

Anne Sayers Full Transcript:

Bob Gilbert (00:08):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales, a podcast series that invites travel and tourism leaders and influencers to share their take on key industry issues. My name is Bob Gilbert and I'm the general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. I'll be bringing you into the conversation with top professionals who are shaping the industry, all with their unique tales and perspectives that they're ready to share with you.

Bob Gilbert (00:41):

Welcome to a brand-new edition of Tourism Heads and Their Tales. Today's guest is a first for our series, and she is the secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. So, we welcome Anne Sayers. And Anne was appointed in March of 23, although led the agency since December of 2020 after first serving as the deputy secretary since January 2019. Tourism combines her love for marketing, organizational management, and all things Wisconsin, of course. A cheese-head I guess one could say in her time with the department, Anne has drawn upon her experience championing Wisconsin's natural resources by leading the creation of the Office of Outdoor Recreation. But enough from me. So welcome Anne.

Anne Sayers (01:39):

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here. Cheese-heads represent.

Bob Gilbert (01:43):

You know, it was interesting, Julie was flying back from a meeting from Detroit and sat right in front of her was AJ Dillon. So for those who don't know out there, and he is a running back or the running back of the Green Bay Packers, and I've quickly come to learn and appreciate what they call in Europe, American football. You know, I grew up with a round ball, but that's another conversation. So welcome Anne. Now let's kick off, if you could share your vision for Wisconsin's future as a destination and what plans you have in place to achieve that lofty goal.

Anne Sayers (02:26):

Yes. Well, it's a very fun place to start because Wisconsin is really having a moment right now. We are landing events and stories and shows, and I think just pushing boundaries in a way that I don't think other folks really expected from Wisconsin. And that's a really fun place to be. And but it's, it presents a challenge for the future, you know, where to from here. And I think the vision is truly to seize these opportunities as they happen, continue to push the envelope. And the word that comes to mind for me, honestly is parlay, you know, all through the pandemic we talked about pivot, pivot, pivot. Now it is parlay. So how do we parlay the fact that we hosted the DNC such that it was in 2020, we're about to host the RNC here in a couple weeks, and how do we parlay that into more outstate meetings or hosting more events of that size and caliber?

Anne Sayers (03:20):

How do we drive traffic to our midsize cities as a result of the attention that that will bring us? How do we parlay hosting the Ryder Cup recently and then we just hosted the US Senior Open into more sports tournaments, more golf tournaments. I mean, continue to drive that throughout the state. How do we parlay this incredible attention we're getting right now from Top Chef into a lasting reputation for the state of Wisconsin as a top tier culinary destination? You know, how do we parlay the fact that Green

Bay's hosting the NFL draft in 2025? How do we attract more large-scale sporting events? And again, how do we move some of that attention into places like Wausau or Steven's Point, et cetera, that are ready to host tournaments and other aspects of sports that folks may not have thought of before seeing Wisconsin on the national airwaves? So the vision is just really about telling this very complete story about what our state is capable of and all of the people behind it that makes it possible to do these things.

Bob Gilbert (04:21):

So how, you know, I get the vision and you know, how does one leverage or parlay all of these, you know, amazing events that have taken place or are going to take place? How do, or how does, you know, I, I live in a small community, rural community and there will be some benefit, uh, some direct benefit, but if I'm in a different part of, of the state, how does what you are doing on a national international stage benefit me? How does tourism contribute to my town, to my community?

Anne Sayers (04:57):

Yeah, I mean, that is the ultimate question. And honestly, as a marketer, I love it. I love the challenge that that presents and I think that's something that drives our entire department of tourism. For us, it comes down to telling these authentic statewide stories. Every part of our state has a culture all its own. And so that is an opportunity for us to say something more about who Wisconsin is. And we try to just make that real for folks. You know, like everybody has sunsets, right? But not everywhere can you be sipping on a perfectly made brandy old fashioned on the shore of a lake, you know, packed with Muskie. We've been traveling by fork here in Wisconsin since before it was farm to table. It's just the thing that we do. We have all these James Beard nominated restaurants across the state. We've been making the ingredients that others are using to fuel their culinary scenes too.

Anne Sayers (05:51):

Those are stories we want to keep telling. You know, we're on two great lakes. We have America's first tribal national park. These are things that are happening in the more rural parts of the state that aren't necessarily featured on Top Chef right now, but they contribute to the story and the reason why a place like Top Chef is coming to Wisconsin or even something like the NFL draft, it's about our culture, it's about our hospitality, it's about our spirit for fun and being welcoming. And the job here at the department is just to tell that story and how honored am I that I get to do that. It's, it's a really fun task.

Bob Gilbert (06:25):

Right? But there's the serious side of it, which is the, you know, visitor economy. How does that play into the state economy and encourage community development as an example?

Anne Sayers (06:40):

Yeah, you're absolutely right. And tourism is big business in Wisconsin, \$23.7 billion industry at last count. That was the 2022 numbers. We're still waiting on 23, but we were really proud. You know, we broke a record in 2019, 2020 was what it was. But we surged back in 21, broke another record in 22. We employ 174,000 full and part-time jobs in our state. We contribute in a major way to the state and local tax roles to the tune of 1.5 billion. So these are all numbers and they're all great and we're really proud of them and they are very important for how we measure our success. But we talk a lot too about what does that mean outside of the direct visitor spend? And we think about some of these induced spending numbers. Like just as one example, we have a florist in Steven's Point who makes sure that the flowers

inside Century World, our beautiful resort on the golf course where the US senior open was recently held.

Anne Sayers (07:36):

They have fresh flowers every day, and the tourism economy helps keep that florist in business. And then in turn, those folks are spending money in their community and achieving a great quality of life in Wisconsin. And so we're really proud that tourism has those stories to tell too. And we hear them everywhere. We have farmers who have just said directly, you know, tourism saved my family farm. When we chose to move into agritourism, people turned out and they wanted to be a part of being closer to where their food came from and that made a difference in their lives. We have entrepreneurs in the outdoor recreation space, the culinary space. One couple comes to mind that just started a canoe company as kind of a side hustle during college and they've turned that into their career now they're 15 years strong and people count on them every summer as a way to get down our beautiful Wisconsin River and enjoy time on the water. So you're right, it's about the business side of it, but it's also about the stories behind those numbers.

Bob Gilbert (08:33):

Yeah, the storytelling piece is a quintessential element in, you know, whoever tells the best story wins. But it is important, I think that storytelling is both one for the visitor and also there's a story to be told locally and from a local resident's perspective that every tourism dollar that comes in has associated tax that helps benefit and contributes to those local communities and kind of offsets or supports, you know, the taxes that we all pay and those taxes can go to firefighter, you know, a nurse, you know, whatever that need is in the local community. So that's all, that's all part of the bigger picture, I guess. So in terms of storytelling, how do you differentiate Wisconsin from competitors friendly competitors in the marketplace? Because obviously you want people to come here and not go somewhere else. How do you differentiate Wisconsin? You know, what is that core story that you like to tell? Is that authenticity, the foodie piece, the outdoors? I'm rambling on here with the question, but I'll come back and add a little bit to that just because of some research, recent research that I have seen that supports the authenticity, the water foodie outdoors. But let's just hear a little bit about your perspective on the differentiation that Wisconsin has.

Anne Sayers (10:12):

Yeah, I love this. We did spend a little time when we approached a brand refresh several years ago doing the research to say, to learn what people think they know about Wisconsin and pair that next to what we know to be true and what we think are the niche selling points of our state. And just trying to square up how do we tell that differentiation. And it really split itself pretty well into four pillars that, you know, after you do all the research, you're like, oh yeah, that, that makes a lot of sense. One of them is outdoor adventure, thousands of miles of trails and scenic, shorelines, freshwater shoreline. We're nearly 50% covered in forest, so we have a really great story to tell about what's possible in the outdoors and it's a huge motivator for travel. We're also really unique in the number and quality, and I'm just going to say sort of unexpectedness of events and festivals, if you can think of a reason to have a party.

Anne Sayers (11:07):

Wisconsin has an organized event to celebrate these things and you know, it actually normally ties year after year, outdoor recreation and events and festivals tie as the top travel motivator for Wisconsin. So

that's, that's definitely something we're bringing through in our brand. And what's fun about it is how it lends itself so well to just highlighting our spirited nature of who we are as people. So that's a lot of fun. Then yes, of course our fresh spin on food and drink. You know, we are at the dairy state, we have a really strong agricultural history and the way that that is now being translated to the plate, whether you're eating at a pizza farm where the ingredients were grown right there, or you're in a James Beard award-winning restaurant, there's a lot of variety there and it's always met with quality. And then the other thing is just a range of accommodations and activities. I know a lot of folks, there's something for everyone, but truly something for everyone, whether you are family, friends, group guys get away, girls get away, couples get away. There is plenty to fill a long weekend of activities in Wisconsin and more so we want to just sort of drive those itineraries and ideas to our audiences.

Bob Gilbert (12:15):

Before I kind of left off with my question. There was some research that I've seen very recently from Get Your Guide, which is one of the larger OTAs in conjunction with another organization called Arrival, that it's the organization that promotes activities, tours, attractions, and events. And their study was with about 4,000 people and they were looking at the what is it people want to do when they pick a destination? What is the experience that they are looking for? Number one was water, number two was outdoors, and number three was the foodie piece. And you've kind of encapsulated those three, you know, the top elements of what people want from an experience and it's all available here. You know, I say here, you know, I do live in Wisconsin, and it is something that has kind of progressed to the point where it's, it almost becomes not maybe demographic driven, but psychographic driven people's behaviors and what they like to see and do, on a trip. And I guess that's something that is very encouraging to hear, especially if you live and work and promote within Wisconsin. So that's why I had that little conversation before we kind of went into that question. Let me ask you this now, in terms of what all the benefits are, all the good things, what are the challenges that Wisconsin faces and how do you, identify them and how do you address them?

Anne Sayers (14:03):

Well, first I just want to remark on that research. I hadn't seen it yet, but how wonderful to hear, because you're right, Wisconsin has those three things in spades and it just reminded me of this story. My mom recently moved out here from the east coast and we were driving around looking for a home and she said, she's looking out the window and said, I just love how you guys put lakes everywhere.

Anne Sayers (14:28):

That's not exactly how it works. But it really stood out to me that we are just a lake, inland lake, great Lake River, streams driven state. Water is such a big part of who we are, it's part of how we developed this craft, brewing history, agricultural history. And it becomes so fun when you're on vacation. There's so much to do on it, near it, under it, you know, so we, we make the most of this water and I'm really happy to hear that's what folks are looking for in terms of challenges, you know, pretty much any way I can answer that question is going to come back to budget. Frankly. We keep getting smarter, I think in the work that we do. We're just trying to like squeeze more impressions and engagements out of every single dollar. But at the end of the day, that doesn't change the fact that we have to be up in front of potential audiences.

Anne Sayers (15:22):

And two of the most expensive markets, Chicago and Minneapolis are our biggest feeder markets and they're expensive. We can't let down our guard and we do see, share-of-voice getting more and more expensive to achieve. So, you can't really efficient your way into making the kind of impact you need in those places. And so, we've been lucky so far in my time with the department, we've had some really nice bipartisan support from the legislature in supporting our budget, but I feel like I'm a little bit of a broken record or like I'm not bringing that bright shiny object to the table because it's just, we need budget for advertising. It's, it's nothing more than that. I mean it is more, but, but that is the key here. We need to maintain our operations as things grow ever more expensive as everyone knows. But we also just need to keep marketing and sort of connected to that is realities around staffing.

Anne Sayers (16:15):

It's just the world of marketing, the world of tourism is changing and growing and the amount of research and data we have access to, the sophistication of the marketing tactics, the sheer number of channels that you have to manage as a marketing group, and then even some of these rising interest areas of outdoor recreations meetings and conventions, film is on the table, things like that just require more staffing and that is really hard to come by in a state government agency. So that's something we have to confront. But I have to say I'm really proud of the way we've kind of looked at those challenges, dead in the eye here in the last few years and just made it work and continue to grow sophistication and impact while also having been able to land a few more dollars for our work, which we're really honored to have.

Bob Gilbert (17:02):

Right? It is a conundrum to a degree because we've seen post pandemic ARPA funds that were injected into a bunch of different communities and destinations and that gave them the ammunition they needed to go after, you know, to increase visitation for their destinations. And perhaps, you know, they had Minneapolis and Chicago as source markets and then if everybody's going after that, it unfortunately has the adverse effect of increasing advertising costs because it's in demand. So, it's tough in this particular environment to be able to make best use of scarce funds on the workforce front. One of the biggest challenges that I hear when I speak to state travel directors is, you know, that's in their top 1, 2, 3 is workforce. How is Wisconsin doing? What's in place to try and overcome that? Which is again, not just a Wisconsin challenge, but a broader hospitality tourism challenge.

Anne Sayers (18:15):

Well, on the, the point about the competition and how it's driving the advertising prices, I will say that I just love my fellow state tourism directors. Were a tight knit bunch and I couldn't do this work without them. And I really do believe that the rising tide lifts all boats, that promoting tourism in any place is good for tourism everywhere. So, we're really proud to be kind of a part of the whole thing, but it, you know, you do need to come back to the legislature and say, I did something with that money you gave me, it made a difference. And that piece is hard as the competition increases, even as I'm happy to see tourism continuing to grow in terms of workforce, you know, at the Department of Tourism. We're lucky in a lot of ways because it does feel for a state government in, when we promote a job, we have a lot of interest and we get a lot of qualified applicants and it's why we have such a fabulous team at the Department of Tourism.

Anne Sayers (19:13):

Although it's been a time of like everyone, you know, retirements are happening and some jostling coming out of COVID. But we've been, you know, on the whole really lucky that way in terms of tourism as an industry, it's certainly been a challenge with the workforce, but at the same time it's been really neat to see the way people have innovated and shared resources, literally shared shifts between the restaurant and the hotel, recruiting staffing together, finding new ways to achieve better retention. There's a lot out there to be excited about even as those struggles continue nationwide.

Bob Gilbert (19:50):

So, you know, one of the nationwide struggles, not struggles perhaps, but more evolution from, you know, what was historically called, you know, A DMO that evolved to a Destination Marketing and Management Organization and even now the, you know, just DO Destination Organization which is really being fueled by things like sustainability and responsible tourism. With Wisconsin being that, you know, I guess the milk shop of America, the dairy land of the country, obviously agritourism, but how is Wisconsin addressing sustainability and responsible tourism?

Anne Sayers (20:33):

I love this question. You know, I know there's a lot of different ways to think about sustainability when it comes to tourism, but just speaking directly to the conservation sort of natural resource side of things, we really have always been a leader in this space, honestly, where the state where Earth Day was founded by, you know, Senator Gaylord Nelson, we also were home to Aldo Leopold, John Muir did a lot of his early writings and growing up here in Wisconsin, we actually, folks don't know this, we've created recycling a woman named Milly Zantow out of Baraboo helped create the system for recycling your plastics. So, this is a big part of who we are, and I think there's a lot of businesses in Wisconsin tourism who just sort of come by good natural resource management naturally. And I feel like our job at the department is just to promote that we know that travelers are looking to travel with their sustainability values in mind and they're looking to put together itineraries that best reflect that. And it's really our job to sort of put a spotlight on those companies, natural areas that are doing the right thing and helping consumers make those connections.

Bob Gilbert (21:38):

So, one of the, I guess, outcomes of the pandemic was to force people, the visitor, to be more understanding of responsible tourism Leave No Trace as an example. And you've given some examples of sustainability and history within that. I have to say, traveling across the state, you know, I do see a lot of that activity taken on by local communities. You know, obviously where I live here it's a little, well when I say different Door County is a little different from other communities just by its location and the tourism that it drives. But is there, you know, an outreach to the communities or sharing of best practices, how does that work? And I guess I would think that, you know, some events that you put on from the state level that shares best practices. Could you give some examples of that?

Anne Sayers (22:39):

Yeah, and you're so right. Some of the biggest progress is being made at the community level. And Door County is really out in front right now showing what's possible and making that connection between where we know the consumer is at and where we know the resident is at. I mean it's just a win-win and they're connecting those dots in a way that's really powerful and frankly something I think everyone's looking to emulate. So, kudos to them. At the state level, one program we're really excited about is called Travel Green. This is a free program that's available to all of our tourism partners who show a

commitment to sustainability. So, they take an annual pledge, it covers six different key focus areas, the community education, energy efficiency, transportation, waste reduction and water conservation. And once they take that pledge and their application is approved, they're able to use the Travel Green logo, which is sort of in the spirit of the Travel Wisconsin logo.

Anne Sayers (23:33):

And they can just promote the heck out of it. They can put, you know, the, the badge on the, the door to the business on the register, on their website, on the place cards, however they'd like to use it, but just sort of raise their hand and say, we are a tourism organization who is not just talking the talk, but we are walking the walk. That's also searchable then on our website, which is very busy, very busy place to be for a potential visitor. So that hopefully gives them a little bit more marketing potential that I think all of them are looking for. The other thing is, you know, we're home to the office of Outdoor Recreation now that was founded just in 2019. We are one of the earlier Midwest states to develop an office like that. And we've really tried to make it our own.

Anne Sayers (24:17):

A lot of the western states have, they're built in a way that responds to Western needs. And here in Wisconsin our needs were a little bit different. We really had no centering organization connecting the retailers, the manufacturers, the outfitters, the health organizations, the nonprofit organizations, the conservation organizations around this idea of we are rich in natural resources, but we're sort of overlooked as an outdoor recreation state. Why is that? How do we strengthen the product and how do we do it in a way that lives our sustainability value? So that's a core tenet of the office as well. And that has just been a resounding success and something I'm always happy to speak to of why we feel like in Wisconsin that has been a huge boost to our tourism economy.

Bob Gilbert (25:02):

So, and that's a good example or a different kind of partnership and collaboration from the green perspective. From a more commercial perspective, how important are partnerships and collaboration in driving success for Wisconsin? And this is a two-part question. So, one is in general the importance of partnerships and collaboration and then the other, if you could share an example of a successful partnership that is positively or is positively impacting Wisconsin. And I know you've mentioned Top Chef a couple of times, I'm familiar with this series on Bravo. So, two questions in there. So, one is partnerships in collaboration, how important that is and then what was the genesis of Top Chef?

Anne Sayers (25:47):

Yes. So, partnerships are extremely important to us. They have the product right that everyone's looking for and we're stronger when we are promoting that together, or at least in a way that supports one another. So we have a couple different programs set up. One certainly is the Co-op Program; we can talk more about that. But our brand campaign is really meant to very intentionally touch and support our entire state uplift all of the many amenities and destinations in this state. Our public relations efforts, we do a lot to get travel writers and content creators out to every corner of the state. We have a dedicated industry relations team of five people as well as a communications person who focuses on the industry as well. So we've really amped up our support direct to the industry and then vice versa, what are they hearing in the field that we need to know about at the state level so that we continue to walk in lockstep.

Anne Sayers (26:42):

And then we provide more and more trainings and affinity groups too. There's a comms affinity group that the comms folks just love. They have their own little clique, they should do a lot of information sharing and getting smarter together. And that has resulted in a lot of big stories getting landed for this state. And you're right, Top Chef is probably the perfect example of how partnership has delivered big for the state of Wisconsin. And the story is a little bit, it's either very long or very short how you look at it, but we had a rockstar chef here in Wisconsin who had been on the show many years ago and came back and said, I have a dream of making this, you know, centering a season on Wisconsin. And I think at first folks didn't think it was possible, but we kind of kept at it and more and more people began to see his vision and believe in it.

Anne Sayers (27:30):

And when we finally had a chance to bring the producers of Bravo's Top Chef to Wisconsin, we gave them jam packed couple of days, I think we brought them to more than 50 sites and pitched and pitched and pitched all the ideas and ways they could use our ingredients, our restaurants and our key attractions and amenities to show off the best of the state. And it really drive some serious culinary challenges. They were into it. And then finally we had to put the partners together. And I think this is pretty unique for Top Chef because it was the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Visit Milwaukee, Destination Madison, Destination Door County, The Dairy farmers of Wisconsin, and the State Cranberry Growers Association. The five of them came together with some money and some agreements about how this would work and we made it happen. I'm just not sure if it's happened so collaboratively in other places, I'm not sure. But I think it's very special about the fact that Wisconsin was able to do that. I think it says a lot about the history of how we've all worked together and trust one another and believe in our state.

Bob Gilbert (28:33):

And it's fun.

Anne Sayers (28:34):

It's very fun,

Bob Gilbert (28:36):

You know, and travel and tourism should be fun. I have been very impressed with, you know, I grew up in London, spent a lot of time in my younger years actually in Milan, which is where my mother was born. You know, I speak the language and I understand real Italian food as an example and I was blown away. I was in Milwaukee a couple of weeks ago and so impressed with the quality of the food and the service and it was so different from what I remembered from, you know, maybe 10 years ago, 12 years ago, just the quality and presentation and the service levels just, I don't want to call out one restaurant over another, but my gosh, I was so impressed with real authentic use that word Italian.

Anne Sayers (29:28):

That is a ringing endorsement. I love it. I'm so happy to hear it. And also not surprised.

Bob Gilbert (29:35):

I love going back to Milwaukee I, I kind of make a little pit stop to the Italian provision stores and bakeries, you know, to get the stuff that I can't get here. But anyway, from a branding standpoint, you mentioned earlier a rebranding. What were the key elements of the rebranding that was that 2020 or 21?

Anne Sayers (30:00):

You know, it really started in 2019 and we were pretty much ready to rock come summer of 2020. And you know how that went? So, we really kind of limped it out to the world late 2020 and then kind of hit in full force in 2021.

Bob Gilbert (30:16):

And what were the key elements of the rebrand?

Anne Sayers (30:20):

We always call it more of a refresh. I think we were really on the right track from the start, which is a nice place to be. We were focused a lot on fun and energy and smiles and we knew that was the right place for us, but how could we expand on that a little bit and find a brand that could help us tell even more stories? So that's where we came to this idea of shared moments of joy. It's kind of Wisconsin as the backdrop, as the perfect place to accomplish what we know is the main travel motivator, which is just time away with friends and family memories that will last a lifetime. You know, mom is one often the one planning these trips and she just wants everyone to have an authentic smile and a big hearty belly laugh during the course of that vacation.

Anne Sayers (31:05):

So, what does that look like in Wisconsin? So, we really focused Wisconsin as the backdrop and the traveler as the star and put them in real situations where they would have real reactions. You'll see our creative is not scripted. We don't really have like a storyboard where we plan it all out. We pick some destinations, and we invite some talent and we get out there and have some fun. And we capture that by video, by drone, by still photography. And it kind of does the work for us. And we've had so much fun with it. It's allowed us to get into so many parts of the state in different seasons and we've invested quite a bit actually in the look and the visual assets. And that has paid dividends, I think. And especially when the Top Chef opportunity came along, we had a whole bank of imagery that we could pull from to go tell that broader story to a national audience that maybe had never considered much about Wisconsin before. So, I'm really glad we made those choices and that we did center that those shared moments of joy.

Bob Gilbert (32:07):

So, was that part of the summer advertising campaign?

Anne Sayers (32:11):

Yes. So, we've been in this brand idea of here's to those who Wisconsin since I want to say 22. We had built the brand assets just prior to that. So, we've had several summer, fall, winter, seasonal campaigns as well as the Top Chef campaign. And then we always have some always on evergreen type content churning out on the socials and the web and digital. So yeah, we've been building it for a while now.

Bob Gilbert (32:38):

I was going to ask you a question about crisis management, but you weathered the 2020 storm. So, it's kind of a redundant, you were able to pivot now we are past that, but I think it does for folks who have been through that you learn a lot, it does make you, I really don't like the word pivot anymore,

Anne Sayers (33:00):

I don't either.

Bob Gilbert (33:02):

You know, I do like the word agile. I think agile is a much better word, but it allows us to be agile, which is not easy. And I would imagine if you are in a, the difference between public sector, private sector, you know, the ability to manage agility, you know, has its own challenges, but that's down to leadership. So what leadership qualities do you believe are essential for leading a successful destination?

Anne Sayers (33:36):

Well, I mean you're right that the pandemic, it was awful, but I know that it made me a stronger leader. And one of those things I took away from it was just calling a spade a spade. Like this is the truth right now. We are going to face this truth and we're going to solve around it. There's no, there's no sugarcoating it, you know, this is what we're dealt the hand, we're dealt and we're going to play it as best we can. So, um, that's definitely one piece that I think now plays into my everyday life, even when things are going really, really well for me. I know my decades of experience in nonprofit made me a real champion of committing to a mission, really understanding that mission so clearly and being able to articulate the why behind that mission. Why do we do this work?

Anne Sayers (34:22):

Why is it impactful to the people we serve? That you're also able to say no with a lot of confidence. So that's a big part of it. And also then admitting when you're wrong is part of that. because sometimes maybe that was not the right choice, but that's okay and we can give it another world. And then definitely I would say sense of humor that's really big some days that's more important than others. And then for me, I listen to a lot of Brené Brown, thanks since my conscious, and Jim Collins and I'm just always trying to tap into other great leaders and people who study this and who have real world examples for me to benefit from. I am always in the middle of about four to five different professional development or leadership type books or podcasts. I just think it's really inspiring to hear how other people have tackled these things. And then ultimately what all of this adds up to is being able to have a great team around you. You know, just being able to hire, retain, train, trust, build with and vision with a great team. And that's also the part that's fun.

Bob Gilbert (35:27):

So, my last question for you really enjoyed having our conversation today, Anne, and it is, what do you see as the future for tourism here for the state of Wisconsin?

Anne Sayers (35:39):

Well, you know, I started by saying we're having a moment, but I've been saying that now for a couple years and I think it's time to admit that it's more than a moment. I think Wisconsin being a big and important player in the tourism space is here to stay. And that we are capable certainly of hosting large scale events, meetings at conventions, being a top tier outdoor recreation destination, a culinary destination. So, the future is about solidifying that reputation for this state and then making sure that

the benefit of that is driven to all the folks who make this industry so wonderful and the residents who support us. So, it's a really exciting time to be in Wisconsin Tourism. There's a lot of smiles right now.

Bob Gilbert (36:23):

And smiles are infectious in the most positive way.

Anne Sayers (36:28):

Absolutely.

Bob Gilbert (36:29):

Anne thank you, or Secretary Sayers, as I should say, thank you so much for your time today. We really, really do appreciate it. Thank you.

Anne Sayers (36:38):

Thank you Bob. I love the podcast. Thanks for having me.

Bob Gilbert (36:43):

We hope you enjoyed today's episode. Please like thumbs up, subscribe and leave a review. You can also visit EddyAlexander.com to learn more about our tourism, marketing, and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies.