

Green Buildings in Colombia Part 2: Green Factory CEO and LEED Fellow Diego Felipe Prada | Transcript

Introduction ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to green building matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals learn insight in green buildings. As we interviewed today's experts in LEED and WELL. We'll learn from their career paths, war stories and all things green because green building matters and now our host and yes, he has every LEED and WELL credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti.

Charlie ([00:33](#)):

Be sure to check out the green building matters community where you can have unlimited exam prep for any of the professional credential exams you're tackling next, as well as putting your continuing education on autopilot, saving time with GPS reporting your hours on your behalf. Check it out. [Gbes.Com/Join](#). Now enjoy this episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. Can't believe it. We've been doing this for two and a half years now. We've got quite a bunch of listeners every single week. Today I've got someone coming to us from Colombia. I've got Diego Felipe Prada Samudio, and he's the CEO at Green Factory. Diego, how are you doing today?

Diego ([01:22](#)):

Great. Thank you, Charlie. Amazing. I'm just humbled to be here and humbled, just to be awarded this is recognition. And of course, we're just waiting to share a little bit of information with you. Thank you so much for the invitation.

Charlie ([01:36](#)):

Can't wait to learn more about you about green buildings in your region, and of course you've done a lot of LEED work and recently you have been awarded LEED Fellow. I know we're in that club together and can't wait to learn more about you. So the first thing I like to ask my podcast guests, where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Diego ([01:57](#)):

Okay, well I'm a full, Colombia product. I went to like a regular high school and things like that here. Then I studied at Los Andes University, which is one of the best universities in Colombia for some people the best. I started in biology actually, which is kind of fun because telling my story, I began studying civil engineering, but what was supposed to be my dream was like saving the world. So I was like, I'm not going to do that while being a civil engineer. I don't know. I wasn't so passionate about it and wanted to get to know life and get to know animals mostly, and so I started biology. I did a little bit of research, mostly about that subject of shark feeding in Colombia. When I realized that what I was doing was something that was pretty specific and that nobody knew what I was doing, like using molecular research and things like that were way too complex for like regular people or actually just to make any effect. Then I realized that I wanted to do something that was more palpable, like really feel it and research for me wasn't what I wanted to do. So I began with the idea of building a company that could save the world and that's why I made the Green Factory. Actually, since my family used to work on construction and in this industry, then I began to get involved in that and doing sustainable building. Well, here we go, 10 years after.

Charlie ([03:43](#)):

I love entrepreneurship, green buildings, it sounds like. So your family was in construction. So you kind of have been around buildings as you grew up. What about sustainability and green buildings? I noticed you went back, got another degree. Did they come up in college? Did it come up in industry? How'd you know about green buildings?

Diego ([04:05](#)):

Well the first thing that I really did was just research about how we could make a more sustainable way of building. As I said, all my life the building industry has been part of my life. I was concerned about the environmental footprint of that activity. So I was like, okay, the first thing that I want to do is try to solve my family's environmental footprint and then I'll begin to do another thing. I began researching that and I came up with LEED, which was at the moment, just beginning in Colombia. I mean, we were like the first people, actually, when I began, there were no LEED certified projects. I began to research that and went to a Green Build, the Chicago one. At the

moment I was like really, really amazed by this amazing movement and just got so involved and that's what I wanted to do. Of course, this sustainable building industry is not just one thing for me, it's really, really complex and full of different things and that's essentially what I realized that I wanted to do.

Charlie ([05:22](#)):

I was at that one too originally and you're right, when you go and you surround yourself with all of these green building professionals from all over the world and you're like, wow, okay. So you chose to make a career out of it. Now, it must've been a little scary to start your own business there coming out of university. So was there a need or is it common there? Help me out. I'm in the States, I'm in Atlanta, but you are not the first person I've met from your region that's like let's just go ahead and start a business and let us go ahead and set up shop. So is that common there Or it was still a little, a leap of faith?

Diego ([06:01](#)):

At that moment it wasn't that common? Actually, people were like, what are you doing man? But now, you can see that most of the people. And I think my millennial generation is willing to entrepreneurship, of course, and well, they like taking things into their own hands and really trying to solve things. I suppose that's making a lot of people have the need to open new things. I don't know I see that here, we have a lot of things that are not being done because of course, I just say in the US, you have everything. I mean, if you want to make up a company, then of course you have a lot of different competitors and things like that. Sometimes here, you just go to the US, you get inspired by that and come back and there's no one doing what you want to do. So of course that's what happened at the moment. I didn't actually even find a company that was doing that. So that's why I began researching and studying how to make LEED accessible for what we do here in Colombia? And that's been like the topic of these 10 years of work.

Charlie ([07:12](#)):

Amazing, man. I love that story. Along the way, did you have any mentors or anyone that kind of opened some doors for you?

Diego ([07:21](#)):

Well, of course you have mentors depending on different subjects. For example, being a biologist, I didn't know much about construction, so I needed to learn a lot about the electric design, maybe hydraulic design and things like that. That of course I was not supposed to know because what I studied was like, how do you follow monkeys in the jungle. So of course ,it's absolutely different from what any biologists will do here in Colombia, at least. So I began to have some mentors. One of them is actually my father, of course, which he's a CEO of a construction company, but I also had some commissioning agents that really liked teaching us things. In Colombia, the Green Building Council everybody is really into spreading green buildings all around them. They were really a big help for us growing up and helped us to get to do these things. But we did a lot of self research. What was good is that I began with a friend and we actually grew up together doing this and then he went to another industry. He went to a renewable energy industry, but I mean, we built the bases of what we do in the Green Factory.

Charlie ([08:47](#)):

Well, tell us about your business and tell us about some of the services, some of the cool buildings you've worked on. Tell us about Green Factory.

Diego ([08:56](#)):

Well, Green Factory has been around, like I said around more than 10 years. It's a consulting company which began with LEED certification consulting and then we began adding more and more services. At the moment we're doing energy modeling. We are also doing biochromatics consulting, like actually [inaudible] one of the most important things that we do because we have a mild climate. So this is really cold, actually all around the year and we don't have any seasons. So we actually use a lot of natural ventilation and of course, one of the main things and the main strategies that we have to use is that, and because of that, then we need to have these services in the company. We also have some commissioning agents that work like us. They're not maybe part of the factory, but we started, and now we have also the part of the tax incentives that they need some processes and things like that that are really specific. So we are like that. So of course people can earn some money while doing good.

Charlie ([10:09](#)):

Yeah, I've heard there's really good tax incentives in your area and more and more LEED projects. So let's talk about that for a minute. What kind of clients in your area are doing LEED versus just let's do energy efficiency? How does that LEED conversation go?

Charlie ([10:29](#)):

I mean the industry at the moment is having a little bit of transformation with these incentives, we have a bit of a boom. I mean, everybody is interested in that of course, but we have a big competitor for LEED that is called the Edge Certification. Don't know if you've heard of it, but it's a certification that is made for developing countries. It's really good in terms that it's really simple for applying and all of that, but sometimes compared to LEED, you're a little bit short, actually, you're really short. Edge certification just has three chapters that are really good, they're energy, water, and embodied energy and materials, which is a good sustainability analysis, but it's not complex enough. When you have the same incentives for doing LEED or Edge, most of the clients go for going for Edge because it's less expensive.

Diego ([11:34](#)):

We're having at this moment, a little bit of competition and of course most of the projects that are working on now are Edge. We're just trying to see a little bit of a difference because the clients that want to do really good and innovation and all of that, they go for LEED and the clients that just want to go for the incentives and the basics and all of that, they'll go for Edge. So mostly residential is going for Edge and when you go for LEED, it's going to be more like office buildings, going to be, I don't know any rotational buildings.

Charlie ([12:12](#)):

We don't have as much Edge in the US but obviously you have a lot more than other countries. So just give us the super high level, what makes edge a really good program in the area. I know, I think you said it's less expensive than LEED, but do you still have to do certain energy savings and water savings? How would you explain Edge compared to LEED?

Diego ([12:35](#)):

Well, Edge is pretty, pretty simple, which is good actually, because it's making green building pretty accessible for everyone, because you need energy modeling. You don't need to actually be an expert. Any architect can understand it. So it's good because of that, but it's bad because sometimes you'd need the wisdom to know how to use it. You have three chapters, as I said, it's to have energy saving water savings and embodied energy. What you need to do is have an application page, the one you try to check different boxes in, depending on your energy efficiency measures, for example. So you take a measure for example, like a natural ventilation and you check it and there's an engine that calculates against a base building, how much you're doing. So it's pretty simple to just check it and then what you have to do is just document it.

Diego ([13:33](#)):

It's like, I don't know, sometimes it's just a lot of work on documentation, but you don't need a lot of work on like starting the building. Most of the buildings actually with, I don't know, being like a energy efficient interment efficient will be a good window to one ratio then we'll do, we'll go with with an energy saving bulbs, maybe, I don't know maybe efficiency in the water heater and the water boiler, and that's it, you have a sustainable building, so it's quite simple. Most of the people, they don't have to do actually more from what they were doing before. They are now just certifying it. So that's why, I mean, it's good because it's taking a lot of buildings to be green, but it's bad because it's not causing people to have an integrated process is not having like an innovation process. It's, it's quite simple.

Charlie ([14:42](#)):

It sounds like that's one reason we use LEED and now people may want to use Edge. It's a guideline. It's like, Hey, if you're going to do this, here's the right way to do it and it's going to force project teams to do a little better, make the building less of an impact on the environment. Tell us a couple of cool projects you've worked on what's top of mind, when you look back on the highlight reel, what are you really proud of? Give us a couple of projects. Anything else you're proud of?

Diego ([15:08](#)):

Well, best project that we have is called Elemental. There are four towers here in Bogotá that actually achieved a LEED Platinum and 89 points. They were really good. Actually, the client was like to whatever you want to do. I just want it to be a platinum. It was like an open letter for sustainability. So it was really good for us because we did a really, really big building. So they have some budget that there was also a good thing. It's a four towers of around 160,000 square meters, which is something really good. We'll be, I dunno, more than 1 million and a half square feet, something like that. It's really, really big and so they told we had a platform in the first floor and we did a landscaping that actually won the world's green infrastructure world in Latin America.

Diego ([16:12](#)):

What we did is that will inspire with the actual or the real ecosystem of the area. We did some wetlands on that, on that place. It was really good. We actually have some species that were endangered incision problems. This was really a big project and we did it. It's a project that is completely naturally ventilated. We have some photovoltaics, of course we have rainwater and greywater recycling. So we're saving around 70% of the water and more than 55% of the energy. So it's a project that is really, really based in the location that we have, it's really efficient. So it's really good. We also have the (inaudible) that is like a bigger arena and in the one day they make in the concerts that feel like that. It's the first arena certified in Colombia, one of the first in Latin America, it was really good. It's something that is saving around 80% of water because it's reusing rainwater from a big, big ceiling that has it's fully, naturally ventilator as well. Having 14,000 people in the same space with an Israeli ventilator system, it's really nice. So, I mean, those are, those are a couple of projects that seem really good for us.

Charlie ([17:49](#)):

Amazing projects you've really had this entrepreneurial journey, great projects. You've done a lot in your region. Anything else you're proud of when you look back?

Diego ([17:58](#)):

One of the things that we did is that we became a B Corp, B corporation. We have been selected from 2016 as one of the best companies for the world,

not of the world but for the world. That is actually our biggest achievement for us, like talking about saving kilowatts of energy and then saving liters of water. Things like that are actually what really moves us. And our philosophy inside of our company is actually being really consistent with being sustainable in our way of living. So I will say that's our biggest achievement I liked by far. I mean, of course being a LEED Fellow and having a lot of these projects is really, really something that motivates us for our biggest achievement is like really having a big environmental positive impact.

Charlie ([18:49](#)):

Wow. Applaud that, man. Thank you for sharing that. All right. Well, I'd love to ask this question. What's around the corner, those that are listening to this podcast, what should we be reading up on? What are you tracking?

Diego ([19:02](#)):

Well for us at the moment we don't have any projects that go into the net zero, net positive, of course. We try to do it, we'll get it closer to that. We have some projects that are using less and less energy every time. So it's something that we want to keep working on. Our biggest goal is to make all of these Edge buildings that I was telling you about all of these social housing, for example, buildings, more sustainable. We wanted to have energy savings, water savings and embodied energy products. We wanted to have even more things and of course it's our biggest goal or our most difficult one because of the high budgets. So you need to be really creative, but in Colombia, we are going to need to build a lot of new houses in the next year. So it is expected to need a little more, at least more than two millions. It's going to be a big goal to achieve a really sustainable social housing, so we can have an environmentally good impact where we're going to have a social good impact. So that's what we hope for.

Charlie ([20:18](#)):

That's a lot of people moving in and a growing population. We're recording this still in the middle of the pandemic. Have you seen a push towards healthy buildings and bringing in fresh air? I mean, you've got a milder climate there, so you have a lot of natural ventilation. So naturally I think that's of course better. Right. But what have you done with healthy

buildings? WELL, FIT Well, or maybe just some more healthy building best practices.

Diego ([20:46](#)):

You're absolutely right. Actually, in Colombia, one of the things that we have to struggle more with is where we are failing LEED certification is because of the need for a good ventilating system. Even if we have natural ventilation, people are not used to having a ventilation study because what we're used to doing is that, we have everything closed because everything is so cold that we just put on a jacket and you go. I mean, most of the places are not naturally ventilated or even ventilated mechanical. What we're doing now is that we're having people really interested in these kinds of subjects because they've realized that that is something that is important. So this has been a push towards understanding the importance of these really big subjects that we have in LEED certification. And now some buildings are starting to wonder how they can go back to work and how they can go back to operate for example, without compromising people's health. So that's a big, big goal and it's a main objective that we have to keep on starting and keep on applying these good practices on any building

Charlie ([22:09](#)):

They're important. They're important. I'm glad you're pushing it. Sometimes clients will push back, right. But you've got to keep showing them why it's important. Let's go through a few more kinds of quick questions about you Diego, what's your specialty or gift? What are you really good at?

Diego ([22:24](#)):

What am I really good at? I'm really good at convincing people to do good. Actually, I would say that's my biggest achievement in what I actually do every day, because I mean, technically there's a lot of people that can do even a better job than I do. But what I actually do is try to show people the importance and the rewards of being sustainable. And of course, that's what I will say. That is my goal in life. So that's why I became so obsessed with being good at it and starting psychology of people and understanding the way to sell them sustainability. And I will say that that's actually my biggest talent if you ask.

Charlie ([23:07](#)):

It's a humbling question, but it's good to know. Self-Awareness I think that's great. Do you have any really good habits or routines that help you stay on point?

Diego ([23:19](#)):

I'm a sports addict, so I will say they're first. I mean, you need to take a lot of pressure off you and once you do have something to put your head on, instead of just your work it's going to be really good for me. I do a lot of sports. I play tennis. I also do triathlons, do trail running, running in the mountains and things like that. I also do a lot of mindfulness and meditation. I'm also a lot into (inaudible) and all of that, which is something that really helps me like to be more centered to deal with every day.

Charlie ([24:08](#)):

It's a lot that life and the world of business throw at us. It sounds like you're really well balanced. Triathlons are actually, I've done several sprints and an Olympic, but you're probably going to tell me you're an Iron man or something like that. So what distance do you like?

Diego ([24:23](#)):

Actually, the half Ironman is my favorite.

Charlie ([24:29](#)):

Maybe one day, the Olympics, but that's amazing. I'll get there. A little bit about bucket lists. Is there anywhere you'd love to travel or adventure? What's on the bucket list? What are one or two things, Diego?

Diego ([24:49](#)):

Well, as I said, one of the things that I'm missing a bit from being a biologist is going to nature and living with nature. So one of the things that is on my bucket list is, for example, I want to swim with a white shark. Yeah. It's something that I have wanted to do ever since I was a little boy. I have always been obsessed with sharks. So it's something that I want to do. Yes. I don't know. I mean, maybe seeing gorillas as well, something that I want to do, going to Africa and doing a safari and things like that. There is something that really pushes me. I need to go there and be back again with nature. Yes. Yes. I do most of the things that I do because I'm so in love with

animals that I don't want them to keep suffering because of our human activity.

Charlie ([25:45](#)):

Well your buildings are helping the environment, but it sounds like you've got some cool bucket list items to get back there. It ties back again to those early studies and that early work and research you mentioned. I can't wait, man. That'd be great. So is there a book or two you'd recommend? It doesn't even have to be about green buildings. If there's a book you'd recommend, that'd be great or tell us how you kind of consume information. Do you listen to podcasts? Do you listen to audio books? Do you like to hold a book? How do you like to learn?

Diego ([26:20](#)):

Well most of my life I've been studying but I like to buy books , but now I'm doing a lot of audiobooks, things like that. It's good. I mean, if you're in traffic or maybe you're running and things like that, it's good for you to do both at the same time, but if you want to call a book,I will do the Upcycling. For example, from Willa, Montana is something that is really life-changing. I really like that and maybe Drawdown. I don't know if you've seen them.

Charlie ([26:56](#)):

Top 100 ways to reverse climate change, right? You pull them out Paul Hawkin and Ray MacDonough. So for our listeners, if you're new into this movement, those are two authors, speakers, influencers. You gotta read up on. So Diego, we're going to put links to those books. You've called out in the podcast show notes. So two questions as we start to wind down, one is looking at your career. Is there anything you wish you had known earlier in your career or even as a business owner?

Diego ([27:26](#)):

Yes. Well, many things of course. I mean, you make a lot of mistakes, but maybe the one that is more important is that just sometimes you need to jump, jump into it and take risks with it. I mean, for me sometimes I was a bit scared and it blocked me from doing things that I could do and I wanted to do, but sometimes you just have to go for it and then you learn how to create your wings on the way down. I will say that if I could have done

something better was just taking off all of these three years and, go with that.

Charlie ([28:12](#)):

Oh, that's a great visual. Just saying get your wings as you're going down, but take the leap. Well let's say there's someone listening right now. You've been doing green buildings awhile, I've been doing green buildings awhile, but they're like, what is this sustainability movement, this green building movement, I wanna work in that. So if someone's listening right now, do you have any words of encouragement for them if they're jumping in?

Diego ([28:34](#)):

Yes. I would say actually there's no better time than just doing it at the moment you can and you want, but now is the time. We need it with the current need to change a lot of things in this industry, in the world. Maybe since then things are becoming a little bit more conscious about the environment every time. This is the moment just to do your effort. Anything that you can do from your perspective is gonna do good and it's gonna help the system to do it and that's what we need. If we all support the system, then we're going to change it. And maybe, maybe we can actually do what we need, which is keeping our species on the earth and surviving because otherwise, if we take more time, maybe it's going to be too late for us. So it's the moment to do it. Just again, go and take the jump.

Charlie ([29:42](#)):

A great conversation, man. We covered a lot. You've got a lot of energy. You're doing great things there on all your projects. I love to hear your journey in green buildings and just everybody. Just make sure you connect here with Diego on LinkedIn. And just thank you for your time today. I've learned a lot about you from triathlons and trail running to obviously your connection back to nature, but a lot of green buildings and the fact that you're a B Corp there at your business, that surely was a highlight. So Diego, thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you so much. It was really interesting. I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the Green Building Matters Podcast. Me and the entire team are stoked and just so glad to continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional

here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you were getting straight from us straight to you.

Charlie ([30:43](#)):

Thank you for listening to this episode of the green building matters projects@gbes.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to gbes.com/podcast for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode. And you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing, yes. Please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues, and if you really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much. And we'll see you on next week's episode.