructure or, depending, on the phase of your firm, infrastructural plan in place for the various future stages of your firm, you're going to be at a disadvantage. So, kind of knowing what I know as a result of my background, matching that up with mandates that help these LPs sift through what is an incredible bit of outreach on behalf of funds and deals these days, it's really that sifting and matching process that shows an LP that you respect them and their time. Trying to sell an early stage venture fund to a foundation that is waiting for venture exits... not that I play much in the venture space, but just because a new venture opportunity came through on the platform doesn't mean that sending that to someone who's said, no, I'm overexposed is going to do anybody any favors because even someone I've known for 20 years might be offended by me sending them something that they said no to in a recent update call. This is a screening process these days. This is a process of respecting and listening to LPs, so they open the next email. If you're getting 400, you want to make sure that if it says Nancy Volakis, you're opening it. And I do anyway.

Dan DiDomenico: Nancy, that's a great point. But you've earned that respect. You've earned that respect by listening, by reflecting on those conversations, by understanding what their needs are. To your point, you're just not trying to sell in an investment strategy that that's not going to be a fit because you have that hard mandate, if you will, and taking on that type of an assignment. So, you're almost looked at as that first line of due diligence. I'm sure that they think through their prior experience with you, and they understand that what you're bringing to them matches not only what their criteria may be but, through your own experience, what you believe is a strategy that is viable for that LP.

Nancy Vailakis: Yeah, and to be fair, most firms have some kind of hair in the story. There are very few firms that are completely perfect at every phase of their evolution. But having cogent, thoughtful talking points around why you may have had a vintage year fund that didn't perform the way that you would have hoped, or lessons learned or how the strategy has shifted since then or how your hiring processes may have changed if someone at the senior level left several years ago, all those things have to be crafted from a messaging perspective. And if there's diligence and an intent to succeed and the learnings are around sort of honest mistakes and don't dent someone's reputation or pedigree, then I think it's fine. I mean, actually talking around a challenging topic can win an LP because the markets aren't always rosy. They can turn on a dime. Things are constantly changing. And so being prepared for the future in full is a tough game.

Dan DiDomenico: Nancy, you're collecting a lot of data on both sides of the aisle. You're collecting a lot of the LP information through the conversations that you're having, their needs, their criteria. That evolves as well just based off of where they are, who the leadership is. There's always turnover. I shouldn't say always, but there's a lot of turnovers at those levels, which could also change philosophies, approaches, those asset allocation programs. In addition to, then, all the data that you're collecting on the investment strategies, those managers themselves, how are you organizing your notes and how are you leveraging that data?

Nancy Vailakis: I'm an obsessive note taker, and I've worked with a number of CRMs in the past. And of course, earlier in my career, I also implemented CRMs. I've implemented Backstop in the past. I've worked with Salesforce. I also like HubSpot and Insightly. I don't want to sell any one or necessarily reveal which one I'm using. But I'm an obsessive call note taker. But there are a number of institutional investors that don't like to be recorded. So, I don't use AI note takers in every case. And that goes for my inner LP interview processes when I'm facilitating contributing writer pieces. Not everybody wants to be recorded. So even though the technology is there, this is an environment where people are increasingly under scrutiny. A lot of public pension plan, senior level investment executives absolutely refuse to be taped. And so, I think kind of being conscious of those internal cultures has helped me increasingly build cachet with those institutional investors. There are a number of considerations, including taping. I actually take written notes. If someone allows me to tape, I do it. And I feed them into a CRM so that I can tag LPs according to interest on the investment strategy front. A number of LPs have said to me in recent years, we don't want to invest in firms that have under $500 million in AUM, and we started Fund III. That's almost a kind of a regular discussion point with a number of these institutions. And so, others want to actually be day one capital because they can negotiate terms that others couldn't. It really depends. But just keeping track of all that data is critical to me and to also other fundraisers. It's no good to have the same conversation over and over again with busy LPs. Some of these investor teams are really small. And given the flow that I described to you earlier in the call, it's important to be respectful of their time. If I can gather an update on what their allocation process is in 15 minutes, I don't need to extend the call to an hour just to shoot the breeze. I'd rather make sure that they that I know that if they're a four-person investment team and they've got $3 billion to facilitate, that means AGMs, and that means managing the existing portfolio. Sometimes, that means evolving the existing portfolio into something entirely new if there's a new CIO. There's a lot of pressure on their side. And the more you can... from boards of trustees. The more you can respect that, I think, the more successful you'll be at getting them to open that next email.

Dan DiDomenico: Yeah, no, for sure. That's so well-said. I mean, there's such power in that data that you're able to leverage for yourself to be efficient but also, to your point, to be respectful of their time. The more that you know, the more that you've collected on them, the more of a profile of you have, what their criteria is, the less likely it is that you're going to bring something to them that just won't be a fit. And maybe the 300, the 400 emails that those CIOs are receiving on a daily basis, maybe that gets cut in half or down to a fraction of it where it's a lot more meaningful. I mean, I believe that that's one of the... hopefully one of the things that we're bringing to the marketplace is just more intelligence, more efficiency. And that shouldn't just be on our side of the table. It should be efficiencies also for the other side of the table, if done properly with the thoughtful investment sales professionals that are learning, that are taking those call notes, and then moving forward. I mean, you have a fantastic now library of information on these LPs. So, you're being very respectful of their time by having that memory, by taking those call notes. And I'm already starting to get a very clear sense of this, Nancy, but I'd love to hear for you to talk about a little about your leadership approach. You've had fantastic experiences at some very well-known private fund managers. Talk to us a little bit about those influences and how that shaped your leadership approach today.

Nancy Vailakis: Well, I think that increasingly, as a result of the experience that I've outlined, I am, of course, very process-driven, as we've iterated. But experience plus instinct and evolving that instinct around whether something is a go or not is critical. Even if someone's taken three meetings, if they're not checking three or four of the boxes that they need to so that they can look good internally... and in fact, often enough, it is about keeping their job... I mean, allocators are not necessarily enabled to just throw darts broadly. They are hampered by a set of criteria that they need to facilitate. So, I think that leadership style is sometimes about putting yourself aside and looking at what the moment is calling for. And also, I have a pretty exceptional memory. So, kind of remembering a little subtlety in that first conversation, making sure that box is checked later... people aren't always going to outline all the boxes that they need to check in every single thing that you need to consider getting an investment over the line. It's critical to be aware of the market, to be aware of the product, to be aware of the LP to the extent that the data is available, either through my process, but also increasingly, people have access to larger pools of data that they can analyze succinctly. And of course, also, everyone has LinkedIn. So, there's a lot of data there. Data is the name of the game for sure. But to rely only on data and to not follow instinct around what a person like me knows the process to be, the goalposts to be, the subtleties around the conversation to be underlining, would be a mistake. I think my leadership style is very intuitive and also extremely honed in on what the LP is saying and what they're alluding to. If their credit program isn't going to start until next year and you send them five credit opportunities now, you know. I mean, I guess you're sort of showing them what kind of pipeline you can facilitate when the time is right. But indeed, they may not have the time to even analyze them. But that's a pretty direct bit of information for them to tell you. There are a lot of subtleties that I think an experienced fundraiser brings to bear versus someone that's just smiling and dialing and just trying to shove opportunities down someone's throat. I don't think the first... everyone has their own style, though. I don't want to negate the enthusiasm of someone that's just looking to sell, sell, sell to anybody who will buy. But increasingly, it's a more thoughtful process, And it's not necessarily a hard selling process. It's more about having the right answers at the right pivot points in the sale cycle.

Dan DiDomenico: Yeah, that's well-said. But in your intuition, you've developed that over the many years with your great experience. You're clearly reflective over the conversations that you've had with LPs but also that acumen that you have in terms of the investment strategies and the managers, those that you're evaluating through the platform. It takes time to get to those points where you can marry both the investment strategy to understanding what the needs are of the LP, where you have that ability to put the LP needs first.

That takes a lot of confidence. We have a lot of young investment salespeople that watch these programs, that listen to the leaders in our industry like yourselves. What advice would you have for those young, aspiring investment sales professionals?

Nancy Vailakis: I think developing that intuition is one thing. Really paying attention to what the LP is saying and what the between the lines messaging is, learning as much as you can about DLP firm before engaging. These relationships last a long time. There are LPs that I talk to that I did meet back in 2004, 2005, and it's critical for me to maintain those relationships and not try to sell them something that I know is not a match. But I also like to see young people becoming perfect at their craft, which takes time. Sending out an email with a typo in it can actually completely kill a sale right out of the gate right now when somebody's sifting through three to 400 emails. They've got to figure out how to eliminate you somehow. If you have a pitch deck that's uncompelling... you don't need to win a Parsons School of Design Award for your pitch deck, but it needs to be cogent, perfected. The footnotes need to make sense. There can't be typos. It's got to be clear. You shouldn't have crowded pages with too much data. People are easily distracted these days. If you're not putting forward a really succinct offering and you're not checking all those boxes in terms of delivery, your email could shoot the sale. Every little corner of the sale is critical, and becoming really good at what you do starts with some of the simplest tasks. The Karate Kid, Mr. Miyagi... we need to learn how to sand the floor first before we close the mega deal.

Dan DiDomenico: That's so true. I always tell our young team members, I always say, you're not going to make the sale through that first email or that first interaction. You can certainly lose it, though.

Nancy Vailakis: You could lose it. Yeah.

Dan DiDomenico: You could lose it. So, you could have to be thoughtful. You have to choose your words wisely. And I think that takes preparing. And so, it's respecting their time by taking more of that responsibility on onto yourself.

Nancy Vailakis: Yeah.

Dan DiDomenico: The email topic is one that we constantly talk about. We talk about it with not only ourselves internally but with folks like yourself. Any advice that you have in terms of, out of those three to 400 emails that a CIO is receiving, what are some of the tips or tricks that you would... I wouldn't say tricks. I want to say, how do you highlight your email so yours just don't get lost in the volume of emails that are being received by that CIO?

Nancy Vailakis: I mean, the reality is that if it's 300 to 400, it could get lost. I try to surmount that by having really solid, succinct relationships with my LPs, so they open my email. That CIO of the major pension plan in California isn't necessarily going to open my next email if I send him a space deal when he told me we're only going into funds that start at $500 million Fund III and I sent him a space deal. Then he may frankly, even if I've known him for 20 years, is he going to be reticent to open that next email? I might be if I had the pressure on my shoulders that he has. So really just nipping and tucking that process and being thoughtful. How many times have I been at a conference or been in a GP pitch session where the GP is so excited to have an investor in the room that they just railroad for a whole hour, and they don't even ask the investor anything about themselves? Even if what the investor is looking for and that's why I've put that match together, showing no interest in the LP when you're probably going to be in bed for 10 years, maybe 10 years 1 plus 1, depending on how the exits go, maybe longer... that's the reality if we're talking about private equity in recent years. You want to know them. You want to understand them. There was one conference I remember going to in 2010 post-credit crisis. It was family office conference. Guy had obviously just gotten off the plane from New York. He got up on the stage, and he dove right into 10 super complex derivatives trade explanations for a family office crowd. Some of the people had made their money in financial services and understood what he was talking about, but they already knew what he was trying to convey. Everybody else was lost, and the guy sold nothing. And we were at the mixer later on, and he's like, what happened? Nobody cares. You have to show them that you're the one to execute. Nobody cares that you are getting off the plane from New York and you know how to explain this complex swap or derivative trade. They want to know that you're going to make money for them and you're going to do the right thing when the going is rough. And they want to... this is an interesting test. I heard about one time. Someone said, if you get on a plane with this person in New York and you arrive in Tokyo, do you still want to be sitting next to them? Now, that's a tough bar, but it's an interesting test that I think more people should consider as they marry GPs and LPs.

Dan DiDomenico: That's such a great point. If there's no other advice that people listen to from this interview, that was perfect, right? And far too many times, you do you get the GP or a portfolio manager, whoever it may be, and all they want to do is talk about themselves, what they do, and they don't think about what level of the conversation should I even be at because you're not asking the right questions. You're not understanding what their needs are. You're not understanding how they allocate or what their understanding even is of what it is that you do because that's going to ultimately dictate how it is that you can handle those conversations, be more effective, create that relationship. To your point, you're getting married for the next 10 plus years. So, let's make sure that the communication that you're going to have moving forward... because a lot of that expected experience, you're getting it a feel for that firsthand in that first interaction.

Nancy Vailakis: That's right. And to be blunt, a lot of CIOs have built up their careers in the equity markets, and now they find themselves overseeing a platform of private alternative investments, PE, private credit. I mean, there are a lot of masters of the universe on the LP side too that really understand these strategies. But there's a dispersion there. And if someone is investing in because you're pedigreed and they like the reputation that your firm has and they believe that when the going gets rough, you're going to have transparency and you're going to facilitate a process that their board can get behind, so they don't look bad... and things do go wrong. It's about knowing how to check the box that says much when things are going right, and performance is there when things are going wrong. If someone's investing in because of your pedigree, don't shoot the pedigree right out of the gate. Make sure you understand why they're considering you. Then in other cases, LPs want to invest with someone that's a master of the universe in the exact sector or sphere that they play in. And they want it to have a friend to call up and bounce ideas around. So, kind of understand what people want from you and try to facilitate it in a respectable way. I mean, that'll—

Dan DiDomenico: Great point.

Nancy Vailakis: That'll win more sales than anything else.

Dan DiDomenico: Great point, Nancy, this has been tremendous conversation. I did want to ask you, though, as a leader in distribution and knowing so many of the LPs out there in the US and globally and also having a very close eye and firsthand seat at looking at assessing what's available out there in terms of investment strategies, private equity, private credit, what are some of the top challenges that you're seeing out there today on a day to day basis?

Nancy Vailakis: It's no secret that this year has been a tough fundraising year even for people at mega funds. I have a little bit more freedom in my schedule to kind of chase opportunities that I think people will jump at or facilitate interest for LPs that are looking for a specific thing and have ramped up their effort. But obviously, sales can be tough. You can have a great win and you're on top of the world, and you can have a loss and you're at the bottom. Trying to keep an even keel and also be patient through tough parts of the cycle is really the name of the game. But day to day, it's just keeping on top of that process, maintaining relationships, and also continuing to learn about where the market is going and what investors might pull the trigger on. But I think for this year, just to fall right on my sword for all alternative asset management fund raisers in the ecosystem, this has been a challenging year, and there's been some spiritual thinking. But for me, I love what I do. And so, there's no question of putting it to the side. But picking your spots and also sticking to your knitting is good. Just because crypto is trendy doesn't mean that I'm the person to sell it. And of course, post-election, crypto is now trendy again. But what I know... and frankly, sticking to my knitting is serving me best. And so that's the name of the game in my view.

Dan DiDomenico: Nancy, your passion clearly comes through. Thinking about the sales cycles, the orientation of the LPs in the long term clearly serves you well. Congratulations on everything that you have created at Ancram. We wish you nothing but the best of luck moving forward, and I hope that your outlook of what you share does come true as we enter into 2025. This conversation has been fantastic. I learned a lot. I thank you for being a part of The Rainmaker Podcast and for all the great support at Dakota. Nancy, thank you so much for joining us here today.

Nancy Vailakis: Thanks so much, Dan, and thank you, Dakota, for having me.