

## **Perkins+Will's Director of Sustainability: Kathy Wardle, LEED Fellow**

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*Charlie:* 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 green building professionals from around the globe to share their war stories, advice and unique insight into how sustained ability 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:* Everybody. Welcome to the next episode, the Green Building Matters Podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti, and I get to interview a green building professional once a week and really learn about their green building journey. Today I've got a green building expert with us. We've got Kathy Wardle with us from Perkins Will. She's a principal and director of sustainability in Vancouver, British Columbia: Kathy, how are you doing today?

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*kathy:* Great thanks, very much for willing to speak to me.

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*Charlie:* I know we connect through LinkedIn Group and actually Perkins Will ,we do some education together, helping professionals pass their LEED exams, but today it's about you and your stories. Take us back. Where did you grow up?

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*kathy:* I grew up in Vancouver. I went to school and did an undergraduate degree at the University of British Columbia, so the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon. I'm not an architect and I'm not an engineer and I did a degree in environmental studies and international studies and was very kind of very much interested in the impact that the built environment had on our environment. After taking a year and a half off after my bachelor's degree, I went back to school and did a masters in environmental resource management studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the other side of Canada. I come to this industry with a very interdisciplinary approach, trying to understand how this industry can be better from a sustainability perspective.

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*Charlie:* It's fascinating that background and obviously working with a large firm now, so connect a little bit on maybe the green side. Where did you start? Would you first start to hear about sustainability?

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*kathy:* I've grown up in a family that has been connected to the real estate building sector. I have a dad who's an architect, who was a developer in the city of Vancouver. I have an uncle who's a builder and in real estate, so I kind of grew up in this industry. It was more through growing up during a time of heightened environmental awareness in British Columbia, there were huge protests against full growth logging on the west coast of Vancouver Island. That was kind of really during my informative years in high school and it just made me realize that industry is everywhere. Industry has an impact. But how do we work with industry to think about different business practices? When I went on to do my master's program, I realized that the building industry generated, from a kind of waste resource management perspective and did my thesis on looking at the construction and demolition industry and understanding how much waste was generated through the construction industry, particularly in metro Vancouver. I was fortunate enough to meet Thomas Miller, who was working at the time for

the Greater Vancouver Regional Authority, and he was very much interested in having a study done on what kind of market barriers to reusing materials in new construction. Thomas now is the president of the County Green Building Council in Canada, so it was through a series of personal connections that led me to connect with Thomas and that really started my journey and connected me with the Green building industry.

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*Charlie:* Pacific Northwest: my mom's from Oregon actually, even though I'm in Atlanta, Georgia and tells me the stories of recycling, at a young age, obviously the timber industry, and it's just a beautiful part of the country. It's great, you have those routes and Canada, so it's coming together for me. You've been at Perkins Will for quite some time, so fill-in after you have that masters, how did you get into that next position?

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*kathy:* Interestingly enough, when I was working on my masters, Busby and associates in Vancouver had just delivered a project for the city of Vancouver where they had dismantled an existing warehouse and were able to raise about 70% of the materials from that building demolition in the new material testing center. And so that was kind of a feature case study in my master's thesis. When I graduated, I moved back to Vancouver and I hit the streets knocking on doors, saying: "do you need someone like an environmental scientist, somebody who can help your clients understand what sustainability means in architecture and the construction industry? I went back to both associates at the time and kind of pitched this idea to them, this was the day before September 11th, so the next day the market crashed. Everything went sideways for me as a young graduate, but I ended up doing some consulting work in corporate social environmental responsibility. I did some consulting work and then six months later, I got a phone call from Busan Associates saying: hey, are you still available? We have a client who is really interested in developing some tenant guidelines and there's this new rating system that's coming into the market place

called LEED, and we're really interested in knowing whether you can help us with this?" I was lucky that they kept my Redman file and obviously maybe it made an impression during that first interview way back on September tenth. It pays to persevere and to stick to your values and what you're passionate about. When times are tough, like we're in tough times right now during a pandemic. But stick to your values and things will work out.

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*Charlie:* What great wisdom there! When you look back, do you have any mentors? When you looked up you mentioned Thomas Miller there, your family connections to real estate. Who else may have had some influence on you?

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*kathy:* Certainly say there's a few people within my own organization. Peter Busby, who was leading Busby Associates before we joined Perkins and Will, certainly took a chance on me and opened the doors in terms of sustainability, leadership within Perkins and Will. I would say, my current managing director of our Vancouver studio, Susan Gooch, being a female leader running high class design studio now I certainly appreciate her leadership style, her ability to run an organization very effectively, to support young women in in growth and leadership and showing as a woman and as somebody who wants to pursue professional goals but also have a family life, you can do it and there's ways to do it. She's been really, I would say, a strong mentor of mine from a personal and professional development standpoint, and then there's others locally: doctor pool, a leading architect and educator at the University of British Columbia. Certainly inspirational in wanting to educate the next generation. I learned a lot from him in my early days of joining Busbian Associates and Perkins and Will and he's now-retired and he's still a mentor and friend.

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*Charlie:* Some great influences, so you've had. As we understand it, Perkins Will may have acquired the other firm that took that leap of faith on you. Maybe 2004. Tell us about what positions you may be held within Perkins & Will?

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*kathy:* It was certainly a really exciting time in 2004 when we joined Perkins & Will, and we were given a really unique opportunity. I was given a unique opportunity to work with several key leaders within Perkins & Will, Polemic Boyd, who is based in our Atlanta studio in Tomazina. At the time we were empowered to come up with a sustainable sustainability strategy, corporate strategy, how we could help bring about kind of knowledge, leadership across the entire organization, how we should walk the walk-in terms of data day business operations, how we would partner with different industry organizations for continuing our advocacy efforts. How do we work with our clients? What would be key market opportunities? How do we support our clients in developing greener buildings, more sustainable buildings? From 2004 onwards, Paula, myself and Tom and others have led that corporate strategy. I did take maybe a bit of a step back while I had some kids around for a little while, but now I'm back and helping co-lead with a number of leaders from within Perkins & Will, what we've called our living design initiative, recognizing that it's not just about sustainability anymore, it's about a diversity of issues that our clients and our staff are facing and what the world's facing. We recognise that we need to address issues of health and well being, inclusion, diversity and regenerative design. How do we create reliant buildings and communities for the people in which they were designed for, in addition to issues of good practices around sustainability? The marketplace, the changing, dynamic environment in which we're working in terms of a changing climate and recovering from a pandemic. It's really making us all stay at the top of our game in terms of figuring out ways to lead by example and help our client and our staff deliver great projects.

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*Charlie:* The forces to innovate, future proof: that is what we need to do for the environment. Perkins & Will, is really known for your sustainability work, but also, how do your future proof has a company. You're thinking ahead and you're doing that, so now for those that aren't as familiar with Perkins & Will, can you tell us a little bit about the company, 2600 people or more? Tell us all about Perkins Will.

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*kathy:* Great question. We are a global design practice, roughly 252600 people. We certainly work in market sectors around the world. We have a number of offices throughout the United States, in Canada, in China, in Europe and in South America. We are primarily focused in delivering architectural solutions, whether that's new construction or building renovations. We also have a very strong interior design practice and then an urban urban design, urban planning and landscape focused discipline as well. We have definitely a talented organization. We have a lot of partnerships with great organization, great consultant teams that we work with. Our work is a result of those partnerships with consultants and clients around the world absolutely.

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*Charlie:* I'm going to ask 2004: how many people work at the ballpark did you have there at that time?

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*kathy:* Oh gosh, probably under command!

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*Charlie:* Okay, so a lot of growth over that period of time and in your principal and director stability can tell us more about how your data day is.

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*kathy:* Today involves a lot of kinds of identifying opportunities with our clients, whether that sustainability scopes setting strategic policy direction or Perkins & Will I also sit on a global sustainability advisory council. We are part of a larger dark group of companies and so I sit on a collaborative advisory council with members from some of our other partner organizations. While I tend to focus most of my project work out of the Vancouver studio, I get to elevate up and look at kind of bigger strategy issues that's affecting all in Arkansas and then kind of how we mobilize or take on strategic endeavors with our partner organizations.

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*Charlie:* I'm a familiar group as well. Tell us some of your proudest achievements.

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*kathy:* It's a great question. I think I've been very lucky to work on some of Canada's First League green building projects. I was responsible for when I joined the firm at the White Rock Operations Building, which was a small operation center that achieved gold and that was really transformational for the market sector bank, the Metrobank, Uber area and in Canada at the time it was the first new construction project. There had been one existing building that had gone through the LEED system. At the time it kind of brought to light opportunities for market transformation in terms of best practices around material procurement, adoption, renewal, energy technologies, also a lot of deconstruction and opportunities for reusing material. We've had opportunities to work on a number of LEED platinum projects, including the Vanes and botanical gardens, which also pursued living building challenges and got pedal certification, the center for interactive research on sustainability. Today I still oversee a number of projects pursuing high goals, aspirations through the LEED system, but also whether the well building standard or the canary building accounts with zero carbon building standards. Many of our clients are rationing, washing up their performance requirements and our role is to help navigate

what's the best tool system, set of priorities for them to meet those aspirations.

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*Charlie:* That's really cool. I think we're connecting the dots, all the radio systems internationally, to keep up with her.

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*kathy:* It's actually a lot. I mean there's a lot of great tools out there. I still believe LEED is great from a whole listic standpoint. Our clients come to us and say you know what's the best tool for our project, for our occupants, for our stakeholders, for meeting our reporting requirements. We have to help them navigate and justify why third party validation is of value.

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*Charlie:* Absolutely, and speaking of, you're a LEED Fellow, what has that meant for you?

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*kathy:* Before, some were not an architect or an engineer but working in the architecture industry. For me it was, I think, a great milestone in terms of being recognized by my peers for a lot of hard work over a number of years and just gaining additional credibility in an industry where I'm not a registered architect or engineer. Really trying to push the boundaries in a different professional sphere and being recognized for that was really a true honor to be recognized by a notable group of peers.

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*Charlie:* You're racing that our little secret. I got a business degree from Georgia Tech. So for any listeners who are listeners, you can take that note, but not an engineer, but still that's good stuff. Let's look ahead. What's coming next, in a green building?

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*kathy:* One of the top agenda items for a lot of people in our industry is understanding the impact our industry has on climate change. And how do we help our clients decarbonise or make a transition to some kind of electrification? How do we use less energy? It's a huge challenge because we're talking about individual behavior change, habitual changes, adoption of new technologies and building a sense of trust in those technologies that they're going to work and deliver and help us make that transition. There's a huge amount of effort going into understanding the carbon impact of the buildings that we are delivering, where we have a deep bench strength of team experts looking at that for what it means for Perkins & Will specifically. So I think that that's a big top of mind issue for us right now. But while we focus on carbon, I don't think we can lose sight of things like habitat loss and how do we ensure we're restoring habitats in the sites that we're developing on so that we don't lose species of bees or birds or other flora and fauna? Because those also have really valuable benefits in terms of helping moderate our climate, mitigate stormwater, create diversity in a healthy planet. And then you know I think the water is also another top of my issue right. It's probably a more undervalued resource. I know we live in a water rich part of the world, but we are seeing the impact of climate change in terms of droughts, heat domes, and so connected to that is a loss of water availability. And so how can we be more strategic in conserving water? These are all the big issues that I think we're talking about for quite a while. I think there's just a growing heightened awareness from more of the general public around these issues, and then, you know what is our professional responsibility: to address them in the projects that we're delivering for our clients.

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*Charlie:* Well said, I agree with all of that, so everyone listening, go back, remind me for two minutes here and listen to that again. Thank you for sharing what's happening in that heightened awareness. Let's talk a little more about you, Kathy. What's special to your gift?

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*kathy:* Specialty or gift? That's a great question. Sometimes it's hard to reflect on. You know your personal traits or attributes of strain. I think maybe what I'm most passionate about, and where I feel like I'm most effective, is that I like listening to people's problems or challenges in trying to help solve our clients goals through the lens of sustainability. I find that I often help translate our clients aspirations for their program and kind of help make the connections to how we can make them better from a sustainability standpoint. I like facilitating client workshops like strategy development. You know, often more engaged in the front part of a project where it's about strategy development, listening to the client, understanding where they're coming from and then where we can take them in terms of you know how quick do they want to move, what trajectory? Where can we help them make it? Have the biggest impact. It is important to understand where all of us have some strength to play and then also understand when you bring in other experts to help you deliver upon your skill set or what you're helping your client to do.

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*Charlie:* Didn't grow that kind of depth of bench right, I mean the client, any tips on how to be a really good listener, because that's what I'm also picking up here. You're an excellent facilitator, problem solver, but a lot of that's being a good listener right tips for someone that thinks they're not good.

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*kathy:* I think that comes with time. I think I've grown to be a better listener overtime. Sometimes it's just sitting back and letting other people talk and get their ideas out rather than jumping in with your own ideas. Because I think, as you maybe grow more responsible, part of what I see is my rule now is actually to let others emerge and grow and share their voices. Interestingly enough, I heard Barack Obama speak at Greenbuild a couple of years ago and he really talked about surrounding himself with

young, talented expert professionals and really taking the time to listen to them and then they often have their perspective shape. Whether it's policy direction, you know future direction and so he said, surrounding yourself with young, talented people and letting them emerge and grow and listening to them really has made, he felt, made him the better leader and I don't know just listening to him speak about, about that skill set in terms of listening really resonated with me about trying to let people around the table, you know, shine and giving people the chance to shine too. I think that that's the role of being a good mentor.

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*Charlie:* I was in Atlanta right a couple of years ago. What a great talk, and you're practicing that now. Let's talk about either good routines, rituals, habits, or any good habits, routines you can share.

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*kathy:* One of your pre interview questions was like: have you read a good book recently and just related to kind of routine and habits? I recently read Atomic Habits by James Clear. I don't know if I don't know if you got it. I just found it really interesting because I think in the last two years, with a pandemic, people's behavior has changed and we've had to adjust our work habits, and so I read it kind of, as all our organization was talking about how do we get people to come back into into the workplace because we have to change your habits? We've all been very comfortable working from home and how do you start a new routine, how do you start to begin to change those habits and leave behind bad habits? There's a lot to learn. It doesn't happen overnight. For me you know part of you know changing habits or setting good habits is I really try and take my professional working hours and take them seriously. It's you know how you get up in the day? How do you start your day? How do you kind of put in place a clear division between home and work? I have three kids. I really try to prioritize when I'm at home. It's time with my kids, like putting the phone away and turning off my email as much as possible. That's been a little harder during

the pandemic because work is at home. Being deliberate during this kind of work from home phase, about setting kind of boundaries, particularly in a family setting, you know when and how you turn off work so that you can kind of be more present for your current family. And that's something that I'm very mindful of. I have three kids and they all have different needs and are trying to be kind to lead by example for them as well.

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*Charlie:* And they're watching. I have three boys, and you're right, they're watching. They want to see where your attention going. That book, though I have to second it. You know atomic habits, and the craving and the record. How do you not just add a good habit, but how do you break bad habit? So anyone listening, you have to get atomic habits there. Thank you for sharing that with us. Let's talk about bucket list. I'm a fan of bucket list. Is there any adventure or travel, or do you want to write a book? Another book? What's on the bucket list?

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*kathy:* On the bucket list, I just booked a bucket list trip for my family. One thing that the pandemic has taught me in talking to friends who have, especially older kids, said: two years have gone by and now my kids are graduating, and we kind of missed out on some family, some family activities. Not putting things off, relief, trying to prioritize things for yourself or for your family, and so you know, for myself and my husband. We really enjoy hiking in the back country and so you know we've just booked to go into a backcountry lodge in northern BC with our kids. For me that's kind of my rejuvenation time and so trying to make sure that those kinds of bucket list trips happen to rejuvenate and feel inspired for what I do. Going back into the backcountry, where it's natural, it's pristine wilderness, and really realizing that there is more to city life and that actually some of these pristine environments are the ones that are kind of regulating our planet and that we have to protect really provide inspiration for for why it keeps me going on my date, my data day life. So that's

certainly a bucket list trip. That's going to happen hopefully at the end of the summer.

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*Charlie:* I can tell you're being intentional and the loved ones, but also nature, and it all springs your peace and you're a lot of things all at once there. When the world opens up even a little more, is there even further destination you want to make sure you go to one day.

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*kathy:* There's other places in the world we love to travel to, so we have family in England, so getting back to see family, that's it. Going somewhere like the Galapagos or maybe as far as going to doing safari and seems potentially seeing some of the big game animals like. I think about habitat loss. There are some amusing species on this planet and the ability to kind of witness them. I think time is diminishing. I don't want to be negative, but you know, you know, how do I find the opportunities to experience some of the wonders of the world while they are still intact or exist?

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*Charlie:* We thank you for sharing the bucket list, but we did hit on a book. I'm not sure if there's even another one you'd recommend, but just in general, you know you like to listen to a book. Pick it up in your hands. You know some interviews or more kinds of trade publications, some just love books, some need fiction because I do nonfiction stuff all the time. So what about you?

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*kathy:* Well, you know a great book that I read recently was a gentleman in Moscow by More Towels. He's also written another couple of books, but the gentleman in Moscow talking about, you know, kind of escaping from reading about climate change or resource management. Or I do like a really great novel, very well-written it's very eloquent, takes you back in time, kind of a period of time in Moscow and the Russian ballet and diplomat

who lives in this hotel because of you know, political, his political journey and the time during during kind of the russian revolution which for me was just really fascinating and kind of escapism to a certain degree, kind of just sometimes you just need to escape from your day-to-day world and then I'm also listening to a lot of audiobooks. I find I read a lot for work and I'm on the screen a lot, and so I'm finding taking the time to listen to audiobooks is another great way to kind of escaping from your dated professional world and still be kind of stimulated around new content, whether it's fiction or nonfiction I have a 13 year-old so I'm listening to more books about, conversations with your 14 year-old and understanding what your 14 year-old is going through. I'm busy with my family life and trying to understand. How do I become a better parent and be patient with them if they go through? Changes they're experiencing with their friends socially and in high school.

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*Charlie:* Great book recommendations. Thank you. I'll link them in the podcast. Show note so everybody can check.

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*kathy:* Thank you. There's a whole range there.

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*Charlie:* It's good stuff. I love just some of those. I'm like, "okay, I need that 13 year-old 14 I'm going to get that one.

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*kathy:* It's really good listening, because I think my daughter would hate me for saying it, but I feel like she's a bit of a textbook case right now, and so I find that all the tools that I can get in there that are really helpful.

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*Charlie:* It's different than when we grew up at that age. It's totally different. Thank you as we start to wind down this just amazing

conversation here. Two final questions, Kathy. Is there anything you wish you'd known earlier in your career?

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*kathy:* I guess you know one thing. I would maybe encourage people as they start out in their career journeys: don't be afraid of making connections and when people are willing to kind of open the door or connect you with others, don't be afraid to follow through. You may not have all the the right questions to ask or the answers, but I think having early conversations with professionals and industry that you are interested in can certainly open your eyes to what's possible, because when I, between doing my undergrad and my masters, you know I didn't know that there was going to be conquering ability, position, architecture, room. That didn't really exist at the time. It's not being afraid to kind of uncover. The potential as it relates to your personal interests and having as many conversations as possible when you're trying to explore what you want to do from an education standpoint, I think it can be really valuable.

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*Charlie:* That's really cool. Thank you. You're right that human connection to just relationships is like not. Sometimes I think we're afraid to do and follow because we're worried it's going to turn into something that's going to take more of my time. But no, do it right there in the moment and just who knows who knows where it goes. Well, my last question: let's say there's someone listening to this bond cash right now. They're going to be really excited by hearing your story. What words of encouragement do you have for them if they're jumping into the screen building movement?

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*kathy:* Persevere, I would say jumping into the sustainability movement means that you're a passionate individual. You care about, care about kind of value based issues and really sticking to what you value, and finding a line with an organization or partners or people, I think, will help people

persevere in the long run, because you know you want to little line with like-minded people in order to kind of fulfill your kind of personal mission. Or or how do you want to bring about change in this world? And you want to be surrounded with positive people who can look for solutions rather than kind of get bogged down in what can be sometimes an overwhelming topic around sustainability. Some people can find it really overwhelming, and so how do you? How do you surround yourself with like-minded people who are like-minded and that can really support where you want to go?

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*Charlie:* Light minded and severe! What fun conversation! Thank you for spending time with us today. We'll like you those books and make sure we link over to your linked in anyone that really enjoyed the shoot Katha message and let her know what you thought of the interview, Kathy. Thanks for spending time with us today.

00:32:19

*kathy:* All right, thanks, Charley. It was great catching up. I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating.

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*Charlie:* 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 Green Building professional here in this industry or just some protip 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 gbes.com. Our mission is to advance the Green building movement through vesting class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to dot com slash broadcast for any notes and links that we mention in today's episode and you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with amazing. Yes, please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues and, if you've



really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on tickets. Thank you so much and we'll see you next week's episode.