

## Sustainability Partner for the Real Estate and Workplace Services team at Google | Lauren Sparandara, LEED Fellow | 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:* Everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast, where once a week I get an interview, a green building professional somewhere in the world. Today, coming to us from the Bay Area, we've got Lauren Sparandara with us. She's with REWS within Google. I can't wait to unpack her green building career. Lauren, how are you doing today?

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*Lauren:* I'm doing great, Charlie. Thanks so much for having me. It's a real honor. You've had some amazing guests on this podcast, so thanks so much for thinking of me and including me in this as well.

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*Charlie:* You deserve to be on here too. LEED Fellow last year and we'll talk about that but, Lauren, take us back. Give us that origin story. Where did you grow up and go to school?

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*Lauren:* I grew up in the Bay Area and I live in the Bay Area now. Bay Area born and raised, born technically in Berkeley in a hospital there. But I grew up in San Francisco, moved to Palo Alto when I was about seven and still live here now. I can speak to that in a minute. Back in the home I grew up in and working for Google now right near where I grew up, which is super cool. I went to school in Saint Louis, though. I went to Washington University, studied architecture. Originally I was pre-med. My dad's a doctor, so I was sort of following in his footsteps, but then switched to architecture and really was focused on WELL. I got really interested in sort of what was being studied in that program and then also in sustainability. I started a cross-disciplinary club for green building at Washington University for undergrad and learned a lot about the field and really leaned into it. Then I was a designer within the architecture field. The consultant for many, many years worked for what was Kima and now as Dean Beagle's, a consultant to Green Building LEED consultant and Love loved that so much. Early in my career I got to work on everything from LEED fire stations to the UCSF Medical Center in San Francisco, where my first son was born. It was really fun to have my son born in the building I had worked on for LEED certification. I went to Yale for graduate school and to get a master's in environmental management and what was the forestry school there? I learned a ton more about our supply chains or global supply chains. I've been working at Google now for eight and a half years on all sustainability for real estate. I have worn a number of different kinds of hats from looking at our existing building real estate, to our new development projects, to now managing sustainability for our Bay Area portfolio amongst many, many, many others in the Bay Area that are partnering with me on that effort.

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*Charlie:* Thanks for showing us that timeline and what a good variety of projects there. You were getting all this green building experience and then you decided to go back for that masters. What nudged you towards that?

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*Lauren:* Part of it was I had gotten really good at sort of LEED consulting. I still love it. I love LEED and I got really focused on the ins and outs of that. I was at a point in my career where I wanted to keep expanding my knowledge, keep learning. The program I did was a mid-career master's, which was fabulous for me in the sense that I didn't actually work while I was in the program. I remember every Friday I would kind of clock in and work on LEED consulting, which was very lovely actually, and have that centering aspect in my graduate degree. It was very multi-disciplined. I took classes in the law school, the business school, and it was just a chance to say, "what's next for my career?" I had been in the field for a while at that point and I was ready to sort of figure out what to do next. I had envisioned I might pivot my career some. Again, I studied more issues sort of around our electronics supply chain. Ultimately, I came back to green building, but I'm able to take a lot of the learnings there that are sort of associated with supply chain issues, which come up all the time for our building efforts and take my career to the next level there. That was sort of the impetus behind that.

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*Charlie:* Oh, I love it. Did you have a moment to say, "My career is going to be all about green buildings?" Was it just stacking along the way? It sounds like the architecture, exposure to LEED consulting and then you went and got the Masters. Was there any other influence there or just always been eco friendly or was there an aha moment along the way?

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*Lauren:* Yeah, I love this question. I grew up around nature in a sense. I always spent time exploring the ins and outs of the bugs, the trees, and barefoot in the yard kind of thing out here. Very basic kind of childhood in that sense. I try to recreate that for my own kids as much as possible. Simplicity, at least how I remember it in the eighties. I was very lucky to grow up actually going to a camp, a summer camp in Yosemite. I'd say that

was a very defining component to my life because there's something about the beauty of nature at that level. It was just outside of Yosemite National Park. We would take backpacking trips with kids into the park. It's spiritual, actually. It's sort of this thing where you're like, "Well, this is what I'd like to do." I'd like to figure out how to capture that and bring more people into that world of protecting this and in loving this and figuring out how to incorporate this into my life in my career.

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*Charlie:* You've done that and you continue to do that. As a parent, I've got three boys. Sounds like you have two boys. How can we teach them this along the way? On a recent trip to the West Coast, we were taking what we call in our company plaques. It's a selfie in front of a LEED plaque. I didn't know the Space Needle in Seattle and Warner Brothers Studios in Burbank were platinum. We've kind of started to do that a little bit on our journeys. How about mentors or anyone that maybe opened a door along the way? If you look back and you wanted to give a shout out to.

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*Lauren:* Definitely. I want to shout out to my mom, which is perhaps a little cheesy, but I want to. So early in my career, she was also working. She was actually bringing in speakers into her job. She was working at SRI International and she was out here in Palo Alto and she had folks like William McDonough and Amory Lovins come and speak. She shared with me this back in 2000, let's say she shared with me handover principles. And I remember I still have the original book. It's a small book. I don't know if you've seen it. It's actually like a little tangible principle. It's fairly compact. I had underlined it highlighted, noted everything around it. It was like I was this a ha moment for sure for me that this was this was a whole world that existed around sustainability and buildings. My mom introduced me to that world. Amory Lovins of course, too. I said, "Oh my goodness, there's a way perhaps I can marry this field of architecture that I'm moving into or studying at this time, and this visionary approach to thinking about

buildings. My mentor for sure initially is my mom. She is retired now but was a real estate attorney. Her career, her life, the curiosity, she'd always sort of foster that within me, which I incredibly appreciate. In terms of the LEED Fellow Charlie, I was thinking there's so many individuals over time in particular women, which was really interesting because I didn't sort of set out in my approach to say, okay, let me think of all the women. It just happened to be that there are so many women that have taken a chance with me, that have believed in me. Andrea Traver when I was not in the integral group, but she played such a pivotal role early in my career when I started working at Kima and as a mentor. Of course, Mary David, who has been on this podcast, she and I connected originally over Twitter and we were connected and friends sort of through Twitter for a while before we had even met each other in person. AI would answer questions. She'd answer my questions. I'd answer her question about things like EnergyStar appliances or LEED questions and such. I think we met officially at a Living Future event, and it was just like, wow, here we are together. More recently, Lynn Simon has been a mentor with me for me within Google and Kate Randolph and then Amanda Kaminsky for circularity efforts. I could go on and on. I feel so lucky really, truly to have had these women I've been able to learn from in terms of their poise, knowledge and extend such immense gratitude to them.

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*Charlie:* I can tell you very grateful and it started with your mom and what she set up. Look at all this positive influence. I'm big on mentors or someone you look up to. Maybe it doesn't even open a door, but it's someone you look up to and they can have some influence on you. As we look back, what are some of your proudest accomplishments?

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*Lauren:* I would start with my two boys. As you mentioned, I have a six and half year old boy who graduates from kindergarten today, which blows my mind and a two and a half year old boy. I'm proud, proud of them. I'm proud

to be a working mom that's continuing to work with two young children and proud to continue to think about sustainability with them. Sharing what I know. Yesterday we were at the Marine Science Institute on a four hour field trip with my older son. He was so knowledgeable about plastic waste issues and the ocean and everything. I was like, "okay, he's super interested in our construction projects that I'm working on." Super proud of him. I keep taking on these big challenges at Google. The beauty of working at a place like Google is that you're often given these opportunities, which can be daunting at times for sure. But there's in particular loss, let's say six and a half years I've been working on these two large development projects for Google and taking on basically the hardest challenges you could fathom with regard to LEED platinum for both and living building challenge for both. I'm proud that I've not given up. That's what I've sort of said, okay, let's do this. There's definitely moments when we I think all of us were like, I don't know if we can, but here we are. The projects are opening now and I'm proud of that. I'm proud we've made it this far and we're still learning as we go. But I'm proud of that.

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*Charlie:* LEED Fellow class 2021. There's 200,000 LEED professionals in the world Lauren, you're part of only about 330 people there. So what does that mean to you?

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*Lauren:* It meant so much. Honestly, as I looked back on my career as part of the process of the application, I was reflecting on how it's been many years for my career. How LEED really opened up so many doors for me. Again, starting at Washington University, I remember I found the first LEED AP I could find in the world was in Saint Louis to come speak and it was wonderful and it was inspiring. Again, 20 years ago or something. As a young person, LEED gave me opportunities to present, to speak, to bring people together at early architecture firms. I organized a LEED training and it's amazing what that has done. It's been many years and so it's a huge

honor. The folks that are on that list as LEED fellows are my heroes in life. The fact that I'm on that list is I have to kind of pinch myself to believe it, to be honest. It's a wonderful thing. The goal now is to share and to bring more people along on our journey.

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*Charlie:* I'm sure you're doing a lot of that too. Fast forward to the present day. You mentioned a couple of really big multi-year projects that maybe are finishing up, but what else is keeping you busy today?

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*Lauren:* A couple of things for sure. These projects again, Charleston East and Baby specifically. Charleston Eastern Bay is 600,000 square feet, maybe 1.1 million square feet. I've been working on them since my first son was born. It's been over six and a half years. They just opened up officially so we've been doing lots of tours and bringing more people into the buildings, everyone from government officials to internal teams, leadership, etc.. So that's been really exciting. Charleston East is still under construction, so working to help. I see every day as an opportunity to increase our construction waste recycling to innovate, innovate, innovate as we work through the project. I'm still very, very busy on those two particular projects, but also within my role. My role as Bay Area sustainability partner within the REWS team at Google is to kind of bring people together across different parts of the organization, to de silo as much as possible to unite workstreams. So I help manage that effort. So every quarter we convene what we call a cohort, the Bay Area cross-functional sustainability cohort. We have cohorts similar in other regions in the world and that's been really fun to focus on too, and just kind of bringing people together, figuring out the key initiatives we want to work on. And so certainly that's another key aspect of my work that keeps me busy.

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*Charlie:* Can you give us a peak towards whether there are certain minimum sustainability or healthy building goals. I know Google is six floors in one market. One of my clients LEED EB platinum buildings and there was a nudge there to if you're going to lease space versus maybe you build it or renovate it. Is there an internal minimum set of best practices you do on every project? Then certain projects will get official certifications and plaques. Like how do you decide that on projects?

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*Lauren:* I'm sure you can appreciate that because our portfolio is so varied as you started to allude to and hit on. We have smaller tenant improvement projects to the larger ground of construction projects that I was talking about a second ago like Bay View, that's over a million square feet. It depends. We do have a sustainability workplace standard for all of our tenant improvement projects globally. It helps to hit on what you're asking about, which is across energy, water, waste, health, etc., sort of here are the minimum requirements and then here are some leadership aspects that we encourage you to to hit as well. For our larger ground up construction projects, we have a LEED platinum requirement for the Bay Area for those projects. Things like Living Building Challenge are kind of addressed as we go sort of in terms of the opportunity at the moment.

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*Charlie:* I think the project has a very diverse portfolio. And then on the workplace side you mentioned the word circularity. To the layperson listening right now and hearing about circular economy or circularity, how does that start to show up in your facilities?

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*Lauren:* Yeah, this is something I'm particularly passionate about as well. Circularity is important. Basically keeping materials in use. In a way it's kind of a similar thing for reduce, reuse, recycle and importantly starting with reduce. What I've been focused particularly on within Google is the reuse



component. Salvaging materials because we have so much real estate and so much change that's happening at Google, we have folks moving from one building to another building. We have different business needs that are constantly redefining how we lay out our spaces and how we move forward. Through that effort, we work to ensure we use any asset that we can either within our existing portfolio or we donate it for reuse in a more external marketplace, hopefully locally if possible. I've been on a personal passion kind of kick there and trying to ensure we reuse those things, which is easier said than done at times. Because you have just the sheer quantity of materials and sort of the logistics aspects of how you manage that. But that's the key thing. Healthy materials are a key part of circularity, too, because you want to make sure that the materials you're putting into the reuse system are healthy enough to do so. We've all experienced on the other side of it where you want to reuse a material, but it's hazardous or in some way or another, in which case you really can't reuse it. You wouldn't want anyone to reuse it. You realize in those moments that there's something fundamentally wrong with the product as designed. So then it's, then that light bulb moment, "Okay, well let's start at the beginning with this particular product. Let's find a way to redesign it first to do first principles."

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*Charlie:* I love those materials in use. Let's pretend you had a crystal ball. Lauren, what's next? What are you reading up on? Were you excited in this green building movement?

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*Lauren:* I'll tell you that electrification is really hot right now. I'm sure you're experiencing that, too, Charlie, in ways that I haven't seen in my career before. I think that's really exciting. I think Google is certainly focused on that. Our Bayview development has a huge all electric kitchen. It's our largest now. It's our first in the Bay Area and our largest in the world. Now for Google's portfolio we want to electrify our spaces across our portfolio. I see lots of conversations about electrification. I think that's really important

to get to Google, our 24/7 seven carbon free energy goal by 2030. I also think again that we want to stay focused on this idea of how interconnected everything is. I think sustainability professionals are really smart and experienced at this, but we don't want to lose sight of the other elements like circularity, health, materials, ecology, biodiversity, water, you know, all these different components of sustainability. That's the challenge and the honor of this kind of role. But say, keep our eye on the prize. We're carbon focused on electrification, but constantly hold all the trade offs in your head and work to navigate those as you go. I think that's going to be a big push, a big focus in the coming years, for sure.

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*Charlie:* 100% in California. You have mandates to convert some buildings to all electric. For the first time in a long time, we're seeing energy modeling needed for existing buildings. How can we shift this over and go all electric, even on existing facilities? To your point, it probably helps that you get a test there first or you're based and then you get to roll it out to the portfolio. Here's how it worked, here's what didn't. Some of those mandates and it's one thing for operating carbon and efficiency and other things for body carbon. You said materials, healthy, healthy materials. And it sounds like you're at a kind of company where you can look at it all. It's not just one or two parts of the sustainability spectrum. You it sounds like you're privileged to you get a look at it all. That's pretty cool.

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*Lauren:* Embodied carbon absolutely is a key part of it. To speak to sort of what you're saying and that one I love about carbon because it intersects quickly with circularity. Material reuse helps with circularity or waste reduction goals. It also helps with reducing your embodied carbon footprint. Again, they're all interconnected. Google is starting to really work towards mass timber construction, which helps with embodied carbon. We also want to make sure that the wood is sourced responsibly. Again, you just keep going after it. All the different components of sustainability.

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*Charlie:* Very excited about it and you finished up those long term projects. Let's get to know you a little bit more here, Lauren. some rapid fire questions. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

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*Lauren:* I think my gift. I'm a great connector of people. When I hear something going on, kind of connecting the dots, bring people together. I'm also a really hard worker and I realized that continues to pay off. I continue kind of from my early days, keep working to learn, challenging yourself. I think that's sort of there's two components that are really.

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*Charlie:* Yeah, it was a pro tip on being a good connector. Do you do an email introduction and say, Hey, I know you both trust me to meet or do you give a kind of a summary on why they should meet? Give us a pro tip on how you like to connect to people.

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*Lauren:* Yeah, it really depends. I will say it is hard over the last couple of years with covered media for everybody, especially younger folks starting off in their career. But I've done everything. I feel like I connect with people. I do a lot of conversations with folks starting off in the career and kind of talking through my career, sort of similar to this podcast. And then I see opportunities to connect them with someone else via an email. If you can shine a light on that person and build them up through your email and kind of give everybody a spotlight into what makes them special through that introduction, that's a wonderful thing to do and just show excitement between the two different parties. I feel like there's you never know where those conversations will go. And it's a beautiful thing to sort of see something start and then how it could manifest into the future. It's a small world, our green building world. It's sort of a family, I feel like. We're all in

this together and we're continuing to connect with each other over the years.

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*Charlie:* I love that encouragement with the introduction. Thank you. Do you have any good habits or routines or rituals?

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*Lauren:* So with two young kids, it's a little crazy every day. But I guess my happy place. One thing I do that I love to do is when I have a minute to do it I go on the runs or jog really out and around my neighborhood. But there's some places where you can kind of feel like you're getting out into nature fairly quickly and they're on the longer side for me. And I listen to podcasts, I listen to podcasts, actually, I love podcasts. Again, honored to be on this one. I listen to podcasts and the fact of moving through nature and taking in information, I feel like I learn a lot and I come back where my brain and my body are feeling energized and learning. I try to create some routine around that, if at all possible myself.

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*Charlie:* Thank you for giving a peek into your world there. That's great. You know, I'm a fan of the bucket list. Are there one or two things on your bucket list?

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*Lauren:* Well, so funny enough, one of the things that was on my bucket list was so again, I'm in my home I grew up in and I've been renovating it. So that was kind of a bucket list to kind of help electrify our home. We all left your kitchen in our own home. That was on my bucket list and all this stuff. But then my backyard, which again I mentioned I spent a lot of time in as a kid and really felt connected with. So trying to make that a special place for my kids and that is wrapping up just about now. So that was definitely on my bucket list. But yeah, I mean, that's the key one. These projects have been on my bucket list. I'm proud of those two. I think long term it'd be

great to get out into the world more. I haven't had a chance to really do that with COVID, but so I travel more with my children and show them some of the things that get me excited. Bringing them into Yosemite National Park would be an amazing bucket list item.

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*Charlie:* Oh, those are all so great and I love how you've weaved in some sustainability to it and that's fantastic. Let's talk about books and maybe a podcast. Is there a book for the listeners here you'd recommend? And it doesn't even have to be about green buildings. Any podcasts you'd recommend.

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*Lauren:* One of my all time favorite books is *Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. So my mom's family is originally from Oklahoma, and my grandmother, who actually lived with me in this home growing up, often shared stories with me about the Great Depression and Oklahoma and thinking lately about sort of the implications of the environmental destruction back then and sort of what we're facing and thinking about now. So that's like an oldie but goodie for me. I also have and I know our listeners can't see it, but *Impact Networks* by David Erlichman and this is something that our team has been reading to think about kind of how we connect different networks within Google for sustainability and do it in a thoughtful way, in a way that helps us ensure we hold different dynamic tensions between prioritize connection. Kind of thinking about some of the things we've been talking about together on this podcast, in terms of podcasts specifically, I listened to Ezra Klein's podcast a lot. I also just kind of like on NPR, I will tune in to and then yeah, like anything comedy related to it can be good to mix it up.

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*Charlie:* Those are great. I don't know how many times, but you're right, it's so important to laugh, be a little more lighthearted because it's so serious

and so no thank you for the book recommendations. We'll put a link to those in the podcast show notes and also a couple of the podcasts. So thank you. That was awesome. Two more questions here. One is, if you look back on your career, is there any career advice, Lauren, you wish you'd have known a little earlier?

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*Lauren:* I'm going to have all of these conversations with folks. I think they're kind of two things. I would say when you're starting off to think about, I would say have one skill that you're really good at, sort of that's that's really easy to deliver on something of immediate value to a company. This could be something like AutoCAD or drawing skills or research and memo writing or, you know, whatever it is, presentation deliverables, you know, something useful. Great, because. Just like that practical element. But I also would say, even at the earliest points of your career, have an opinion that's yours, that you feel in your heart is true about whatever topics you're passionate about and hold that strongly and continue to have curiosity and learn. But bring that to the table. Even though you may feel that others in the room know more and that you're missing out and that you wish you would ever know that you have talent, you have good instincts, and make sure you feel like you can share your voice, particularly for young women. I would say that it's really important to have that, to hold that and to bring that to bring that forward. Keep having curiosity and exploration through your career. I think that's super important. I still feel that a key component to my career so many years later is to keep asking questions, keep learning, keep reading, keep challenging the status quo, and you'll be in great shape if you do that well.

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*Charlie:* Nuggets of wisdom in there and then kind of building on that, just any final comments here, let's say someone's listening to this podcast. They're getting super inspired by your story and they're just now jumping

into the screen building movement. That's been good to you. It's been good to me. Any words of encouragement to them.

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*Lauren:* I'd say, just get started, jump in, join us. It's the best job you could ever have in the world. We need you. We need more people in this field, no matter what your experience, your background, your passion. We need all of it. There are so many different angles to this. So jump in, find some topic that sparks something for you. Whether it could be anything, it could be around biodiversity, it could be about electrification, whatever it happens to be. Take that with your own background, your own experience, your own family upbringing, and bring your passion and story forward. Just go for it. We're excited to have you join us.

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*Charlie:* Go for it. I'm excited, too. Lauren, this has been very special. You are an inspiration and so thank you for being on the podcast today. We'll connect your LinkedIn profile. Anyone listening? Reach out to Lauren. Let her know what you thought of the podcast. Lauren, thank you so much.

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*Lauren:* Thank you, Charlie. Great job with this.

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*Charlie:* Hey, 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, we're 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](http://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](http://gbes.com/podcast) for any notes and links that we mentioned in

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