

## **FirstBank Executive Vice President of Real Estate Adam Snyder on finding a job you love, networking, and owning up to failures**

Adam Snyder, Executive Vice President of Real Estate at FirstBank, has been with the company for 15 years, and says that while he loves the job he has now, he had no idea what he wanted to do when he was in college. Snyder grew up on a farming ranch in Paxton, Nebraska, a town of 600 people. He says the ranch taught him a lot about hard work and running a business.

Snyder describes that as a child he was a music nerd and played the piano and saxophone. He attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and chose his major in business because he was not sure what he wanted to do, and wanted a degree that would make him more marketable when he got out of school. After graduation, Snyder travelled a bit and then began looking for work.

He found a sales/customer service job in Omaha, Nebraska, and Snyder said that while it was not his dream job, he figured it paid enough and was a good place to start. Despite the good pay, shortly after starting to work, Snyder realized he was not learning a lot. "That was important to me, that whatever job I had, that I wasn't just chasing a paycheck. That I really wanted to be doing something that I'm excited about day to day," Snyder said. After two years, Snyder decided to leave this job, saying he knew he had the potential to do more with his life than that job would allow.

After some soul searching, Snyder made the decision to move to Colorado and get his commercial real estate license. He took a job at a high-end rec center to pay the bills while working towards his license.

Most importantly, Snyder says, he began networking and setting up meetings with brokers around town. "My general goal was to just get an email out to somebody and see if I could take them out for a cup of coffee or for breakfast or for lunch," Snyder said. He credits his parents with this idea, and admitted that at first, he had not wanted to do it. "I kind of gritted my teeth and did it and quickly realized that taking that step to network, although it feels uncomfortable at first, that is a tremendous tool to opening doors," Snyder said. He explains that people like sharing about themselves and how they got to where they are, and that through connecting with them, he was able to find out about opportunities that were not sitting in a newspaper.

Through his networking, Snyder was able to get two offers to work in Denver with two different brokerage companies. He realized fairly quickly what a hard job he had chosen, made more difficult by the fact that it is a full commission position.

It was then that Snyder found a newspaper advertisement for jobs at FirstBank. He needed a more stable income and began working as a lending officer. After a few years, an opportunity came up in the facility's real estate office, where Snyder has been working for 11 years now.

**Advice: Do not just look for opportunities in a newspaper**

When asked to give advice to recent college graduates and professionals aspiring to become part of an executive management team, Snyder first offers that you need to find an industry you are interested in. After his first job he began questioning what he was doing, and what he wanted to do for his career. He says it took time to realize that he likes working with tangible end goals and tangible assets, which is why he chose real estate.

He says once you have chosen this industry, find the opportunities within that industry. He encourages college students to look beyond the career fair or newspaper advertisements in order to seek out those opportunities. This connects back to his own story and how he learned to network.

He says find people that are doing what you want to do and invite them to breakfast or lunch. "Each time I met with somebody I just said, 'hey is there anybody else I can talk to learn more about your industry, learn more about what opportunities are out there'", Snyder said, "And everybody had somebody that they would be willing to give me their information, and that led to great job opportunities, and that's something that has stuck with me."

Once you have found an opening within your industry, Snyder says learn everything you can. "Start at the bottom, really learn that industry and learn that company before you can expect to be groomed to be at the top," Snyder says.

When asked if there was a piece of advice he would give his younger self, Snyder laughs and says, "Don't be so serious." He goes on to explain that life is short, and while your career is important, don't only focus on where you want to be. Remember to enjoy where you are.

**Bottom line:** Find your industry, network, network, network, and learn everything you can about your company.

## **Be humble.**

Snyder says in thinking about leadership, his bosses at FirstBank come to mind. He describes them as very smart and capable people, but that they are usually the most humble people in the room. "Lead with humility." Snyder concludes.

## **Have confidence and share your failure**

When you fail, Snyder says it is all about owning up to it. He adds, "Have confidence to admit you failed, and to share your failure." The company environment matters too. Snyder says it is important to work in a company where your boss knows your value and makes you feel supported enough to come to them and share your failures. "I knew [my boss] had my back, so I knew I could go to him and say hey, I screwed up, I should have share this with you earlier. Ashamed I made this mistake, it won't happen again," Snyder said.

**Bottom line:** Don't wait, own up to your mistake quickly.

## **Always room for improvement**

Snyder says that his new role has moved him from being a project manager, or a "doer" into more of a "thinker". By that he means that he spends more of his time engaged in strategic planning, looking beyond the end of the year, but into more long-term projects and decisions. He says he works with an executive coach, which he enjoys, and describes himself as constantly working on self-improvement. "I have been a self-improvement nerd my whole life" Snyder laughs.

## **Work with amazing people**

When asked what keeps him motivated to come to work each day, Snyder replies simply "The people that I work with." He goes on to explain that his bosses have his complete trust, and his peers, as well as the employees below him are all wonderful to work with. "We hire smart people," Snyder says. "Working around other people that challenge your own opinions, and are doing amazing things that make you get that little competitive spirit and think 'man I've got to have something to prove here because these guys are putting me to shame.' It's a great environment to work in," Snyder said.

## **Family Influences**

Snyder reiterates his admiration for the amazing people he works with, as well as some of the tremendous bosses he has worked for over the years, but when it comes to who has influenced him the most, Snyder keeps it in the family. First he lists his dad, who showed him what it meant to be a leader of a family, run a business, and also be active in the community. Snyder says his dad has his MBA, owned a ranch, and chaired the community hospital board.. Next on his list, Snyder says his mom was the soft and empathetic voice in his life, who knew how best to support him and listen to him when he needed it. Snyder then lists his wife, and laughs as he says she keeps him grounded and from getting too big of a head.

## **On the Bookshelf**

On the topic of lists, Snyder is asked about his top three books. He admits to being a Science Fiction nerd and lists *1984* by George Orwell, and *Dune* by Frank Herbert. He says that nonfiction is not his favorite thing to read in his free time or before going to bed, but two nonfiction books that have impacted him are *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, and *What Color is Your Parachute* by Richard Bolles.

## **Outside of the office**

As the interview winds down, Snyder shares that he has become a fitness junky in the last seven or eight years. He says he has enjoyed participating in a few obstacle races called Spartan Races, and plays a few sports including tennis.

Snyder attends meetings and seminars hosted by the Colorado Real Estate Journal, and participates in the Building Owners and Managers Association. On the charity side, Snyder has worked with the Special Olympics, on their golf committee, as well as Habitat for Humanity's finance committee in Denver. He has fundraised for Junior Achievement, and a nonprofit called the Developmental Disability Resource Center.