

People-centric leadership is the key to success for BGIS

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Gary Bullen, President, [BGIS UK and Europe](#) speaks exclusively to FM Director about why focusing on people is essential for a business to thrive.

BGIS is a global leader in technical integrated building facility management services. Offering a full range of facility and real estate management services, it partners with clients across the world to bring forward innovative solutions.

Gary Bullen was appointed President, BGIS UK & Europe in 2021 as the company wanted to foster growth across the UK and Europe. A key part of this expansion plan was the purchase of the Optimum Group in 2020. Shortly afterwards, Gary was brought on board as to ensure high quality service delivery to customers, whilst implementing new technical offerings and growing the business across the region.

Gary has almost two decades of management experience in Corporate Real Estate Services, having started his career with Johnson Controls in 2009 and progressing through several management roles. In 2017 shortly after CBRE's integration of the JCI GWS business, Gary was promoted to provide executive leadership over several high-profile accounts in the EMEA and APAC Regions.

FM Director's Editor, Claire Middleton, recently spoke to Gary about his journey within the FM industry so far, his people-centric approach to leadership and BGIS's goals for 2025 and beyond.

"I love the FM industry," Gary begins. "Of course, it has its challenging moments, but it's still a wonderful industry. Like many, I fell into it, but I love it. It's different every single day and I particularly love being part of the BGIS team. I enjoy chatting to our team every day, it's what makes the day fun for me. I like getting to know everyone, from contract support to the administrators, and from the engineering team to

the supervisors. It's such a great group of people to be around and although growing a business is always challenging, it's been great so far and I've really enjoyed it. It's a great company to work for."

Gary prides himself on having a people-centric approach to leadership. He explains: "I've been lucky enough to have some incredible mentors throughout my time in this industry, many of whom have been really focused on people rather than business. They understand that getting the right team in play, investing in them, the results quickly follow when everyone is marching to the beat of the same drum. I found that – especially in the world of M&E and FM – having a good team around you is what makes people successful.

"If you have good people around you, and you help to develop those people, then the business will flourish. To be a good leader and build a solid team, it's important to work with people through the ups and the downs, be vulnerable when needed, and be true to yourself when it comes to the way you manage. Rather than trying to be a hard-cutting manager, it's more effective to be real with the people around you. This approach has helped my career grow because it's enabled me to build strong teams.

"I get a kick out of seeing people grow. If you look at my current leadership team at BGIS, most of them have come from junior positions and grown into management roles. For example, my former PA is now an incredibly strong account manager. There are lots more similar examples, many people who've started in administration roles and gone into leadership positions, or engineers who've gone into technical manager positions. That's the part of my role I've enjoyed the most."

Looking deeper into the strategies Gary implements to develop people from within and build underneath their feet, he explains: "It's about the fundamental understanding that everybody is an individual. A lot of companies use a one-size-fits-all model of training and development, but they're not necessarily right for everyone. Our approach is more tailored. We ask our people where they want to go and what they want to do. Then we work out what their next step should be. I've built a lot of career paths with our people, where they might say, 'I'm an engineer today, but I want to be a project manager – how do I get there?'

"On the flipside we also have some members of the team who don't want to move on, they're quite happy in the role they have. They want to learn new things as they go, but they're quite comfortable where they are, and that's great, you always need some of those people inside your business. But for those who do want to grow, develop and move on to their next phase, with goals and objectives they want to achieve, then we get together with them at the end of the year and ask how we can support them in getting there.

"There are many unique career paths available to our team at BGIS. We've got over 40 people currently progressing through an ILM course, several people doing financial accreditations, some who've recently done their MBAs, and some doing project management qualifications.

"The secret to being a good leader is keeping it individual-centric and really getting to the root of where people want to be and what they want to do, listening to them and creating a road map that gets them there in a way that works for them."

Moving onto talk about the goals he had in place when he joined BGIS back in 2021, Gary explains that his immediate priority was to get to know the team and learn what made the people tick.

"I'd lived in Asia for several years before this role, and as soon as I landed in London, I headed straight to the office to get to the heart of the business," he says. "Being people focused; I was keen to get to know

everyone straightaway.”

He adds: “My first goal was to measure the pulse of the business. I asked lots of questions such as – ‘How are you feeling in your role? Tell me about the IT situation, the leadership, what support is in place. Do you have all the tools or PPE you need? Do you have all the health and safety you need to deliver your role correctly?’ I wanted to understand where staff felt they stood within the organisation and how they felt about the business.

“Once I’d done this, I was in a good position to work towards making sure everyone was happy in their roles, and ready to stay with us and build a career.”

Gary went on: “Next on my agenda was getting to know the customers and making sure we were doing all we could to keep them happy. Once again, we asked them the right questions – What are your goals and objectives, what are you trying to achieve and how can we as a business support that? By embedding ourselves more in that way, we’ve become much more than a hard service company. We’ve become a hard service partner.”

And how successful has Gary’s approach to leadership been in creating growth for BGIS as a whole? Well, the facts speak for themselves. Revenue has increased by approximately 40% in the last three years, and the company has grown to become a real thought leader within the FM industry.

As we move into the new year, 2025 looks to be just as successful as the last. Gary explains the goals for the year ahead: “We’ve just acquired an incredible national mobile M&E firm, called Briggs & Forester Building Services Maintenance, part of the wider Briggs & Forester Construction group. We’re currently in the process of integrating them into our business, which is very exciting. This will enable us to be a leading provider of national M&E services, delivering heightened resilience to our customers and improving our ability to self-perform in areas. This acquisition will set us on that path.”

Gary concludes: “I’m lucky to have a fantastic group of strong leaders around me and a lot of incredible talent coming through the ranks as well. I’m really looking forward to seeing them flourish in the next year. Exciting times ahead!”