



## **IN CONVERSATION WITH BIL INGRAHAM, SVP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AT CENTENNIAL**

### **Bil, you're a high energy individual. What gets you out of bed in the morning?**

As I get older, I'm continually motivated by leading and guiding others to discover their highest potential. I wake up every day excited to interact with my team and to encourage them to perform at levels they haven't yet imagined. My secrets to success are transparency, empowerment, collaboration, and accountability.

### **What have been some pivotal moments in your career?**

For 7 years I was actually a stage actor and performer in Chicago while holding down a parallel day job in the financial industry. It was during the .com era and I was selling online trading systems to floor traders when one day I finally said: what am I doing in the financial industry with a Liberal Arts degree? I saw a job posting for Westfield Malls in marketing and retail and went for it. The folks at Westfield loved my blend of sales, marketing and financial experience and took a chance on me. 13 years later, here I am. Looking back, I've always been a part of a disruptive industry throughout my career and the same is still true today.

### **What qualities do you look for in a potential new hire?**

First and foremost, I look for someone who is passionate because I believe you have to love what you do in order to be successful. Besides that, I look for someone who is driven, someone who is tenacious, and someone who has a positive outlook on life. Negativity is an absolute no-no. So is lack of polish. And being on time to the interview just goes without saying.

### **What are you working on right now that you're excited about?**

Diving into the local entrepreneur communities around our malls is probably the thing that excites me most right now. Our communities are filled with passionate, hardworking, and creative people who all have their own unique stories and pasts. The thought of Centennial providing a platform for these people to live out their dreams is highly motivating to me every day.

### **What are some of your favorite brands and why?**

I like Suit Supply for the quality of product and the level of customer service. And Restoration Hardware for its impeccable design and feeling of accessible luxury. Starbucks is also a brand I identify with although I hate to admit it. The consistency of the product and the convenience of its locations and delivery options just can't be beat. I'd rather support a local coffee shop, but there it is.

**What are your predictions for Holiday this year?**

A. I foresee that we will continue to see a distribution of sales growth across all channels. I also think that inventory and product fulfillment will be a challenge for both e-commerce and brick and mortar. With Thanksgiving falling so late this year the compressed Holiday shopping period will probably result in some lost sales, but I predict we'll see an even more hectic Holiday season to make up for it with lots of last-minute shopping. The power of these always-on mini computers in the palm of our hands has allowed us to have an even more last minute on-demand relationship with everything, and that will be especially true for Holiday 2019.

**What do mall operators know that you wished specialty leasing tenants realized?**

Obviously at Centennial we have a focus on how our specialty leasing tenants look and feel in terms of their entire store presence. Sometimes our tenants don't realize how much that affects the success of their tenancy. A better-looking store that's properly and effectively merchandized will generally yield better sales and foot traffic for that tenant.

**What makes a tenant a great prospect? What factors are you looking for when out canvassing?**

Our renewed approach to specialty leasing and business development at Centennial includes an even tighter focus on the curation of our tenant community. That means we have a desired merchandise mix in mind and then we go out into our communities to find best-in-class operators for those different types of businesses. We may not be able to get a Lululemon today, but can we find that local or regional entrepreneur who has a similar product or brand. We're looking for quality visuals, passionate and hardworking operators, creative product and merchandising, and, of course, excellent customer service. Hospitality is becoming an increasingly vital part of our business.

**Can you speak to the role of specialty leasing in the context of the larger business?**

The role of specialty leasing and business development is arguably more important now than it has ever been. Because of the transition in our properties, many of which are predevelopment or undergoing significant redevelopment, we need to fill gaps in our merchandising, and we need to do it quickly while our development projects come to fruition. At our best, Specialty leasing should set the stage for successful permanent leasing.

**What is one piece of advice you would give someone new to the industry?**

Be ready and able to thrive in an environment that is constantly changing. Stay focused and driven, but also be patient. Our industry and the world at large is changing rapidly due to the digital evolution of our lifestyles. It can be scary but it's also exciting and ripe with opportunity. It's a great time to be in this business.

**You have a high-pressure job. How do you manage stress?**

I love to run. It's a great escape and allows my mind to actively think and solve problems. It also helps me sleep which is the other thing I like to do. When I run in the morning, I find that it motivates achievement and drives action throughout the day which allows me to rest and stimulate more passive creative thought while I'm sleeping. My mind is always going and going.

**What's the best career advice you've ever received?**

It might seem trite but believe in yourself and don't put limits on your own dreams. Even as a confident person I still need that reminder from time to time. Without it, I'd still be on the trading floor.

**Thank you, Bil.**

**About Centennial**

Centennial is a national owner and developer of major shopping, dining, entertainment, and mixed-use destinations. Rooted in retail since 1997, the company is focused on shaping the evolution of American retail by creating a superior, multifaceted shopping center experience. Centennial properties serve not only as a place of commerce, but a place of community. For more information, visit [CentennialREC.com](http://CentennialREC.com).

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