

Something Extra EP 083 – Brandon Mann

[00:01:29] Lisa Nichols: We're really excited. This is the first virtual version of the Something Extra Podcast for us. This is a milestone for us. I'm really excited to have Brandon Mann on the show today. Brandon is the CEO co-founder and managing partner of Kingdom Capital, and the founder and executive chairman of Biblical Business Training. Brandon, I am so glad that this worked today for us to spend some time together on the Something Extra Podcast.

[00:02:00] Brandon Mann: Oh, it's my pleasure. It's an honor being with you. I'm a huge fan. Many time listeners they'd say first-time participant.

[00:02:06] Nichols: [chuckles] Well, good. Well, thank you for listening. I know that your story and everything we're going to talk about today, I know that it's going to resonate with our listeners and there's going to be a lot of great takeaways for them. Let's go on and get started. You and I have already talked a little bit and I'm thinking, how are we going to fit everything we want to talk about into this one 30-minute podcast, but we're going to do our best here. Did you grow up in St. Louis? I know a little bit about your background, but I can't remember if we talked about that.

[00:02:35] Mann: Sure. I grew up in Hannibal, Missouri, and the first thing people tend to think about Hannibal, Missouri is Tom Sawyer and Mark Twain. I had the privilege of growing up there. I was born there. My parents still live there. They're in their late 80s. I have a sister who lives in the area as well. Hannibal's home to me. Another little fun fact is that I was actually a tour guide at the Mark Twain Cave. The same cave system that Mark Twain explored as a child and that in the book, Tom and Becky were lost. I had the privilege of serving as a cave guide there for a couple of years, met people from all over the world and I'm very thankful for my hometown.

[00:03:11] Nichols: I love Hannibal, Missouri. I remember one year for Christmas, what we decided to do because Greg and I are originally from Kentucky, moved here right after college. One year for Christmas, what we did for our parents was we gave them a week in St. Louis. [laughs] We brought them both up, put them in a nice hotel and then did all the things, but Hannibal was one of the things that we did with them and that was just so much fun. I love that.

You grew up in Hannibal and then you went to college, obviously, and then you were in corporate America for a while. Talk to us just a little bit about your educational journey and then what you did for a profession.

[00:03:52] Mann: For me, I was very fascinated with business, specifically finance and investments. Here I was in Hannibal, Missouri, I would walk down to the local Edward Jones office and I would borrow the two-day old paper. Now they let me keep it, but the point was I would take it home. My parents were both in the medical field. My dad's a pediatrician, my mom was an RN and then became a pilot, which is probably a whole another podcast.

[00:04:16] Nichols: That's another story.

[00:04:17] Mann: Yes. Both amazing people. There I am with the Wall Street Journal, a few days old, but looking at it on the kitchen table. They're curious about that because there wasn't a heavy business focus in my family, but ultimately, I went to Mizzou. I was very privileged to get in, as I say, because I hadn't found my focus and then I did in business, so I really wanted to go to the business school.

My sweetheart at the time, my high school sweetheart, who is now my wife of 27 years was attending the J-School. She went to the very prestigious school and I was just glad to get in. Frankly, she inspired me. She was very focused in journalism. She went on to a great ad agency career before we were blessed to have our first child, Logan, who's 17 now. I pursued a degree in finance and then realized that I was able to get another major in real estate investment, which compliment is both in the finance department. Along the way, as God would have it, my plan was to go to Wall Street and that meant at the time, finishing my undergrad, quickly getting a job in some investment bank and working my way up a bit for a few years and then getting an MBA.

God had such a better plan. I would love for the listeners to hear this. If you hear anything in my voice today here, holding a bit loosely to your own plan and let God do the heavy lifting because who would have known that a finance professor, a highly regarded finance professor, not only at Mizzou, but around the country named Dr. David West would ask me to become his research and teaching assistant, which was a fantastic opportunity. Not only for me to engage in deeper studies at a higher level, but also, I was able to host CEOs and business leaders from all around the country who would come to speak at these finance courses at c. He was incredibly well networked.

The other thing about Dr. West that I didn't know, at least initially, is he was also a practitioner. He ran an investment fund off campus. He's very hands on practical experience and I had a role that enabled me to also work off campus in the investment fund. I had this wonderful plan. I could have never predicted this. Only God would have planned.

[00:06:31] Nichols: That's like an MBA while you get your undergrad.

[00:06:34] Mann: Then I went on to get my MBA still at Mizzou working for Dr. West and with him just had amazing experiences. Ultimately, I graduated, but it wasn't until I had learned so much from him about both the academic side, which are the theories and understanding how things fit together and then the practical side, how do you really get things done?

[00:06:58] Nichols: What a blessing. Like you said, we do have sometimes our own plans and then God just comes in and surprises us with something that we could not have even imagined at the time. What a wonderful education you had.

[00:07:14] Mann: Very blessed. I think about Romans 8:28, in all things, God works them for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. All things which may be very frustrating at the time, He works for the good of us who love him and are working to advance his kingdom and the way he's given us. I say, hold those plans with an open hand and open heart and an open mind to see what God has planned.

[00:07:37] Nichols: That is great advice. Well, I want to talk about, there is a gentleman here in St. Louis, David Steward, who founded the great company, World Wide Technology. Everybody knows about World Wide. At some juncture, you and David met, but I do want to talk a little bit about his journey. He wasn't able to join us today, but can you talk a little bit about that, Brandon? I know that he started as a salesperson for FedEx, correct? Ended up being sales person of the year, was honored by Fred Smith and then he did something that no one expected.

[00:08:14] Mann: Yes. That juncture in his career, he had reached the pinnacle as he would say, and at the pinnacle he was inducted into the Sales Hall of Fame at Federal Express. They had talked about an incredible executive career for him. It was there for the taking, right? He had proven just how talented he was. Leading up to that you may be interested to know that he also had incredible career in the railroad industry, which led him all the way back to when he

grew up in Clinton, Missouri. He literally grew up on the railroad tracks. As he would say, he grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, but the tracks were so close. It was almost like they grew up on them.

Now I've been to the home area. The home is long gone that he actually grew up in, but the same plot of land is still in the family. I had the privilege of seeing it and literally there's a railroad spur that bisects the property. He has come a long way and he never in the time he was growing up, schools and communities were segregated. It was very challenging. He would not let those negative forces slow him down for what as he would say-

[00:09:20] Nichols: They didn't define him, did they Brandon?

[00:09:22] Mann: No. He learned from his parents, the power of love and forgiveness. God's love conquers all and by forgiving you're able to then move on to the incredible blessings that God has for you. Those are his words.

[00:09:36] Nichols: I've heard David speak several times, but also just remember reading that even as a young man, God planted something in his heart. He did not like seeing the segregation. He didn't like seeing how some people were not included and he always thought he would love to one day lead people and lead them in a different way. God planted something in his heart, even as a young man. What did he do? Here he is, like you said, he's at the pinnacle of his career inducted into the Sales Hall of Fame for Federal Express, which is a phenomenal company, by the way, and then he did something that no one expected and a lot of people were telling him he was crazy to do. [laughs]

[00:10:22] Mann: As you said, he saw the power of and forgiveness. He also saw his father model entrepreneurial-ism looking for opportunities to serve others and to make a job developing opportunities. We would say there really wasn't one. That's what Dave sought to do as he transitioned from Federal Express. He began to think I've taken jobs, so to speak, meaning he's been an employee for many years, FedEx, and then the railroads before that and some jobs right out of college. Ultimately, he said, "I think it's time for me to give back. The way I want to do that is to create a business or buy a business." He ended up buying a couple of businesses and he did it very creatively. I have a finance background, but he's the guy that will always say, "Look, I'm not a finance guy", and when he says that to you, be careful because he really understands-

[00:11:10] Nichols: He really is.

[00:11:11] Mann: Yes. He's very creative and so he bought essentially an auditing company that audited freight bills for the railroad and essentially with the pricing and charging process that they had, there was often an overcharge or an undercharged. There were different regulations that had to be audited. His companies did that. One did it for the customers, ultimately, one did it for the railroads. What's fascinating is the way they provided value to their customers because he knew the business given his previous experience. How they actually accomplish this up to 40 times faster than the manual process of the time is that they were doing some very primitive, as he would say, but effective local area networking. They did that in a way that allowed their folks to process it so much faster.

Now by the late '80s, technology had caught up in the railroads to where they were. Dave saw that the need for the railroads to having that's outsourced by them, it was being done in house now. He began to look, he said, "Okay, am I really in the auditing business, or am I really into technology solutions business?" It was from that question and the answer that he had was that, "No, I'm in the technology business", that he founded World Wide Technology in 1990 with 5 people and 4,000 square feet. From day one, it was called World Wide Technology. One of his buddies once remarked. He said, "Well, I heard the name then I saw your space, I didn't even think it was Wall to Wall Technology. It was so small, so much less worldwide."

[00:12:54] Nichols: Yes, but God put that vision in his heart. I'm just thinking about businesses today. You have to look at what's going on around you. Maybe it's time to pivot and that's precisely what Dave did and he said, "I'm not going to be an auditing company anymore. I think I need to be a technology company."

[00:13:14] Mann: That's exactly right. In innovation, he's in entrepreneurial spirit. Regardless, if it's a small business or a large business, we really have to look-- Again, Romans 8:28. Look and see what is happening here. It may not fit our immediate plan or even our perfect plan, but God has a better plan. When you frame things in that way, you're looking for the opportunity in the challenge and in the change and that's key. That's Dave's hard and mindset is always looking to see what is God doing and how do I join him on his plan versus mine.

[00:13:46] Nichols: That's wonderful. Well, we're going to take a quick break and we'll be right back with Brandon Mann.

[music]

[00:13:52] Nichols: As a business leader, you know that keeping a solid first impression with your potential clients, customers and talent is vital to reaching your organization's goals. If you haven't optimized your website, or if you don't even have a website, you're missing an opportunity to shape your first impression so that it shows your brand in the best possible light. If you're thinking about revolutionizing your website, let's talk. Our team at Technology Partners is ready to help you reshape your online presence. Go to tpi.co/websites and start your journey today.

[00:14:26] Nichols: Welcome back everyone. Brandon, how did you and David Steward meet?

[00:14:31] Mann: As God would have it, I'd volunteered for a mentoring program through my church in collaboration with the Minority Business Council and the Black Leadership Roundtable. The essence of this was to bring people from various industries and experience together with the minority business community that was looking for not only mentors and advisors but to do it in a way, and this is why the church was involved, based on Christian values, based on biblical values. I thought it was a wonderful idea. I raised my hand and was matched with a few small businesses and their owners. One of those owners in particular kept encouraging me to meet one of his other mentors.

When I found out it was David Steward, I was blown away because I had not met Dave directly. Just knew him from World Wide's incredible reputation and their work and philanthropic endeavors and their giving heart. I just had this admiration for him. About the same time, his book was coming out, *Doing Business by the Good Book*. We happened to be on a conference call with this business owner and I heard Dave's incredible wisdom. We talk about grace and truth in the Bible. Jesus came full of grace and truth in the gospel of John and I could hear those elements in Dave's comments as he was sharing his thoughts with this business owner. I'm like, "Hey, I need some of that too."

I reached out to Dave really under the guise of, "Hey, I want to make sure I'm mentoring in line with how you're mentoring this business owner." By the end of that meeting I said, "Hey Dave, would you mentor me too?" He said, "I thought I was?" I said, "Perfect. We just keep doing this." That was in the early 2000s when I started that mentoring program. Then by 2004, Dave and I were connected. That's when the book came out. What's interesting about the journey is that as he was mentoring me, God is doing things in my life. Like Dave's mentoring, I was involved in some Bible studies. Along the way, God called me to start a Bible study at work.

I didn't want to do that and for many of the listeners may say, "Well, I probably got a long list of why not." You think, gosh, you don't want to impede on the work environment or be maybe distract and other challenges. I certainly had that list and more. The other side of it is I didn't really feel capable of doing that. Dave was very encouraging and I began with a co-worker. That's a story Lisa we have to unpack some other day, but I was connected with this co-worker who God had called me to start this Bible study with before work on Thursday mornings. We just got together with our co-workers. Now, we started with the Book of James. The Book of James is very practical.

[00:17:04] Nichols: It's a great book to start. It's small. [laughs] Five-chapter, six chapters.

[00:17:10] Mann: You just take your time and it's very practical and even speaks to business people at one point. It says, you say that you're going to go to this town and do this work or business. How do you know that? Your life is but a mist. What you should say is if the Lord wills it, we will go to this town. I share that with you because the Book of James was so powerful and many of your listeners have been part of small group experience. Envision this. We're sitting there after many weeks of studying the Book of James with our co-workers. By the way, this was a very diverse group.

The only thing we had in common is we worked together. This Bible study was filled with men and women of different ages, backgrounds. Some had a church background, some didn't. It was open to anyone. Again, it's from 7 to 7:45, we were wrapped up long before the work day started and technically it was eight o'clock. I sure that was trying to paint this picture. What happened is as we were studying God's word, this amazing community would form with accountability and encouragement. What that looks like is we'd read scripture. Remember we're all co-workers while not directly working with each other, we understood each other's responsibilities.

A co-worker of mine may read, "Hey, quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger", and you go, "You haven't met my client or my project. It's very challenging." Well, here's this accountability and encouragement naturally happening around the table. "Hey, we understand what you're going through. Here's an idea of how to approach that and we'll pray for you. We'll pray for you and next time we're together, let's share how it goes." Now, there's a positive accountability. There's that encouragement. Well, we get to the end of James and we're watching, basically, I'm blown away. Remember, I was the guy that's like, "Hey, I'm not sure we should do this."

Now at the end, these men and women and myself first and foremost were like, "Oh my gosh, we don't want this to end because we're getting fed by God's word on how to apply it that day." That became the real litmus question that anyone would ask. "Hey, great scripture, but how are we going to apply it right now? It's a Thursday, we've gone through three days. We got two more to go. We need this." That is for the mission of Biblical Business Training was born. How to help people apply God's word to their work very directly?

[00:19:30] Nichols: There's a few things in James I think about. Count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials because it works out perseverance. I'm thinking that so apropos for where we are right now. This is the funny thing. I think about the tongue. Taming the tongue [laughs]. It was like you had a practice field [laughs] right there, didn't you? Every day, and people knew what you were reading. It's like, woo, Brandon.

[00:20:00] Mann: I'll just be first person. I came to the Lord at Immanuel Baptist Church in Hannibal, Missouri and at a relatively young age. What I noticed in my life is that there was the knowing versus the doing. What I mean by that is for those of us that identified as Christians or follow biblical principles, or at least understand them, they're still a big gap between knowing it and actually living it out. Sometimes I got real cozy on a Sunday. "Oh, yes, this is a great sermon." Somehow by Monday, I fell into this-- I'll call it a false dichotomy and that is the Bible's really more personal focus. When it comes to business, there's just certain norms and approaches that you default into. That's a false dichotomy.

The reality is God's word applies to every aspect of our life, all of it. Why our vow to piece and set it aside and say, "No Jesus, you really may not understand this." How ridiculous is that? Yet, I think in my own behavior, what happened around that table with these co-workers is they began to share. "Hey, this is a struggle. How do we practically do this? How do we share this with each other?"

What happened at the end of the book of James, we actually began to wander a little bit, trying to find the right material. Literally, I'm praying. Don't let this Bible study fall apart because what we needed was to stay connected to the application of God's word. Dave's book which I had for several years by then, this was by the way, just to frame this. This was late 2008, early 2009. I'd had the book for several years. I'd given it-- I even had an opportunity to deliver the commencement address back at my Alma mater at Mizzou in 2007 for the Business School and we gave the books to the graduating seniors who wanted them. It was an opt in. Why I share

that with you is here is this book staring me in the face as a great resource. It was actually in prayer that God reminded me, "Look at Dave's book."

[00:21:56] Nichols: Look at that book.

[00:21:57] Mann: Dave's book became the first curriculum for what then became Biblical Business Training.

[00:22:03] Nichols: What a beautiful, beautiful story. Well, I want to get into the current book, but I'm just thinking with Dave Stewart, it's almost like a-- I don't know what you'd call it. Davidisms or Stewardisms. He's got so many of those, but I remember reading one is he said, "I don't work to make a living, I work to make a giving", and his mission has always been to serve and really to hear him tell it, he believes that that is the secret to the success. That he has just stayed surrendered and that he has tried to do business by the Good Book and because of that, World Wide has been tremendously successful.

There's a lot of those that I just think are worth mentioning, but that brings us to where we are today. You and David have become friends and you're doing all kinds of things together. Then you founded Kingdom Capital, which is what you're doing today and I don't know if we'll have a little bit of time maybe to talk about that, but what I really want to do is I want to talk about this new book.

[00:23:06] Mann: *Leadership by the Good Book.*

[00:23:08] Nichols: This book is a much expanded on Dave's first book, correct? At the end you've got questions and I was very blessed and humbled to have a little preview of the book. I maybe have a week up on everybody on this book, but there are so many different chapters in there about loving, serving, risk-taking. I don't know exactly how many sections, maybe-

[00:23:35] Mann: 10 sections, 3 chapters a piece for 30 chapters.

[00:23:38] Nichols: It is a very in depth. Could be just an in-depth curriculum for someone. Are there some particular chapters in there that are just really close to your heart, Brandon, that you can give us a little bit, wet our appetite a little bit, if you would.

[00:23:54] Mann: Well, thank you. We are so excited about the book for multiple reasons. The first thing, I always have to check myself when someone says, "Hey, your book with David Steward", I look around and make sure they're talking to the right person. I have the privilege of listening to and learning from Dave every day with the work we do at Kingdom Capital, the way I serve and support him and World Wide and then at Biblical Business Training or BBT as we call it. By the way, four years, the book was written over a period of four years. Now we all had multiple daytime jobs, so it was quite a journey, but it was an incredible labor of love. One of the reasons that I'm so excited about this book is that it's written in first person so that when you read it, when the readers engage with it, they're hearing Dave's voice.

My commitment as his coauthor was to ensure that the same voice, that same voice I heard years ago, mentoring the small business owner, the same voice I hear every day, those Daveisms, as you said, that they come through and that his voice is really an amplification of what God has done in his life. I've to tell quick story. Dave did not want the book written in first person. Back to his humility, he's very cautious about drawing attention to himself. He wants to point people toward God's word. What we endeavored to do is to focus on the challenges that he faced, but God gets all the glory for the success. That was a key element in the book. I have some favorite components in there. One I'm really excited for the listeners to read is in the opening of the book, there's a scene in 1993, and I'm not going to steal from the book's ability to engage with the reader. There's a scene there that I think all the readers can relate to in some way. Dave was experiencing incredible adversity. It was just crushing surrounding him and he was reminded of how God's word is eternal and will meet you exactly where you are and provide you what you need to overcome that adversity.

I want to at least tease the listeners to become readers, because that opening scene is so powerful. It was not told in the first book, it's a scene that I was very excited for us to share in this book. It's emotional, there's a weight to what he's experiencing three years into the journey of World Wide. I'll just say this, it wasn't going very well. In fact, all things that could go wrong had pretty much gone wrong.

[00:26:26] Nichols: Well, Brandon, I am suspecting that is going to resonate with a lot of people right now. I was just on a call last week with a business owner here in St. Louis and just based upon what they do, he basically said, "Lisa, this has decimated our business." I think a lot of people are going to be able to relate. With COVID-19, there's been a lot of adversity and a lot of really probably sleepless nights for a lot of people. Just to read that and see how he made it through and obviously he did. There's hope.

[00:27:01] Mann: There's hope. One other quick section that I'm very fond of and it's a section called loving the unlovable. This is another thing about the human existence that I think we have some tension always, gosh, the golden rule. Love others as yourself. We think about God's love. As expressed through Christ, like I run the BBT table early on, like, "Okay, how do we really love someone?" That is a challenge. Well, this section talks about loving the unlovable and it's a Daveism called loving them through it. Forwards, loving them through it.

In this section, we just parse out each of those words and we explain to the reader and back it up with scripture, again, there's a scriptural index in this book as well, which was not in the first book. There's some other interesting features that we should talk about too, around leadership and how it integrates with BBT, but the loving them through it is like, how do you really do this? If someone's disappointed you it's challenging to forgive, forget and all of these emotions are there. Again, that's the type of God's wisdom through Dave's voice that we're so excited for the readers to experience.

[00:28:07] Nichols: Well, one other thing, and I forgot to talk about this, and this is Something Extra. I have to ask you, [laughs] what is your something extra that you believe every leader needs?

[00:28:18] Mann: Well, speaking for not only myself, but Dave, it would be a servant's heart. At Kingdom Capital service is the first value we talk about. We use an acronym SHIELD for service, humility, integrity, excellence, love, and diversity, but really, it's that servant's heart. I think of Jesus in Mark 10, and you will see this again in Matthew 20, where the disciples are arguing about who's going to be sitting at his left hand, his right hand, kind of be, his executive VPs, if you will. He quickly reorients them. This isn't about rising to the top and lording over others as he uses that language, but managing down, it's actually a race to the bottom. It's a race to the bottom and how do you serve all of those for whom you are accountable and to whom you're accountable.

Dave, same thing. We call it the inverse pyramid or inverting the pyramid instead of being at the top, you're at the bottom, supporting. The beauty of Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the last supper. This imagery. Now I do want to say something too, and this is about this something extra, that servant's heart sounds noble. "Okay, we can do that", but I also heard this years ago from a friend and he said, "Brandon, you'll know the type of servant's heart you have by the way you respond when people actually treat you like a servant." It's not about always, "Hey, let me

do this for you." It's about literally lowering yourself, humbling yourself, one might say, to a point where people you're not doing it for their thanks or for their appreciation, you're simply doing it out of God's love. That's what Jesus modeled for us. He wasn't looking for a thank you. He was setting an example for us so that we can serve others. As he said, "Go and do likewise."

[00:30:06] Nichols: Oh goodness. How can people get ahold of this book? If they want to engage with BBT even, tell them how they can get involved.

[00:30:15] Mann: Absolutely. The book is designed and integrated with BBT completely. What I mean by that is to get the book you can go to b-b-t.org. That's just the BBT website, b-b-t.org/leadershipbythegoodbook. There you'll see multiple ways ordering. Amazon, Christian Books, et cetera. There's multiple outlets. Again, the on sale or publication date is officially, May 12th.

What you can expect though is so much more than a book experience. It really is a movement and here's what we mean by that. Each chapter wraps up with the leadership flywheel. This is the BBT leadership development model, but it's not exclusive to BBT. Learning, living, leading, and leaving a legacy for the Lord. Those are the four principles, if you will, the leadership flywheel. At the end of each chapter, the reader can do some self-reflective questions and then there's a sample prayer. That's great because it allows us to do that on our own, but also at the BBT website, you're going to find more resources.

For example, for a small group experience, you can choose the book study. Now this is more of the classic book discussion group where scripture will frame a bit of it, but it's more of a classic book discussion. Following that book study, you can move over to an in-depth Bible study still oriented to the book, but goes deeper into scripture. Wherever you on the journey. Maybe you've in a Bible study, in-depth Bible study for many years, the Bible study that accompanies the book is for you as well. Now, the transition from reader to leader is so important.

In addition to an amazing curriculum book study or Bible study, there's a whole library of studies so that going back to my first small group that I was in with co-workers, you don't ever run out. You can always find the next version. *Leadership by the Good Book* is there, obviously. That's what we're talking about. *Doing business by the Good Book*, Dave's first book is also there. There's a whole library available to you. Couple other things-

[00:32:12] Nichols: We've got curriculum writers, I know. We've talked about..

[00:32:14] Mann: We've got curriculum writers, we've got coaches and thanks to Technology Partners, we have an amazing new technology platform coming out that enables the group leaders and the participants-- By the way, we believe that anyone around the table can facilitate and lead. Thanks to you and your team at Technology Partners, Lisa, we have now the ability to reach them through technology that even enables virtual groups to meet.

[00:32:39] Nichols: Which is [laughs] certainly needed right now, isn't it, Brandon? Brandon, thank you so much for being on. I know this is going to resonate with our listeners and there's going to be so many nuggets. I would encourage all of you to go out, get the book. It's going to be terrific. I promise you because I've had, like I said, I was blessed to have a preview of the manuscript and it's rich. It really is very, very rich. Thanks again Brandon for being on. This has been so much fun for me.

[00:33:10] Mann: Lisa, thank you for the honor and the privilege of joining you today. You are a blessing to us all. God bless you and all of your organizations that you're serving.

[00:33:17] Nichols: Thank you.