



BY DAVID HEATON



Michael Griffiths, Visa

Michael Griffiths: HIS SHORT AND WINDING ROAD TO SUCCESS

When it comes to significant decisions or events that have impacted Michael Griffiths' career thus far, the decision to move to Washington, D.C., for his first job is front and center.

After completing his undergraduate degree at Penn State, Griffiths began his career in Washington, D.C., in management consulting at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC). After PwC, he continued on the consulting path with firms like Kaiser Associates and Booz Allen Hamilton.

"Consulting gave me a great foundation in critical thinking, analysis and most importantly, the ability to work with all different types of people," he says. "The business exposes you to numerous issues and challenges with both your clients and consulting colleagues. Management consulting afforded me opportunities to develop versatile business skills that ultimately applied to future roles that came my way."

Next was the decision to move across country to California in 2005 for business school.

"This was life changing as well for several reasons," says Griffiths. "Pursuing a graduate degree in real estate and finance ultimately positioned me with the opportunity to land a job in real estate, and, I met my wife in business school, so I think that investment yielded a pretty good return in my personal life."

He received his MBA from the University of California, Berkeley - Walter A. Haas School of Business. He was able to transition into a role at Visa following his first year of business

school and ultimately joined the Global Corporate Real Estate (CRE) department in early 2008.

Currently, Griffiths is Director, Global Portfolio Management, at Visa Inc. His responsibilities include global portfolio management and strategic planning, performance reporting, metrics and analysis, policy development, lease administration and relationship management. He's also responsible for leading special projects that apply to the firm's global real estate portfolio like AWS, financial benchmarking, change management, communications and many other ad-hoc initiatives.

"Living in the D.C. metro area is what first piqued my interest in real estate," he notes. "I lived there during a period of explosive growth and real estate development and literally saw neighborhoods transformed in a few years, fueled by a very healthy economy. This was a completely foreign concept to me, having grown up in a really small town near Scranton, Pa., where land values increase very slowly and very little real estate development occurs. After working in consulting, which is often undefined or intangible by nature, real estate was something tangible that I could see, touch and feel and truly loved learning about."

In a relatively short period of time, Griffiths has made the most of his career opportunities.

"I'm a firm believer in continuous professional development and education," he says. "Relevance is a critical success factor in every profession, and if you're not out there learning, networking and

talking to people in an effort to understand what's changing, you'll quickly find yourself to be irrelevant, ineffective and behind the curve."

CRE Workspace of the Future?

"I certainly don't think any of us has an accurate crystal ball to predict the future, but we can certainly make some educated guesses based on what we're already seeing in the market. We need to force ourselves to think outside the status quo and visualize what the paradigm might look like in 10 to 20 years," explains Griffiths. "I believe what we consider to be an 'AWS' now will be the new norm. And the 'workplace' will continually evolve to be something very different due to rapid developments in technology, increasing globalization and even sustainability. I don't think the concept of a virtual workplace will be the exception, it will be the expectation."

Griffiths notes there are a lot of thought-provoking questions that will impact what CRE strategy might look like in a scenario where workplace becomes significantly more physically fragmented and virtual than it is now. It's certainly feasible to imagine a world where this is reality.

"We're finally at a point technologically speaking where high-quality audio, video and virtual technologies can redefine 'place' for all of us," he says. "I can literally have a high-definition video conversation with anyone in the world in the palm of my hand."

He adds as the sustainability compo-



YOUNG LEADER

nent of corporate social responsibility programs becomes more mainstream (and reportable for publicly traded companies), the palatability of consuming more land for buildings may be less desirable for companies.

"Social networking tools and the societal change created by them is changing the way companies sell and provide products and services," says Griffiths. "It's inevitable that it will continue to create a different type of demand for workspace, and the workplace will change as a result."

According to Griffiths, as CRE profes-

sionals, we can either help our companies define the new paradigm, or we can wait and have our companies be defined by it because the world will change around us and the outcome will be defined without our influence. He feels we need to demonstrate that we've prepared for the change, thought through the implications and have structured a CRE strategy to accommodate the work practices of the next generation.

Connecting with CoreNet Global

Griffiths is very active within CoreNet Global and is part of the Northern

California Chapter. He's received his MCR designation and is currently pursuing his SLCR. He also actively participates in Global Summits, Discovery Forums and in both the Strategy & Portfolio Planning Community and the Young Leaders Group.

"CoreNet is great in many ways, but the knowledge sharing, professional development, networking opportunities and spirit of camaraderie in the organization are truly invaluable to position one for continued success in our field," he adds.

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