

## Making Your Stress Work for You with Dr. Deborah Gilboa | Transcript

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*Introduction:* Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the Green Building Movement. Your host is Charlie Cichetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a LEED Fellow. Each week, Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. Settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee and get ready to find out why green building matters.

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*Danny:* Welcome to the Green Building Matters podcast. My name is Danny Bauer and I have the pleasure of producing the Green Building Matters podcast. Charlie has asked me to record this special episode today on his behalf because he's out on a wonderful vacation with his family. Today's show is special for two reasons. One, we have two non green building experts on the show and resilience expert Deborah Gilboa, aka Dr. G. The second reason today's show is so special is that we are recording in front of a live audience made up of the incredible LEED fellows from around the globe. If you're a LEED Fellow, please reach out to Charlie because each month we get together to talk about the industry and also to give you tools to help you be even more successful in life and at work. Charlie can be reached at [Charlie@gbes.com](mailto:Charlie@gbes.com) is now LEED Fellows you are here so take yourself off mute for a second and say hello to the Green Building Matters podcast listeners.

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*Danny:* We are so glad you are here. This is truly an honor to work with you every single month and I am super excited to have Dr. G. on today's podcast. Resilience expert Deborah Gilboa, MD aka Dr. G works with families, organizations and businesses to identify the mindset and

strategies to turn stress to an advantage. Renowned for her contagious humor, Dr. G works with groups across multiple generations to rewire their attitudes and beliefs and create resilience through personal accountability and a completely different approach to adversity. Author of the new book *From Stress to Resilience*. She is a leading media personality seen regularly on Today, Good Morning America, the Doctors and of course, LEED Fellow monthly calls. Dr. G is a board certified attending family physician and is fluent in American Sign Language. She resides in Pittsburgh with her four boys. Dr. G. Welcome to the show.

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*Dr. G:* Thank you so much. I'm excited to be here.

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*Danny:* Absolutely. It is my honor to host you in front of this wonderful Lead Fellows group in the Green Building Matters. Listeners, I want to start with a provocative idea that you have. I've heard it before because I'm getting to know you. But you say that stress is not a toxin, it's a tool. What do you mean by that?

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*Dr. G:* Isn't that annoying? When I was in medical school many years ago in the late nineties, one of the things they were telling us in classes about almost every disease process is that stress is the new smoking. Tell your patients to avoid stress if they're experiencing stress. That's the problem. We would leave class and they would say, don't forget, you should also be doing a research project and please, please, please leave three groups and spend more clinical time and keep up your relationships at home and exercise is important and get enough sleep. I thought, Wait, are they trying to kill us because they don't want us to take their jobs when we graduate? Or is there something a little bit more nuanced than the idea that stress is just the worst thing ever and you should avoid it? Because what they're asking us to do was stressful. What we'd signed up to do was stressful. The

goals we had for the future were stressful. The relationships that we wanted involve some stress. Part of my work, and I'm a family physician, I'm a regular family doc like you'd go to if you were having back pain or your kid needed a well-child check or whatever. And I kept seeing this same issue in my patients that they would have an illness and work to recover. But at the same time, all these stressors were coming at them all the time and saying Avoid stress was not only ridiculous because what exactly am I suggesting that right cut off all your relationships, live in a room with a door closed, no interactions, and some of the stresses they were encountering were were in doing things they were doing to try and be better. Stress itself is a byproduct of change. All change. Our brains see all change as stressful, meaning all change or even the possibility of change releases certain stress hormones in our bodies. But change is often, as you know in your industry, better than maybe any other industry is often the way to the healthiest possible future.

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*Danny:* Dr. G. We have incredible people on the call LEED fellows. We have the green building matters, folks listening. How might these professionals leverage stress in their personal lives or in the lives of their teams?

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*Dr G:* This idea that all change is stressful, I think is really useful in a meta way for people, especially people working in an industry that is trying to get others to accept change, to see the value in change. We have some law in our society, Danny, that if you go with your gut, to trust your gut. Here's what happens. Your brain hears we're going to change. We're going to change how we're building this project or we're going to overhaul our facility, or we're going to make one change to make our physical plant much more green. Even if being more green aligns with my personal or professional mission, even if this sounds to me like the kind of world I want to live in or create for the future. Still, my brain has these three reflex

reactions to change, and those are unfortunately loss, distrust and discomfort at the exact same time that I might be feeling relieved that we're finally dealing with our building and climate, or excited that there are these opportunities and possibilities or hearing you about all the things that could be great about this. Still, my brain, which is just trying to keep me alive, says, What could I lose as a person and as a business? Can I really trust that what you're saying is true, that it will really do that, that it's worth the money, that it will cost? As little as you say it will, no matter how much that is and what's going to be uncomfortable about it, is it going to be weird that I'm still driving my 17 year old gas guzzler when I pull up to this brand new building? What's going to be uncomfortable? So that lost distrust and discomfort are just three reflexes that my brain goes through to make sure no matter what the change is, this isn't going to be the one that undermines my safety. One of the things I think would be really useful to you is to stop believing. If you do that, if you just create the right presentation, build the strongest relationship, have the right tone, that people won't feel those things that when you present that opportunity, they won't experience loss, distrust and discomfort. That is like me saying, when a kid comes in for a well-child check and I sit them up on the table and I tap their knee with my reflex hammer, that if I do a really good job of getting this kid to like me, they won't kick me. It's a reflex, right?

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*Danny:* So would it be also correct to think about it with loss, distrust and comfort? I'm guessing people move through those components, maybe at varying speeds, but it's still going to happen.

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*Dr G:* Though, at the beginning of this call in the chat you asked everybody to rate their own resilience on a scale of 1 to 10. And we had some really interesting answers. I want to point out that one person said today an eight great answer because the number isn't so important, recognizing that this is a transient answer. That's like saying what is your heart rate right now?

Because it changes depending on your circumstances and what's happening around you. Understanding that resilience, good news. It is a growth commodity. There are things you can do to strengthen your resilience, to navigate those three reflexes more easily without feeling as overwhelmed. Bad news is any growth commodity can also drop. So depending on the circumstances, the situation, the other things happening for you, it can go down. Someone answered and said, Well, I think I'm a six at home and a three at work, so I'll tell you a five overall. But it is absolutely true that in different circumstances the same person can have different levels of resilience. I have some stories that can eliminate that if you'd like. It's important to remember that, yes, you can build the skills to navigate those things more easily, but different situations will change, will put different obstacles in your way and make it easier. The same information to a group of employees that they're building is going to go more green, whatever that means. In your context, we'll hit some of them like their brains will take easily through that loss, just trust and discomfort and get to the next part of the cycle, which is choice. What choices do I have? How can I engage with this and become more the person I want to be and us to be, more the organization we want to be? And they'll slide through that so easily that they might not even notice the loss and distrust and discomfort. Other people will get stuck in one or more of those three and really struggle to focus on what choices they have. And this is the most frustrating part for leaders and change makers, which you all are. Is that a person who normally navigates change really easily because of something happening in another aspect of their life or a situation they had about an environmental initiative in another situation or the weather or an illness may get stuck in loss or distrust or discomfort when normally they wouldn't.

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*Dr G:* Interesting. I'm resonating with this idea of people getting stuck. There's loss, distress, comfort and then you said after that, there's choice. If we know it, is that somebody on our team or maybe it's somebody that's working with the local government. We have some kind of initiative that

we're working on and they're stuck, it's clear. What advice would you have or do you have a story around helping people get unstuck?

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*Dr G:* A lot of my stories professionally are about helping people get unstuck in their medical decision making, and I think I'm going to stay away from those stories because they bring up such strong emotions for people because they immediately draw us to the people we love. But we do have strategies. I'm going to take you to a client that I work with, a company that I work with that has a large hospitality company. They surveyed all their people, which is always a great thing to do if you're going to do something with the answer. In medicine, we say don't ask a question unless you're going to actually do something with an answer. They asked their people, what are some of the most frustrating systems that we have in place? And they heard back pretty consistent feedback that their payroll system was clunky and frustrating. We all get that. How that can be the case. They decided they were going to undertake an evaluation, they were going to do a call for a new service, and they put out the call and they got a bunch of proposals and they narrowed it down and they decided on a new payroll system and they announced the new payroll system. And they came to me because of the tremendously big kick pushback they got when they said they announced a new payroll system. They said, we just told them we didn't even give a date, that we were rolling it out. We just said, "Hey, we heard you guys. The payroll system was clunky. We're going to a brand new payroll system." It solved just about all the problems that you guys mentioned. We're super excited about it. You'll hear more next week. And they're all their department heads. Emails were filled with. What do you mean, what are you talking about? You know, this makes me super uncomfortable. I don't like that. Why would you tell us about it this way? And they came to me because I help people with changing navigation professionally. And they said, Dr. G, what is happening here and what can we do about it? There are four different strategies that help people, other people navigate change more easily. The first one is both the simplest and

maybe the hardest, because it's not actually doing something. And I know that you are all people who want to do something to just fix it so they don't have to feel this way. We don't have to have this conversation. There are seven cognitive barriers to connecting with someone who's struggling with navigating a change, and one of them is not understanding why it's hard and not like one another is disagreeing with the emotion that they're expressing to you. And so wherever these people were in loss, distrust, discomfort, and they heard all three, the biggest frustration, the tech the chief technology officer for this large company was having was they should be happy. They are having the wrong emotion. The first thing to do as a strategy is to let go of your expectations about other people's emotions.

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*Dr G:* There's no wrong feelings. There's wrong behavior. There's wrong actions for sure. We can judge people on their behaviors and their actions, but there's no wrong feelings. So stop trying to control what other people feel. And this thing that's hard to do is to effectively express empathy without trying to fix it. I understand how frustrating that might sound simply saying, Hey, you are valued, so I care about what's happening for you. I care about how this lands for you. I don't have to agree with it. I don't have to endorse it. I don't have to like the decisions or the behavior that came out of it. I don't even have to understand it if I can simply say you are valued. I care about how this lands for free, then what can you do? Well, in this case, in this example, they could give a little bit more processing time. They could say, we heard you. So this is going to be a Q3 initiative, not a cue to initiative. You can give some more transparently sourced information. Here is an anonymous entry. Anonymous we're not going to say who said what, but here is the report on your concerns with our old payroll system. 75% of you said this, 60% of you said this, said this, of this. Here are all of the systems. Here are all the vendors that we solicited pitches from. This is the one we picked and why we picked it. We're not asking you to relitigate that, but we are giving you transparently sourced information. Lastly, some autonomy. They worked really hard, this

company, to find three different things that people could choose about how and when they opted into the new payroll. Got it. The end result in 2023 is the same, but the experience of it and the competence of navigating that change skyrocketed for their people.

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*Danny:* To reflect back to you, make sure I'm tracking along. Empathy is a beautiful thing. Not labeling emotions is wrong. There's behaviors that are problematic, but everybody's emotions, expressing what we hear and how you might revise action and take action, how to add more transparency to the conversation and then giving people autonomy and choice. These are some ways that we can empower our teams. I see a lot of chatter in the chat about resilience, and so I think it's a good part in terms of our podcast. How do you define resilience?

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*Dr G:* As you ask people to rate their resilience, that people might be answering different questions. Especially as I'm starting to read the chat and understand that in your industry you have some industry accepted terms that include the word resilience. That maybe means something a little bit different than what we're talking about. We are talking about human resilience and someone pointed out that this is maybe not the same thing as infrastructure resilience. Although, over a beer, I'd be happy to make the argument that maybe it does.

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*Guest 2:* I'm happy to just chip in for 60 seconds. Generally I'm surrounded by people way smarter than me. Correct me if I'm wrong. But generally, when we're talking about resiliency in the green building nerd, there's there's variety. There's two aspects. One is, okay, we know the probability of extreme weather events is increasing. How does your facility respond if there is a flood, if there is a blackout, how does it come back from that? The other one borders onto kind of adaptability. We know that if we're



designing a building for the summer temperature now, that summer temperature is going to be quite different if the building stays up for 50 years. If we're saying it's going to be 35 centigrade in the summer, we know that's going to go up. So how does a building cope in the future? So that's very loosely kind of how does the building respond to the general trend that's kind of borders on adaptability. And then there's the resilience of like we we think there's going to be more likelihood of nasty things happening. How does the whole infrastructure and how do the people recover? So there is ranges from don't put mechanical stuff in the basement where it might flood to. Is there a safe place for people to go and that kind of thing? I'll get I'll get loads of people. Tell me if I've got that wrong.

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*Dr G:* I really appreciate that. And that is, I think, a specific way to that definition is incorporated in the social science definition of resilience. Resilience is the ability to navigate change and come through it mission focused. So for a person, that means the ability to navigate change and come through it with integrity and purpose aligned to your own purpose for an organization that is the ability to navigate, change and come through it aligned to your mission for a building, I mean, as simply as one building that makes sense to me to how are we going to protect and support the people and systems that are happening inside? When you think about that ability to navigate change, that goes to my argument that all change has some stress built in, that all change gives our brains pause. But certainly the changes that you're talking about, be it a weather emergency, any other sort of disaster, that is a sudden and profound change. Resilience is considering not just how am I right this minute, which is a really important question to be able to answer. But what skills and strategies can I use given the fact that change is both a constant meaning, the fact that it is a constant and that its velocity is really picking up. The rate of change is really increasing. How do we navigate that?

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*Danny:* Now, a very important question you brought up, if we had a beer together to talk about industry resilience and personal resilience, what beer would we have? I need to know.

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*Dr G:* You're asking me your brand of beer? Because I only like drinks that taste like ice cream.

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*Danny:* I was curious what kind of beer you would get. I for sure would get a Westmalle. A triple From Belgium. That is the world's best beer, in my opinion.

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*Dr G:* I don't know. It feels a little elitist. I'm just kidding.

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*Danny:* Well, it's tasty, and it's the world's best, you know? Let's go back to Resilience. You've identified eight skills in terms of your work that help grow resilience. Can you give a quick overview of those eight skills?

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*Dr G:* Absolutely. To give the background, what in the world are the skills that build resilience? A team of researchers and I at Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University, which is my alma mater, we went digging to know when we say resilience, what do we mean? We are talking about resilience in a work setting, but we're talking about human resilience. What do we mean? What are we asking about in the scientifically validated tools that measure resilience and know no beers that taste like ice cream? When we think about what those skills are, when we measure that in adults, what are we measuring? It turns out that in the 250 questions that are used in those tools, we're asking over and over again about eight different skills. I can tick through those because some people will have trouble moving on from that until they hear what the eight skills are. I have

some resources if people would like to read more about them, but those eight skills and you might think about yourself as you listen to them. How do I navigate change and do I utilize these skills? And to what degree? The ability to build connections, set boundaries, open to possibilities, manage discomfort, set goals, find options, take action and persevere.

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*Dr G:* In no particular order, actually, I had to pick in order to give them to you. But in no particular order and in no particular combination. Because it depends on both you, the operator of those skills and the situation that you're using them on. You might need a different set of those eight combinations of some of those eight, depending on the change that you're navigating.

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*Danny:* When I asked the LEED fellows, was there a specific skill there that you heard that you would like to hear Dr. G. Dig into a little bit more.

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*Dr G:* What do you think about that? I'm going to say that just being on this call means that building connections is already a skill that you work on, that you nurture, and fundamentally that you must see the value in. But I wonder if there might be one of the others. When you think about either your own resilience or helping people be more open to your ideas because you are change makers.

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*Dr G:* I see Steve with his hand raised, so Steve feel free to either put it on the chat or come off mute. You're welcome to join us.

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*Steve:* Dr. G. Perseverance would be an interesting one for this group. As green building practitioners, it takes a lot of effort to sustain pushing the

world towards our vision. So this is a group of people that persevere in the face of adversity all the time. I'm curious about that.

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*Dr G:* Absolutely. Someone in the chat mentioned managing discomfort, and I think that we could talk a little bit about those, too, if that works for you. Danny, here's the issue. I want you to think for a moment. Every time in our society, we try to get someone to persevere. We have one thing we do over and over and over again in commencement speeches, in middle school conversations about trying again. We give examples of individuals who have persevered to success. That is our go to strategy for getting other people to persevere. We say, look at Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison, the guy who invented the Dyson vacuum cleaner, and it took him 5000 patents to get there. When I sat down to write the section of my book, that's about perseverance, because we had identified these eight skills, this is where I struggled the most not to understand the value of it, but to figure out how to teach it. Because it occurred to me not only do we not in general teach it, but. I discovered this dichotomy, Danny. Finish this sentence for me. We say to children often, if at first you don't succeed.

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*Danny:* Try. Try again.

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*Dr G:* Yes. Finish this sentence for me. We say to adults, often doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results is the definition of insanity, right? I sat down to write this section and thought, how do I reconcile those two issues? I recognized that try, try again is not the whole story. When we sit down with a kid who's frustrated, trying to tie their shoes or do a problem in school, we show them something. We don't just say, well, try again unless they really haven't tried and we're trying to get them to put in effort for the first time. Perseverance is not one action doing it. Repeating it is two actions. It is repeating and changing something, maybe

something small. The color of the pen you use, the friend you're sitting next to while you do it. The music you're listening to, the day of the week, the time of day, who knows? It could be something small. It could be something huge. Turn it upside down. Try it on a different platform. Go to a different branch of the government that you're arguing with. But we say try again and change something. So the first question for an adult who needs to persevere is to figure out what choices do I have? That brings us back to that same question. What choices do I have? Even though I'm in discomfort or loss or distrust about this, not working should work. Last time I'm right, they need this or they ask for this or this will work, but someone isn't accepting it. So in addition to those strategies about how you can help them be more resilient when you are trying to use this resilience skill, please remember to not only try again to figure out what's the thing I'm doing differently this time. Does that help?

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*Danny:* I think that's great. In terms of trying again, the definition of insanity, it's like keep keep going but try something new as well. I think there was one more skill that you wanted to dig into, and then we'll end this show with the same questions Charlie always likes to ask.

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*Dr G:* Okay. I really love the idea of talking about managing discomfort because honestly, if I could wave a magic wand and give one of these eight skills to everyone in the world right now, it would be the ability to manage discomfort in a safer way. We all have dozens of strategies for managing our discomfort. They fall into three categories: negative, neutral and positive coping mechanisms. Too many people find themselves so uncomfortable or with so few positive and neutral coping mechanisms that they just go to the negative ones over and over and over again. We call those some of them red flags. Red flag behaviors like substance abuse, blowing up relationships, blowing off obligations, self harm behaviors or other harm behavior, other people harm behaviors. The more positive and

neutral coping mechanisms that we have to manage discomfort, the easier it is to not get stuck. Remember I said that when you navigate change, you could feel happy and still feel that loss, distrust and discomfort. In the exact same way you can make choices and act and still feel some loss distressed in discomfort. We can feel different things at the same time. That's part of being a human. But if you can remember, what helps you manage that discomfort? Much more likely to be able to think, okay, what choices do I have? How do I start to get through this? A couple of ways that we can build that skill of managing discomfort in ourselves. And right now I'm really just talking about it in yourself when you want to figure out How do I manage discomfort? Ask yourself how you're already doing it. Quite literally, make a list. This list is only for you. You can burn it afterwards. So nobody else is going to see this but make a really honest, transparent list about all the things that you do when you don't like how you feel to distract yourself or change how you feel. Some of those things you might consider positive. Maybe you exercise or create art or listen to music or hug someone that wants a hug. Some of those you might consider neutral, and it's about how you consider them, not how I would consider them. You might consider some of those neutral and some examples of those might be playing a video game on your phone that doesn't really go anywhere, but brings you comfort or sleep. Might be positive or neutral depending on your situation. Or eating ice cream. You heard my passion for ice cream here. If I don't do it 23 hours a day. That could probably be neutral or maybe even positive. You also have some negative coping mechanisms: your irritability, your frustration, your avoidance or withdrawal, your anxiety. Those all will bring out behaviors that don't serve you or anyone else. You're not responsible for your feelings. But the longer a list you have of tools for managing your discomfort that are positive or neutral, the safer you'll be and the more easily you'll get through that. So look at that list. That is as honest to list as you can make. It may take you a couple of days to think of most of the things you do scratch out everything that is damaging to you or someone else in the amount that you do it for you. This is your decision making. Copy that list over now and you have all your

positive and neutral coping mechanisms. Now, if there's a situation in which you are really struggling to manage your discomfort, circle all the things on that positive and neutral list that you can do in that setting that you can carry into that moment or that situation or that venue where you are having trouble managing your discomfort. And then and this is the ongoing work, build those two lists, listen to podcasts where you hear things that other people do or read biographies by people you admire and see what they did to manage their discomfort or talk to people that you trust and say, What do you do that you're not embarrassed about to manage your discomfort? Think about yourself and things you did as a child that manage your discomfort. Think about other ways that you could and grow that list for actually ever, and you will get more and more facile at navigating change.

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*Danny:* Dr. G. Thank you for being our guest here in the Green Building Matters podcast. I learn something new from you every time we talk. I am so indebted to you and very just grateful to have you in my network. I'm going to finish today's show with some questions that Charlie always likes to ask. One of them's around books, so of course, write your book from stress to resilience, folks need to pick that up. It'll be in the show notes for the listener, for the LEED Fellows. I am putting that in the chat right now if you want to check it out. But outside of your book, what is one book that you would recommend listeners of today's show would check out?

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*Dr G:* I think because we're in such an online world, there's a book that came out last fall that really made an impact on me. It's called You Are What You Click okay, and it is about how to use creativity and connection to be really intentional in your online life. I found it really impactful, easy to read and had useful strategies.

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*Danny:* Great. Is there any career advice you'd wish you'd known a bit earlier?

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*Dr G:* Yes. I wish I realized it's all useful that my path has been unusual. The older I get, the more I realize everybody's path is pretty unusual. Every time I've made a decision, a career decision that was aligned with my intention, even if it was not obviously immediately helpful at some point, it was just really briefly I was my undergrad degree. I mentioned Carnegie Mellon. It wasn't in business, it was in drama. I was a theater major. I went out and I worked in theater and television for about six years, including at Second City Improv in Chicago. I bailed on that to go to medical school, and then I ended up back there 20 years later doing a show with them about resilience. If you allow it, I think all of the decisions you make with integrity, even if they seem not to turn out well, can be useful. Regret is not all that useful. That's what I'm finding.

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*Danny:* What is an encouraging message you'd like everyone listening to the Green Building Matters podcast to hear today.

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*Dr G:* On this topic of navigating change, you have mad skills. You have navigated so many changes in your life, both professionally and personally. When you're a little bit more intentional about recruiting those experiences and skills and then polishing the one that seems like it would be most useful to you in the current. Situation, you will find that your effectiveness at navigating change jumps forward.

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*Danny:* Thank you for listening to the Green Building Matters podcast. You can get the show notes and links from all our episodes at [gbes.com/Podcast](http://gbes.com/Podcast) The Green Building Matters podcast releases every Wednesday with the Green Building professional here in the industry with



some pro tips to help you advance your career. If you enjoyed today's show, tell a friend, click subscribe and leave an honest rating and review.

00:33:11

*Charlie:* 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 were stoked and just so glad you 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 are getting straight from us, straight to you. Thank you for listening to this episode of the Green Building Matters podcast at BBC.com. Our mission is to advance the Green Building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to GB's 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 guests. 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.