

This transcript is edited and condensed.

John Matze, Host of *Greater Perspectives*

Hello and welcome to another episode of Greater Perspectives. I'm your host, John Matze. And today we have a very special guest – Dawn Matze, my mother.

We were all really excited that you released your book. And I wanted to tell you, and I've waited until now to tell you, that I have read your entire book.

John Matze

I think I'm the first in our family because you just released it last week.

You know, some of the things that I thought were really interesting in the book – that I didn't even know – was the background of your father, my grandfather, Dom. I didn't realize that him and his father actually had so much to do with the construction and plumbing of the Chicago International Airport.

Dawn Matze, Author of *Nailed It!: Reach Financial Freedom Faster Through Value-Add Investing*

That's right. O'Hare Airport.

John Matze

That's the first I've actually learned of that was in the book.

Dawn Matze

You know, my dad – your grandfather – always told us all about how he and his five brothers had to work on O'Hare International Airport. It was the very first sewer system in Chicago (he was a plumber.)

His whole family was involved in that process.

John Matze

Even in his older age he totally emoted. He'd always have a glass of wine in his hand, saying something ridiculous.

Dawn Matze

He was pretty flamboyant, but he was very basic. He never had an education over second grade. You know, he was a blue collar.

Between my father's side and my mother's side, we had a heavy duty construction background.

My mother's father (Archie) would tear down old barns and reuse the lumber and build houses. So that was both sides of the family.

John Matze

And the pipe housing that they would build and all the old pipes and things that he would collect over the years, right? So that's probably where your inspiration and construction came from.

Dawn Matze

After leaving the Midwest as a 17-year-old and attending UCLA, getting my master's – über educated – here I am going, what am I going to do now that's really bringing me joy?

That led me to – hey, I'm going to build a house. It was so easy for me. It was so natural that I built several more.

From there, I got my license in 1987. That's kind of how it emerged.

That was pretty cool, though, because I didn't know what I was doing – and yet – instinctual. It was amazing. I just kind of breezed through and I didn't look back.

John Matze

You've naturally been a boss our entire life, right?

Dawn Matze

Come on, don't give away everything, okay?

John Matze

When I started reading the book – all the chapters, at least as far as I can tell, are how to become a financial investor, how to become your own construction manager, what it's like. A lot of experiences.

When you started getting into the era where you were building large custom – for lack of a better term – mansions over in the early 2000s before the bubble burst, you had a couple of interesting stories in there. A lot of it about the discrimination that you faced as a woman in this field because people weren't really having it.

Some numbers you had broken down – for every 100 men that were working in the field or for 100 people that were working in the field of construction, about 10 of them were women.

And of the 10 that were women, nine of them were back office, meaning there was only one out of 100 people in construction who are women actually out there on the job site.

Dawn Matze

It's just a male dominated field. It just is what it is. When you have something that's so physical – construction – you're going to find people who are physical. And that ends up to be men with muscles that can handle that.

I felt as though I, as a woman, had an upper hand. Some people will disagree with me, but that's okay. I wasn't in a position to be swinging hammers – although I did at first, and sledgehammers, nail guns, all that kind of stuff. I just didn't have the physical muscles.

So what happens is it pushes you into another area of construction – being the boss. I get to point the finger and say, hey, do this, hey, do that, instead of using my muscle and brawn. It's really an opportunity for women to understand.

I have many men ask me, how did I get started in business? And can you help me get started in business through my career? I have helped, oh, I would say dozens of men.

I'll tell them, if you go get your license, I will give you two or three of my first contracts. And let's see how it goes. I know their quality of work. They just need the license. Often I've done that.

The book is, for me, helping others see that they can reach financial freedom through real estate investing with this value-add concept.

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John Matze

This is all a great transition to you being a CEO mom, if you will. I remember when I was a kid, there were no downtime weekends where we could hang out and just do nothing. You had us at the construction site, sweeping, cleaning, even if we weren't feeling particularly keen on working that day as kids, you would have me playing there.

Dawn Matze

Yeah, I'm sort of a pusher, John. This is total opinion, but it's good for kids to know how to work. And it's good for kids to work hard and not sit behind a desk all the time. That's what I grew up with. And I just believe that it gives them a lot of integrity and an opportunity to feel good about what they're doing. It was so fun to raise you three kids.

For your audience, all three kids are extremely strong-willed. I don't know how that happened, but they're all strong-willed.

John Matze

Yeah, I think it's really clear how we became strong-willed. If you go to any of your job sites and see you screaming at these people.

Dawn Matze

Yeah, I really don't scream anymore.

John Matze

No, you don't. I think that must've been a phase when you were younger, when we were younger too. You also had a lot of high pressure projects back then too.

During the early 2000s you were doing these custom homes from nothing where you buy a piece of land and you would turn it into somebody's dream home.

Dawn Matze

I cut my teeth when I started my custom construction business on homes that were between 3,000 and 12,000 square feet.

I did a lot of fun things. I did [Street of Dreams](#), where I won first place. I was the only woman.

John Matze

That actually in and of itself is a really great story by the way. Because there was a home building competition in Poway, California. It was back. When was that? What year?

Dawn Matze

2000.

John Matze

So basically there was this high end build like community, they were trying to build around this golf course, and there was something like eight to 10 lots of just dirt land that they were going to allow different general contractors to acquire, finance, and build a large custom home on. And they were competing to see who would win the best and most attractive home of all those eight to 10.

Dawn Matze

Yeah. This is called the [Street of Dreams](#). It's a corporation outside of Oregon. I don't know if it even exists anymore, but they would go around to these land developers and create a contract with them. We will market, we will get the people there if you can get the custom builds.

So it looks like a model home, fully furnished, hosted, the whole nine yards. I was invited after several kinds of hoity-toity builders rejected, they thought they had enough work. So I was invited to purchase. It was a very creative deal, hardly any money in the purchase, to build a model home.

And in the middle of it, these four or five of the other men put a petition together to get rid of me. That was interesting. I just laughed because I figured, hey, that's more advertising for me.

I had a knee jerk reaction, but it actually fueled the fire. I was just so excited. And your dad was so supportive. He would take you and Matthew to Taco Bell when I would be putting in 12 hour days. And he was so supportive. He was so excited at the same time.

It was just so much fun. I loved it. I won first place with the judges. And that set me into motion with the construction.

John Matze

And you immediately sold the home, too. And you had a good return.

Dawn Matze

I sold it for the most money ever in that neighborhood. It's the Heritage in Poway. That was pretty cool.

John Matze

I think that is also probably a little bit of where I get this relentless commitment to making sure that things get done when everyone tells you it's not possible. Because everyone told you you were going to fail. They said you shouldn't be here. They even, like you said, had a verbal petition to get rid of you. And you're like, no, I'm going to win now. Thanks for the motivation.

Dawn Matze

Exactly. People don't understand when they're bullies, they really motivate the right person. And you're exactly like that, John. You're a leader. You're charismatic. You do exactly a lot of the things that I do. You're persistent. You won't let go. When you have a project, you think big. You really do think big. And you think way bigger than I do. I'm just... learning myself how to do that.

It's a sign of a leader and more than anything, I think if we're getting back to the CEO idea, raising a CEO – first as a parent, dad and I had to realize we needed to give you way more space to create and allow you to make mistakes. With the other kids, I was more like, you know, okay, be careful, do this, do that – more directive.

With you, you needed the space and the experimentation. What it is is you're a visionary. And I think that's what CEOs are. You have to give that child a lot of space to be creative and to think and to...

John Matze

Yeah, and some of that space kind of involved making a lot of mistakes – like trying to burn down the neighborhood by accident during a school project or driving the golf cart that we had off a cliff.

Dawn Matze

One of my clients, I just finished building her a house. Her husband loved golf and he just gave me one of these old used golf carts. And I thought, okay, that's cool. My kids will enjoy running around.

And so John says, hey, I'm going to drive this thing. And his little brother was next to him. Lo and behold, before I knew it, they were off the edge of a hill and John's running the other direction. "Matthew did it. Matthew did it."

John Matze

We invented little sports where he would drive it and I'd hold onto the straps that are intended for the golf bags. And I'd hold onto it on a skateboard behind it. It was like a surfing kind of thing.

Dawn Matze

Everything you could do on that, on that golf cart got done.

John Matze

We figured out how to turn the [golf cart] governor off so that it couldn't regulate the speed. We'd bomb it down hills too.

I don't know how we didn't die, to be honest.

Dawn Matze

The other funny story is when you were in, maybe it was middle school. Learning about World War II and you were really fascinated.

You had to do a video. And so you're going to do the book burning.

So you put these books out in the middle of the street and put a circle of gasoline around it. I usually got home about 3:30 pm or 4 pm, you guys got home at three.

So you're out in the middle of the street of a high end, three to four, two to five million dollar houses. And there's a circle of fire around these books. And here sits the gas can right next to the circle of fire. And I'm like, oh, my God, what is he doing?

The neighbor rushes over. What is your son doing? You were thinking! You were being very creative.

John Matze

I think the reason that I picked that topic and project for school was simply because I wanted to burn stuff in the middle of the neighborhood. Yeah. It's an excuse to get the gas can out. Let's go.

Dawn Matze

Let's check out that result.

John Matze

It's reckless and difficult behavior, me as a kid. I actually feel pretty bad for you and dad having to deal with me all those years. Cause I don't think I was an easy child.

Dawn Matze

Well, you were definitely a challenge, but as a parent, you have to recognize that that child is charismatic. That child is a visionary. You've just got to steer them in the right direction a little bit and hope they take off.

It is definitely a challenge for sure. But it was so much fun. It was so much fun in another way. You always make people laugh. You always make you know, I mean, you really do lead the group. It's awesome.

John Matze

I think I had no choice growing up, to become some kind of entrepreneur. Not just with your background, cause you were always basically self employed running your construction businesses, but also because dad was also always doing some sort of startup or technology company. He was programming something, building something.

Dawn Matze

He's a software engineer. He would build software programs and sell them off. So, you know, him being an entrepreneur and me being an entrepreneur, I guess our DNA created you.

John Matze

Yeah. I mean, I did get a job after college in software. And after about nine months, I got incredibly bored.

I'm looking at you and I'm looking at dad and you guys are having fun building companies and having teams and doing stuff and it's chaos. And I was punching in and out of a job every day and I felt bored.

You guys told me I had to get out of the house if I quit my job.

Dawn Matze

That I don't remember.

John Matze

I think that I seem to remember it a little differently. But I remember you guys saying, if you're not going to keep working there, you got to go live somewhere else.

Dawn Matze

Well, if you're not working, period, you know, you've got to get a job.

But we did want you to have the job experience. You don't realize what it is to have a W-2 until you're in the seat and you're doing it. And then you're like, oh, my gosh, hell no.

But to be honest, I've never worked for anybody. I'd probably get fired [working in corporations] because, you know, they go a little bit slower than I want to go.

John Matze

And they're a little bit more politically correct. I feel like you would just, you just come out like guns blazing and just tell it how it is.

Dawn Matze

A little bit of that, but I would be like, let's just get to the bottom line. Let's just make this happen. And in corporate, it doesn't happen that way. You have to follow protocol.

John Matze

A lot of that's rubbed off on me too, because I think the working environment I've created for people is one where everyone feels very welcome and they feel like they're a part of a team and it's very casual, but we kind of push the limits right away and we just say it how it is when things get difficult.

Maybe that's what you need to be successful.

I don't want to completely discount corporate [culture] because I'm sure there's tremendous value in it. Just not if you're going to make moves and going to really change an entire landscape of an industry.

Dawn Matze

There's many different ways to make a lot of money. I'm just used to small business.

Corporate has its place, and it's phenomenal. I just can't see myself fitting into that after all these years of doing it alone, as a sole proprietor or a small team.

John Matze

We've also had to deal with some of the consequences of starting a business and kind of pushing the limits.

You know, back in early 2021, right after the horrible Capitol Hill events on January 6th. We started getting a lot of death threats and a lot of strange behavior was coming out of that world. Also, as a result of some of the things that people were saying on television.

We kind of went into hiding, if you will, and it really freaked out the whole family.

Dawn Matze

Yeah, that was very, very bizarre. One minute you're at the top of the world. You're doing so well, you're at the top of your game, you felt extremely good about where you're at.

Then in just a split second, these other high tech companies can take you out. And I think that's saying something about, not only Capitol Hill, but politics in general.

There was a huge wake up call. You were super excited and on fire and making huge progress. And of course, dad and I were extremely proud of you.

Then in the next split second, you know, the big boys are bullying you. “Hey, everything's your fault.” How could something be your fault if you're the small, small guy on the block in terms of social media? So that was a huge wake up call.

The whole thing unfolding – I kind of didn't even swallow it until we were on the airplane. We were going somewhere and then we ended up kind of rerouting and hiding out for about six or eight weeks.

Yes. Death threats on our house. All sorts of really bizarre things.

John Matze

People at the front door thinking they're being sneaky and they're hiding around the corner with these big camera lights. I have security cameras all around looking at them. Like I'm not, I'm not picking up the door for that. That's insane. I'm going to get jumped.

Dawn Matze

When you get close to – not stealing, but getting in their financial – market share. You're getting into the market. You're breaking in.

John Matze

[Parler] was definitely young as a company, and by no means was what we were doing perfect, but to completely put blame onto us for something that wasn't entirely – that we had almost nothing to do with.

And what was really crazy is you and I and the entire family had context. We knew that we had notified the FBI in advance of what was coming on January 6th and that we had cooperated in trying to make sure nobody was organizing anything – even weeks in advance – to everything that was happening on Capitol Hill and in our time at Parler.

It was clear for all of us that we weren't responsible for this. We were even helping to stop it. And yet the tables turned in such a weird way where our entire family was basically cast as being somehow guilty of all this.

People are threatening our lives. People are showing up at our houses. We had to run away. We isolated ourselves.

Dawn Matze

When shit hits the fan politically and there's lives at stake, some people want to blame other people. They look for the guy that's trying to strive, right? And that was you. You were a victim in a bully situation.

John Matze

[I] was a convenient target, that's for sure.

I don't want to go too much into the details of the Parler drama, but not only was the [public] turning on us, it's the people who are supposed to be my investors and are supposed to be working as a team to make a company successful turned on me and saw it as an opportunity to steal what I had built.

Dawn Matze

How did you feel, John, when people you thought were your allies were now your enemies? Wasn't it a huge wake up call?

John Matze

There were always some disagreements and there's always back and forth, especially when you're building a company. You want what's best for the company, right? So you're not always going to be in agreement.

But when you really see how someone sees you, at a point where they feel you're weak. I don't think that I ever was really weak, but they thought I was and that I was replaceable and that they wanted to take a company somewhere else.

Dawn Matze

You were the scapegoat.

John Matze

Yeah, you're getting betrayed on all sides. It's like the entire world is sitting on you.

Dawn Matze

It was very personal. But now looking back, I think you have to say to yourself – what have I learned from this experience? And what you've learned is becoming a better leader, a better team player, knowing who you can delegate to and trust.

John Matze

I've certainly learned a lot since then. I think our whole family has from that experience.

I don't think that I should have had to go through all that to learn all of this. I don't think that that was ideal, but I've certainly calmed down. I've gotten a lot more humble.

You know – I was really difficult person to work for before, I think. Now, I think I've gotten a lot more reasonable.

Dawn Matze

You take a deep breath before you jump in. You analyze. You talk to your attorneys before you make moves. This is wonderful and incredible and something that you are ready to learn.

John Matze

I feel like I've gotten a law degree in the last few years. I paid a lot more for it.

Dawn Matze

Yeah, you sure paid for it.

John Matze

It really opened my eyes to what the world needs today as well. Everybody in this toxic social media environment was jumping in on us and our family at that time and blaming us for essentially what is unsustainable business practice.

When you're Facebook and you're Twitter and you're these companies managing social media from a central point of authority, a dictatorial force where you can't react in time to handle any of this. And then these large companies realize as a result of their business practices that they can't even enforce their own platform.

They have to blame someone else and they blamed me.

Dawn Matze

It's a bully. In very simple terms, that's what it is. And you know, when things have gone awry, everybody looks for somebody to blame.

John Matze

We need to take a look – and I don't mean we as in you and I, I mean society – should take a look at the landscape of social media.

Is the current status quo maintainable or are people just repeating mistakes over and over again? And did anything actually change to stop what led up to January 6th? Did anyone change anything in social media?

The answer is no, nothing changed. In fact, nobody has even accepted blame for any of it. And that's why we need to rebuild social media differently. And there's that ambition we were talking about again. Now we got to go in and change it.

Dawn Matze

It's definitely a convoluted topic, social media – what to allow, what not to allow, who do you let in, who don't you let in, the parameters surrounding that.

John Matze

Speaking of social media, right, you've got your Instagram that you've been running, which has been controversial within the family because we're all against – I'm at least against Instagram.

Dawn Matze

You're protective and you have a little PTSD, so to speak. You just don't want to see anybody hurt.

If you want to go to my Instagram, it's [@womanbuilderdawn](#). I'd love for you to follow me. I have almost all construction [content], a little bit of mindset, you know, and it's just a lot of fun.

John Matze

Some content where you're swinging hammers or demoing walls. A lot of it actually is also from your demo parties that you used to have.

I don't know if you've had one lately where you buy – when she buys a new house that she's doing a flip or a remodel or whatever it might be, she invites all of the friends and family out and gives them sledgehammers and we just start beating down walls. Those are fun.

Dawn Matze

When I buy a small multifamily, maybe a duplex – there's an opportunity to have fun.

That's what I'm all about now. Forget the hard work. I just want to have some fun.

John Matze

Yeah, you bring a bunch of wine and beer. You get the sledgehammers–

Dawn Matze

Wait a second. Wait a second. You can't say you're drinking and swinging at the same time, okay?

John Matze

Oh, not at the same time. One before the other, one after the other, right?

Dawn Matze

It's a lot of fun because most people aren't used to doing any of that.

Hard hats, safety glasses, close to a shoot. It's a lot of fun. Everybody gets dirty and we have a good time. And then we all have margaritas, chips, and tacos.

John Matze

Yeah. And then we blow our nose for three days, blow out all the dust.

Dawn Matze

It is fun to see the process and people love it. And then we have an after party and we celebrate.