# Industry Insights and Leadership Lessons With Kevin Sears

You're tuning in to a special episode of Drive with NAR: Mic Takeover from here at NAR NXT in Boston, Massachusetts. I am James Dwiggins, the co-host of Real Estate Insiders Unfiltered podcast, aka Dwiggy, along with my my fearless partner in crime, Mr. Keith Robinson, aka Crazy Uncle Keith.

Yes, sir. So today I'm not going to laugh at.

I know, but it's still good. So we are doing a MC takeover here at the largest real estate conference in the US. Absolutely. And we had Mr. Kevin Sears, the President of the National Association of REALTORS®, tell the viewers and listeners what we learned from him today. Yeah, it was great.

He shared with us, as he always does, open, transparent, vulnerable. He talked about what we've been through, what he's been through, what we've been through as an industry in the last year, what he's been through, what he's learned as an agent, what he's learned as a leader, and what the future holds for 2025. And he talked about empathy. That was probably my favorite part. You're definitely going to want to check that part out. You're going to dig it. Put it in your kids.

Kevin, welcome to the show. You are a busy guy, so thank you for taking some time to come by here and hang out and talk to the membership. Um, we don't have a whole lot of time with you, so I want to dive into quite a few questions. First of all. Boston. Awesome city. Yeah, the energy is electric here, not only just in the hallways of the convention, but around. Um, tell us some of the stuff you're hearing from from the membership in the hallways. What's some of the what some of the conversations going on? Yeah.

No, thanks. Thanks again for affording me the opportunity to be with you two again. Of course. Um, you know, I love being able to have the conversations. Um. Yeah. Boston. It's great. Um, I'm really enjoying it. I don't live too far from here, but people just assume. Oh, I'm Boston, so, you know, it's almost my hometown, but, um, it has been electric. Hopefully you guys have been eating well. You know, we've got, uh, got some good restaurants here a bunch. But you know what? I'm chowder.

Yes.

Yep. Uh, clam chowder at the Parker House. That's my favorite. Okay, uh, somebody write.

That down for me.

But I've been, uh. Well, you can listen to it tomorrow. Oh. That's right. Great point. Or today. I'm sorry about spilling the beans. No, it's all good. But, um, what I'm hearing from the members is, as I've been seeing them walking through the halls, there's optimism. Um, despite everything else that's that's been going on. And it's just a true testament to to our members, to REALTORS® across the country. How how not only can and will they adapt, but they're resilient. Um, don't get me wrong. You know, there there are some definitely some challenges out there, but we're finally starting to see inventory pick up just a little bit. And that's good. You know, affording buyers a little more uh, an options. Um, but, you know, happy that the fed dropped their rate yesterday or two days ago. But, you know, ultimately we don't think that's going to have a big impact on mortgage rates. In fact, after the last cut, mortgage rates went up. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So but no it's it's it's optimism. The other thing that I'll tell you and James, you know, you and I have become friends over the last 11 months now, even though we met a long time ago. But, um, it's I was asked I was interviewed today by the Wall Street Journal reporter. Um, and I talk about, um, you know, the first thing that a lot of the members are saying to me is thank you. And so it's it's humbling. It's nice. Yeah. But everything that has transpired since I became president on January 8th, it's been my goal, and I feel my duty to repair the trust that was broken. Mhm. Um, and it's not something that's going to happen overnight. Right. But the members are seeing the effort that, that the leadership team of the National Association of REALTORS® has been putting into that. Um, you know, you and I have talked about this and I've been with you at a couple of different things, but by the end of the year, I'll have been on the road 268 days. Yeah.

Sheesh. I mean, I have to give you a lot of credit. You've gone on stages in sometimes unfriendly territory, sometimes hostile and hostile.

So? So I actually had a nice meeting with the CEO of Inman, Emily Paquette, this morning. And and I said, listen, if I'm not afraid to take the tough questions, you know that. Yeah. Um, yeah. But that's part of rebuilding that trust, right? And the fact that Brad Inman in July actually paid Nar and myself a compliment. Hey, hey, that that's a.

Beginning. That's a beginning. And on our show, he reiterated that. And, you know, he said that, you know, the leadership is definitely taking things in a different direction and that that you deserve credit for that you've stepped up in a way that that needed to happen. And I think the industry is incredibly appreciative of that. And it's not, you know, as a much smaller time leader, but it's not easy going on a stage and unfriendly waters and doing that. But it's it's been impactful. Yeah.

And I mean, really, aren't the waters just waters like, you know what I mean? Like, you just keep one.

Of the, one of the things Keith and I talk to you guys about this before, one of the things that I know to do before jumping or diving into the water. Check the depth. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Right, right. Yeah. It is. It's just waters and weather. It's it's it's a puddle or an Olympic sized swimming pool or the ocean. Yeah. We're we're going to do what I can to to tread that water and, um, you know.

Yeah, I've been experiencing that optimism that you mentioned too. And I think it has something to do with just, you know, the human beings who wake up every day and have no idea where their next paycheck is going to come from, and they absolutely know where their next bill is going to come from every single month, that group of humans. Optimism is like it's it's a character trait that is required to be successful. Yeah. With that, or maybe expand on that a little, you know.

And I think you guys have heard me say this before, when I'm talking about our members and how resilient they are. And yeah, we wake up unemployed every morning. Yeah.

Right. Right, right.

Um, and and it's a choice that we're making. We're entrepreneurs. Right? We're self-starters. Um and and ultimately, given the profession that we've chosen, we're the fabric of the community. And I think that, um, anytime you go out, you go to a PTO meeting, you know, go to a habitat build, go to a soup kitchen, or you see REALTORS®, they're volunteering. Yeah. Coach on the sideline. You know. Right, right. Um, and I've done all of those things, but it's we're part of the community. So yeah, I do believe that there is an optimism because of the entrepreneurial spirit that that our members have.

It's in the DNA. Yeah. So, you've had an interesting year. Um, what would you say you've learned? And it's going to be a two-part question. What what's what's been the biggest learning lesson for you this year as an agent? Because you still transact business every single day in addition to your 265 days of travel or whatever. So, what have you learned as an agent this year? And then what have you learned as a leader stepping in as the Nar president?

Yeah. So, it's NAR, just so you know. Thank you. Sorry. That's okay. Sorry. That's sorry.

We have a bet going. How many times we do that?

I owe James a dollar.

So, um. So as an agent, um, you know, what I've learned is before the settlement happened, um, I had a longtime client call me and say, Kevin, I need to buy a house. Okay. Met with him and the Massachusetts buyer. Representation contracts were not part of the license law or a statute. Right. And so. But just knowing that Nar for the last several years has been advocating the use of them. Um, and then it was after the lawsuit, after the the jury verdict. Um, I sat down with my client, my friend, my high school friend, and went through, um, a buyer contract. Yeah. And I explained, reiterated the process he'd already been through many times with me, but I explained what tasks I was going to take care of for him, how I was going to represent him, the value that I was going to add, the expertise that I was going to bring to the table. Oh, and by the way, I'd like to get paid for that. Yeah. Right. And so as an agent, it's like I was an old dog learning a new trick. Yeah. Yeah. And so I think that's the biggest thing. It's, it's and then it's communicating that to our, our 1.5 million REALTOR® members that having these conversations with the consumer is a good thing. Yeah. Anytime we can explain our value, it's a good thing. And I think that, um, the members, after the shock and awe of the settlement and the practice changes going into effect on August 17th, by August 17th, I know some states did it or sooner. Mhm. Um, that that they're understanding it's now up to them to have the conversation with the consumer, the buying consumer and say and this is what I believe my services are worth. Yeah.

Yeah. And it's, it's interesting you say that because I've been at first everybody's shocked about it. But I go this is a great opportunity to be more professional in a way like you're going to learn. We do it on the list side. We're going to do it on the buy side. We should have been doing it anyway. Now we're going to get really good at that craft. And you said something earlier and we say this all the time to to our people. If we need to remind people that in most cases, it's a contingency fee. We're paid when we accomplish the goal you're trying to do. And if that doesn't happen, then our services, you don't pay anything. And I think we as an industry have got to remember to emphasize that more when we're working with with the general public.

Let me tackle your second part of the question. Yeah. Okay. So now what what was the biggest highlight or what did I learn the most about in my leadership journey? Yeah. And, um, you know, it goes back to what's that old saying, you know, or the book. I learned everything I needed to learn in kindergarten. Yeah. Type of thing. Great book. Um, last night in my inaugural remarks, I talked about a book that I was recently reading, uh, written by a friend of mine, Cam Inman, and he's talking about the franchise of the San Francisco 40 niners. And there's a great quote, quote, um, that I, that I showed and used in my, in my speech and from Bill Walsh, the genius. And it was basically treat other people as you want to be treated. Right. And it's the golden rule. We we we live by the Golden rule. And and that's what I focused on doing, is just being very simple and basic. But treat others as you want to be treated. If you get asked a question, answer it right, right. You know and and and and don't duck and weave. Um, if you need to actually go on the offensive. Yeah.

So I like that part.

Keith likes the I like part.

Start punching back.

Yeah. Let me ask you, what is your this year? Obviously it's it's been a difficult year and that's been the right. But you've been the right guy for the job. What are you most proud of this year as an accomplishment. And then I want to second part of the question is what do you what do you hope to see next year in 2025 as you as you have your second term?

One of the things I was the most proud of being able to do was go to Washington, DC with four other members of the leadership team and have a conversation in person with the Department of Justice. And what's that like? And be able to to tell them how what we do is good and noble.

Yeah, sure.

What we do is we help people achieve that dream here in America that, unfortunately, is slipping through some of the hands when, when it shouldn't be and getting harder. And so, you know that that for me was a highlight, being able to represent our, our 1.5 million underrepresented members in that. And so looking to 2025, you know, we're going to continue to have a world class advocacy. Um, uh, you know, we just had an election a few days ago. And and one of the best things about the REALTOR® party is that, um, and housing issues, you know, when I talk to our legislators about, say, flood insurance, they say I've never seen rising waters knock on a door and say, are you a Democrat? Are you a Republican? House. Right. These are American.

Issues. Yeah.

And so we've been so effective, um, on how to communicate these American issues to our legislators. And we have bipartisan support on so much of the stuff that we do because they realize this is good for their congressional District. This is good for their constituents. This is good for America. And so 2025 will continue to do that. I'm going to give a shout out I see Jessica Lautz out over there. I love being at conventions, um, around the country, different states and seeing Jessica or Lawrence join present the economic data. The research that we have is so robust. And so what what I'm looking forward to in 2025 is, is leaning on our advocacy shop, on our research shop to be able to get out the good stories that we have to tell and to punch back a little bit. Yeah.

Well, and I just said on on the shout out part, even to Shannon McGann and her team, to the advocacy side, I will say I think people underappreciate dramatically how much, uh, the association does to influence and help make sure that, you know, private property rights and these things exist in our industry is still here. Yeah.

If if you like the independent contractor status, uh, and being a 1099 An employee. You should send na a love note, right? Like, I mean, there is so much work that goes on behind the scenes that that were just. I think we're aware of it, but we aren't consciously aware. Right.

The REALTOR® party as we know it. I was very fortunate in 2010, after the Citizens United case, to sit on a presidential advisory group where we developed the REALTOR® party as we know it today. And so I'm just seeing what we've been able to do in the last 14 years, uh, 13 years going on 14. Um, it's incredible because, you know, the old adage or saying, you know, you can feed a man, a person for one day by giving them a fish, or you can teach. You can feed them for a lifetime by teaching them to fish. Yeah. Through the REALTOR® party, we're equipping the the local associations, state associations with the programs, tools, resources, grants so that they can fish and feed themselves and their members for for the lifetime. And so I'm just super proud of the way that it. Yep. We're great in DC, but hey, come to Boston. We're going to be good here in Boston. Go out to Springfield, my hometown. We're going to be good in Springfield and all the little towns and cities around the country. Yeah.

Let's get tactical for a minute and talk about the, the skill of and the art and the craft of representing clients. Like, what would you say to the membership about 2025 and how can they prepare or what skills should they level up? What things in the craft of residential real estate are you transacting? And you you help clients every day.

So so for for if you're going to work with a bank consumer. Yeah. Um empathy.

Mhm. Sure.

And unpack that. What do you mean.

It's, it's not a you know that's not a business type thing but, but empathy because of the struggles, the real struggles that buyers have gone through over the last few years. Unfortunately, unless we get significantly more inventory. And like I said earlier, it's up a little bit.

But not where it needs to be.

But not where it needs to be. And over the last decade or so, we've underbuilt by 5.5 million units. And so, you know, um, uh, when's the best time to plant a tree? 20 years, 20 years ago.

When's the second best time to plant a tree? Today. That's right. Right.

And so so we can't we can't fix it overnight. But we need to plant that tree today. Um, by crafting better. Um, uh, whether it's legislation, zoning, whatever it is, so that we can give builders that opportunity to to put the shovel in the dirt and build, um, Shannon McGahn and the advocacy group and and to the state and local presidents was was talking about how, um, what she's hearing from the home builders is that before a shovel goes in the ground, it costs them $90,000. Yeah.

Yeah.

We've got over 40 examples of real life things that have been done in communities that are successful to, to try and, um, free up or build. Yeah. Um, you know, more property. Yeah. And let's just take underutilized commercial property. Can we convert it into residential? I mean, it's it's there. And then the.

Ideas are there and.

Then the other thing and I'll go back to, to Shannon and her team's efforts in DC is, well, can we incentivize some long term owners to sell.

Right.

And who are holding on to things because they're like, well, I don't want to pay that massive tax.

Yeah.

And so that's interesting, you know. But and then and then the other thing we talked about interest rates as well. Um, um, it's even though the interest rates are they're down substantially from a year ago. Yeah. They're we're never going to see them back.

I that's three 4% is gone, right. Yeah.

Um, but it's also convincing those homeowners that maybe have been in the house 5 to 10 years. Hey, you know what? Yeah. You are going to get an interest rate. That's going to be a couple points higher. But think about the equity that you that you built up. And you know what. You can put down a bigger down payment, have a smaller loan and maybe keep the payment. It's just it's it's talking with your customers, your clients and just having those conversations and help them plan things out.

With empathy, with.

Empathy.

So we've got two minutes left. Um, we've got 10,000 people here, but a majority of the the membership is not give them give them your message for 2025. Like what would you tell the rest of the membership about what 2025 will look like and what what they need to do? Yeah.

So it's something I told you a long time ago. Um, it's it's trust, but verify. Hold. Hold me. Hold your association accountable. Make sure that we keep doing the job that that you've asked us to do and provide the guidance and the professionalism for our members. Uh, 2025. I'm optimistic. We're okay. It's a personality, right? Uh, I'm optimistic because I know, um, our members and I know what they are doing on a daily basis. And, you know, it's it's going to take all of us. We do have to come together, you know? There's a lot of conversation. I'm not afraid to talk about the tough conversations, James.

As you know.

A lot of conversations out there. And so we just need to continue having those because ultimately through those conversations, you know, we're going to have, um, future successes. Yeah.

Thank you for your leadership.

Definitely. Kevin, you've done an incredible job. Thank you for being here. We know you're busy, but thanks for stopping by for the time. And I know everybody will enjoy it. Yeah.

No. Thank you.

And keep, uh, keep checking the depth before you jump in, but keep jumping in that water.

I'll do a gainer for you. Yeah. All right, I'll watch.

Thanks again.

All right.

Thanks, James. Thank you.

Thank you for.

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