# A Coleman Conversation: Stephanie Castagnier Dunn

August 12, 2026

BC **Bob Coleman** 4:33

Welcome to A Coleman Conversation. Stephanie Dunn, Leader Bank, a new position. Stephanie, I don't have my notes here. I didn't do my homework. What is your official position with Leader Bank and what do you do there?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 4:45

Well, good morning. Thanks for having me. Excited to be here as always with you, Bob. You're the best. I am head of SBA for Leader Bank and we are a national SBA platform and the bank is based in Boston.

BC **Bob Coleman** 4:47

Yes.

Excellent. Stephanie, you're a former Coleman, I don't know if we say former, you're a current Coleman SB Executive of the Year winner. You also got an award from us for your Podcast of the Year. Stephanie's been around for a number of years. She's great. She's passionate. You're going to join us. I'm going to enjoy this conversation.

So anyway, it's going to be good to catch up with you. So tell me about, but what I'm fascinating about your approach to our business is you have a pod concept. This is not Stephanie Dunn, the Lone Ranger out there traversing the plains of rural America and mainstream America.

Let's start with that. Tell me what your approach to getting access to capital to Main Street in rural America is, because I love what you do.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 5:51

Absolutely. And that is that is one of my big topics of interest is everyone knows in this business that it takes an entire village to crank out SBA loans, right? You have to do a good job. You have to provide excellent client experience, but you also have to have an excellent team experience. You know, it's that you take care of the team. And if everyone's taken care of, they'll take care of the customer. It is that the assembly line that we refer to all the time about the team and what it takes to make these SBA loans successfully and then maintain them for the life of the loan. You

know, it's a 25 year relationship that we have. So the team is crucial.
And it's all about consistency. And when you have a consistent team that has worked together for years and years and years, you understand each other's rhythm and how your styles, and then it translates into this amazing client experience. So yes, I believe in, call it the pod concept. There's a lot of different terms to it.
But I believe that we are all partners in this. Every single person that touches a loan is a partner in the business. And I like to think of, we're like partners in a law firm. And all the partners that are involved are equally important, right? It's not all these silos that a lot of banks do.
where you know you have a separate sales team and a separate underwriting team and everyone's not really in sync. I like a very flat organization.

BC **Bob Coleman** 12:20
Stephanie, how many people do you have on your pod, your team?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 12:33
Right now at Leader Bank, we have six people on our team in our pod. And a lot of us have been together for years and years and years. You know, everyone knows that I do this podcast and I'm on Lords of Lending with Shane Pearson and Brian Congelleri. And Shane and I have been together for almost

BC **Bob Coleman** 12:37
Wow!

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 12:52
15 years and Brian now almost, geez, coming up on probably 8, nine years. So I believe consistency is key. When you work with a team that has been together for years and years and years, you just become so much more productive and efficient in everything that you do every day.

BC **Bob Coleman** 13:11
And you're accountable to each other.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 13:13
That's right, you're accountable to each other and to the client experience. So...

**Bob Coleman** 13:17

Well, that was my, yeah, that was my next point is you're all on the same page in what you want to do. Define your client experience. What makes a successful client experience in Stephanie Dunn's universe?

**Stephanie Dunn** 13:31

I've talked about our secret sauce for years and the client experience is really the white glove concierge client experience. And a lot of people claim or say that they offer it, but the key is when you have a team of six people that work hand in hand on each
every deal, every day. The client gets immediate response, seven days a week, you know, 24-7. Small business owners need quick response, and they need it when convenient for them, not when convenient for us. So bankers hours don't exist for us. For us, it's when the client needs us,
We need to be able to respond. And we were just talking about, you know, balancing life. Well, balancing life for us is, it takes one second to respond to a text or an e-mail, you know? So you do that and the client feels like they have a team of people that they can access all the time. And it does just speeds up the process. Everyone knows this is a, it's a long,
process. There's a lot of information that needs to be gathered on a daily basis and this is for the life of the loan, right? All through servicing. So you need to have that relationship and the relationship with the client is access, access and speed.

**Bob Coleman** 14:49

There are no secrets in our industry execution.

**Stephanie Dunn** 14:53

That's right, execution and consistency and access. You know, if you're on the road, like I'm on the road right now, when you're on the road, you still need to be accessible. When you're on vacation, you need to be accessible too. You know, and that's the realities of our life. Our life is when I'm on vacation, I take an hour in the evening and an hour in the morning and I respond to everything I need to respond to.

**Bob Coleman** 15:15

Excellent. What is your lending niche? You're at a new lender. What does Stephanie done? What product, what specific SP product are you, I don't want to say an expert in because obviously with the concept you do very well.
But what is it that you are focused on if you can pick one?

**Stephanie Dunn** 15:40

I certainly have industries that I love. I'm very passionate about, yeah, I'm very passionate about pick a few industries that you're passionate about, be very, very educated in those industries so that you can talk the talk when the customer calls, right? And understand all of the things that that.

**Bob Coleman** 15:44

Tell me, tell me.

**Stephanie Dunn** 15:59

business owner goes through in their industries. So I'm very heavily focused still in the funeral industry. I love that business. I'm heavily focused in it. I do a lot of hospitality, restaurants, still very passionate about the restaurant business. I personally am in the restaurant business.
So I've come from multi-generational hospitality families. So I understand the business and I think it's a great business and it's thriving in our country. I'm very passionate about manufacturing. I love manufacturing and I'm thrilled that the government now is really boosting our program to help manufacturers because I've always been in manufacturing.
And I have always had a good pipeline of real estate secured business, and I'm passionate about that. I love real estate, and that's probably why the industries that I focus on have real estate components to them. I've financed a lot of franchise concepts in my career. I've financed a lot of, you know,
child care, senior care, I love those industries. I think that is the lifeblood of this country is manufacturing, caring for our people, and providing services to our community. So those are the niches I'm in.

**Bob Coleman** 17:18

Very good. What about business acquisition? Is that something that you are interested in because in those transactions you don't necessarily have the real estate?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 17:28
Yeah, do a ton of business acquisition. And of course, business acquisition is rampant in the restaurant business and, you know, in every business, really. So if you're talking about businesses, ancillary businesses, I am active in all of those business acquisition, ancillary businesses. Yeah. We're seeing a lot of volume. I mean,

BC **Bob Coleman** 17:31
Okay.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 17:48
I have to say, this year, 2026, I know that the numbers are down, but we're seeing a ton of volume, a lot of demand. It's back to that. There's a lot of demand, and we're not able to provide enough access.

BC **Bob Coleman** 18:05
You've been in the business for a number of years. I will get into how you got into it, but tell me the trajectory of SBA lending over those years. What has changed that has made you more passionate about your position?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 18:22
That's a great question.

BC **Bob Coleman** 18:23
I know, I wrote it down.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 18:25
Yeah, yeah, yeah, good job, Bob. I would say, you know, a lot has changed, but a lot has stayed the same. And I think, really, I'm as passionate about this business today as I was 25 years ago when I started out. I love
the mindset of the entrepreneur. And I love how this country has become more and more, especially since COVID, passionate about entrepreneurship. I love the access to capital and I love when we're able to provide that. So I think what has changed is

There probably is more competition in the space, a lot more lenders, right, than when I first started in the business. A lot of lenders out there. But the unfortunate thing is there are a lot of lenders out there.
But I still think that the small business owner doesn't know where to find them.

BC **Bob Coleman** 19:25
Mmh.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 19:25
Which is interesting, right? I think we're not, we're probably more active peer-to-peer in our peer groups than we are to an actual out in the in the public in the ether.
So I would say that there's opportunity for us for sure.

BC **Bob Coleman** 19:38
You?
You are a legal immigrant. I enjoy that part of your story. I want you to get into that. But I'm going to tie that in with something else. And that SB is traditionally

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 19:48
Yeah.

BC **Bob Coleman** 19:53
funded first generation legal immigrants to create generational wealth. Tell me about how your unique experience of immigrating from Canada affects your job.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 20:10
Also a great question, and yes, very...

BC **Bob Coleman** 20:13
Okay, on two for two. Now, if I don't ask a good one, are you going to say no, that one doesn't cut it?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 20:14
Two for two.
No, yeah, exactly. I was saying we have to step that one up. No, this one is a great

question. And this ties in directly to why I'm so passionate about what I do. And I choose to be in this profession every day, right? It's a choice. And the reason I'm so passionate is, yeah, I graduated from college in Montreal.

BC **Bob Coleman** 20:22
Okay.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 20:37
And I had the, I wanted to chase the American dream. And to me, the American dream was move to America and enjoy all of the fruits of my hard work and go out and do a good job for people and help others. So that, that's the whole point of life, right? Is to try to be a.
good person and help others every single day. And I think what we do, Bob, here in the SBA businesses, we help people every day. We are helping families and all small businesses have family components to them. And it really makes a difference. So if you could provide a...
service to a small business owner. And I believe in entrepreneurship and the American dream and supporting our communities. And I'm very passionate about hearing their stories. And everyone at some point immigrated to America, right? So we at some point in our
lineage, whether it's in our lifetimes or our grandparents or our parents. So I'm passionate. I love to hear the stories about people's dreams and wanting to succeed. And if I could play a part in that, that's what I want to do.

BC **Bob Coleman** 21:51
What a great fresh perspective. I wanted that. I wanted your answer because I know how you feel about that. Good for you. Tell me about the future of SBA. How do you see the program evolving?
Five, even 10 years out.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 22:12
I love what the administration is doing with the program. I love that they're forward thinking. I really feel that they're thinking about this question too. How do we continue to evolve the program? How do we, I think we need to increase the cap from 5 million to 10 million, right?

I think that small business ownership has evolved over the last 50 years. So the program needs to evolve as well. We need to provide bigger loan amounts, more access to capital. I think it is in the country's best interest for more banks to offer this program. I'd love to see more.
non-banks also have be able to be added to the program. I think that that's what we need to do. We need to enhance the program and enhance access to twofold.

BC **Bob Coleman** 23:06
I have a theory and I want you to comment on it and please disagree if you don't agree with me. But I believe the entrepreneur has become so much smarter, not support choice, so we're so much better, efficiently running their business, especially if they manage that business through the Great Recession, through COVID.
through all the economic cycles that we've had over the last 15 years. You're on the ground, you're talking to these people. What do you think about my premise?

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 23:37
Absolutely, absolutely. You know, what's interesting is, you know, my grandparents were both entrepreneurs, but they were, you know, in the trades and they were not college graduates, right? So when you think about the entrepreneur today, in college, we're learning entrepreneurship. So when

BC **Bob Coleman** 23:55
Mhm.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 23:56
when kids graduate from college, the new dream is it has evolved. It used to be, you know, even when I was in college, the dream was, I'll graduate and I'll go work for a big company and hopefully I could spend my life working for a big company and get a good pension, right? Now, you know what I love? I talk to my kids.
kids who are 12 and their dream is starting a business. We never thought that way, you know, when we were in college. We thought about going to work for a big company. I do love now how entrepreneurship has become more and more popular. And I love that because our country needs

**Bob Coleman** 24:22

Gene.

**Stephanie Dunn** 24:35

We need to innovate. And innovation will come from lots of ideas, lots of companies, not just a few big ones. So I think that I'm very excited about the new, the American dream of entrepreneurship is evolving and growing.

**Bob Coleman** 24:53

Excellent. Tell me about your podcast, Lords of Lending. Putting together a video. Yeah, it takes time. It takes energy. You want to produce good content. You do very well at it. Tell me about that.

**Stephanie Dunn** 24:58

We're podcasting.
Okay, we have a new revived energy on Lords of the Lending. Our podcast now is under the Leader Bank banner, which we're very excited about. So we have a lot of content that we're going to be putting out. We're in studio as we speak, right, producing all our content.

**Bob Coleman** 25:16

Okay.

**Stephanie Dunn** 25:27

And the whole point of Lords of Lending is this, again, it just falls in line with our passion to serve entrepreneurs and serve communities. And the Lords of Lending podcast is all about education. We don't want to talk about ourselves. We don't want to highlight small business owners. We interview small business owners to talk about what they're dealing with. We want to hear the real heartbeat of America on the podcast, and we want entrepreneurs to be inspired hearing other stories through our podcast. And we also want to educate these entrepreneurs, right? So it's all about teaching them, like you said, you know, the entrepreneur is becoming more and more sophisticated right now.

Yeah, and on our podcast, we want to give them tools, more tools, more tools, more tools to be very successful entrepreneurs.

BC **Bob Coleman** 26:15

When you say that the entrepreneur has difficult matching up with the appropriate lender, I'm an entrepreneur. I get flooded every day in my e-mail box. And on my phone, I got on someone's list of all these offers of MCA type offers. Hey, Bob, we'll give you money in 24 hours. And then you look at the fine print and they want to charge me.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 26:33

Yeah.

BC **Bob Coleman** 26:39

38 percent. How do you...

Educate your.

potential borrowers, the people you're talking with on what is the appropriate way to manage their capital structure, their capital stack.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 26:55

Yeah, and there is an art to pumping out information, right? If you flood the market with advertising, advertising, advertising, advertising, the small business community or the viewer turns off because it's just so much information. Me too.

I'm flooded with texts now and emails on, you've qualified for this, you qualify for that. It's all become noise. Yeah, yeah. But you know what happened? It all become noise. And now no one's paying attention to any of it. So now it's like, remember in the 80s when we used to send postcards to people? You get home and you have like a stack of postcards, what would we do? Just throw them out.

BC **Bob Coleman** 27:22

Good news!

Right.

Right.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 27:38

And we started to realize, okay, you mail, you fail. Remember? And we stopped mailing the postcards because we realized everyone's just dumping them in the trash. Same today. Everyone's just swiping those emails out into the trash can, right? We're not reading it anymore. So I think what we need to do, and this is why our podcast is so important and what you do is so important,
What we need to show people now is the information in a different format. So I love case studies. I'm going to show you what this guy did with his access to capital and how he used the money. And that will spark an idea to someone somewhere that's looking for the same thing. We need to see live examples now.
of how this stuff works and how to get it and where to go for it. They'll find us if you put it out correctly.

BC **Bob Coleman** 28:27
You have demonstrated in this interview what makes a successful, what makes Stephanie Dunn successful, it's having a vision and executing. As I said, your secret sauce is not secret.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 28:41
Yeah.

BC **Bob Coleman** 28:42
It is simply execution well done. I'm going to end the conversation with something we did, I guess, a year ago. So I'll give you a little bit of prep time. But I inadvertently stumbled on the fact that you are not only bilingual, but maybe more, but I want you to give us a send-off in French.
because I was so enamored with that and give us a good recap for our audience of SGA lenders of encouragement on getting capital to access to Main Street America, but I'm going to have you do it in your native language, Stephanie.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 29:20
I love that. And then maybe we could appeal to some French-speaking entrepreneur somewhere that'll hear this. Perfect. Good. Well, merci beaucoup, Bob.

BC **Bob Coleman** 29:24
Oh, I love it. Yes, definitely. Go ahead.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 29:38

Yeah.

BC **Bob Coleman** 29:43

Very well said. I don't know what you said, but it sounds excellent. Stephanie Dunn, thank you so much for joining our Coleman conversation and good luck with you in your new position.

SD **Stephanie Dunn** 29:47

Perfect.

Thank you for having me, Bob. Always a pleasure.