

Leading with Moxie

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Being a real estate developer is not an easy occupation, particularly in the last couple of years. It takes guts and perseverance. You have to be immune to being told no repeatedly. I admire people who have the vision and discipline to successfully transform landscapes with real estate ventures. Real estate development can also be feast or famine, so you also need solid business acumen to weather the inevitable downturns. I recently sat down to visit with Andrew Mattiace of The Mattiace Company. The company, which is headquartered in downtown Jackson, is the largest volume privately held development company in Mississippi and one of the Top 75 development companies in the United States. Mattiace founded the company in 1985 and has developed over 5 million square feet of real estate in Mississippi. Mattiace affiliated companies, with a team of over 150 employees, owns and operates properties in Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana. Anyone who has shopped in Jackson has probably been to one of his properties. Mattiace has developed numerous retail centers including Purple Creek Shopping Center (Academy Sports, Toys R' Us); The Junction (Target, Home Depot, Office Depot, and Petsmart), North Regency Square (Pier One Imports, Lowe's), Duling Place in Fondren, the new Malco Theater in Madison, the soon to be opening Dick's Sporting Goods, Best Buy and Steinmart, and the Renaissance at Colony Park (Fresh Market, Barnes & Noble, PF Chang's, Apple, Anthropologie and J.Crew). Many of these relationships were initiated at the International Council of Shopping Centers annual convention where The Mattiace Company has positively represented Mississippi on the floor for over 25 years.

Mattiace has successfully transitioned from being a visionary developer to the entrepreneurial owner of a major development company. I wanted to learn more about how he had accomplished such a feat. Mattiace was the son of a first generation Italian immigrant who taught him the value of hard work. Mattiace's father was a small painting contractor and would often bring Mattiace out on jobs. From an early age, Andrew was required to go work with his dad and his other brothers. His first job outside of the family business was in the 6th grade when he worked for Western Auto where he repaired lawnmowers, air conditioners, and delivered products. A talented baseball player, Mattiace was able to attend Belhaven College on scholarship. Before starting his own company, he was the Hinds County Comptroller and Deputy Chancery Clerk. Mattiace brings a tremendous work ethic to anything he does. Even today, he leads by example in setting the pace at the office.

Hard work is obviously needed, but it also takes moxie to land some of the largest brands in the world in your shopping centers. Mattiace was the first to bring such brands as Toys R' Us, Pier One, Malco Theaters, Haverly's, Home Depot, PetsMart, Michael's, Starbuck's, Apple, Fresh Market Grocery, PF Changs, J Crew, and Anthropologie to Mississippi. For example, it took him over seven years to get Target to open their first location in Mississippi. Mattiace noted, "One of my favorite things is to share with national companies about all the great things going on in Metro Jackson and the state of Mississippi." Based on his track record of success in bringing these brands here, he must be effectively communicating a positive message about Mississippi. Mattiace has chosen to maintain headquarters in Downtown Jackson and continues to have a substantial investment in the Central Business District.

We also discussed several key principles that have helped him in his journey. First and foremost is the value of maintaining relationships. Mattiace cited numerous examples of people he has now been doing business with for over twenty five years. Many of the key business relationships he has developed have also become personal friends over the years. He also noted that he believes in “treating tenants like a guest in your home.” I like this analogy to describe the care and level of service they provide. He also emphasized that “you have to be competitive on the economics with tenants and follow the market trends.” Given the complexity of his projects and detailed financial nature of his business, Mattiace is also appreciative of the training in accounting he received while he was at Belhaven. Mattiace also stressed the importance of his team and the talent of the people that he works with. He strives to find people with integrity, a great attitude, and honesty.

What’s particularly encouraging to me about Mattiace’s story is that he started from very humble beginnings and with a vision and the boldness to act on it; he has built a national level company. Many well-known brands that probably would not originally return his calls are now loyal clients. It’s easy to set our sights too low in life. Mattiace helps remind us that we can, and should, think big. Whether developing world class shopping centers or actively re-developing downtown Jackson, Mattiace and The Mattiace Company will no doubt continue to have a big impact on the real estate market in Mississippi and around the Southeast.

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