



IREM® From the Front Lines Podcast

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Managers by Choice

Todd:

Welcome to another edition of From the Front Lines, where we discuss both the day-to-day, and one-of-a-kind issues facing real estate managers. In this episode, Brett Voeltz, CPM®, IREM's manager of member engagement, will talk to three of IREM's student members—Kaitlin Novak, Thomas Letke, and Rihan Ballari. They'll share what drew them to the profession and talk about their experiences as students in real estate management programs. Over to you, Brett.

Brett:

Thanks so much, Todd. I am so excited today to be joined by these three students. They are changemakers, they will be the future of this industry, and we couldn't be more excited that they are a part of the IREM family, a part of IREM Georgia, and have already gotten so well connected with just their chapter, their community, their schools. And we are, like I said, we're just so excited to have them on today. So I'm going to go around to each of them and just ask them to provide a little bit of introduction for themselves. So if you can just share with us where you're coming from, what school you're attending, what program you're studying, and then yeah, we'll get going. Oh, also when you're planning to graduate. So hopefully we can get you connected to the industry. So, Kaitlin, let's start with you.

Kaitlin:

First off. Thank you, Brett. Hello guys. My name is Kaitlin Novak. I am a senior at Georgia State University. I will be graduating in December of 2024. It's unreal to say. And my major is real estate. I'm just honored to be here today along with Rihan and Thomas, so thank you.

Brett:

Thanks so much, Kaitlin. Thomas, over to you.

Thomas:

Hi, my name is Thomas Letke and I grew up in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and I'm studying at the University of Georgia and the program that I'm in is called Housing Management and Policy with an emphasis in residential property management.

Brett:

Awesome. And Thomas, when are you graduating?

Thomas:

I will be graduating in May, actually coming up very soon.

Brett:

Real quick, yeah as of today, recording on March 6th it's a couple months, so got a lot to look forward to. We're excited for you Thomas. And then last but not least, we have Rihan.

Rihan:

Hey Brett, thanks for an introduction and hey everyone listening to the podcast. My name is Rihan Ballari and I'm a senior at Georgia State University and I'll be graduating in May, 2024 with a double major in real estate and finance. And fun fact about me is that I started commercial real estate at the age of 16.

Brett:

Wow!

Rihan:

So I've been very driven and passionate about this industry.

Brett:

And it just goes to show there's so many opportunities, whether you're 16, 18, 30, 50, mid-career, late career, there's something in real estate that can touch anyone and you can be so impactful in the real estate network, whether that's in management, whether that's in investment, there's so many opportunities and we're so excited to have you all to share your experience and kind of talk to us about what brought you to this moment. I know you all are still pretty young in life and then you have a very long future ahead of you, but we want to just kind of learn about what initially drew you to real estate. So Rihan, we'll actually start with you because you just mentioned you started at 16, so how did that come to be? Did you know someone that was in the industry? Did they connect you? Where did you first learn about it and what drew you to then continuing with that and deciding to study it in college?

Rihan:

Well, when I was a teenager, I'd been so driven by watching personal health videos and watching videos about entrepreneurship and there was this video about this person who, he was a hustler and he was inspiring and said, invest in real estate. And from there as a kid, I always knew that I wanted to be a businessperson and work in commercial real estate asset. So fast forward to my 16th birthday, I got my first job and it wasn't like working at fast food or babysitting or being a tutor, it was managing my parents' real estate portfolio. So my dad had assets in Atlanta, which are townhouses and he thought that it would be a good opportunity for me to learn things such as financial responsibilities or just be responsible in taking care of stuff. And so he put me in a room full of, well put me in a house, actually house full of older tenants. So these are college students and he told me, okay, so your job is to maintain them, take care of the property and do leasing. And I was 16. I was like, what? And then after getting used to the industry and after getting better at speaking to people and learning how to fix AC units and plumbing and just how to show people why you should spend time and why you should spend on our property, that's when I got involved in real estate. I knew going to college I want to be in commercial real estate, but I don't know where to begin. So that's like my teaser. So that's how I got into commercial real estate.

Brett:

That's awesome. I know my first job was I was a piano teacher, so not really in line there, but those little things, you got to kind of start somewhere, but that's awesome. Right at 16, you were already in the throes of property management and it just goes to show those are valuable skills. What you

talked about is so true. You learned how to speak with people, you know how to communicate, you learn basic home maintenance operations. If my AC ever went out at my house, I'd have no idea what to do. I'm calling up the next HVAC vendor to come out and help me out. But you're learning those cool little things that you'll be able to use later on in life when you're owning your own home, when you're managing your own properties too. So it's a great, great awesome opportunity that you had at such a young and we're so happy that you to continue that and now look into the commercial side of the industry as well. So awesome. Thank you so much, Rihan. Kaitlin, how did you end up in the career and real estate management kind of bubble?

Kaitlin:

Yeah, so it's pretty interesting. I'd say it's pretty similar to Rihan, maybe not with a job or anything, but kind of just being thrown into something. My parents invest in real estate and around the age of, I think I was about probably 9 or 10, my dad owns an aviation business and we usually travel a lot. So one day we were in Honolulu and we have a family friend who's very, very topnotch in her game with her clientele and everything out there. And my dad was like, you need to shadow her. And I'm like, what does that even mean? He was like, I want you to go with her and meet her clients and do all this. I think I was 10 years old, so I'm a little 10-year-old girl wanting to go get some ice cream. I'm over here at this showing for this, I don't know, \$8 million house at the beach. And I'm like, you know what? Maybe I want to do this when I get older. And my dad is just like, I think this would be great for you. I think this is something that you would love when you're older, you love talking to people, you're very, very personable and I think that you would be a star in this industry and I'm glad that my parents really gave me that exposure and gave me that idea to get out there at such a young age and to build up to that. If I were in Rihan's spot at 16, I think I would've just been the same way and was like, what? But luckily I was given that exposure when I was younger and it really led up to that. So getting to college, I knew exactly what I wanted. I knew that Georgia State offered a great real estate program. I knew that being in the heart of the city, the opportunities would be endless and the amount of people that you would meet would never end. Just coming out of college, right now I'm sitting on eight different internships that I've had since August of 2021. So that speaks volumes of just how much opportunities there is just in networking. Half of the internships that I've got, I've known the person that connected me with someone else and the other half is just applying and showing you, showing them who you are. So I think just getting into that, and my first big internship was with Greystar. I was a seasonal leasing professional intern. And so learning the ropes of that and leasing and stuff is just so interesting. We don't think about it really that there's so much to property management and the daily roles are critical. I mean, like you said, the AC goes out, heat doesn't work. I mean your oven doesn't work, you can't cook. You have to be able to adapt and be adjustable and fix these things. So I think it's very important. I think just going from that to interning at Walker and Dunlop and now Wells Fargo, it's going to set me up well to know exactly where I want to be in 5 to 10 years.

Brett:

Yeah, you're getting a lot of great experience too. Like you said, you've gotten the experience on residential front of doing the leasing and now I know we talked briefly before we started here about getting into banking, the banking side of the real estate industry. So there's so many different aspects that play into the real estate market that we talk about. It's not just buying and selling homes or buying and selling commercial properties. There's so much beyond that initial what you see on the tv, what you see in selling sunset, the idealized version of what people can get into. And you realize there's a lot of, you got to be kind of tough and you might get tenants that are not happy with the way things are operating, but it's learning how to manage those and manage expectations, manage the emotions that go into the industry too that really will make you

successful as both a student in the industry and then also starting your careers. So thank you so much, Katie. That was a great story. And maybe one day you'll get that 8 million house in Hawaii or probably now today it's what, 30 million if we had to guess, but oh gosh, you don't even know at this point. Who knows at this point, so awesome. Thank you Katie. Thomas, let's go to you. What's your story? How'd you get into real estate? What kind of drew you to a career in what this might be in the industry for you?

Thomas:

So the story starts out actually on the construction side of things, and it's where installing a window meets the frame of a brand new home. And that's where I fell in love with creating the essence of home for people. I think it began there learning that side, that experience was incredible. And with that I knew that I wanted to do something in management of some form with real estate. And it wasn't until I attended my brother's graduation a few years ago at KSU Kennesaw State University that I realized that there was something cool about the operations side with real estate and property management. And he had a speaker there, and it's actually the speaker's school as my brother was a philosophy major, and it was more of a humanities arts, arts philosophy type school. But the speaker was Norman Radow from Radco in Atlanta. And it's amazing how he was there that day and spoke because he was able to connect the heart and the meaning from something, let's say my brother was studying philosophy in that college and he was able to connect it to something business oriented and more of the financial side and the asset type. So once I saw those two worlds collide, I was inspired and I realized that I, residential property management had a space for me. So I actually did a little bit of research at UGA and it perfectly lined up because there was a housing management and policy program at the University of Georgia. So a few months after that speech from Norman, I actually switched over because I was so inspired and I haven't looked back since. And that's actually how I discovered IREM through the program was through my professor Sherle Brown. She helped link me to IREM and that's how I got involved from there.

Brett:

Wow, I love that. Shout out to obviously Sherle Brown who is a key player at UGA. She's been very well connected with us here at IREM. And then Radco too, like you said, we have so many Radco employees that come through IREM, a lot of great friends of mine too that I've connected with over the years. So I'd love to hear all those different stories. We get through the familial ties into real estate management. We get through construction, we get through a humanitarian, or not humanitarian, but the humanities, just a general speaker come to speak about what real estate can do. So it's really, it just goes to show, we talk a lot about in this industry that people just fall into property management. But I think that can be said about any industry, any career choice, at some point in time you're going to just fall into it, not someone doesn't grow up and be like, I'm going to be an accountant at three years old. No, eventually you realize maybe accounting is where you want to be, and so you'll fall into that. So it just goes to show there's so many great different opportunities for individuals to get into real estate management beyond just the kind of, oh, I guess I just needed a job and I'm going to go start leasing. People are aspiring to these. And Thomas, I loved what you said. You're creating the essence of home. I think just having that mindset is going to set you apart from so many other folks that get into residential management that are just in it to make another dollar because you're truly trying to create, in your words, the essence of home for these people. And that's going to really shine true in your management style and what you create for that. So thank you so much all for that. Let's dive a little deeper into your individual stories too and what you're getting into there on campus and in your programs. So Rihan, we'll go ahead and start with you. If you can just share with us a little bit, what are you

studying specifically in your program? What are some of the classes you've taken, some of the concepts that you're learning, what is it that you have gone through so far that you know you'll be able to take and transition into your career once you start in the industry?

Rihan:

When I first got into college originally I didn't want to be a real estate major, even though I do real estate, I was just undeclared finance major, so I didn't know anything about investments or banking. I just thought, hey, I just go get a bunch of money and some kind of career in finance and didn't invest in real estate. But I think after it was during the pandemic, so there were no opportunities for me to know people or find people who are alike to me. So it was a good time for me to reevaluate my situation like, okay, where do I want to be in my career? That's one of the things that comes in your college, figure out where you want to be. Then next, who do you want to meet with and how you can meet them? So that's some advice I was given as a freshman, no, during my time, definitely not the pandemic era. It was hard to make connections and hard to make friends. But from there, after realizing those three points, I discovered there was a commercial real estate club at my school and it was called the Commercial Real Estate Group. And the president back then was Alex Fiche. And so after I chat up with him, he invited me to the meeting and oh my, I was just blown away with the professionalism and just how well they described me to all different types of asset classes in commercial real estate, retail, residential, multifamily in industrial. And I was just so amazed like, wow, you can join a career in commercial real estate. You don't have to be a realtor that many people think about, you know, in commercial real estate. And after I learning there's rules such as property management, asset management, I was like, wow, send me on board. Let me get my real estate degree, let me get my finance, and that's why I decided to double major. And so some of the courses I got exposed to at my time at GSU were related into both segments of finance and real estate. So courses such as taking real estate development really got me inside of how a property starts from ground up to get top down and then put into the market. And courses in real estate investments, I learned how to create equity waterfalls, do financial modeling. And whenever someone asks me a technical question such as like, "Create a cashflow statement," or "Create a proforma," I can say this thing in my head, I'll be like, yeah, there's potential income, there's operating expenses and there's effective income and there's after tax. So those courses really helped me really well, getting better with technical skillset. But my favorite course this semester was actually with the director of the Georgia Master's program taught by Lynn McKee and that's Credit Asset Management. And taking that course, I get exposure to the day-to-day hours, what asset management does, how it's different from property management as well as the different types of financing abilities, what are some problems asset managers are facing, how to reevaluate assets and how to reposition them in the market. And from there, I just got so curious in asset management. So even though I have multiple internship experiences, the pathway I think I'm getting from exposure with my courses is guiding me to the people I want to be connected with. So the courses at GSU, some of the classes we have guest speakers coming in so we can interact and meet with them and ask questions. So overall, GSU is doing a great time with the clubs. So clubs allows us to find a social group. Our professors are educating us with this technical stuff. And then the outreach, our huge alumni base is cutting up with all these jobs and opportunities. So that's my experience so far with the education resources and my growth and learning to take this aspect of commercial real estate.

Brett:

Yeah, that's great. What you talked about with how you can get into property management, but then you can grow from property management to asset management to I guess property management, portfolio management, asset management. There's so many ways. I think a lot of

people, especially younger folks, they see the dollar signs, they see the money that you can make in real estate and they want to jump right into it. But what we see so often is those that are most successful in those higher level asset management roles, they started in property management, they learned what it's like to be on the ground and actually having to do those things. And so you just have a level of empathy with those folks that are your tenants at those properties and you understand the operations just that much little more that can make you even more successful as an asset manager. So obviously that's a great aspiration for your career path and we're excited to see where you end up. And I know you're going to be making all that money down the line one day, so we'll be here cheering you on the entire way through. So thank you so much for sharing that Rihan. Thomas, I'm going to go over to you now, I just want to hear from you what's been one of the most memorable experiences. Four years have gone by now for you in college, you obviously started in the height of the pandemic. I'm sure your freshman year in college was very far from what one would consider a normal year in college. But what's been the most memorable moment for you in your time in college and what would you like to share with other students that are considering maybe a career in this pathway?

Thomas:

Yeah, absolutely. So one of the most exciting moments was what I would say was a turning point in a trajectory and alignment kind of way of saying things is when the first time I was in Professor Brown's class of Intro to Residential Property Management. And that was certainly, it was like a beacon of hope of what was coming because I had realized that this was the right place to be in. And I think just from the first class and on it was able to take things, and this was actually said at the IREM conference, take things from the head and drop it to the heart. And that's where I found myself in that class already researching the types of companies that I wanted to work with. And yeah, not soon after that, there were career fairs that came and I started meeting these people and the story unfolds that way. One person after the other that you meet, it just leads into one thing to the next, then all these bridged connections. And I already feel that happening now, it just in the last few years and I'm thinking, well, what will it be like in 10 years from now when I meet these people? So really, yes, that patch of sunlight that was in that class, Intro to Residential Property Management, that for me was awesome.

Brett:

That's so great to hear and I'm glad it had that much of a lasting impact for you because I think a lot of people take these intro courses and they're just like, I just got to do a gen ed credit or just got to pass the class and forget about it. But it shows that you can become inspired. And I think Sherle Brown, obviously she does an incredible job too at showing that passion that she has for the industry as well and just the ability that she has to share that with her students. It's an incredible program that you all have there at UGA and I can't speak highly enough of it, so thank you so much for sharing that. And I know those connections, they say never burn bridges, especially in real estate. You never know who's going to be at which company, which merger is going to happen, who's going to buy out your properties. So always want to be just aware of who you're connecting with, who you're engaging with, and making sure that you're always presenting yourself in a manner that's going to be indicative of your future success. So Thomas, thank you for sharing that. Kaitlin, we'll go to you for another question here now. So graduating in December, which we do have to shout you out semester early. So congrats on an early graduation for you, but what are you most looking forward to about getting your career started? What aspect of your job do you think you're going to enjoy the most?

Kaitlin:

I think just the excitement of another chapter is closing and a new one is opening. I think that's the most exciting point for me. I had an eye-opening semester last year. I went through a lot of terrible medical scares. I had a huge cancer scare. Rihan was there for a lot of it, very, very supportive. I have a very good supportive group at Georgia State and just the professors that we have, especially the director, Lynn McKee, he really pulled me out and said, you got this, the more that you keep going, the more that you're going to be stronger for it. And if I didn't have that support to keep inching me forward, then I would've never made it to the IREM Global Summit. And I'm so thankful that I did because I have a couple different mentors that I speak with every other week that I met in Toronto. And I think that that's just like what's so insightful to me is that they're not going anywhere. They're along the way. And I feel like the more that I grow and the more that I leave Georgia State, the more I want to give back to it because it's given me so much. I think that just finding myself and realizing who I am and where I want to be and what efforts that I want to make into making myself better and making the community better around me, I think that that's my biggest moment of excitement because whether I stay here in Atlanta or move to Miami, which is a huge dream of mine, I think that if it's attainable, then to definitely shoot for it and to keep going and keep working hard and always putting your best foot forward and keeping those that are around you, that kept you in high spirits when you're at your darkest moments. So I think that's what's exciting for me. I'm very excited.

Brett:

That's awesome. And I'm glad things have worked out well and people recognize you and I think especially now with LinkedIn, it's so easy to stay in touch with those individuals that you meet along the way and they're cheering you on the whole time too. Whether it's just a quick click of the like button or you go, Katie, you've got this, you're doing it, you're doing the thing. It's reassuring to know that people are looking out for us in this industry specifically because like we said earlier, you never know where you're going to end up. If you're in Miami, you might've made a connection at the IREM Global Summit last year and hey, they might be able to get you a job and if it's not that first job, maybe when things aren't working out well in that first one, maybe it's the next job right away, but you got to hold onto those connections and they're really going to help push you. I mean you all are the movers and shakers of this industry, so just people are going to be looking out for your name and seeing what you're doing next. It's very exciting. We're all super excited for it. So next thing we want to talk about is obviously graduation's up and coming for you all. So what are your next steps? What are you looking for? What type of company? I know a lot of you talked about kind various aspects and roles that you're looking into pursuing post-graduation, but just what role specifically? Is there anything that you've seen out there that you're like, that's the job I want, that's what I want to be doing right after graduation? Rihan we'll start with you and then we'll work our way around to the other folks. So what's your next ideal job?

Rihan:

Well, I'm currently right now looking for positions to apply for as I'm slated to graduate upcoming this semester. And for me to know what role that works best for me is where I want to get exposure at and where my career goals align at. So I definitely know that I want to work with the numbers and understanding the financial understanding. And so working a role more of an analyst where I can get experience like the market research, the financial modeling, how put in rent roles or leases onto the system or understanding the investment returns. So roles like being a development analysis or working in capital markets analysis. It would give me a great exposure with all deal flow and understand how deals are created and explain investors their returns. So companies that I want to apply for are usually the top adversity firms like JLL, CBRE, Cushman & Wakefield, Walker

and Dunlop. But I'm also looking for smaller companies as well where I get exposure due to how the market is right now with interest being high, it's definitely hard to get jobs, big firms and especially someone like me, I knew that I'd be competing with people who were recently laid off looking for an entry level positions. So I knew that I must stay optimistic and find opportunity or find consumer education pathway. So I'm really balancing those ideas. But when it comes to development, I'm a huge fan of retail. I like retail real estate. And the thing about retail real estate I like about it is it mixes human psychology and real estate together. We always have been curious like, hey, who our consumers are, where do they shop? What do they like to eat? What do they drive, what do they need? And I think retail real estate interests me. So if I want to go for development analysis role to still learn numbers, retail is something that aspire to. So our companies I may look into is the CIM, which is doing a development called Centennial Arts and it's this big portfolio, this big project, and it's a sports center and they're bringing food and beverage tenants and they're bringing multi-family meeting office and they have a huge retail sector. So those type of large scale real estate projects would have a huge emphasis in a customer service. And making sure people have a great experience kind of excites me a lot. So probably in those kind of companies, I'm looking forward to apply in this two positions I'm interested in first starting my career in commercial real estate.

Brett:

Awesome. That sounds great. Rihan. Katie, how about you? I know we talked about Miami's the goal and we want to get down to Florida. So what kind of jobs are you looking for specifically and how are you going to get your intro into real estate?

Katie:

I believe that the best thing for me personally, I think that I've nailed it down, is either starting off with Rihan said different companies like Walker and Dunlap or PNC or Wells Fargo looking to see if they have that location. I know PNC does. So hopefully I can leverage that and say, Hey, I intern at Wells Fargo just starting off hopefully with a rotational one to two year analyst program. I feel like that would be beneficial for me just to get my foot in the door and realize which areas and what kind of sector do I want to be in. And then eventually get into property management because I feel like you said, knowing the operations in and out and either asset management or research at CBRE, those kinds of roles are so important that a lot of people don't put a lot of emphasis on. And so I just finished a CBRE fellowship, it was on capital markets and the managing director Chelsea Cutler, she is phenomenal and she gave us really good insight. It's like no matter where you start, it's just how you get into the area of where you feel like you best fit and where you can grow. And that's what really matters. And I feel like if I go into a rotational program or look at different companies, I mean no company is too small or too big for me. I feel like wherever I feel most comfortable to get uncomfortable and grow, that's going to be the best. And I think that that's something that I'm really looking for right now currently.

Brett:

Yeah, awesome. And sometimes those smaller companies are where you can learn the most because you're going to be working directly next to your asset manager, you're going to be working directly with the development lead, the VP of development or whoever, some of those bigger companies, it's kind of like you have 40 different property managers and so you filter up through this regional role or director role and you're never really actually one-on-one with those individuals that are making those key decisions on the construction side or on the development side. So I will always speak, I had a great experience at a smaller boutique company as well where I did have access direct CEOs. I would talk to the CEO almost every week on a call and it was just like I shared the performance of

the properties I was managing. And it's just so you just have that closer of a connection with those individuals and they can also be a huge support in helping you get to your next step of where you want to be because they want to see you grow too. You can grow that company, they want to be there for you and support you along the way. So great, awesome aspirations. Katie, and I'm sure you'll get to Miami sooner than you expect. Thomas will come to you last here. What are your goals? Where are you looking to be that first job lineup that you'd like to see for your career start?

Thomas:

So I definitely want to go along a career path in a company that has a really good training development program for new people, a really good track for them to grow over the years so they can see, okay, what does my next five-year plan look like? And I know a lot of people end up starting and then they'll start somewhere and they'll switch and that's possible to happen. But it would also be really cool to stay in the same company if it works out really well. So one of those companies, definitely Cortland, I've been looking at and that leasing consultant position with Cortland, just to learn that sales side and be the front of a community, really a community consultant, a way to look at it and represent them that way, that would be an incredible experience. And they actually have a really cool career path of a higher position later down the road that you can work your way up to as a resident experience manager. And I've looked into that as well. And I think if I was able to do that in a few years, that would be incredible. So that type of company, company that's either fully integrated that the vertical integration as well, something I'm super interested too because it seems like they have a strong connection to the asset itself, the tangible asset, then it might be managed better as well. So that's another thing with housing as well. I think I like housing because a little more of that personable connection with the residents rather than just tenants, it's residents and it's homes, not just units. And that's where I see myself in a company like that for sure. Yeah, and location wise would be Nashville, Tennessee is what I'm looking at.

Brett:

Alright, cool. And I have to ask, so I also loved the resident experience on the commercial side. It was obviously tenant events and stuff. It's fun to put that stuff on, you see, I mean it might be tacky, it might be a donut and coffee in the morning, but just something to kind of brighten the moods of your tenants. So I have to ask Thomas, do you have any dream goal resident experience programs or any ideas that you have that you could share? I mean we won't disclose anything specifically, but any ideas that you have of what would be that perfect resident experience?

Thomas:

Well definitely for resident experience would be a community garden and really creating a space for people to plant seeds and sow seeds and allow them to grow. And I think just the beautiful imagery of a garden itself, I think people can see story unfold for them. And I think it's similar to that of a home starting with, oh, I'm going to be here. And then seeing that space unfold into something personal to them I think actually can happen amongst different people in a community garden. So that's one idea, but really finding a summary of different touching off points that are tangible things. So that could be just music, that could be game night, that could be food events, and then allowing that to be a touching off point for social and then friendship and then community. So I think that's very possible too. And that changes the perspective people have of landlords. It really changes it because a lot of people, at least if we look at housing history, there's all kinds of rough stuff in the past and there's the landlord things and it's like, oh yeah, the landlord raising the rent type perception, but I'd like to be part of something that changes that with rental housing. So yeah, that's how I see it.

Brett:

I love that. That's incredible. And yes, the main goal is right, we want to get this perception of the mean old landlord out of people's minds when it comes to housing because that shouldn't be what the case is. People shouldn't be afraid to talk to their apartment manager or their property manager because they should feel a connection to that individual and that person managing those assets should feel that connection to those residents. And it's not going to be everyone, right? There's always going to be those couple of tenants that it just, no matter what you do, they're going to be upset with the scenario. But you can keep trying and trying to find that way to connect with them so you can create a personable a memory for them in that moment of time for them in that housing. So really appreciate all. The last question I'm going to ask you is, I know we just talked about where are you going to be after graduation, but let's look a little bit down the line here, five, 10 years. Where do you see yourself? I was telling you all before we started here, I graduated college 10 years ago myself. If I had told you I was going to be working at IREM, I didn't even know what IREM was at that time, obviously. So who knows where we're actually going to be when the time comes, but every experience along the way builds you to where you're going to eventually end up. So let's think idealistically 10 years from now, five years, where do you see yourself, Katie? We'll start with you.

Katie:

Perfect. So if we're looking at idealistically, hopefully I'll be in Miami. Hopefully I'll have made it to where I want to be in one of those companies I listed. And if not one of those companies, a great company, I'm sure I'll find down there. Hopefully, maybe I'll have a boat and a family.

Brett:

I love it. A houseboat or just a boat to casually go out in?

Katie:

I don't know. Miami is nuts. The amount of just the yachts you see. Hopefully I'll have something comparable to that. All jokes aside, that'd be great.

Brett:

I'll keep in touch with you Katie, whenever I'm down in Miami in five years I'll call you up.

Katie:

Yacht party! But I just think that I want to create a family, obviously have husband and kids and the life that I want to create, just obviously putting my career myself first, but hopefully finding that along the way and keeping the faith and being optimistic and making sure that checking in on me and knowing what I want and keeping that happiness there because that's what matters. So hopefully.

Brett:

Alright, cool. Like I said, I'll call you in five years and we'll check in on that yacht for you. Great. Cool. Thomas, how about you? 10, five years from now, where do you see yourself?

Thomas:

Yeah, so I definitely would love to be with one of those companies that I talked about previously. And I think that type of company to really grow in. And I see myself managing people down the road, having a team of some sort in real estate and I think that would be super cool, super thrilling. So I sort of have those goals already thinking through them and how I'm going to start now.

Another thing, I want to be a family man as well, and I'm getting married in July actually, so that's coming up.

Brett, Katie, Rihan:
Congratulations, Thomas!

Thomas:
Thank you very much. So that's another thing, big part of my life and I'm super thankful for that as well. So those are part of where I want to be and who I want to be.

Brett:
Perfect. And then Rihan lastly, where do you see yourself five, 10 years from here?

Rihan:
Well, I guess in five years from now I'm probably work in the same company and be a president or director role where I can mentor the next generation of commercial real estate professionals in my community outside. And I've probably see myself as the guest alumni where people ask for like, Hey, can you give me some introduction to IREM? Or can you introduce us to the other programs at commercial real estate or Hey, I see Katie's in Miami, can I want to go intern for Katie, can you give us the introduction? I probably see that as myself, always nose to nose of whose who. And then of course I have family goals as well. I want to pride myself time with my family, be a great father to my kids as well, and spend time and volunteering too. Volunteering is very important to me, so trying to balance being a commercial real estate professional, a volunteer director, and being available for all the kids who want to learn commercial real estate. So as much as this industry has put into me, I definitely want to give back to a lot of people too. So I definitely have small goals, but I do see I have myself a bright future ahead.

Brett:
Awesome. And one last question I'm going to ask you is, let's say you're talking to someone and they don't know what they want to do, and what would you tell a student that has no career goal set out for themselves? What would you tell them to consider in real estate management or to consider a pathway in the real estate industry? And, let's say one, two sentence best advice of what you would tell them. Thomas, we'll start with you.

Thomas:
I would encourage them to not just network with people, but to net weave. And that's something that Dr. Debbie Phillips will say. And there's something more real about that than just networking. And you want to build real true relationships with people and connect to them on things they like to do or find those bridging connections between one another. And I think that actually happens. There's really a thread that runs through something like IREM and what I would tell them to do is, you should do real estate because of that thread that runs through everything at IREM. There's all these companies that are supposed to be competing in a way, but they're together. And I think that's cool. I think that's awesome. And I definitely noticed that when I was at the conference, the Global Summit in Toronto is that everybody cares about each other. So I could encourage somebody to say, Hey, I realize you don't know what you want to do, but there's an obvious place here for you. And I could tell them that my experience started, I'm not sure what this is going to look like and I don't know if my housing management program is going to be good. But the first time I sat down in class, it seemed like there was an opportunity for any type of person. So yeah, that's how I would word that.

Brett:

Awesome. Katie, how about you? What would be your pitch to someone that's unsure of where they want to be, but you want to lead them down the real estate path?

Katie:

First of all, I just want to give a shout out to Dr. Debbie Phillips, Jasmine Sylvester, and Deborah Westfield because those three women changed my life and I can't give enough thanks to them. And just mentors. I think Thomas put in a perfect motto and said the right things. I think I would just say get out there, get out there. Don't be afraid. Show people who you are. Be confident in yourself because everyone is fighting their own battles. Everyone is in their own shoes. And sometimes, like you said, net weave and network. You never know what someone else is going through and you guys can come and find common ground on that, Hey, I don't know what major I want to be in, but I'm kind of interested in real estate will go and find these different clubs and organizations. I promise you they will welcome me with open arms. And I've never felt more welcomed than IREM. All the events that I've been to, so much fun and such a great environment to be in. You meet so many different people and it's just an insane, the world is actually so small, we think it's massive, but it's not the amount of people that I've met. I'm like, oh my gosh, you know her too. Oh wait, you know him. It's such a small world. And like he said, all these companies are competing against each other, but at the same time they're not because they're all very friendly. And I think just the real estate industry as a whole is very, very personable and I love that. And I think just getting to know people for who they are and working with them and collaborating with them, I think that's the best thing about it. And if I were to tell someone take a chance on real estate, you won't look back, you won't regret it. You'll love it.

Brett:

Awesome. Thank you Katie. And Rihan, last but not least.

Rihan:

Well, this is great quote that really defines how connected we are in commercial real estate. We're all connected like drops in the ocean and each one is important to the whole. So what it means is we're all interloped and we all fit one big puzzle just like the earth is all connected to each other. So find your place of where you want to be in commercial real estate and it's okay to learn the different avenues and have mentors to different field. Even though I'm trying to pursue the analytical part of real estate and work development or working capital markets, have mentors who work in other areas in real estate and it's good to open your mind up to all the opportunities out there. So don't close yourself out there. Still stay, remain, connect with people, net weave as Dr. Debbie says, and try to ask questions as well of where you want to be and ask guidance as well. The best part being student is it is the opportunity for you to ask questions and get help because no one expects from you, but people expect you to learn and find those opportunities to learn. So it could be like, hey, if we have a broker buddy asking like, Hey, can we go on property tours and drive? Show me how you read the market. It could be your analyst buddy who works at Capital Market like, Hey, show me how to read the models and fundamentals. Or who could be a mentor but she's working in asset management or property management. Ask like, Hey, tell me about how you started career property management, asset management, and take those bits and pieces and see where you fit along in industry and how you can bring people to together or connect your knowledge outside in the world. There's much you can learn in school, but the real knowledge is always outside of market. So I always recommend if you want to be in the commercial real industry, be a sponge, be a go-getter and try to meet as many people as I can and try to connect many people as you can.

Surprisingly, not many people know each other. So being a student and have a lot of doors open to you, also open doors to others who are in industry who do business. Because when I do a business together, it'd be like, ah, yeah, Rihan Ballari introduced us, let's think about it. Let's give you opportunity. So that's my advice for students if they want to get proactive in this commercial real estate business.

Brett:

Yeah. Thank you all so much. I know we're running up on time here today, but you heard it from these three students. These are the movers and shakers of this industry. I want everyone listening today to kind of make a note of Rihan Ballari, Katie Novak, and Thomas Letke, because these three students, they're going to make huge strides in this industry and we are so excited that you all took the time today. Thankyou very much for sharing your story, sharing your wisdom. I mean, you're young, most of you haven't even started your true careers, but you already have so much wisdom that you can share both with me, but then also with everyone listening today, the students that might be out there that are unsure of what they want in life. And I think if they were to listen to you all talk about your experience, it'd be a no brainer for them to consider a pathway in real estate. So again, thank you very much. Look out for these three. They're going to be huge. They're going to make huge strides in this industry, and we're so excited that IREM can be here to support them. They've got the local connections there in their community too. And just want to thank you for being here today.

Katie, Rihan, Thomas:

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you so much.

Todd:

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