

Intro:

Leadership is more important now than ever before. Entrepreneurs are natural leaders. It's time to step up, take control of your business and decide to be your very best as a leader right now.

Mike Paton:

Hello there. This is Mike Paton with the Lead Now podcast. Today, I couldn't be more excited to introduce our guest, Kris Lindahl, the CEO and founder of Kris Lindahl Real Estate. In 2014, Kris was recognized as Minnesota's number one real estate agent.

Mike Paton:

And in 2018, he began his journey as an entrepreneur, which he's grown his organization into one of America's top real estate teams. He's nationally recognized as a leader and influencer in marketing, leadership and culture. And Kris believes that both real estate and community involvement can push business and culture beyond the status quo. Kris, I'm proud to call you a friend and a client. I'm grateful for your presence on the show. Welcome.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, thank you so much. That was a strong introduction. I feel like I have a lot to live up to now.

Mike Paton:

Well, as you know me pretty well, lowering expectations is usually the key to my success. So, let's see if we can both delight the listener despite raising them.

Kris Lindahl:

I love it.

Mike Paton:

Do me a favor. Let's start by you sharing a little two-minute history of how you created Kris Lindahl Real Estate and where you are today as an organization.

Kris Lindahl:

Yes. So, I got my real estate license in Minnesota in May 2009. I was an individual agent with a regional real estate brokerage. In 2012, start to become a lot of bank-mediated sales. So, I became an expert in short sales and foreclosures and sort of noticed that progression start to ... We started to get outside of that type of business, '13, '14. Then I went to another real estate brokerage in July of '14.

Kris Lindahl:

Started the Kris Lindahl Team in January of 2015. Like you had mentioned, started Kris Lindahl Real Estate, the independent brokerage in May of '18. We're now licensed in Minnesota, Wisconsin, in Colorado, with other states to come in the near future. So, I went from an individual agent, to a team leader, to a real estate brokerage and broker, and I've made so many mistakes along the way.

Mike Paton:

And isn't that what makes us all better?

Kris Lindahl:

That's true. Yeah, that's exactly it. Yeah, I've learned so much along the way. And also, I've been fortunate to learn a lot from you, too.

Mike Paton:

Bless you. And the faster you forget that, the better off we're all going to be.

Kris Lindahl:

Well, we're getting close to forgetting that, I think.

Mike Paton:

There you go. Good to hear. Good to hear. So, give us a sense of size and scope. How many agents do you have today? You mentioned multiple states. What's the organization look like today?

Kris Lindahl:

Yup. So, from an employee standpoint, so this is non-licensed real estate agents, we're right around 75. I guess, people in that industry would sort of classify that as W-2 versus 1099, which are real estate agent commission only. So, 75 on the W-2 side. On the 1099 real estate agent side, we have 240, which by the end of the year, should be close to 500.

Mike Paton:

Wow, that's amazing. And you've developed a reputation as something of a maverick and a game changer, a disrupter, if you will. Tell us where that came from and why you've seen the need and the opportunity to change the way real estate works.

Kris Lindahl:

So, it's interesting, I think one thing that at my core, and the reason I paused for a second there because it's my core, but it's also when you look at everyone that you surround yourselves with, they also share similar characteristics. And I think that competitiveness of being an athlete is a big part of that, of wanting to win, wanting to change the way things are done.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, there's two parts, there's that competitiveness that has really led us to where we are. But then there's also the really staying focused on giving back piece of it, which for us happens to be, be generous. And so, so you take this competitiveness of wanting to win and then you add in the giving back part of it, that's like, "Hey, we want to win. But we also want to give back to consumers in a way that is far better than what they've experienced or what their other options are."

Kris Lindahl:

And so, we want to do things different, which is what you tend to hear from any company that really is innovating and doing things at a higher level. They tend to do things in a different way. In real estate, we just saw an opportunity to provide a lot more value and help consumers get a lot more.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. Thanks. You've opened the door to go deep into where this competitiveness and generosity comes from in you. And so, if you would take us back to the earliest moment in your life when you saw someone being a leader or recognized leadership being applied for the very first time, who was it? What was the situation? And what did you learn from that experience?

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, so I love the question. For me, it's been sports, so it's been coaches. And I think when I look at the early days, there were so many coaches that I had the opportunity to play for, that when I look at leadership, I think a lot of times, people think leadership means business. And it doesn't. There are so many other forms of leadership from parenting and coaching and friends. And I mean, the list is ongoing.

Kris Lindahl:

And I was fortunate to play for a guy by the name of John Swanson, who's my football coach in eighth grade and my basketball coach in ninth grade, and I was for sure the worst player on the football team in eighth grade. I had no experience in playing sports. I came in two weeks late because I was so hesitant to even step into football. And he put me a nose tackle. Because that was I think the only position where you didn't have to know anything that was going on other than to just line up right above the center and just charge forward.

Kris Lindahl:

But the principles in the way that he trained and taught me, so that was eighth grade football. By ninth grade, I progressed into one of the better athletes on the team. And by 10th grade, I even went further than that. And I went from nose tackle, to tight end, to wide receiver in less than three years, with no football experience, and won countless awards. And I can tell you that Swanson was a huge part of that.

Kris Lindahl:

So, what makes the story a little more interesting is he was then also my basketball coach in ninth grade. So, two sports that I didn't have a lot of experience playing, and we just blew everyone out. It wasn't because we were the best athletes. It's because of his leadership and the way that we figured out how to play together.

Kris Lindahl:

And I've seen it so often that the best locker rooms and the best culture in the locker rooms always beat the teams that have the most talent because you have all these individuals that are so selfish and they can't figure out how to play together. And I look back to those moments, and we wouldn't be where we are, and I won't be where I am as a person without those moments because you have to learn how to play with all these different types of personalities.

Kris Lindahl:

And you know what, some days are great, some days are challenging. You have all that mix of things going on. And if you don't know how to work and communicate with a team, it's almost impossible to succeed in this world. And so, many of those came from him.

Mike Paton:

What are the specific things you saw him do that brought out the best in you and fostered that kind of collaboration and teamwork? What were his attributes?

Kris Lindahl:

I think accountability is a big one. I mean, we were accountable. Like, if we didn't show up, there were certain repercussions that you're going to do more running, you're going to do more of this, more of that, more practice. It can be positive or negative reinforcement. You know what, if we play so well tonight, we don't practice tomorrow. And there were all different types of principles that I learned from him. And I think accountability is one of the ones that comes to mind every single time.

Kris Lindahl:

Intensity is another one, intensity. Like when I look at the way that we did things, we did things the same way every single time at the same intensity. I think that too often in life, there are so many people that think we can just throw days away. Every day that comes up, it's like, "Well, tomorrow, oh, yeah, tomorrow, I'm just going to sleep in. I'm going to hang out at home. I don't really have to go in. I don't really have a boss." And they just start throwing days away. And so, one of the things that he did well is the intensity was the same at every practice as it was during the game.

Kris Lindahl:

One of the best examples in football is Jerry Rice. And I was with one of his former teammates a couple of years ago and he was telling a story about Jerry Rice. And he came into the organization as a rookie and Jerry Rice was a veteran. And they had all the wide receivers running routes, actually I think it was like more of a slant pattern for those that are listening that know what the slant is. And it's like a 10-yard route.

Kris Lindahl:

And when he would catch the ball, he would run for 80 to 90 yards at full speed every single time he caught a slant pass until he got to the end zone. So, they asked him like, "Well, why do you do this every single time?" He's like, "Well, you have to practice the same way that you play." And so, that always stuck with me that intensity of everywhere you are, you have to bring that level with you.

Mike Paton:

What a great story. One of the true greats. Is there anything you saw Swanson do that didn't work?

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, I think what tends to happen, and this is one of the most difficult things than leadership, I believe, favoritism. So, you end up connecting with someone in a certain way. In sports, especially back then, I mean, a lot of coaches tend to trend and navigate towards the best player. You notice that they're like pushing the best player a little more. Plays are designed around that player more. There are certain things that you can do to the best that you will not be able to do to some of the football players. And you see this often in leadership.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, when you have a team of whether it's basketball is five or football is 11, as a leader, how do you treat everyone in a similar fashion? And I think that becomes difficult to do. Reality is is there's no way in

leadership that you can treat everyone the same. But what you have to do is you have to treat them unfairly. And I think that that's the hardest part that I saw about being a coach in sports is you know who your best player, you just want to push it even more because you know they can take it. And you know that there are others that they might be a little more fragile. And so, I saw that often with him.

Mike Paton:

Did you intend to become a leader, Kris? Or do you think you just wanted to win at whatever game you were playing, and you woke up one day and found people were following you?

Kris Lindahl:

It's such an interesting question, especially the further that you go through life, your reflections on what you were, and who you were, and what you wanted changed. So, as I look back from where I am today to where I was in my early years, my passion was always to help people. And that's why I was going to be a teacher. And that's why I went to college, student [inaudible 00:11:05], got my degrees in education to be a teacher because I truly wanted to give back and help others.

Kris Lindahl:

At that age, I guess I wasn't really sure who I was actually going to help and who I was going to give back to. But that's always been the core of who I am. And looking back from where I am today, being a teacher is a form of leadership. I mean, it takes a very special leader when I look at teachers that have made an impact in my life and coaches and everything else, I mean, it's a huge leadership position to be a teacher.

Mike Paton:

Yes, it is. My grandparents were both teachers and heroes of mine, and always a big part of what I've tried to do in the world as well. We talked about a good example of leadership from your early years. Who's the worst leader, and we don't need to name names here, but recount for us the worst leader you've ever been affiliated with, somebody who led you or you've watched lead others.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, yeah. I never do name names. But I will tell you that I've had a couple of them. And I mean, it's more of that dictator type personality, if that even is classified as a personality. It becomes so toxic, that everything that happens is do this, do it right now, super disrespectful. And I've watched those things that I've had the opportunity to be a part of them to know exactly what we will never do in our companies.

Kris Lindahl:

And to me, it's not healthy to treat human beings that way and just no one wants to be told what to do nonstop or be told what they're doing wrong all the time. There has to be a way to help coach people. And it's like in our company, we call those failures learning opportunities. So, there's a positive in everything where you can take things that have happened that are challenging and turn them into a moment where we can grow and we can learn from them. And I think that, that's the first part of it, is that sort of dictatorship personality.

Kris Lindahl:

But the second part of it that comes with it is like the ego side of it. So, you have this super macho [inaudible 00:13:10] lookalike leader that doesn't want to show any insecurities. It doesn't want to show any vulnerability where they may be weak. And so, all of a sudden, they just start casting stones at everyone else so that no one's looking deeper at what they're doing.

Kris Lindahl:

This year, I saw a lot of that with the pandemic and all of the other things that have happened that have made 2020 such a challenging year. But I saw it happen often with leaders in our industry, where these things would happen, these events and all these horrific things that have happened in our world, and no one would say anything. They wouldn't do anything. They won't step out on video. And all these things would happen. And they just kind of let them all float by and not address it.

Kris Lindahl:

And that's their decision as a leader. And I'm not judging him for that. But what I'm judging these other leaders for is their inability to do the things that they want others to do, but they won't do them themselves. And so, you see it often like you have these leaders that are on the top floor of the office building and these big private offices that no one ever sees. And they just want to bark orders, but they're not willing to do any of them ever.

Kris Lindahl:

To me, the ones I think of often now as I think of video. Video seems to be the one that ... I mean, it's been talked about for years and years and years. And you have other leaders and other industries, like you need to be on video, you need to be on video. And then you watch that person attempt to be on video or attempt to speak and they're terrible.

Kris Lindahl:

And you see it often where it's like they look a certain way and they don't want anyone else to do those things. And I know what it's like to work there. I know what it's like to be a part of that. And that's why everything that I want to do is I want to lead by example and I want everyone to see like, hey, anything that I'm asking someone to do or asking them to consider, I've already done and I know what it's like to be there.

Mike Paton:

So, having talked about a fine example of leadership and troubling examples of leadership, how would you summarize, give me three to five adjectives describing a great leader and then three to five adjectives describing the kind of leader you hope you don't have to encounter in the rest of your career.

Kris Lindahl:

Yes. So, great leaders, when I think about adjectives and the descriptions of ... I mean, there's a little bit of crossover of both. But I think when I think of a great leader, I think open minded. I think open minded is one that comes to mind, one that's willing to listen, willing to listen a lot more than they're willing to talk. Because I think leadership is about what is actually happening inside of that organization or that team or whatever form of leadership that may be.

Kris Lindahl:

And there are different forms of listening, too. You have some people that have a really high EQ that can walk into a room and they're like, "Hey, something's off. Something's off." It doesn't feel right. And there are others that where they need to rely on other people to tell them what the problems are. And that's what makes us all unique.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think being open minded and being willing to listen are some of the most important ones in great leadership. I've just seen it over and over again, that you get into that room. And then the other side of it, the more challenging side of leadership is where people don't listen.

Kris Lindahl:

So, all of a sudden, you know what, it's like, hey, the team is telling you, "Hey, we've got a problem. We've got some issues." And they don't want to have any of it. They're like, "No, there's no problem here. Everything's good." Or I don't really care what they say. I own the company or I run the company, or this is the way that it's going to be or this is the way it's always been done.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think the other one that, and this is what I see puts most industries, most companies out of business, is the lack of vision when things are great. So, the lack of vision when things are great. And so, there's a window of opportunity, obviously, for every business, for every industry. And you have people that are doing well. And they actually don't know that they're really vulnerable. They have no idea because all they can see is the success.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, it doesn't mean that the leader actually has to be the one that has the vision, but they need to have someone around them that can give them that feedback that they can take and do something with it. And I see it happen so often in business. I've been a part of several companies, where I've seen where things were great. They couldn't see that it was going to change. And they're no longer companies.

Mike Paton:

This is the foreword from the book, Good to Great. Good is the enemy of great. When things are going well, the courage to disrupt them and see potential hardships in the future tends to ebb because we're doing fine, right?

Kris Lindahl:

Exactly, yeah.

Mike Paton:

In you, Kris, that's never been your mantra. You've been successful at everything you've applied yourself to. But whatever success you're just now beginning to enjoy, you're constantly looking for the next challenge or the next frontier. Where do you get the courage to disrupt when things are going well?

Kris Lindahl:

I've been fortunate enough to be a part of some of those learning opportunities in those other organizations to know how exposed you can be when things are going really well. And I've seen it

happen enough times. And I think in our company, we have a lot of people that are committed to lifelong learning.

Kris Lindahl:

So, we're reading. We're learning. We're trying to figure out like, hey, I mean, a lot of success has been done before. We're not the only ones or the first ones that have done it. It might look a little bit different. There's different things that have come into play. But a lot of the principles are still the same. And so, we're constantly watching what those things are and we're looking for it.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think the vision piece of it, if you're a leader and you're not looking for it, you actually can't see it. You can't see it. And so, for us, I mean, we're just so obsessed with, hey, where are our issues? What are our problems?

Mike Paton:

Give us some specific examples of status quo that was working fine that you've kind of tweaked or changed or flat out thrown out the window and created something new from scratch.

Kris Lindahl:

So, when I first got into real estate, the way that it typically works is you get ... I say this loosely, but you get trained by a sales manager or a general manager or an office manager that typically was unsuccessful as a real estate agent, and now became a manager, and is training new agents on how to be successful in real estate. And so, when I look at our company and I look at that model, because that's what most consumers experience, the result of what I just described right there is there's never been a conversation around the actual experience for the consumer.

Kris Lindahl:

And the conversation at the previous companies that I've been a part of or that I've seen over the years, they think their customer is the real estate professional. They think that their customer is the real estate professional, not the actual consumer that's looking to buy or sell real estate.

Mike Paton:

So, if I want to run a successful agency, my job is to attract real estate agents. Not my job is to wow the people who are buying and selling homes.

Kris Lindahl:

That's right. And that never made sense to me. The people that are ultimately transacting the transactions aren't even the customer of traditional brokerages. Their thought is, is like we'll just attract more agents by the stance that they're our customer. And then those agents then will go work their, in real estate they call that their sphere of influence, the friends and family and their supporters, and they'll buy and sell real estate for them.

Kris Lindahl:

But things have changed so fast with technology. And the way that things are done, the consumer doesn't need a real estate agent the same way that they did before. And so, in the traditional real estate

brokerages, now, you have a lot of solopreneurs, which are real estate agents that work for a brokerage, that have to compete with companies like ours, with technology and consumer experience. And they're one person. And they're one person trying to move at the speed of social media and cell phones and technology and everything that's happened, they can't do it.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, what's interesting, I have seen this play out over and over and over again. They're so committed to that model that they can't even change. Even if let's just call the leadership team corporate or whatever we want to label that as, they know that it's changed. But they're so committed to their model and it's like, the innovator's dilemma, like what made them innovative is going to put them out of business.

Kris Lindahl:

And they're so stuck in that model that they can't change even though what I just said, anyone that's listening is like that makes perfect sense, that anyone that hears that knows the experience that they went through the last time that they've bought or sold real estate. And they're like, "Yeah, that makes sense. My experience was awful. And here's why." If it's a solopreneur trying to run the entire real estate transaction, it doesn't work.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, that's the example that comes to mind for me in the real estate industry is that that model is so focused on the agent being the customer. And to me, I fundamentally believe that that is the wrong way to do it. I know that if I was a consumer, the last thing that I would want is that the company I was working with, they thought that my salesperson was their customer.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Kris Lindahl:

To me, it doesn't even make sense.

Mike Paton:

Well, and I'm listening to you describe this, ironically, isn't your pitch to the agents who you hope will affiliate themselves with your firm that you're building an organization delivering value to the consumer. So, if you plug into that, there will be tremendous opportunity for you as well. So, in the end, you're creating a great experience for the agent as well as the customer by disrupting the model.

Kris Lindahl:

That's exactly it. And so, in a roundabout way, what you've just described is what I would say shortsighted type personalities, can't see the full picture. They go like, "Oh, all Kris Lindahl Real Estate cares about is the consumer." But at the end of the day, if you take care of the consumer to your point, the agent looks better. The agent looks better, you're more likely to want to refer more business to him because you had an amazing experience. You're more likely to build a lifelong friendship with them because the experience was great.

Kris Lindahl:

Whereas in the other traditional model, if you have a model where the agent is the customer, you're going to have a one-off transaction, like most of those brokerages do. They're going to work with that friend or family member that they know, and they're going to go, "We're never doing that again."

Kris Lindahl:

And what you're seeing is you're seeing so many of these realtors that have worked with families for generations and generations, where now the younger generations are doing more research and going, "I'm not going to follow the same path as my parents, as my grandparents, as my friends, in my family, I'm going to do research online. I'm going to check reviews. I'm going to find out what companies actually give me the biggest advantage. I'm not going to just hire the one that we're loosely connected to, but somehow someway."

Mike Paton:

Because we go to church together or what have you. Yeah, interesting.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah. I mean, there's so many examples, right? Neighbors, sports, I mean, you name it. And we feel obligated to use that person with one of the most, it sounds crazy, but it's like one of the most significant investments of your life. And you spent less than one minute interviewing or even having a conversation like, "Well, yeah, I'll just use the one that we've always used."

Mike Paton:

Interesting. How do you as a leader drive ... You mentioned with Coach Swanson, accountability and intensity. And I know you value those things in your organization today. What are the leadership skills you use to drive accountability and intensity in your organization?

Kris Lindahl:

So, accountability, I think it starts with me. If I can't be held accountable, how can I expect anyone else to be accountable? And so, for me, allowing and giving permission to others to hold me accountable is where it starts. Like, hey, if I'm running around like crazy, dreaming of all these big ideas because crazy visionary Kris, but I won't ever allow anyone to hold me accountable anything? How can I expect anyone else to be accountable?

Kris Lindahl:

This kind of goes along with like, lead by example. And so, for me, I feel like it starts with me. If I can be held accountable, then I can expect others, too. If I can't be held accountable, and I can't expect anyone else to be. So, for me, that's a prime example of that. In giving people permission, conversation that I just had this morning with one of our leaders, I said, "How can I do this better? So, how can I do this better? How can I articulate this better, so that this doesn't show up again?" And it started with me, not with anyone else.

Kris Lindahl:

Now, I could have totally reacted and said, "Well, that's not true. It's so and so. It's this, it's that." Point fingers, play the blame game. But it started with me. And I said, "I got to look in the mirror. How do I show up better for that?" And I think that that lead by example is the first one.

Kris Lindahl:

And then the intensity piece of it is that if I don't show up with that intensity, I can't expect anyone else to. And so, if I don't bring that level of energy, and if tomorrow, I'm not that interested in a meeting that we're having as a company or as a leadership team or whatever it may be, how can I expect anyone else to be engaged?

Kris Lindahl:

And so, you see it often where ... And this tends to happen I feel like in organizations where you have recurring needs. It's like, it's Tuesday morning, 7:00 AM. We're going to have the same meeting, the same meeting, the same meeting over. What are we going to cover today? What's going to happen? It's the same thing over and over again. And I know my job as a leader is that everyone took their time out of their day to commit to that to get value. And if I show up flat, unprepared, no value, I've just taken time out of their day.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think it's super irresponsible to take such critical time for anyone in the world and not bring that level of intensity in that value to them because they took that time and committed to learning and growing. You have to show up the way ... For me, the way that I show up, I can only expect them to bring that level of intensity and the means that they show up during the day, if I show up with that same level of intensity when I'm with them.

Mike Paton:

That's right. And have you created an environment where when you're not doing that, you're not the only person in the room calling you out for that behavior?

Kris Lindahl:

I have, yeah, totally. There's been several times where it's like, hey ... I've had people ask me. They're like, "Is everything okay?" You'll have an off day. I mean, and by no means am I saying that I'm 100% superstar. We all have off days. No, I've had several times where people around me go like, "Hey, is everything okay?" And so, when someone asks me, is everything okay, it's typically because I wasn't bringing the level of intensity that I almost always do. And it doesn't necessarily mean that something was wrong. It tends to be that we start going through the motions. The same thing that I described starts to happen.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Kris Lindahl:

There are days where I totally lose track and forget that, hey, I'm just starting to go through the same motions that we're trying to avoid. And you need people around you that can call you out and say ... Then you get called out and you're like, "Wow, boy, that was a lackluster performance."

Mike Paton:

Well, it's a vicious cycle, that you can fully engage in a meeting that's adding value and the thing that reduces your level of engagement is the declining level of value. And then the less engaged you are, the less value there is in the meeting. And you can get stuck in either of those cycles. And if you're fully engaged and driving value and accountable for that, the meetings great and it's always going to be great. But if it isn't, it goes south fast.

Mike Paton:

And what I watch clients do all the time is throw away the value of the idea of meeting all together when really the issue is the quality of the meeting, the value of the meeting. And so, what I hear you saying is, if you're there fully engaged, bring intensity, be accountable yourself, expect accountability from others, and walk the talk, is that a fair statement?

Kris Lindahl:

It is. And I think the part when we bring that level of intensity, and I want to make sure that as others are listening one part, I think that's really critical that intensity doesn't mean you just bulldoze the whole place. I mean, you also have to create a safe environment where constructive feedback and criticism is encouraged.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Kris Lindahl:

So, I mean, the last thing that I want in a meeting is that it's the Kris show for an hour of like full blown intensity where everyone feels like holy cow, what just happened. And no one feels safe to be able to share and help us learn and grow. And I think having that environment that encourages that feedback is one of the best ways to grow.

Mike Paton:

Your example of asking the question first with the leader you spoke to this morning is a great example. Sometimes the fear of knocking on the boss' door is the reason an issue doesn't come out until it's a crisis. And if you eliminate the need for the people who should be giving you constructive feedback to have to muster the courage to knock on your door, you're eliminating a barrier to open and honest communication and issue solving.

Kris Lindahl:

That's exactly it. And the other thing with when you ask that question about there are others around you that can give you that feedback, maybe you're off, maybe it's not the perfect day. The other thing that happens when you really start to commit to learning and growing from a leadership perspective is your brain actually starts to recognize when you're starting to get off.

Kris Lindahl:

When you're like, "Hey, I'm feeling out of whack. Maybe I'm feeling a little burnt out. I need to take a few days away. I fell off track with nutrition or fitness," or whatever those things are that recharge you

or kind of keep you in alignment, I found that the more education and the more learning that I've committed to, that I actually know more often than not, when something's not right.

Kris Lindahl:

It's like anything, you have to practice and you have to constantly train your brain. If you want to be the ultimate leader and you want to get to a point where you're making this commitment to so many other people in their lives and their families, then it's only responsible that you continue to train and continue to grow your brain, or else you'll never achieve that leadership state without those commitments.

Mike Paton:

One of Gino's 10 commandments for managing human energy is know thyself. And you're just echoing that verbatim. So, there's two principles or two leadership points I know are vital to you. One is generosity and the other is visibility. I would call you a leader in both of those categories in our community. Where does that come from? And how does it manifest itself in your business in your life, Kris?

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, so, the generosity piece to me growing up, we didn't have much. And so, when I say we didn't have much, when I grew up, I didn't feel like I didn't have much. So, it sounds kind of crazy when I say like, hey, I was just a kid living, doing everything I could to get through school and sports and everything else. I never felt like I was shortsighted or that I was frowned upon.

Kris Lindahl:

But as I've grown up to look at what we had, and my mom's commitment to getting us through it, it was challenging. It was really challenging to have four kids. I mean, we had shared rooms. And I think we had a 1200-square foot fourplex. We have one unit of the fourplex. And it never felt strange to me.

Kris Lindahl:

But now that I've been in real estate, it seems like everyone needs anywhere from 2000 to 20,000 square feet per family. And I'm like, how did we do that with just a little over 1000. And that was normal, a little bit more normal back then. You look at a lot of these communities, I mean, there wasn't many houses over 2000. If you had over 2000 square feet, you were really living in luxury back then.

Kris Lindahl:

And it's so interesting how times have changed. And I think that what I've realized is that the success that we've achieved as a company is very rare. Once we really take a deeper look and we look just at sort of the real estate industry, it becomes even more rare. Because so much of what has ever been achieved in real estate is very solopreneur, what I described earlier as the traditional real estate model.

Kris Lindahl:

And to be able to get to a size of a company that we're at now and where we're going out in the future with a commitment to a streamlined world class consumer experience is really hard. And most people quit about 40 mistakes ago. So, I've realized that we're starting to achieve things that have never happened before in our industry. And I think it's super important to stay grounded, stay humble, and help those communities that are helping us.

Kris Lindahl:

And what's challenging when you scale to the size that that we're at today and where we're headed, is that there are a lot of people that support us that we never have the opportunity to think. We don't actually even know who they are. There's a conversation over at dinner. There's a conversation out with friends or family. I'm like, "Hey, maybe you guys should check out Kris Lindahl Real Estate," or "Have you thought about this?"

Kris Lindahl:

Because one of the things that I've learned is that real estate is a conversation that comes up almost every time that people meet, like, oh, we're just starting to look for a house. And then everyone wants to shed insight into, "Well, have you tried here? Have you tried there? You should move over here."

Mike Paton:

Everybody is an expert.

Kris Lindahl:

You should do this.

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Kris Lindahl:

Yes, yeah. Everybody's an expert. And we have so many supporters that we can't think because we don't know who they are. But we know that they exist. And so, staying grounded to that generosity and giving back to the communities that at scale is a huge way that we stay committed to saying thank you to all those people that are helping us. So, the visibility piece, what exactly do you mean by that?

Mike Paton:

Well, I think that in a very short period of time, you've created immense visibility for the organization you've built and the innovative work that you're doing more than any more traditional real estate agency I can think of including some really well-known household names. And so, why has that been a driver of your thinking and why have you been successful creating that awareness and interest? I mean, you've got one of the most recognized brands in the industry, a few short years compared to some of your competitors into your career. Why is that happening?

Kris Lindahl:

So, there's obviously some luck associated with it. I think timing played a critical role in it from technology. I mean, for me, I've kind of got the best of both worlds at the age that I'm at. So, I really understand technology. But I also really understand how to maintain and run a business.

Kris Lindahl:

What I've noticed is, we'll have some that attempt to start real estate companies or teams or brokerages that might be very tech savvy, but not mature enough to actually lead people and stay committed to helping families and do those things. So, there's a little bit of hybrid of both, which I think is just simply a

timing thing. I think the piece that's the biggest of them all, is that our model is different. And it allows us to do that. And it allows us to fulfill the client promise that we made.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, the challenges, if you look at all of those other brokerages around the country, is that they could make a client promise, but they could never fulfill it when they have to live through solopreneurs. There's no streamlined approach to any of it.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, the promise that we can put out there we can deliver because we control the experience 100% of the time through the infrastructure that we've created, which is simply a result of the timing of starting a real estate company in a different era.

Mike Paton:

You're saying that what's held other organizations back from massive visibility standpoint is the concern that they couldn't deliver on excess demand.

Kris Lindahl:

The model.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, wow.

Kris Lindahl:

They don't have the right model to support it. Because here's the head scratcher that people always ask me. They're like, how in the world were you able to do this in multiple states without any other real estate company attempting to compete against you or stop you or at least throw up some sort of fight? I mean, anytime that I talk to someone in leadership that's an entrepreneur or understands business, I can't believe that over the last several years, that every single organization has let you just completely dominate the entire thing to this level.

Kris Lindahl:

And this is a lesson I think for a lot of us to learn is it's not a money thing because a lot of these companies like you had mentioned, that are really Centennial brands that do have the funds to be able to do something can't do anything because the model is not putting the consumer first. It's putting the agent as the customer.

Mike Paton:

One last question about sort of this visibility thing. When you're visible and you put yourself out there as you do very vulnerably, you tend to attract naysayers and critics. So, talk to us as a leader, how do you respond to that? And what does that mean to you as a leader?

Kris Lindahl:

So, there's two phases, I would say. There's like when Kris first put himself out there and then there's where Kris is today. And when I first put myself out there, it was tough. It was really hard. I mean, there's the Reddit feeds, the Twitter feeds, anything you can possibly think of it exists on the internet. If anyone's curious, just Google my name, you can read for days. There's been great material.

Kris Lindahl:

But I didn't know how to deal with that. So, I knew what it was like to win as an athlete. I didn't know what it was like to win as a business. And it was also winning as an athlete is completely different than winning in business with social media and so much access to be able to communicate however you want behind a keyboard with an alias.

Kris Lindahl:

So, the criticism that I faced as putting myself out there as a business was far different than us winning games in sports. Winning games in sports, the spectators in the stands from the other team are heckling you and doing those things. Maybe there was a writeup in the newspaper. But that's as far as it went. And winning in business today when you put yourself out there, it's endless. It's all day, it's every day.

Kris Lindahl:

The thing I love about the criticism that we face is that I know that what we're doing is working when we do see that feedback, we hear those conversations, because it tells us that people are actually noticing what we're doing. And I worry about the day that that goes away. Because if that goes away, what we are doing is no longer effective.

Kris Lindahl:

And so, the way that I look at it is I see that as a positive. I love and I welcome all the criticism, the dress up like Kris Lindahl, the make fun of him and memes, the conversations or whatever they are. I find humor in it. And I really love when people do those things. I think it's neat. I welcome that opportunity. And obviously, there's funny stuff and then there's more hateful type stuff, and there's everything in between.

Kris Lindahl:

And the part that I also realize and have now recognize is if someone's going to be really hateful is that the issue is with them, not me. And when we first did it, I thought the issue was me. No one wants to read anything super negative about themselves. I'm like, gosh, is this really who I am? Is this what it is?

Kris Lindahl:

And then I started to realize that they're the problem, not me. If you're going to go behind an alias on some social media thing and draft up some long-written thing about a person that you've never met in your life, that's an issue that they have to deal with, not us. And so, once you start to change your perspective, it makes it a lot easier now.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. And it sounds to me like you've realized that the more fuel you give somebody who's just taking potshots, the less value there is in focusing on all the other positive things.

Kris Lindahl:

And the other thing too is a lot of these conversations that come up, whether it's negative or positive, are only continuing to help our company and the consumers that work with us. It just sheds more light on what we're doing.

Mike Paton:

When you're having a dark moment, look at Teddy Roosevelt's Arena speech.

Kris Lindahl:

I love that speech.

Mike Paton:

That's what gets me through it from time to time. That's a world class reminder that if you're in the arena, there are going to be people heckling you, period.

Kris Lindahl:

You know what's so interesting about it, too, is that social media and technology, this would be for people that remember this, but the telephone game. We have way more sophisticated telephone game happening, and it's social media. Now, I mean, it's like, what started as a person that I've never met, turned into an experience that they were my best friend. We went to high school and college together. And they saw this, and they heard this, and they did this. And then I see it. And I go, I don't even know who that is.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think this goes with everything that we read from the media, to social media, and everything else, is that as a society, we can be spun around so fast on what we see as a headline or clickbait or whatever it may be that it just turns into this domino effect. By the end, what they're even talking about had nothing to do with what really even happened.

Mike Paton:

There is a little bit of a bipolar disorder in our psyche, in that we love the mighty and we love when the mighty have fallen. And the minute you accomplish something, somebody out there is rooting for your demise. And I wish that weren't the case. But it has unfortunately been proven to be true over and over and over again.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, I agree with you. People really do enjoy watching companies, leaders, people, any public figure ... The fall. I mean, that's why you see it all the time. You see when the example I was going to come up with was Britney Spears checking into rehab and everything else, and then sold the most records ever.

Mike Paton:

Right.

Kris Lindahl:

Right? I mean, right after the whole meltdown of everything that had happened. And she's on the front page of everything. Everyone's cheering on whatever things were being said, and then all of a sudden has the most success that she ever has right on the end of that.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, and all you can do is just keep moving forward and trying to be your best self every day.

Kris Lindahl:

And what's so interesting about it, too, and you're right, is that what most of those people don't understand is that these things don't affect us. I think the strategy of like, hey, let's write this. Let's say this. Let's do this. If it doesn't affect anyone, why do it?

Mike Paton:

Yeah.

Kris Lindahl:

Right? And I have the best example that just happened a couple of days ago. And I love it. I'm not going to name any names. But we had an agent that decided that they were going to move on to a different company, different commitments. There are a lot of factors that went into it. And it happens from time to time. I mean, no one stays anywhere forever.

Kris Lindahl:

And I always believe that, you know what, we have to treat people with respect when they leave. And I know what it's like to leave somewhere and not be treated well. So, I put a comment on the announcement. And I said, "I'm so excited for you. I'm wishing you continued success." Some person that I've never met comments on it and says, "Awkward." And a former employee of ours said, "You would think that, right? But I've actually met and worked for Kris, and that's not him."

Kris Lindahl:

But that's the way that we're trained to think like. Because I wish someone well, and they made a significant contribution to our company, which we're so grateful for, we can't actually wish them the best in the future without others that are spectating thinking that I had some sort of ill will because I wish this person the best.

Mike Paton:

I think the world would be a far better place if more people would assume positive intent. And they don't.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah.

Mike Paton:

So, well said. Let's talk about you've mentioned this a couple of times that you're not perfect and you've made mistakes. Take me to the weakest or worst or scariest moment in your leadership career. What do you wish you had gotten a do over on?

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, so I've got several. The one that comes to mind is when we were first starting out. And I didn't understand anything about personalities or assessments or I mean, what makes us all different and what some of us are good at, and some of us are not so good at, which we all have strengths and weaknesses. And we had some people that decided to leave the team when we were first getting started. Things were chaotic. We didn't really have a plan. There wasn't much in place. This is back when this was a team, not the brokerage. So, this was quite some time ago.

Kris Lindahl:

And we had some people that decided that they wanted to leave. And our response wasn't very good to it. I think there was about five total that decided to leave in about a one-week span, which at that time was, I want to say about 75% of our business that left in one week. And I would say it was immature leadership. There was nothing that was said or done that was super harmful, or anything like that. It just wasn't handled the best that it could be.

Kris Lindahl:

And what's fascinating about it, it was one of the greatest learning opportunities that I've ever experienced in my career. And then we went on that year to actually grow our business when we lost 75% of the people from the previous year in production. And what I learned is, is exactly what I described in the previous story, is that you have to really wish people the best. If they're leaving, you have to accept responsibility for why they're leaving. And a lot of times, it's not what they're going to tell you it is. It's something different.

Kris Lindahl:

But as leaders, we can start to make assumptions about whether they're going to have success or not, or why they're leaving, or why they didn't have as much success in our organization. And we can point fingers at certain people or certain things. But if you just really start to really focus on the positives and wishing them well and thanking them for their contributions, and really going over the top on the gratitude and truly meaning it, not just saying it, life starts to get a lot easier.

Kris Lindahl:

And then what you'll have is what exactly what I described with a former employee that stepped into that comment thread and said, "You would think that about Kris, but that's not who he is." Those are the types of things you have when you really invest in people and want the best for them. And that's the example that comes to mind. And that's the part that I didn't do well.

Kris Lindahl:

Here's the part that I would say I did really well. And there was a little luck associated with it. And I want to bring this up because this happens all the time. When big changes happen in leadership, we tend to want to think about what we're going to do. We're like, gosh, there's going to be a major breakup. This

is going to happen. It's going to look this way. We need to have it all perfectly planned out of how we're going to announce it to the company. What are we going to say? What are we going to do?

Kris Lindahl:

In that scenario, the best thing that I did was I got on the phone all day long with the rest of our company and they heard it from me first. And I didn't even know that what I was doing then was the right thing. It was just instinct. I want them to hear this from me. That has held true three other times in our company where major things have happened and I just went, "I'm going on video right now. And they're going to hear from me. I've got no thoughts, no nothing. They got to hear it from me now."

Kris Lindahl:

And every single time that I've done that, the other side of that has been the best experiences that we've ever had. And it's avoided some major casualties every single time. Because if you don't control the narrative, someone else is looking to control it right after that.

Mike Paton:

Well, and their fear and lack of information is going to trend them towards the scariest possible narrative. So, kudos to you for recognizing that even if it was instinctive. All right, last question. And it goes to the heart of why I'm doing this podcast. And that is this. Most of the people I'm surrounded with didn't intend to be leaders, they found themselves with followers and needed to be really good at this. And this work of leadership can be scary and lonely. And I think 2020 is probably the best example of scared and lonely for most of us.

Mike Paton:

And so, if I ask you to give a young leader who isn't sure of himself or herself one piece of advice that would get them through the tough moments of leadership, what's that advice? And why do you think it's important?

Kris Lindahl:

So, that's a really good question. The one that comes to mind first is the criticism. The criticism is one of the biggest things that any leader is going to face at some point. Sometimes they don't even know that the criticism is coming their way. It could be happening and side conversations. And they don't even know that some of the people they think are their friends or coworkers or supporters are actually the opposite. They're rooting for sort of their demise.

Kris Lindahl:

And I think that once you realize that you can't be all things to all people and that there are going to be some people that don't agree with what you're doing, or especially if you're trying to shake things up, I think life gets a lot easier when you start to realize that that's going to happen.

Kris Lindahl:

And it was hard for me because I went from this person that everyone loved and liked and more extroverted, love hanging out with people, love spending time with people to the thought of like, wait, there's certain people that don't like me? It's a very challenging thing to face. For me, that's a really big

piece of it. Just know that when you're on the right path, you're going to face naysayers and doubters. And the moment that those start to happen, that's probably where your breakthrough is going to be.

Kris Lindahl:

The other part of that too, you mentioned surrounding yourself with people and having advice and mentors and leaders around is having some sort of framework to follow, whether that's EOS or whatever that is for you, it's one of the things for my personality, and I think a lot of times in organizations that are just getting started, you have more a visionary that has no structure and doesn't really know what to do.

Kris Lindahl:

And everything's just sort of a gut reaction and instinct to things is if you are more of that vision type person, having some sort of structure that you can follow to not only hold you accountable but to start to keep things in between the lines.

Kris Lindahl:

I mean, there's so many young entrepreneurs that I've had the opportunity to meet and be around over the years. And a lot of them don't make it. And the reason that they don't make it is there's no structure. They've got great ideas. They've got great energy. But they don't actually know what blueprint to follow. And they're just running on an idea. I've been fortunate to have you, Mike, in our corner, helping us get through that.

Kris Lindahl:

And I would also say the other part of that, too, is that there's an illusion of what success in a business actually looks like. We think that we see companies and we assume that everything is so perfect, and they've got it all dialed in, and there's no challenges and wow, why can't I be like this, and do those things. And I would just say that we all have struggles. They never go away. They might be different ones.

Kris Lindahl:

But I think that's the piece when I was just getting started is I thought that certain companies and certain ways of doing things that they were just so much better and smarter than everyone else. And there were no challenges. And it's such an illusion and it's not correct at all.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. So, you're going to have issues and surround yourself with the right people and the right framework for making the right decisions. And you're good to go.

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah. And the people that you're around that you just mentioned, we mentioned a couple of times is a big part of this. I mean, if you want to be extremely successful, and obviously, everyone's definition of success is different. But whatever success means to you, as a young entrepreneur, if you're surrounding yourself with people, where none of them are experienced any sort of success and leadership or business or entrepreneurship, or whatever it may be, it's going to be awfully tough for you to get there.

Kris Lindahl:

And what I found happens when you don't have people that are around that are at the level that either you're at or you're trying to go to, it does tend to get pretty lonely. You might achieve some early success. But if you can't celebrate that with anyone? I look at my early days. And I think of the success that we achieved. When you don't have anyone that you can have that conversation with that actually wants to celebrate with you, that's a problem.

Mike Paton:

Well, and I think the other thing that happens when you surround yourself with great people is you realize they're regular people, and they're flawed, and they're going to make mistakes. And so, you're minimizing the fear around perfection that so often drive successful entrepreneurs and you're maximizing the joy of the wins that you do encounter, and you're surrounding yourself by people who will help you learn from the mistakes you do make rather than get down on yourself and give up. And I couldn't agree with you more. That's great advice as well.

Kris Lindahl:

And you want people around you that will challenge you. And I would say this part of it is really critical when you're just getting started out. Sometimes challenging conversations, you don't take very well.

Mike Paton:

No.

Kris Lindahl:

Right? So, you have someone that could kind of see it and they give you feedback. I think the more that you can welcome that feedback, they're only there to help you. I can't tell you how many times I received feedback and I thought they were completely wrong, and I took offense to it and everything else. And then looking back now it was some of the best advice that I ever received.

Mike Paton:

Well, Kris, you've given the listener a lot to think about. You've given me a lot to think about, and I can't thank you enough. Help the listener know where they can go to learn more. Where can we learn more about you and your company?

Kris Lindahl:

Yeah, thank you. So, the best place to connect with me is [connectwithkl.com](http://connectwithkl.com). It has all my social media logins and everywhere to connect with me, and then if anyone wants to send messages, direct messages, questions that you may have, that's the best place. Our real estate company address is [krislindahl.com](http://krislindahl.com). But I mean, this being more of a leadership podcast, if anyone's at a position where they have questions or things that they heard on this episode that they want to ask further for me, I'd be more than happy to be back [inaudible 00:54:06].

Mike Paton:

Great. We'll make sure to get [connectwithkl.com](http://connectwithkl.com) in the show notes. And again, I can't thank you enough. One last note to the listener. If you were as delighted with what Kris had to share with us today,

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Mike Paton:

Thanks again, Kris. Great to have you on the show.

Kris Lindahl:

Thank you so much.

Mike Paton:

If you got value from today's episode, do me a favor. Open your podcasting app and subscribe to the show so you never miss an episode. If you've already subscribed, please subscribe one of your friends.