

From Movie Sets to LEED Fellow with Jennifer Berthelot-Jelovic 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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Charlie: Hi everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Thanks for listening. Every week I get an interview, a green building professional somewhere in the world. Godday I've got Jen on. She's a LEED Fellow out in Los Angeles. We're going to see those roots maybe even tied to the Midwest. Jen, how are you doing today?

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Jennifer: Great, thanks. Thanks for having me.

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Charlie: I can't wait to unpack your story. We see each other in different circles around green buildings. I like to take our guests to get a peek into where'd you get that start? So, where did you grow up and go to school?

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Jennifer: I grew up in Stowe, Ohio, so between Akron and Kent and I went to high school at an all girls high school in Akron, Our Lady of the Arms and then Ohio University in case Western and Cleveland before moving to Los Angeles.

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Charlie: When you were studying and thinking about what you might want to do when you grow up, what were you thinking and where did you end up? Tell us what that was like.

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Jennifer: It's actually a really long story. I'll try to condense it. I knew I wanted to help people save the world, but that was really what it looked like. When I went to college, I originally went premed, thinking I was going to help people that way, quickly learned that was not something I wanted to do, and I decided to do psychology before I found social work. I got my master's in social work to run nonprofits and was extremely burnt out from working in sexual assault, foster care and adoption. Ironically, I had an opportunity to work in the movie industry and took it and moved to L.A. as soon as I got out of grad school and I moved to L.A., worked in the movie and music industry for about ten years, and my boss at the time decided we needed to build a LEED platinum airplane hangar for our 737 deejay here in Burbank, California. I said, I produce movies and music. What's LEED? Why does it need to be platinum? Why is this my job? And that was in 2006. Imagine LEED in 2006 trying to apply an airplane hangar to new construction. I used to call Rick Parisi all the time and be like, "Rick, this isn't fair. We can't do this." He's like, JEN, that's not how this works. By 2008, we had built a LEED platinum airplane hangar. It was not only platinum. I realized a few years ago working on our website, it was also not only net zero but net positive, but we didn't even have that terminology in 2008. So that was super exciting. That was my first project and subsequently they opened a construction company. For four years I moved over from entertainment to the construction company and worked with them and was doing sustainability over there. Loved it. After four years they came to me and said, "You need to start your own company. People want to hire you as a consultant and don't need our GC services." In 2012 I started ASAP, a sustainable production and at that same time the WELL building standard was being created. My boss happened to have been an investor in

that. I got involved with that before it was released to the public and very quickly became an expert in WELL building standard early on as well. For the last 11 years now I've been running a company and we work globally doing sustainability and wellness both for buildings and at the organizational portfolio level.

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Charlie: Pre-med kind of came back in the form of WELL and they were early in that. I recently took my family and we went to the Warner Brothers Studio, which has a LEED platinum building there. I was impressed to take a plaque, we call it there self in front of that LEED plaque. There are a lot of LEED projects. And that hangar, what a great early project. I usually ask, did you have an aha moment to get into sustainability and make a career in green buildings and I think you kind of explain that to us. How about the entrepreneurship journey? It sounds like you were pretty much told you should do this.

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Jennifer: I followed the guys I worked with at Shangri-La from Shangri-La Entertainment Music, Shangri-La Construction, and I knew they were going to lead me to where I was supposed to go. I knew it wasn't entertainment. I knew I was meant to be doing something else and somehow they were going to get me there. Once I started doing sustainability with them, I was like, "Wait, I can get paid to be a tree hugging hippie with business sense." This is my dream job. When they said, "You should go out and do this on your own," I'm like, ``This is scary, but I've got them behind and their clients. A really exciting opportunity.

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Charlie: Sometimes we need that nudge. Talk about maybe any mentors along the way, anyone you looked up to or maybe someone opened a door for you. Anyone you want to give a shout out to?

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Jennifer: It goes so far back to mentors in high school. I still visit when I'm home in Ohio. My favorite high school biology teacher, Mrs. Curtis, very favorite, wouldn't be here without her. There were so many right along the way. When I got into sustainability, it was so unique because often when you're out in the world and business people are fighting to get ahead they don't necessarily want their competitors to win. When you work in sustainability and wellness, we want everyone to succeed because we have the same end goal to help people and save the planet. It was really incredible when I started to have people like Jamie Nash of Three Square Zinke, who I just saw as this incredibly successful woman doing all the right things, working with all the right types of clients, say, "Hey, if you need anything ever, I'm here for you". That was awesome. I've tried to repay that as I've gone along, having all these people and even the guys at Shangri-La who taught me so much business, I literally would not be anywhere near. We are where I am without Steve and Andy and everybody else in that office over the ten years I worked with them and so I could never narrow it down. I feel like there have been so many different mentors in every area of life since I was a child that have just really got me where I am. I think that's why I'm so involved in trying to pay that back, because I'm so grateful for that.

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Charlie: Thanks for giving us a peek in here. I love it. You're right, this industry, this green building movement, it's all about that rising tide and this common mission. said. Looking back, what are some of my proudest achievements?

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Jennifer: In general, being a mom, I have two boys, they're 12 and 14. Of course, they're high on that list. Having a business for ten years, it's taken a lot, especially as a single mom, doing it that entire time. It's but it's so rewarding. Its ups and downs, but I really do love it. If I look at some of my favorite projects, we did a project called Step Up on Vine where we took

some of the most mentally ill homeless on the streets of Los Angeles and put them into permanent living communities that essentially had solar and had gardens on the roof and were LEED platinum and really made them feel valued and had health and wellness in mind. And this was back before the wealth standard was there to help guide that. Looking at some of my favorite projects, the hangar, of course, was just such an incredible game changer in how you could do things, especially in that industry. We're doing some senior living work right now and that's also super rewarding to know that we can be touching 280 senior living communities around the country and actually be making a difference in their COVID response and their health and wellness for their employees. And looking at how they are doing to electrification and urbanization and all of these decarbonization and all of these things. I'd say where we get to give back is probably where I'm most excited and proud about my work.

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Charlie: That's fantastic. You get to work all over sometimes just right there in your backyard and your community. It's just so meaningful. Talk to us a little bit about credentials and the USGBC and well, so to our listeners, some have been doing this a long time and you're giving them a spark. They're so excited about what they heard. Some are just now getting into this movement. What have credentials meant to you? What is maybe volunteering with WPI or the USGBC? Can you just talk about that for a minute?

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Jennifer: I'll start on the side of USGBC, because I've been with them for probably about 15 years volunteering. USGBC National, I have been involved with them since 2006 or 2008. Something along those lines. I've attended Green Build, I'm a LEED AP B and C, I'm a LEED AP Homes, LEED faculty, LEED Fellow . Obviously I believe in those credentials and I'm honored to be a LEED Fellow . The credentials, they're a value. They help people understand that you're committed, that you've done some of

that work. When I look at USGBC, L.A. is a chapter where I was on the board for six and a half years. Some of my dearest friends in life now personally have come from that chapter. Some of my greatest mentors, my partners, collaborators, clients plugging in to that chapter and being involved both as a volunteer with everything that they do. And the Center for Green Schools and Apple. I can never get that one right. Give back the day of service. There's just so many ways you can plug in and learn and people. And that's been a huge, huge benefit, an asset for my career and my company. I can't imagine where I would be in my career or how much I've learned without both the national and the local Los Angeles chapter.

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Charlie: I know the LA chapter is very, very active there. For our listeners in Southern California, make sure you reach out. You mentioned you got an opportunity to be so early in the wellness movement before the pandemic. It's like, "hey, we need to talk about healthy buildings." And then the pandemic hits and it's like, "How do I make this a healthy space?" Can you hit on that a little bit more?

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Jennifer: When I was introduced to the WELL building standard, it was like a pilot. It hadn't been released to the market. This was 2012 and I was like, Wait a minute. There's something I've been telling people my whole life. Like I'd been a vegetarian for 30 some years now. I'm a vegan and I raised my kids that way. Like all the things I'd been doing around health and talking about for all these years was suddenly in this standard, much like LEED. It was like, "okay, we can measure how healthy the building is for the people or planet now. We can measure how healthy it is for the people." It was just like everything that was missing and LEED I had been looking for more right was in WELL and so to look at these ten concepts of air light water mind all of them, it also included a lot of my social. When you look at community and mind and some of those features and now the equity rating that will be released in the fall, that was really getting back to

my social work roots of like I get to now take care of people in a meaningful way that actually has an impact. It's measurable, it's verifiable. And I can do that at this large scale. Whereas in social work I was really sad and burnt out and quite frankly hated the world and everybody in it. And this allows me to make a difference in a way that I really wanted to. WELL has done that in a way that's very scientific and global and easy to implement. We've been actually working with the World Building Standard for ten years now. I was one of the first APS provisional-only peacekeepers in the world, while faculty and I travel the world teaching WELL, and we even teach it to a lot of our competitors. Again, our dear friends, we want everyone to succeed. We want the movement to succeed. The more people that get it right, the more healthier people we have in the world living longer, more vibrant lives.

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Charlie: I'm seeing the pre-med, the social work helping. Jen, tell us a little more about your company and how it's grown over the years. What are you best known for and where do you want to take things?

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Jennifer: Great question. It has ebbs and flows. We grow and then sometimes we'll shrink down a little and then we'll grow again. We really started with LEED naturally. When we got in, that's what we were focused on. We would have people come to us looking for a kind of white glove sustainability based, not doing LEED . So we did a lot of that as well. Honestly, I got started pretty quickly after I started my company. We very quickly became known for WELLl because we were the only consultants doing it and working on all those first projects in the world outside of Fellows and then AWB. In the market we're still known a great deal for being the WELL experts and doing that at scale with portfolios. We were some of the first portfolios in the world implementing WELL. I love that and that is somewhere we want to continue to stay. Working with well-being is at the forefront of it because we really believe in it and think

that it's going to make such a huge impact in people's lives and in such a meaningful way with LEED . When I started to work with portfolios, I realized I may know WELL at a portfolio level, but I don't know how to implement the portfolio level of a large corporation that I needed some of that knowledge and we brought a president to our company, John Harrison, and he had been at Starbucks for 12 years and overseeing their LEED volume program of over 1600 certifications in all 50 states and 20 plus countries. Bringing John on, I think it also opened us back up to that LEED market more where people were like, "Oh, wait, these people know how to do LEED volume as well." We've really become known now as the sustainability and wellness people that can do it globally and for organizations at scale. And I love that. What we've really noticed in the last two years is the ESG market has been flooding us with requests. Some of that work that we now have taken on over the last two years is looking at ESG from the organizational level because we're already implementing all their sustainability and wellness attributes. I'm still helping to put that together in a more cohesive ESG reporting strategy all the way down to BREGGs or any other built environment level reporting for ESG. And then everything from looking at decarbonization and electrification and our portfolio benchmarking play to zero, for instance, with Arc. So we've been really branching out in the last two years and bringing on a lot more scope that fulfills ESG holistically because that's what the market and our clients are demanding. That's what some of the Fortune 500 and very large companies are putting out in the RFP is we want someone to come in and fulfill all of these ESG strategies and needs for us from top to bottom and bottom to top. And we've created partnerships to be able to do that.

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Charlie: Oh wow, we've made some good moves. I interviewed John when he was at Starbucks on this podcast, I guess several years ago. Really great, great, great advocate for all things sustainability. It's exciting to hear. This next question I love to ask is what's next? Jen, what do you think is coming at us down the road in this green building movement?

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Jennifer: It's such a good question. No, I do think that we're going to see sustainability as a whole, I think people are going to be focusing more on health and wellness. I think that's very important. Coming out of that slide, I really see diversity, equity and inclusion as something that's really being sought. I was at the Green Sports Alliance Summit in Minneapolis this summer, and I had so many people saying, we're looking for a solution around this. It was like, oh, good news that the International World Building Institute has a WELL equity rating coming out that had a two year global advisory to sit down and say, you know what matters? Who's not at the table, what voice aren't we hearing? And I think that's so much of what's important in sustainability. In sustainability, as we look at it, we've done a really great job in our buildings. We've started to understand how to make the difference. We know how to do these things now. It's a matter of the innovators who are always innovators and willing to spend the money and do it first. And then we have the codes or whatever the laws to bring us along to also pull the people behind that aren't willing to jump on or make those changes. I do think that as we look at sustainability, it's going to be more people focused. How are we making sure transportation is being reduced on the sustainable sustainability side for the planet? But then how are we helping people move and healthy ways as well? Looking at electrification, we don't need gas in our homes. That's not healthy for us. But that also will help us to be able to use solar and not have to have gas coming into our home. Looking at how sustainability and human health work together and then also ensuring that everybody has a seat at the table and a voice while sitting at that table.

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Charlie: Wow, you nailed it. I'm going to agree with all those things and still have a lot of work to do right on the green building front. But fortunately, I personally think we've made a lot of progress and it's easier to have the conversations but still work to do and look at all these other things. It goes back to what you said earlier. Just there's more good to do

here and a lot of like minded people. We're making some changes. So let's get into a little bit more about you. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

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Jennifer: Oh, wow. I don't know if anybody's ever asked me that question.

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Charlie: Humbling question. Sometimes if you have a hard time answering it, what would your colleagues say? What's your specialty or gift?

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Jennifer: I would say it's one of two things. It's either that I'm a good connector. I'm really great at putting people in things together or people together and also giving back. Like my commitment to actually taking care of people like this isn't a job to me. This is my passion. Everything I'm doing is truly authentic and that I want to take care of people and give back and make sure everybody has a healthy, safe, sustainable life.

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Charlie: That's good, good answers. I love it. So do you have any good habits or routines, rituals you could tell us about?

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Jennifer: It's funny. I feel like they come in ebbs and flows. Yoga is one of my favorites. I really try to get to yoga regularly because obviously it's a good workout, but also it's like mind, body and spirit. And so often just to take that hour, hour and 15 minutes to sit on my mat and just breathe and be present and have nothing electronic or no disruptions really is good. So I try to do that often the weeks that I have my kids, we go to the gym instead. Getting to either the gym or yoga, making sure I'm getting that movement. I've been a vegan for nine months. I've been a vegetarian for 30 some years. I would say that type of diet for me is kind of like a habit or

ritual of something that's super important to like who I am and what I do. Getting enough sleep is also really high on my list. I didn't used to be that person. I used to be that person who could go without sleep and work really, really late. And now my sleep, I know, is super vital for my performance the next day.

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Charlie: For that self awareness on the vegetarian and vegan side, I'm sure you get asked, what's the hardest part? I'm not going to ask you that. What's your favorite part about just making that a priority?

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Jennifer: It's actually how I feel. Being a vegetarian forever, like I've always kind of felt healthy. But when I went plant based like nine months ago, it was supposed to be a seven day plant based challenge. I started losing so much weight that I was like, I'm just going to keep doing this. I ended up at this point, I lost about £30 total. I had gained weight during COVID, and everyone's like, wait, all you did was cut out dairy and eggs, right? And what it was wasn't the dairy and eggs aspect of it because I was already vegetarian. I can no longer eat the cookies, the cupcakes, the ice cream, all the junk food my kids would have and leave. I didn't have self control and would just eat it. I can't eat that. I can't go in and out and grab milk. All that kind of stuff. The weight loss was actually all the sugar and crappy foods that I could still eat as a vegetarian, that eating plant based or vegan, I couldn't eat. I feel healthier, like, like as a habit or like what I like most is like what I'm somewhere and I actually say, Oh, I can't get this. Like, there's that disappointment. But I'm actually happy because I know like, oh, in the past I would have eaten that. I wouldn't have felt well after I ate it. And now I'm not having that experience or putting the weight back on. So that's been really inspiring.

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Charlie: Thanks for sharing that with us. I mean, it's so, so important and you're nailing it. That's awesome. Thank you. I'm a fan of a bucket list. What are one or two things maybe on your bucket list?

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Jennifer: Yeah, that's a good question. I try to live my bucket list, but there definitely are countries I haven't been to, like traveling to countries I haven't been for years up there.

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Charlie: Well, it's one of those countries, though you'll get you'll get to.

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Jennifer: Croatia is high on that list.

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Jennifer: It's funny, I've been all around to countries surrounding them. Vietnam as well. There's a few over there that I want to get to that I haven't made it to. Yeah. So those are countries that I want to go see what else is on my bucket list. So funny. I should have liked canned answers to these and I don't.

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Charlie: I've heard a lot of different things. You'd be surprised by some of the answers I get. But I think it's just these are the things that get us excited that if we want to happen, we've got to be intentional about it. I know you get to those countries. Anything else pops into your head there?

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Jennifer: No, I'm just thinking. It's like I like to build schools in other countries like Nepal and Malawi. I guess on my bucket list is getting to the other countries that I work with, a nonprofit called Build On, and they build it in very specific countries. I've done Malawi and I've done Nepal and I'm going back to Malawi with my company next summer. But I'm like, okay, I

do want to get to Guatemala and I want to get to Haiti and I want to get to these other countries. I guess my bucket list would be giving back to build on by getting to other countries, but also looking at what are other ways I can be giving back at that level of building a school in another country?

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Charlie: Amazing. Oh, good answer. Hey, next, let's talk about books. It doesn't have to be a building specific, industry specific book, but is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners?

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Jennifer: Oh, wow. That's an interesting question, Charlie for.

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Charlie: And I'm so proud of you for not like preparing and writing out your answers. This is really fun. You're doing great.

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Jennifer: Books that I would recommend. It's so funny. My favorite book is The Little Prince, which is a children's book, but it really has so many.

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Charlie: Our listeners have kids. They'll note that, no, that's good.

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Jennifer: It really is one of those books that's like even as an adult, you go back and you read it and it just holds true to like so many really good, important life lessons. not the typical like, oh, I'm trying to think of how all the amazing all of my friends have written green building books. I feel like everybody I know, like I'm constantly like I've stocked with my friends books. They're all so incredible.

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Charlie: We're going to put that one in the show notes. That is an excellent answer. My boys are 14, 11 and nine, so. Okay, good, good answer. There's two more questions. This is fantastic. This one, career advice. Is there anything you wish you'd have known earlier in your career?

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Jennifer: There's a lot of things I wish I would have known. It's so interesting really looking at it like I have a lot of 22 to 26 year olds that work for us and they really understand their value and worth. I don't feel like I'm 45. 20- 25 years ago when I was starting out, I didn't know that I read my value or worth or how to speak up for myself in a situation in a room full of people or and I'm pretty outspoken. I'm the one in the room that typically does. But just looking at how people are prepared these days to enter the workforce compared to how I felt prepared to actually deal with people and politics and all of that goes into having a job in career. I'm grateful I have my master's in social work and psychology because that helped me a great deal. But I think just knowing my value and worth and how to speak up for myself and how to find really good mentors is probably the things that I would have told myself to start with.

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Charlie: A lot of good wisdom here you're sharing with our listeners. My last question, let's say someone is listening to this podcast. They're loving to hear your story. You made some adjustments and gosh, look at you over the last ten, 11 years, just going all in, building up your business here, making a difference, and they're getting inspired. But let's say they're just now jumping into the green building movement. I've been doing it a while, but let's say they're just jumping in. Do you have any words of encouragement for them?

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Jennifer: Get involved. Find your local sustainability organizations, whether it's USGBC. There's so many great organizations around the

country. Volunteer. Get to know people because those are going to become your mentors, your colleagues, the people who hire you. They're going to become your clients. It's just a great way to find out what people are doing and start making those contacts and figure out sustainability is such a wide topic and there are so many areas to choose from. Just get involved in nonprofits and organizations working in those areas so you can get to know people and opportunities. I think that that's probably the best way to start jumping in.

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Charlie: As we've said, it's a rising tide. And hey, thank you for sharing your story today. Everyone listening, hop on LinkedIn and connect with Jenn. Let her know what you thought of the interview. I want to say thanks for spending time with us today.

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Jennifer: Thanks. This is great, Charlie. Thanks for having me.

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Charlie: 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 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 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 in next week's episode.

