



CRE Tech Talks

Episode #21: Millennialization and the Effect on CRE Industry Talent Pool and Hiring



Scott Sidman, Chief Marketing & Strategy Officer, Building Engines, Inc.
Diane Danielson, Chief Operating Officer, SVN International Corp.



Announcer: Welcome to CRE Tech Talks, this podcast series is brought to you by Building Engines. Providing Web and mobile property management software to innovative commercial real estate owners, managers and the clients they serve for over 14 years.

And now a man so unpopular, we probably pay guests to appear with him. In fact, even as a child his mother tied raw meat around his neck, so the family dog would play with him. Building Engines Senior Vice President, Scott Sidman.

Scott Sidman: Welcome to this episode of CRE Tech Talks. For the third episode in a row we are very fortunate to have another local, in studio guest today. Which if nothing else is a testament to the incredibly accomplished real estate people we have here in Boston.

Our guest today is someone I've paid attention to for the past few years for several reasons. Especially because as a marketer, I've admired her clear points of view. The way she has distributed her message on multiple forums and channels and how she is willing to be out ahead of trends in important issues, including a number related to technology.

She was honored as one of the 40 Over 40 Women to Watch in Forbes in 2013. In 2014, she was selected by Bisnow as one of their 50 Power Women in commercial real estate. In 2015, Real Estate Forum named her as a 2000 Woman of Influence. In 2016, she was appointed to the Legacy Council of CREW Boston.



Today, she is the Chief Operating Officer of SVN International Corp overseeing operations in brand development. These are just a few of the many varied accomplishments we'll, hopefully, hear more about in a bit. Without further ado, I am very pleased and excited to welcome Diane Danielson to the podcast. Welcome, Diane.

Diane Danielson: Thank you for having me.

Scott: Great to have you here. Short walk?

Diane: It was a nice short walk and a beautiful day here in Boston. [laughs] We're going to enjoy them while we have them.

[crosstalk]

Scott: That's good. We're just talking about we hope we have a few more. I think we will. Beyond that introduction, all those accomplishments, and all the things you've done, I'd like to hear more of the back story. How you got started in real estate. A little bit about your journey to where you are today.

As always, as we talked about, we always like to get something unique and interesting about you that perhaps isn't revealed.

Diane: Isn't on the bio.

Scott: Isn't on the bio...

[crosstalk]

Diane: I have actually always been interested in commercial real estate. I didn't really know it. I grew up in the planned community of Columbia, Maryland. That was a lesson to me about how commercial real estate could be used for social good. We had no country clubs. Everybody had access to all the facilities if they wanted to. We had affordable housing mixed in with regular housing.

We didn't even have churches. We had interfaith centers...They were just the same building. It was really based on those principles, and growing up.. I'm going to seem ageist, but growing up was just fascinating. When I got older I got more sort of a little urban planning but I ended up going a law route. I was a commercial real estate lawyer. More on the environmental side. I had some interesting work here in Boston, but it just never fit the law thing. I like to say, "I'd rather build towers than bill hours."

[laughter]

Diane: I'd like to build sustainable multiuse towers with affordable housing. Then I swished in the commercial real estate instead of being a lawyer. I took the big leap from being a lawyer to sales because that's all they hire me for in 1996, which was quite a leap. I was a broker.



I realized, after my first deal, that there's got to be a better way to do this. That's when I jumped into marketing and operations and worked at a couple of very large regional firms around here who had since gone national. I actually left the industry. I know you asked about the tech thing, later in my tech background and we could talk more about that later.

I ran an organization called Downtown Women's Club. At one point in time...This had started when I was working, actually, what used to be Meredith and Grew and with their support, they realized that all these women executives out there and we're not tapping into that marketplace. They supported my startingness. It ended up at one point after I'd left the industry.

It ended up being 30 chapters in three countries. This is where the tech happened, was that I decided to see if we can make things more efficient instead of running it like a traditional trade association.

We were trying to use technology to leverage conversations and there was this new...We called them back then user-generated content, back in 2005. [laughs] There was this new thing called LinkedIn, and we were one of the first 10 groups that they put on their website.

There was something else coming out of Harvard. Some Harvard dropout guy that we will keep nameless, while we started something called DWC Faces. We ended up being the first social network for businesswomen in the US. We're actually, probably in the world at that point.

The next day, after that I got announced to one of the big trade periodicals for the tech industry. All I did was get a lawsuit from somebody who thought we couldn't use the term "faces" in connection with anything called a social network.

Scott: Who could that be?

Diane: Oh, jeez.

Scott: [laughs]

Diane: After I spent all my money...We can't get into trying to raise venture capital as a single mom back in 2006. It's not a whole lot better, but it was really impossible then.

I had bootstrapped my way to where we were and I couldn't do that so we dumbed it down. We changed it around and called it an online directory, [laughs] member directory. That was how I got into...with all the ups and downs and mistakes I made in the tech world. I even tried to launch a software company, at one point, based on the technology we had for trade associations.

Scott: That's a crazy idea. [laughs]

Diane: It was totally crazy, especially in 2007. [laughs] This was all going on. I realized that I so much more enjoyed solving these technical problems than running an organization, an association, basically, or a networking organization.

I took those skills and started consulting with clients. Most of my clients were traditional industries that are trying to adapt to this new, digital world. I could speak both languages. I



worked with some banks. I worked with some financial institutions, law firms, and, of course, commercial real estate firms.

That's when I started building some regular clientele. That's when SVN came calling. They had a different name back then. The best line was "You have the weirdest background but we have the best job for you."

Scott: [laughs] A match made in heaven.

Diane: It was. What they did was they looked at the skill set. If you put into LinkedIn, at that time, "digital marketing," "social networking," "law," "commercial real estate," "sales," there aren't going to have too many people that have all that on their résumé and they looked beyond the normal candidates.

They said they actually wanted to include women and people of color in their search. That was something new and different. That was over six years ago.

Scott: Wow, that's a great back story.

[crosstalk]

Diane: There's a little, unique fact in there about getting sued by a certain someone from Harvard dropout. [laughs]

Scott: Another interested thing, just in terms of our connection. Our co-founder, who started this company, David Osborn, is now our Executive Board Chair, environmental lawyer.

Diane: Oh, is he? Wow! There we go. I am glad he chose a different path, too.

[crosstalk]

Diane: My trouble with being an environmental lawyer is...Only people hiring back in '93, when I was getting out of law school...which was another mini-recession, not like we've experienced since then.

They were all not working for the environmental side. It was more like I ended up doing a lot of work for Massport, putting in runways and stuff like that. It was still trying to do it in a socially conscious way, but it was a different thing.

Scott: You are currently the Chief Operating Officer at SVN.

Diane: Yes.

Scott: As a customer of Building Engines, I certainly know who you are, but perhaps not one of the more familiar names.

Diane: No, it's not. We're working on that.

[crosstalk]



Scott: That's part of your marketing.

Diane: It's really hard when you change the name, a couple years ago.

Scott: Tell us about your organization.

Diane: We are a franchise operation. That was one of the things that attracted me to come back to corporate America, full time. It's commercial real estate, which I do like. I really like the people in commercial real estate. They're just nice people. They like to talk. They are very friendly and very smart. The thing...

[ringing]

Diane: We've got things ringing.

Scott: Yes.

Diane: The franchise model intrigued me. My first gut reaction was like, "That's something people's dad did, back in the day." Then you start looking into it. There's some amazing franchises out there. IKEA is a franchise. People don't know that. McDonald's is the obvious one.

It's a different growth model. What I really liked about it was that we are seeing an era, in every industry, where mom and pop shops, or the local, independent business... We've had some huge independent ones here in Boston, who have all since gone national.

With us, you can keep your reputation. We don't put something on your board. If the Miller company in Maryland comes to us, they become SVN Miller. They can still keep their reputation. Keep their independence. They operate as a true franchise.

My job, when I first came in, was to both create a platform that can work for our secondary and tertiary markets, but also primary markets, where we are working ahead doing more in primary markets, because the deals still flow out to the secondary and tertiary. Sometimes the cap rates are better the further you get out. [laughs]

Also, bringing up the brand to a different level. That was part of when we changed our name back in 2016 to just SVN. There's some other big ones out there that have done the same thing. [laughs] Just to elevate that we do national business because we have 200 offices in the United States, and often in places where other people aren't. We have a very close, engaged network. That's been really exciting.

The final -- because I have to be very consistent with my platform here -- is why I came to SVN, besides the fact that they were willing to have a woman on their executive team, which is very rare for a national firm. I'm often lonely. I'm the only woman at meetings, but not at our company. Women and people of color do very well as franchise owners, because it is an open playbook.

This is how it works. We can give you a playbook for how to run your company, if you want to grow. Some of the programs we have are unique, like our open property listing Monday call,



instead of an internal meeting. It's open to the world. You can dial in. Clients dial in. Clients like to have their properties up there, so it's not just SVN calling in. Something like that.

Once you get a property, here's an open playbook. Having been a young, female broker a long time ago, I realized a lot of the trading was happening on lunches I wasn't invited to -- not intentionally -- or the rules would change. "We told you you'd get that split? No. It's actually this, whereas we're like, 100 percent of 50 percent of the fee, 100 percent of the time off of properties."

Scott: That's interesting. 200 locations, 200 franchisees...

[crosstalk]

Diane: Some of them have multiple satellite offices.

Scott: Full service lines? Management brokerage, or...

Diane: Not every individual firm has every service, but we do have some that have them all. Some of our larger firms might have up to 50 or 60. That's on the larger end of our franchisees. We've been working on supporting larger and larger franchisees. Across the spectrum, if our office in Everett, Washington can't provide it, we have somebody that can.

They can bring in expertise, especially in different product classes. There's a lot of specialization. We have a hotels group. We have golf and resorts, which is different from hotels. Isn't it right, Lawrence? Because it's multiple businesses, it's completely different. We have a marina specialist medical office. You name it, we can probably cover it. Different things.

Scott: That's great. Again, for those people not familiar with SVN, it sounds like there's a lot to offer.

Diane: Check out SVN.com. There's a lot to come there. We're finding the franchise model is actually attracting some younger folks.

Scott: Yeah, I would think it would get them into the industry.

Diane: We're seeing kids...They're millennials. They're not kids anymore. [laughs] Millennials are inheriting offices. Their parents' office. It might be a local family office that they want to build on a national scale, and have a national name that's recognized. Plus, some of the resources we provide will be more expensive to them to try to develop on their own.

It's actually brought a youthful nest to this 30-year old branch.

Scott: That's great. You've touched on a couple of things we're going to dive back into, which is great. I'm real excited. As someone who pays close attention to the voices in the marketplace and influences...Which is a relatively new kind of thing in commercial real estate, right?

Diane: Yeah. [laughs]



Scott: People having points of view, on a number of topics. I want to dive into a couple of those in the discussion. As I said, you touched on a couple of them. The very first time I became aware of you -- or heard you speak, or heard something you did -- it was about millennialization. It was about millennials in the workplace.

You might have been one of the very early voices saying that this is something people have to pay attention to. I'd love to know what you saw, and how that came to you.

Diane: It really hit me early, because in '96 when I decided to stop being a lawyer, and I wanted to get into commercial real estate itself, the only people I...First of all, I'd come out of law school, and being a lawyer. This was in the days before that social networking thing, so I didn't have that many contacts. I was basically starting from nothing.

The only people that knew anybody in commercial real estate were people's fathers. I remember when I was interviewing, they said, "No one's gone into commercial real estate in the last couple of years, because of this." I'm like, "A lot of lawyers got flushed out."

When I got back into commercial real estate in 2012 -- when SVN called -- we were coming out of the tail end. It was in my mind, that...I looked around, and I was like, "OK. Some of these folks are as old as my parents, throughout the industry." I left the industry for about 10 years. I came back in Boston, and the same people are still president of the company.

A little grayer, but they're still there, and nothing had changed. I started looking at the numbers and thinking about it, going, "There's five years where no one went into commercial real estate." If you take a five-year gap of not getting young people in a business, that's why our demographics don't align with the US labor force.

We have 60 percent boomers. We still have some silent generation. Good on them. We need their experience, we need the boomers' experience, but then we have about 30 percent Gen X. We're down to about 15 percent or so, in Gen Y and millennials. When the boomers -- who are starting to retire -- all retire, there's going to be like a tsunami. It's a huge gap.

Scott: It's enormous.

Diane: I like to call it "tsunami of opportunity for young people." We need to get young people in the business before the boomers retire, because we need them to pass along their knowledge. If you look at the marketplace, I think we're up to now...The regular labor force, I think it's like 55 percent millennial. We're a total mismatch, and you know what?

This is funny, because this isn't commercial real estate. Residential is almost the same.

[crosstalk]

Diane: I was surprised. I went through NAR. We had some of NAR's research, and we did calculations based on that. We broke up the commercial from the residential. The residential was a little more female-skewed, whereas the commercial is more...That was our thinking, and noticing this, so we started studying then.



Started automatically, like "How do we retool the brand to talk to younger people?" Sperry Van Ness was what we were called back then. We were known for investment sales, mostly in California. When taking it nationally, we had been planning it for years. Just switched to SVN. When we wanted to upgrade...

We actually have some young people who don't even know our old name, which is great. [laughs]

Scott: It's perfect for marketing.

Diane: Now the brand SVN is known for...We have a couple of great folks who are doing national accounts, and they're saying they don't even think we're the same brand, [laughs] which is kind of fun. That, for me, was a big attraction. Our company was willing to..."What do we need for Diane to go find these young people?"

One of the things we did do...We said, "We're going to study, because no one's looking at this." I had this other inkling, in the back of my mind. Can you take a commission job if you have six-figure college debt? We were losing the ability to recruit our typical white male, of middle class background. [laughs] We needed to expand that, so we did a survey.

We found it wasn't a huge factor, but it was starting to be a factor. Like, "I can't take a commission job." At one point, the industry might have to look at the commission. I know some firms are looking at it, like there's a team-based pay. Then you can get commission on top of that -- for what you do -- which I think is one of the trends that might have to happen at some point.

Scott: That's really interesting. I hadn't thought of that.

Diane: Building owners are going to have to be OK with the system that supports that. There's got to be some very...I don't know. I thought billable hours would go away in law firms. It still hasn't.

[laughter]

Diane: I get the lawyer bills now, I'm like, "Really? You can get that much per hour? Is that a real thing?"

Scott: Besides that, that more pieces are starting to look at the brokerage clinicians, how do you think the industry's responding? Do you think they've heard the message? Do you see movement where they recognize the tsunami that's coming?

Diane: Yeah. I feel like a lot of firms have stopped being resistant to the technologies or the change in how we office. We're sitting and hearing your beautiful, wide open office space with lots of meeting room for privacy because it's a balance you have here. People are experiencing it and realizing, this is the way it goes.

By the way, the millennials are not 35 years old at the oldest end. They're in leadership roles as far as Gen Xer. We're in the middle here. [laughs] Those who have embraced it and stopped



resisting technology...The thing is with our industry the big holdout is that there are still folks out there who have built up their...

I always use the word rolodex and I have to explain what that is to certain people I know.

[laughter]

Diane: I had one at one point in time, but they can still go through their rolodex and do a couple of deals a year on the phone and not needing to do the other things. We're starting to see as they're starting to retire, and their clientele is starting to retire, there's going to be new ways for people to find clients and to distinguish themselves.

That's where the technology is starting to be more embraced rather than resisted. I do believe that's why we're seeing all this money falling into FinTech and Siri Tech because it's the last best. [laughs] There's not many more places that haven't been invaded with technology and apps. Your company and things like that are capitalizing on this.

You've been around for a little while.

Scott: We've been around a little bit.

Diane: [laughs] You've been around for a while, but you've gotten on board with what's going on. There's going to be more of that. It's going to be interesting because clients are getting more sophisticated, but they're also new clients. They're not the same people trading buildings.

I am really curious about whether millennials and Gen Z, which is coming after...Those are college freshman at the oldest. I've got Gen Zs and millennials. I've got them both, and they are different. Whether they want to own real estate as much as an investment because they barely use the real...

Starbucks is an app, go through the drive through or Dunkin' Donuts. They can see it, but it's not used. For me, I'm looking at it more from a theoretical. Do they see the value of commercial real estate if they use it? They also use it differently. It's an experience that's differently, but I don't know where that's going. I'll have to do a study on that next. [laughs]

Scott: Something to work towards. I feel the same thing, and I have older kids thinking about the same things, and they don't view real estate the same way I did, ownership and everything else.

Diane: Yet they're in commercial real estate almost every waking hour, and most of them are going towards multi-family housing, so they're in commercial real estate every single important thing in their life. Everything they do is in commercial real estate. University med, eds, everything is commercial real estate, but because they're living in digital worlds...

By the way, us Gen Xers are the last folks to remember life before the Internet.

Scott: That's... [laughs]



Diane: Then Gen Z only knows the digital world. They've never even experience desktop first. Remember when we used to design software desktop first, then it would go to the mobile, and then it would go down to whatever the watch or whatever you're doing now. They've never experienced a desktop first.

Scott: Any technology out there that you're really excited about or that you've seen or that SVN might be using?

Diane: It's just the collaborative software in general, being able to work...Because we've got 200 offices being able to work on projects because I actually wish the real estate...Real estate licensing has to catch up with the world. That is what's holding this industry back. This has hit me. I've talked about this before.

You say, "What's holding the industry back?" Licensing being different in 50 states. If I'm an owner, I don't care what state we're working in. It's really more of a protectionist play. Lawyers do the same thing.

When I was a lawyer, I had a real estate license just by being a lawyer. We wrote those laws, [laughs] so we didn't have to take continuing ed for real estate.

This is protecting, and there's great reasons to have licensing boards, believe me. But with global society and with work, we're seeing a lot of specialization, so that goes cross border. My other biggest beef about real estate licensing is all the training there's no commercial component in most of the training to get your license.

When you go in you have to know you want to do the commercial real estate, and that's where that's closed network of not seeing a wider array of talent especially from women and people of color because I feel like both of those groups are pushed towards residential, and we're missing out on a big talent pool.

That goes back unless they're aware of it. Part of what we're doing now is you can't be what you don't see. We're trying to reach out to veterans. We have a new veteran's program. We're trying to recruit from a lot of different areas.

Scott: That's really interesting. I've been in this business a long time, most focused on the operations side of real estate, what we do with our customers.

Diane: Got to keep those billings open and running. [laughs]

Scott: Again, that's one of the things I was never aware of that licensing. I always assumed that there was a commercial license.

Diane: That there was a commercial. It's really geared toward residential, and I think commercial needs to step up. Then on the property management side, I would love to see more apprenticeship programs with tax credits. That's my big beef, but I think one of the big trade associations needs to get behind and lobby for that.

Scott: That's really interesting.



Diane: That's another group that's aging out too, facilities managers.

Scott: Absolutely. Engineers is another huge issue. Maintenance technicians.

Diane: Right because they want to do the other type of engineering, which is very cool, but we still need the basics.

Scott: One of the things that I was asked from users or people on your side of the table is, when you look at technology that's out there and things that you've used or seen your franchisees use, purpose-filled commercial real estate technology, if you were talking to companies like ours what can we do better?

What are the things that you think that we're not doing well enough?

Diane: We have to talk. The different technologies have to talk to each other. You can't keep translating and have the go-betweens and not being able to move smoothly from place to place. Like I'm so expecting to see my text messages show up on my phone, on my iPad, I'm going to expect my technology to flow between devices, to flow.

I know this is not your area, but accounting software has to get its act together.

[laughter]

Diane: It's not even software. It's practically hardware because it's from the 19...The fact that nothing speaks to accounting software well, and basically, we're a money business and you got to count the dollars somehow. Really, that's the only thing. I'm seeing great stuff, but if you switch it just...

Which is part of the thing to not switch, but then someone goes out of funding or making a move away from a platform that we're comfortable with. That's being more...We've gotten beyond the device agnostic part. We're all there now, but it's still being able to interplay with different folks.

Scott: Makes perfect sense. Both of the things you mentioned are things that a lot of people talk about regularly so it's good to hear about that. You've touched on a few things that I wanted to get into.

[laughter]

Scott: One of the things you're clearly passionate about is gender equality, and I thought about you last week. I was at a client event, and one of the keynote speakers was a woman who put together this incredibly complex deal, one of the largest real estate transactions in this sector that had ever been done.

It was a panel, and she was telling a story about when she was putting the deal together and there were all these entities she had to go get signoffs from and the structure get all done, she's sitting in the boardroom with the CEO, and she was proposing what she wanted to do. He goes, "How's a little girl like you going to get a deal like this done?"



Diane: [laughs] That's like a dare. You just dared me. This is so going to get done now.

Scott: That was her exact...Her message to the audience was, "You go out and get it done." She said the most satisfying thing in her life was putting that deal at the front. I wanted to share that with you, get your reaction.

Diane: That was a good story with a great end, but the sad part of that story is, why am I doing this if you're not going to give me the benefit of the doubt? I will say that I didn't actually expect I'd still be here six years later at SVN, but I'm given the benefit of the doubt. I had to earn it.

The franchisees were like, "Whoa. Who's this woman with her technology talk bringing in here? And she's from Massachusetts and it used to be a California company." It was a lot of change, and I'd like to see the industry open up a little bit, and that's part of our focus, especially on the brokerage and the finance end.

While we see the studies where some places say 30 percent woman. I'm like, not if you get to the brokerage and not if you get to the financing end of it. One thing we started doing is looking at the skill set that it takes to succeed, and my view was we keep hiring these elite athletes, and they're all male elite athletes.

Maybe there's other skill sets out there, and actually my research did say, yes, there is some correlation between a very good commercial real estate broker and being an elite athlete, but it's not necessarily that it was athletics. It was you the fact that you had grit and determination to do something that was easier to give up than to keep going.

I say, "Well, there's got to be other places like that." Ironically, some of our top brokers, they might have been athletes or some weren't, and they were accomplished musicians. They spoke second languages and military.

Those are things that we're starting to look for on résumés and who's going to succeed and what we're hoping to train. One of the happy results we had about interns the other summer was across the board we had half for women and minorities for the first time ever.

We found that the ones that were succeeding and getting offers, we were able to look at their résumés and say, "Look they had the athletics, or they had the music, or they had the second language." The other one we found from just the résumés, the ones that did well, actually child care.

Scott: That's interesting. What do you think the connection is there?

Diane: Customer service training. If you can take care of someone's precious gem, [laughs] you've dealt with anything. That was the other one that we hadn't spotlighted. My idea with that is, Title 9's been around for 45 years. We have as many women elite athletes out there, but we need to get the women to feel like it's a welcome environment.

We also may need people of color. We're seeing a lot more minorities having a better time breaking into residential real estate. Commercial real estate is not that much different, except



there are clients that might stay with you for a lifetime instead of having to get new clientele every time.

We're trying to figure out ways to reach out. Again, the military veterans. Actually, some of the military veterans we've hired have been young African American women from the military. [laughs] Have the discipline. By looking at what we're trying to accomplish and breaking down...

The other thing we took off our standard hiring is you don't necessarily need a college degree.

Scott: That's great.

Diane: As long as you can do math at a certain level we can teach you the rest. We have a fantastic training program. That's what we've been investing in because we knew we were going to have to bring new people into the business. It's been a long-term play to get where we are now. We brought on Mike Sullivan, our EVP.

Actually, he's our new chief development officer, and he has built a training program that you can come new to the business or you can come been in the business for 20 years and still learn what's going on with how to do a deal or work in a different specialty in that.

That's been one of the things we've been focused on, and by leveling the playing field, by opening up and looking for new talent, our company has transformed.

Scott: It seems like you've made a commitment at an executive level obviously with you being able to drive that which is great.

Diane: Yeah, we had a jumpstart training recently, and there were 40 percent women brokers.

Scott: That's fantastic. That's great. You're looking for attributes, characteristics, skills.

Diane: Skills. It's growth, mindset, and grit. If you want to read one book, it's that "Grit" by Angela Duckworth. Looking for that because you can't tell when someone's coming out of college or this is their first job. I would advise every parent out there [laughs] to get your kid a customer service job at some point before because we don't want to train that. That part can be done.

Scott: How about awareness of this as a career path?

Diane: It's not. Certain cities, Dallas and Chicago, it's really a well-known career path. A little bit so in Boston, but it's still closed network. People think of us, and they think of asset management. We're very heavy on that, and the brokerage has always been around, but that's very similar closed network thing.

It's really making aware... We've registered our franchisees at all the colleges and community colleges for job fairs and things like that so that the recruiting, looking beyond that. I just said we don't need a college degree. That's something we've just started. We're working with a couple of veterans' programs now. We got listed as a veteran-approved franchise.



Those are common different things. CCIM has just started the approval for their training, but it has to be done in Chicago. We're providing grants to any of our veterans that want take that, and we'll provide grants to help them facilitate that.

Scott: What kind of advice would you give to young women who want to see this as a career and want a position like yours one day, want to be in executive leadership?

Diane: [laughs] Mine is never stop learning and know that it's a lifelong...There's one year where I had to leave the industry because I was a single parent, and I had a child with some physical issues, all fixable, all good. He's great. He's at college now and doing awesome. I had to step out completely.

I couldn't keep my vice president job that I had, and I think one year the best thing I accomplished was being the best lunchroom monitor [laughs] – I kept going and learning.

All of the sudden the "Boston Globe" asked me because I had complained about something on the job section that you're having a bunch of young kids from the Midwest writing this. You're leaving out segments of the population. They said, "Well, do you want to come blog for us?" I've learned to say yes.

2003, I did not know what a blog was. I went out the next day, and we went to a seminar. I was like, "Oh, OK. It's just writing little...I can do that. Put it on technology. I can do that." I became one of the first bloggers for the Boston Globe. I was just learning technology.

Whenever something new was interesting to me, I would keep learning it and learning it and learning it. I would not have made it back to this industry at the level I did without having that outside knowledge.

For young women who want to be in this industry, you probably have a lot of outside knowledge that you could bring to it and to not give up and to pick a firm and a team that's going to be supportive of you. Even the bigger firms which might seem like the old boys' club, there are going to be people within that group if you can be on that good team.

It's very lucrative. We need to give more opportunities and be more open, and we have to make sure that women and people of color can succeed when they're here and are not isolated because if you're the only one...I'm always the only one. [laughs] It's lonely, and it's different.

The thing is, I have a sports background. The other fact, I still play soccer, and until recently I got back on an over the hill women's soccer team, but I was playing on an over the hill guy's soccer team because we didn't have any women's ones near my house.

[laughter]

Diane: I'm more comfortable in that world, but I know there's a lot of other women that are too. We need to be open to the hiring, and we need to make them aware that it's an option because really when a woman says she's interested in real estate people still think I work for a residential firm.



If I say I'm in real estate, I have to say commercial real estate just to make it very clear. I say this to the residential brokers out there, I'm like, "Hey, give us a shot. It's more a 9:00 to 5:00 hours and you get your weekends back." [laughs]

Scott: Exactly. showing places on a Sunday morning. [laughs]

Diane: It's less of an emotional purchase. Home ownership is an emotional purchase. This is a financial. One of the things the real estate business has done really well is to put commercial real estate. We're marketing it more on the financial spectrum.

When I go back to my college to recruit fairs, we're part of the financial path along with OK, we can go ask an investment bank, and we have had more and more people at commercial real estate because Golden Sachs and the rest took a hit for a few years. [laughs] We're seeing more and more looking at it that way.

Scott: That's right. That's marketing...

[crosstalk]

Diane: We have to market our industry or we're going to be dead in the water in a few years when all the boomers retire.

Scott: That's great. Some great advice, I think great guidance for the industry as well. It sounds like you're saying the industry has to take a look at itself, and you need leadership to drive those changes down as well. If they do it they're going to help themselves.

Diane: I also think we're facing some new challenges, which is with the sustainability. I was trying to figure out...I'm going to a climate change in Boston seminar next week. [laughs] There's a lot of stuff happening that are going to be long term or infrastructure projects.

We need young people that are going to be in for the duration to build the cities they want to live in, to build, to bring the culture back to the cities that they want, and to just create. There's so much opportunity right now to bring technology and innovation to infrastructure and construction, and updating buildings to places we all want to work in. [laughs]

Scott: No shortage of things to do.

Diane: No, there's no shortage.

[laughter]

Diane: They're big projects so we need people with big ideas coming in and who are willing to stick it out.

Scott: It makes it exciting.

Diane: It does.



Scott: This is really good, really interesting. Thank you for sharing all of those thoughts. I think you touched on one little thing though that you didn't share with everybody. You're also an author, aren't you?

Diane: [laughs] Yeah, pretend. The writing thing's out there. Besides a few business books for woman, I did actually write a children's book. Recently we just put out a book about the SVN difference, which we have unique culture. Writing's always been my thing, so whenever I get a chance to do something, I like to do that.

Scott: That's great. Incredibly interesting. We've learned that you play soccer still.

[laughter]

Scott: Didn't know that part. That wasn't out there. Didn't know...

[crosstalk]

Diane: I went to the World Cup this summer in Russia. It was really...

Scott: Did you?

Diane: Yeah.

Scott: That's exciting. That's great. Any final thoughts? You're going to be moving into our building, which is real exciting for us. We're happy to have you as a neighbor.

Diane: I appreciate that you're interested and what we can do to recruit new people to the industry, and it doesn't have to be young people. We just need new, fresh thinkers because we have in other coworker spaces have upended the way we think about that.

We're seeing changes in hotels and what's going on, everything from Yotel to different types of...I don't remember this many new things coming on the market. Rethinking how we do this business is an opportunity right now, and it's a challenge. It's going to be fun.

Scott: Thank you again for joining us, Diane. It's been great.

Diane: Thanks for having me.

Scott: Great conversation, really enjoyed it. You mentioned svn.com, best place to get information on the company.

Diane: Best place to find information company. We have information about whether you want to own a franchise or if you want to just join. Last time I checked, we had 50 or so firms hiring in different markets.

Scott: Are you open to questions if people want to reach you for...?

[crosstalk]



Diane: Absolutely. LinkedIn's a great place to find me, but also diane.danielson@svn.com, that's me. I'd say if you can't find me on LinkedIn, you're not trying. [laughs]

Scott: That's perfect. We'll share all that information in the show notes. I want to thank our guest, Diane Danielson.

Scott: Thank you for listening, and we look forward to the next episode of CRE Tech Talks. Thanks.

Announcer: Thank you again for listening to this broadcast of CRE Tech Talk. We hope you found today's session valuable. Remember to visit our podcast page at www.buildingengines.com/cretechtalks to download today's transcript and key takeaways as well as listen to other sessions and share with colleagues. We'll see you next time on CRE Tech Talk.

QUESTIONS FOR THE HOSTS?

Contact: Scott Sidman
ssidman@buildingengines.com
www.buildingengines.com

Contact: Diane Danielson
diane.danielson@svn.com
<https://svn.com/>