



SEASON 4 EPISODE #4

ALISA KOLODIZNER
PRAIRIE HILL HOLDINGS

Narrator: 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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Alisa Kolodizner: Thank you.

Gui Costin: So thrilled to have you.

Alisa Kolodizner: Thank you.

Gui Costin: So, Alisa Koldodizner is a founder, operator and certified planner with deep experience across commercial real estate and private equity. She is the co-owner and managing partner of Prairie Hill Holdings, alternative investment fund, with over \$100 million in commercial real estate investments. In addition to Prairie Hill, Alisa is also a founder and advisor to a growing ecosystem of ventures including Acumen Advisory Consulting, Toll Booth Trading, and Glaisnock, all focused on delivering strategic, tactical, and income generating solutions to financial advisors and their clients. A first-generation Russian speaking Ukrainian American, Alisa is a passionate advocate for inclusive leadership, having launched women's finance networks and youth focused literacy programs. Prior to entrepreneurship, she was the top ranked institutional sales consultant, supporting clients with over \$3 billion in assets. She previously owned LCW, a cultural competence training firm, which she successfully exited and remains proud to have led. Alisa holds a B.S from the University of Illinois and completed executive education acquisitions at the Chicago Booth School of Business. She serves on the advisory board of Genesys works, is an 11-time triathlete and Certified yoga

instructor. This is such a fascinating conversation because what a background you have. So, walk us through your career. It's been very fascinating career as you've been with TD as your certified financial planner. But then now where you've ended up in the commercial real estate business. So, take us from the beginning and how it went so we can get a perspective.

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure. And so, I appreciate you starting with the personal journey, because it always ties, for me at least, into my professional. I entered financial services right out of school. I started in-- the starting role, I was at the front desk doing paperwork, and it was at TD Ameritrade. Then I went to Fidelity. Similar role, just a couple more complexities with working with high-net-worth individuals. And then I ended up back at TD Ameritrade as a financial advisor. My at the time boss took a chance on me. I did not have a background as a financial advisor before that. I did have quite a bit of a background in sales. Started when I was five years old. We can get back to that. And he took a chance on me and hired me as a financial advisor, and I got my certified financial planning designation. So was the youngest in the branch, in the network. Unfortunately, not many women either, so I was also one of the few. And I became number 5 in the company out of 900 advisors within the first 2 quarters. And so yeah, so—

Gui Costin: That's insane.

Alisa Kolodizner: I was very fortunate. Yeah, I didn't understand at the time that was unique. You don't really know what you're doing, that it's different until you're older and people tell you enough times. So, I really enjoyed having an impact. I've always been very impact driven. I've always been very curious. So, I try to learn a lot, and then I try to apply. And I started getting phone calls from other financial advisors where they were basically saying, hey, how did you excel so quickly? What are you doing that's different because you don't have a lot of experience in this? Also, you're female and there's not a lot of women in the industry? And I enjoyed those conversations. I enjoyed being able to provide guidance to others more than my own success. And so, it got to a point where that became like half of my day. I was still doing really well. I was still number 5 in the company, but I was also spending half my time helping others. And so, I started the first women's networking group at TD Ameritrade to be able to provide this space for other women to learn from one another, to be able to discuss what they face in their branches and their everyday. And I applied for this aspiring manager program that TD Ameritrade started doing. I got in. Did that journey and decided to move into the manager space. And so, it moved me into product. I took a pretty big pay cut to be frank. But that goal of how I can have a bigger impact seemed more there, basically, because it would be like now my job would be to teach full time other financial advisors on how to have better financial plans, how to discuss various products. And I started traveling the country, started coaching financial advisors all over the country. As an employee of TD Ameritrade, they created

the role for me. That was a really wonderful experience because I got to learn from others once again, like, why does this branch do better than the other. And what I would do is take those learnings and be able to then apply them to the other branches that I would visit. And my division became number 1 in the company. There's a journey to get to that. So, it doesn't just happen overnight. There's a lot of hey, if someone isn't interested in getting better, move on because there's a lot of that. But then there's the folks that are really excited and interested in like, how can I do better. And I don't know because I'm stuck in this one branch, and I haven't seen one on one how others are able to achieve success. So, I did that. And then--

Gui Costin: So, you were like Ron Carson before Ron Carson?

Alisa Kolodizner: I guess. I don't know, perhaps. I've never thought about that.

Gui Costin: Well, he that's really at LPL. That's what he did. Yeah, he was the coach. He would not only have his own practice, then he would go out and coach other LPL financial advisors to have insane success. A legend in that way. So, congrats.

Alisa Kolodizner: Thank you.

Gui Costin: There's also-- I'd love to hear from you because learning a craft, if you will, and then being it, sometimes it is more gratifying to teach the craft because you've known how to do it, and you cross that Rubicon. Talk to me about the excitement of being able to help others and teach others. And I don't know if it was weighted towards more women when you got the official role, or if it was just any financial advisors, or how that worked?

Alisa Kolodizner: So, it was not weighted towards more women. It was weighted towards everyone. However, through the experience-- because I didn't realize that there weren't a lot of women in financial services. I'll be frank, because my branch actually had half, so it was half women, half men. So, I never saw there was a difference. And once I started traveling to these other branches, that's where I started seeing OK, I'm the only woman in the room. And so that's where I started noticing that there is definitely a gap in the space of more women being in financial services. And so, I ended up bringing a nonprofit that taught financial literacy to high school girls to my alma mater because of that experience, because I was like, OK, where does this problem start? And the problem starts, well, if you don't know this world exists, why are you going to enter it. And so that was part of what I did on the side, I guess. And so, I recruited all of the volunteers from various branches as well as Thinkorswim, which was located in Chicago, which is where I still was.

Gui Costin: Oh, that's great. And so, tell me what happened at the end of so TD. How long did you spend there?

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure. So, I spent the majority of my corporate career in TD Ameritrade. So, I spent over 10 years there. From that product role I ended up going into institutional. And so, my clients became wealth management firms. I covered Michigan Indiana. And I became number one in the company. So, I continued to grow my impact, which is what I wanted, which was from individuals to financial advisors, which worked with individuals to wealth management firms that had advisors that worked with individuals. To me, that was very gratifying. And so that's my career at TD. In the middle of it, I also was part of a program where we built a lending platform. So, it was before commissions went to 0. It was like how we disrupt before we're disrupted. So, I got to do that project. And that was part of what exposed me to entrepreneurship, because I was still in that guidance sales manager role, where I was teaching financial advisors, and then once again, on the side, I was also building this platform with a team at Thinkorswim. And our clients for this lending platform were financial advisors and wealth managers and also other business owners. So, these were all business owners. And that's where I learned I'm like, OK, I want to be surrounded by these types of people because all of these business owners, they have similar energy to what I associate with. And so that's really where I got my taste of entrepreneurship from. And that's why I went to institutional, because then I was like, all right, I want to work with business owners. And so that was who I got to work with institutional. And then I left because we were acquired by Schwab. Excuse me.

Gui Costin: I was going to say Chuck probably would have loved you. So being a financial advisor is the absolute ultimate in entrepreneurship. I mean, it's like sink or swim. You were on your own. At least they provided some support from you, which is nice. But go back to when you were 5 years old. Go back to why you were so driven to entrepreneurship, because clearly your parents had to be very entrepreneurial from what you told me before we started. Talk to me about that and how that's really informed you, guided in your blood, if you will, to be an entrepreneur or self-starter.

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure, sure. So definitely my parents are the first influences for entrepreneurship. I mean, they left everything to give me a better life. And so, whenever I'm having a tough moment, which there's a lot of them when you're an entrepreneur, I think about that journey and it really gets me to a point where it's like, OK, I'll be fine. I'll figure it out. And so yeah, I mean, their experience-- their decision, honestly, of choosing to start over and give me a better life is where I believe I started to see true entrepreneurship. I was also raised by my grandmother. My grandmother was a pediatrician in the former Soviet Union. She was an entrepreneur too. So, she had her own practice.

Gui Costin: In the Soviet Union.

Alisa Kolodizner: In the Soviet Union. Yeah. And her father, who wasn't educated at all. I don't even think he got maybe sixth grade education. He was an entrepreneur. So, he worked in the rail system, and he would buy a fruit that was available in one city but not in another. So, he would buy it in one, and then he would give it to my grandmother, as a child, to sell it in the other city and make money off of the margin. And so that's where my grandmother learned it. And she had that spirit. And then she-- I was raised by All of my fondest adventures were with my grandmother, where we would-- yeah, we took a lot of different risks, and it was fun as a kid. I always had a good time. We'd visit a lot of different places. And that's where I saw it, was through her, actually, I'll say. And then when I entered into corporate, I mean, it just-- once again, I didn't know what entrepreneurship necessarily was, but I knew that I had glimpses of it throughout my life. When I was 5, I sold bracelets at my kindergarten, 1 for 3, 2 for 5 specials. I don't remember this, but my mom was like, OK, I remember coming into your kindergarten and you're like-- you're hustling. You're trying to sell these bracelets. All the other kids there at the end of the day, school's over, they're ready to go to the playground, you're there trying to sell your bracelets. And part of it was because my parents didn't have much when I was growing up. I mean, they're doing really great now, but when I was younger, I saw that. And it's like-- I don't know where this came from. But I didn't want to be a burden, I guess. The best way to put it. I wanted to-- however I could contribute, I wanted to do it. And so that's why I went into entrepreneurship too, is like I knew I could make my own money. And so, I just started doing it at a very young age. And yeah, there's a quick story. My other grandmother, who unfortunately is no longer living, she told me that we went to the dollar store, and I've always had this color hair. She's like, I lost you. And all of a sudden, I see this little girl with this ponytail with a bag. And she's like I was shocked. I was like, why do you have a bag? And you told me that you went and bought a few things for yourself. And she's like, I was angry that someone sold something to a five-year-old. But then I was also so impressed that you went and got something with your own money.

Gui Costin: Oh, my gosh, that's crazy. Oh, that's great. So now fast forward to 2021 when you started Prairie Hill. So, what was the motivation to start it? Give us the founding story of Prairie Hill and what you guys do.

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure. So, Prairie Hill is an open-end fund. It's a triple net lease real estate fund that my business partner Matt and I started in 2021. The foundation starts from, well, I was no longer in corporate, and so I was-- actually I took a class around mergers and acquisitions at Booth. And I learned about this opportunity to buy businesses. It was called entrepreneurship through acquisition. And it's a whole world. Most folks that are in this world, they've gotten their MBA at a top school like Wharton, like Kellogg or Booth. And I called outreached, which I'm very comfortable with

doing to all the folks that were in the space in Chicago, because that's where I still was. And Matt was one of the people that responded. And we met just to talk about his journey. He owned a few printing companies at the time. And we started talking like you and I are right now. And towards the end of the conversation, he basically said, hey, I've had this idea that I've been focused on, but I can't do it full time because my skill set is really more on the investment space. It's not as much on providing capital and bringing in new investors. And based on your background, you would be great if we can partner together. And so that's actually how Prairie Hill fully started, was just a conversation between 2 people, a conversation initially that I just thought was me learning about how to be an entrepreneur through acquisition from Matt. And then it became, let's launch this fund together. And that's how we launched in 2021, was as an open-end fund and trying to figure out how to grow it because of my background in financial services as both a certified financial planner. So, I understood that this was a hole that existed in portfolios. Most individuals have the basic 60/40 blend, which is you got your equities, you got your fixed income, maybe you have a little bit in real estate, but not much. Most people don't really see real estate in their portfolio outside of their house. And so, understanding that this area existed, that this gap existed, also seeing that folks were really starting to struggle. I mean, this has been a while if you look at how so doing. But it's not keeping up with your needs, wants, and wishes, those returns. And so, knowing that there's an asset class that has the stability of a bond, so you're able to achieve the exact same level of volatility, but returns that are tied to equity was a space that was just isn't-- it's just not being leveraged enough. And part of that reason is because it's expensive. I mean triple net each of these acquisitions is between 5 to \$30 million. So, most individuals can't go out there and make that purchase themselves. And if they can, maybe they can do one. They can't do multiple. So that was another reason why we decided to make it an open-end fund so that we can take in capital at any point in order to buy more of these properties into the portfolio. Also making it diversified. So, we're open end so that when you start, maybe depending on when you started with us you have a certain number of buildings in your portfolio, now that's more. I mean, we're literally today closing on a property. So, I signed the paperwork before. So, we're good. But yeah. And for me as a financial planner, knowing that it's a diversified portfolio, it's quality companies that are the tenants, these are all e-commerce resistant. So, these are education, medical, quick service restaurant industrial grocery anchored as well. So, these are high quality tenants that do make up different sectors. And so, it provides that diversification in someone's portfolio too. So yeah.

Gui Costin: So, being a distribution and a fundraiser myself, how have you gone about raising capital for the open-ended fund?

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure. So that's also morphed. So, where it started is not where it is. And so, I can talk about both because I think that's important.

Where it started was conversations. So literally it was once we started it was starting to talk about this opportunity because a lot of it has to do with education. Most people don't know that this is an area that exists. They don't know what triple net is. I can talk more about it if we need to understand it better. They don't know that you can buy triple net through an open-end fund. It started really as education towards my network, and so talking to people that I've met. And it was honestly fairly natural initially. I would talk about it and if someone was interested, they'd be like, oh, well, how do I invest in this? And then it was like, OK, well, now let me talk about how we can do it. Then we started moving into the wealth management space. So, because the role that I had at TD Ameritrade prior to leaving was an institutional, I did have-- I do have quite a network in the wealth management space of owners of registered independent advisory firms. Now, they are fairly concentrated in two different states because those are two places that I covered. But being able to reach back out to them and now with a different value prop, and because of my experience as being a CFP, an advisor, then teaching advisors, I understood where it felt. Basically, when I would have conversations with these business owners, it would also be like, hey, I know why this is something that would benefit your end clients because I've been in that same place. I've been in your shoes. So yeah, we moved into the wealth management space and then we started offering it to registered independent advisory firms. Then we got it onto custodial platforms. So, we are available through Schwab, through LPL, through Inspira. For retirement accounts too, so that also became part of the offering. And so being able to navigate all of those aspects. And honestly because we're a boutique fund, and I'm very fortunate in my business partner. I mean, we're both flexible and quick and being able to adapt to what our clients' needs. And so that offering was part of the adaption too. Then we started doing dividend reinvestment because literally someone asked, they're like, wait, I don't want my distribution on the quarterly basis. I want more ownership in the fund. And so, then we started offering that. Now we do 1031s. And so that became also part of-- now you can't 1031 into the fund but into the properties. And since we're constantly have deal flow and we're constantly buying, we're able to accommodate 1031s. Like the one that we're closing on today it is a combination of our fund and a 1031. And that's how we're doing the acquisition.

Gui Costin: Oh, that's great. So as an entrepreneur, as a business founder, what advice now that you're 4 years in, 4 and 1/2 years in, biggest struggle-- and if somebody's listening right now, they've started something-- even a lot of people listening are individual salespeople. A lot of women were Mimi Drake, were really into a lot of the wow and the whole thing. I don't want to get into that. But there's a lot of people listening that would love to hear from a successful woman who started something on her own. And what's the biggest struggle for you with getting this company off the ground?

Alisa Kolodizner: That's a loaded question. There's a lot of struggles of starting a company. I'm not going to paint that rosy picture. But I'd say the biggest struggle is-- and I'm still learning it. But realizing that, number 1, you do need the team. You can't do it alone. So really honing in into your craft. My skill set is sales. I mean, my skill set has always been networking, sales, negotiating. But that's my skill set. So, the other aspects of picking out the properties or operations that's not my skill set. And it took me a very long time, and there could be a fully different story on that, to come to that realization. And it was a very humbling experience. But it's real. And it's being able to say, here's what I'm good at and then here's what I'm terrible at. And that's OK because I just need to find the people around me that can complement me so that I can have a thriving organization. And I believe that that's what we've done together. I mean, we are really our lanes. And that's part of it. And that's how we make decisions, too. And so, my business partner, my team as well, they know and I know, hey, this is what I will make decisions on. And this is what you will. And that to me was really a big lesson that took quite a bit of time because initially I thought I can do it all. I'll be honest.

Gui Costin: So, as we're coming the final few questions, I want you to unpack this one for us. So, playing to your strengths, this is a big takeaway versus trying to focus on improving your weaknesses.

Alisa Kolodizner: Yes.

Gui Costin: Would you mind addressing that in just a clarifying because a lot of young people might think, oh, I got-- I actually want to hear it from you.

Alisa Kolodizner: Sure. And like said, I'm still learning that. And I'm fortunate I have family, friends, business partners that keep reminding me because it's a tough one for me. But yes, I have learned through this journey that focusing on your strengths versus trying to perfect your weaknesses is what will get you furthest. Not only will it get you furthest, but it will help you avoid a lot of very difficult failures. And by the way, I can speak to that because I've had those failures. That's how I learned. I unfortunately didn't initially listen to the advice of, hey, just focus on your strengths. I actually try to also focus on my weaknesses. I've made a lot of decisions in my life thinking, oh, I can figure this out. And they did not work out very well. Let's just put it that way. So, on paper there's a lot of success I can talk about, but there's a lot of failure behind that too. And that failure the most of it, I'd say almost all of it comes from me choosing to focus on those weaknesses versus staying with my strengths. So yeah, I mean, that's what I've learned throughout this journey, still, like I said, I'm learning, is just focus on your strengths and find-- and by the way, that will mean paying money. That will mean potentially giving up some equity too, which was also very difficult for me. But it's allowing me to go further, faster. I mean, it's allowing me to scale my business much faster than if I did it alone. Because sure, could I go raise capital alone? Yes. However,

would I raise it as quickly and be able to expand my fund if I just tried to do everything alone? The answer is no.

Gui Costin: Gotcha. OK. So, two final questions. Where would you rank yourself, maybe personally or business wise, of just integrating any kind of LLMs, any kind of AI technology and tools into your business?

Alisa Kolodizner: We are very much integrated and more so I actually-- we're talking about Prairie Hill. I have other things that I'm working on too, that are in that space specifically. AI and LLMs or Large Language Models are really impactful because they basically-- before you had to hire someone, you literally had to hire more people to take the data that you have and to be able to say, oh, this person needs an email because it's their birthday or this person made this buying decision. So, let's give them a call. Now you can use software to do that right. And so, we use it personally at Prairie Hill through our CRM. Our CRM uses AI in order to help us with doing notes for us. It helps us with providing task reminders. We use AI in our meetings, so we use Teams, and it gives us-- if someone couldn't attend, yes you can record it, but that AI piece allows you to pick up on some of those points that honestly, maybe you didn't even hear because you were so focused. I mean, we're humans. We got so hyper focused on that one conversation. And maybe there are a couple other ideas that were brought up that we didn't hear. AI captured it. So, we use it in that sense. And then also in calendars as well. So being able to pull calendar information to see, OK, here's where you had a meeting. It's been 3 weeks since that last conversation. Probably you're a little late on sending that email. So, we use it in different ways. And we're looking to expand, I'll say. Definitely looking to expand on how we use it.

Gui Costin: So, as this relates to a young person. So, this is a question around advice for a young person getting into the financial services business. And let's just say sales, and it could be fundraising, because now you're in the fundraising business in a different way than you were as a financial advisor, calling on the actual firm who's got the underlying clients to put their clients in your open-ended fund. What advice would you give to a young person getting in the business today?

Alisa Kolodizner: The advice that I would give to a young person getting into the business today, I guess there's a couple pieces of advice. The first one is reach out to your network. I did this when I first started in the industry. The reason I was able to do well very quickly, at the time, I didn't realize it was quickly, but now I do, was because I would reach out. I was very comfortable with being vulnerable. And that's something that I will say is still really important throughout your career. It's OK to be honest and say, hey, I don't know. And it's OK to ask for help, because when you're comfortable with vulnerability, you're authentic, you're genuine. People will want to help. So, the advice I would give is number 1, reach out to your network. So, if there's a

career that you want to have, if there's someone that you'd like to be them at some point, reach out to them. Reach out and ask for advice. Will everyone Respond No. But if you reach out to 20 people, 10% respond, OK, that's two people you get to talk to. So that's 1. 2, always learn. I mean, learning is so critical and important. And when you showcase your consistent thirst for knowledge, what that ends up doing is number 1, it makes you more attractive to employers. It also makes you more attractive to your end clients because you're now becoming dependable. You're basically showing hey, you're right, I don't know this. But I'm going to learn about it or I'm going to go and find where those resources are, and I'm going to bring them back to you. Because part of building your capabilities and sales is number 1, reliability, so being a reliable human. And reliability comes from not necessarily you are knowing it, but you are being comfortable with saying, I'm going to go ask and I'm going to go learn. And then the other one is trust. And so, you build trust when you're reliable. And so, when you're able to become that person where you're constantly trying to learn, you're dependable, people trust you, they want to do business with you, they want to hire you. So those are the 2 pieces of advice I would give is lean on your network. You have people out there, whether you know or not. Go back to your schools, alumni. By the way, I should take that advice myself. But you have that. You have your LinkedIn. You have friends that are in the industries.

Gui Costin: You brought up a very, very key point around trust. If you're reliable and dependable in business as a coworker, let's just say that, or to a client, so you're responsive to a client. You're responsible to a coworker. You're a good worker. I would say I want to be seen as a really good worker in that I respond quickly. I do the job that I'm asked to do. I actually do more than that. So, as we close out, could you just comment a little more on that one piece of advice because I think people don't realize sometimes that their reliability and dependability to get a job done for their teammates actually makes their teammates vote on whether they want to work with them more or less. That's why it's funny. If you're a consultant, if you're a pure consultant, the voting is over, like you do the consulting work, and then you move on to the next thing. If you're working at a company and you and I work together on a project and I'm not very reliable, I do an average job, you end up having to do a lot of it, I wasn't really that responsive, you're like, I'm not voting to work with Gui anymore. I'm sure I'm going to go to someone else. Could you just unpack that just for 1 minute because I think that is kind of underrepresented in the work world in terms of working with an organization, of just being somebody that somebody wants to continue to work with. Why? Because you're reliable. You're dependable.

Alisa Kolodizner: When you tried to do something personal, so you're trying to get something fixed in your house or you go to a store, and you are trying to buy some groceries. If that person that's helping you, if they are actually helpful, if they're in your house, they're on time, they come towards the job, so

you don't have to wait, you have plans later on, or if you're in the store and they walk up to you and they're like, how can I help you, and they're there for you and they're reliable for you, you're going to come back there. You're going to do business with those people again. Well, it's the same thing for yourself. And so, my mom taught me this when I was a kid, because I had a period where I didn't have a lot of friends because I, you know, foreign kid. And she always said-- she's like, if you met yourself, would you want to be your friend? So same question. If you met a coworker like you, would you want to work with them? And if the answer is yes, then you're doing a great job. You're being reliable. If the answer is no, there's probably a couple things to work on. And so, I always think about that example. But yeah, being reliable is really turning the table on yourself and thinking, OK, am I someone that someone would want to work with? Am I dependable? And thinking about the experiences that you've had to shape that because what did you like, what did you not like when you've tried to rely on someone else, and emulating that. That's what reliability is. And that is key. I mean, that really is key because reliability builds trust. And trust is well, that opens the doors to doing business and to moving forward.

Gui Costin: Yeah, it's blown me away in the software business that we've started how much we've always had a white glove approach to our customer success and interaction and response, like 5-minute response time, how much people sometimes even value that over the product, which really taught me that lesson. Well, this has been amazing.

Alisa Kolodizner: Thank you.

Gui Costin: Congrats on your journey. Congrats on starting the business, Prairie Hill, how it's growing. And we might have to do another one in 2 years just to get an update on all your success. So, thanks so much for being here.

Alisa Kolodizner: Thank you. Thanks for having me. This was a great conversation.

Gui Costin: Great. All right. That's a wrap. Another edition of the Rainmaker Podcast. Thanks so much for joining and can't wait to see you in the next Rainmaker Podcast.

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