

Taking an Entire Portfolio of Real Estate Carbon Neutral With Kilroy's Sara Neff

Transcript

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

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

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

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

Hello everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the green building matters podcast. Today. We've got a special guest. This is a special guest because she's a client. She's a friend and actually a freshly minted LEED Fellow. We've got Sarah Neff with Kilroy Realty with us. Sarah, how are you doing today? I'm great. Thanks so much for having me. Yeah, I know. We've been wanting to get you on here a while because I know you've got a great story to tell and obviously your company and what you do there on a sustainability front really are known as a leader and a trailblazer. We'll get into all that, but I've got to ask, where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Sara ([01:33](#)):

I'm from Washington DC actually, which is unusual for us out in Los Angeles, but I'm a DC native and the school question answers why I ended up in Los Angeles. I went to Stanford, undergrad where I met my husband who is a television writer. We live in Los Angeles now and then I actually went to business school to focus on social enterprise. So, I went to Columbia for business school in New York.

Charlie ([01:45](#)):

Those are some great schools and obviously in your husband's work kind of kept you in California, Southern California. Connect some dots, sustainability, seeing that business background, the social side of things. Heck maybe just now some of the programs you're working on right now, Sara are pushing more on the social side, but when did you first realize you might do something with the green and green buildings?

Sara ([02:24](#)):

Yes. I know the answer to this question. So when I graduated from undergrad I did a bunch of sort of crazy things. I've lived in London for awhile. I lived in India for a while and because I was in love with my now husband, I ended up in Los Angeles and spent a few years working in television. As far as brief stints in television go I think I got fairly lucky. I got to work on Arrested Development. I got to work on 24, but I got to a point, not very long into my entertainment career, when I looked at my life, I realized I was just working on shows about white people in New York. Like how many shows about white people do we need? And so I wasn't happy I sat down with my now husband and we made this little spreadsheet of all the things I'm good at and not good at and what I want out of my career and whatnot.

Sara ([03:16](#)):

And he said, Sarah, it looks like you want a role that has social or environmental good at a company. And it looks like you should go to business school. I cried because I was like, I don't want to go to business school. They're bankers. I don't want to know bankers. Which is very funny because my best friend from business school is an investment banker at Goldman Sachs. So, I left entertainment, spent a year actually at Google because they had a linguistics background from undergrad and they were looking for people in their linguistics team. And then I went to Columbia to focus on social enterprise and ended up at Kilroy. It was because I was unhappy with television and wanted to make a difference with my career that I ended up going to business school and finding my way to sustainable real estate.

Charlie ([04:06](#)):

Fascinating background. But just that moment, it sounds like you knew you wanted something different and it was good to have someone in your corner there and your now husband, just in your corner saying, Hey, we got this right. You need that encouragement a long way. So to connect the dots, I mean, you've been obviously focused on real estate commercial real estate. Maybe tell the audience here a little more about Kilroy and the fact that you develop new properties, you obviously own and manage a lot of properties up and down the West coast. So tell everybody a little more about what attracted you to Kilroy and what you've been doing there.

Sara ([04:40](#)):

Yeah. So Kilroy is a publicly traded real estate investment trust. It is active on West coast markets from San Diego to Seattle. So major presence in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. It's about 13 or 14 million square feet. Mostly office space with some life science, residential and retail thrown in, but it's primarily office and we're developers. So we have approximately depending on how you count, entitlements are another 5 million square feet in development. What I really love about Kilroy is that we have so many of the right market forces to make sustainability happen. We serve primarily tech and media on a tenant base, obviously it's a diversified tenant base, but a lot of tech and those folks really, really care about sustainability.

Sara ([05:35](#)):

We are able to have the justification for a lot of our sustainability programs based on these things. The other thing about our markets is that California and Seattle have local government that's also very proactive on sustainability. There's a lot of regulation that supports our sustainability efforts and inspires us to get ahead of the curve as well as opportunities to do things like procure off-site renewables that are green. So there's a lot of really great things about the company and the market, but I just, I love the culture at Kilroy. John Kilroy hired me directly for this role and he has a real belief that you should hire the right people and then let them do their jobs. And so that's what it was. I came in and I started the program from scratch. He has always really been a champion of our sustainability programs from day one and so many people in my job or at other real estate companies the CEO, isn't a true believer and it makes things so much harder. John Kilroy has always been really on a side of doing the right thing environmentally

and between his commitment to the environment and my passion for sustainability, we've really been able to make a great program.

Charlie ([06:48](#)):

Well, I love it now, what a great place to work and you guys and everybody on your team is just fantastic. Let's talk a little bit about that career path again, and I'd like to talk about mentors or even influencers. Looking back, is there anyone that you, Sara would call a mentor or maybe just someone that had some influence on you along the way?

Sara ([07:08](#)):

Yes. One of the people it'd be interesting to see if she listens to this. Her name is Sukanya ("Suki") Paciorek who ran sustainability at Vornado. I remember very distinctly because I ended up at a conference with her in Las Vegas, in the middle of July and I was really pregnant. It was just so uncomfortable, so hot and I didn't want to be there, but she was there and she said, Sara, let's connect. You're early in your career. I'm actually from Vornado and she's had a very successful career since then and I'm going to give you all the advice I wish I had been given. And that was life-changing. She helped me realize the need to advocate for a standalone sustainability budget because the capital budget process doesn't work great for sustainability because by definition, sustainability isn't the emergency.

Sara ([07:58](#)):

It's not the piece of equipment that needs to get upgraded. It's not the specs that have to get built out. It's not the issue that your insurance said was causing a liability problem. It's so easy to cut sustainability projects out of a budget. She was able to give me the tools I needed to advocate for one and she also gave me a really great piece of career advice, which was Sara, it's your job to keep your job interesting for yourself. It is not anyone else's job. Your boss, my bosses at Kilroy are all men and she's like, your boss has his own job. It's not his job to make sure that you stay engaged with your work. That is your job. I really took that to heart because I have always made sure because you can really get trapped in sustainability as you know, Charlie in the role of just working certifications and reporting and certifications and reporting, and maybe you get a little energy efficiency stuff done and you don't, and then that can be your whole full-time job. And that is a really quick

way to burn yourself out after a couple of years. The reason I think I've had staying power at Kilroy this long is because I took Suki's advice and I really worked hard to expand the program into places I was interested in. Into biodiversity, into green leasing, into carbon neutrality before people were doing that solar batteries and a lot of it was how do I keep this interesting for myself? I really appreciate her.

Charlie ([09:20](#)):

Wow, what a fantastic mentor. I didn't know that I know Suki Paciorek, what a great story. This is what this podcast is about, Sara, storytelling. So, almost 11 years at Kilroy now. Let's talk about some of the highlights, projects that just really stand out to you and then we'll talk a little more about what you're doing today. But, looking back, what's on the highlight reel?

Sara ([09:44](#)):

Well it sort of continues today. We're recording this in December of 2020. This will be the month that Kilroy gets to carbon neutral operations. Putting the finishing touches on that right now. It's going to happen this month one way or the other. So that's the thing I'm the most proud of.

Charlie ([10:02](#)):

Let's talk about that for a minute because I'm thinking listeners might not realize that the last one to two years you came out, your CEO came out and said, Hey, we're going to do this and then that will shock the commercial real estate world. It's like, Oh, wow. Okay. So tell us about that.

Sara ([10:17](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So basically what had happened was that the data center companies, so Digital Realty and Iron Mountain. It was noticed by the environmental community that they use a lot of power, a lot, a lot of power. And, they got targeted by the Sierra Club Greenpeace kind of folks because of their energy spend. Since you can't just pick up a data center that's in the middle of a coal country and move it to Washington state, they really had to start getting creative at the time about off-site renewables. They pioneered the Use in Real Estate Off-site Power Purchase Agreements to be used to essentially offset on-site consumption of power. But those companies are many, many times my size. I saw that work being done and realized that I

had the opportunity with a dealer of that nature, to get all of Kilroy, to carbon neutral operating.

Sara ([11:13](#)):

I saw that as an opportunity this was in late 17 and decided to go for it. It was a big process. We had onsite solar at the time, had a lot of onsite energy efficiency and we continue that work and have more onsite solar and more energy efficient buildings on a daily basis. The balance of it has to come from an offsite procurement. I had to run the offsite procurement, find a solar developer utility scale, who's building something or the right timing and size for us. Did that whole process and then as you mentioned, the big thing was John's announcement. Like it wasn't just something that I wanted to tweet about. We were going to be the first American real estate investment trust to declare that we would achieve carbon neutral operations. John, like I said, he is somebody who has a major commitment to sustainability and we decided to make that commitment very publicly at the global climate action summit in 2018.

Sara ([12:10](#)):

He got on stage in front of the world and made this commitment for us. It has changed the real estate industry. We've seen so many other real estate companies make their own commitments. They actually got beaten on getting to carbon neutral, which it was bittersweet for me. Hudson Pacific actually declared that they were carbon neutrally operating in September and we won't get there until this month and they didn't have a sustainability program when we started. I love that they saw the value in the work that we were doing and decided to try to one up us on it. I think that that just shows the amount of influence Kilroy has had over the whole industry, especially in something as important as carbon. So that's what I'm

Charlie ([12:50](#)):

Absolutely. You mentioned that you're very active on Twitter, so make sure we follow Sarah on Twitter, the latest, but also GRESB, you've been a leader there, there's gotta be something.

Sara ([13:06](#)):

Not To be forgotten. We've been very active with GRESB since I started in 2010. 2011 was our first year that we disclosed to GRESB. We've done it every single year since then. It's sort of a funny story about that it's a little bit of an embarrassing story, but the same I was pregnant with my older daughter. At that time when I was pregnant with her and we'd done GRESB one year and we'd done not very well. I'd only been at the job six months in that reporting year. I didn't have complete data, didn't have this, no carbon, that kind of thing. We hadn't done well and I was about to go on maternity leave and I was like, I'm not going to do GRESB before I go. Nobody will notice nobody ever asks about this, it's not important. I think that's going away anyway and I left. I was still in the hospital after having given birth to my first daughter, when our CFO called. He's like, Hey, did you get that GRESB done before you left because we have investors to ask about it? I was like, Oh sure. I did. I'll take care of that. I ended up doing GRESB 2012 trying to nurse like a six week old baby or six day old baby.

Sara ([14:21](#)):

So we didn't do great that year, where we showed great improvement since then. We went from that very low point to four years after I started Kilroy. We were named the number one company, a real estate company in North America across all asset classes on sustainability. This expanded to the Americas I'm happy to say seven out of the last eight years we've been able to stay on top. We're now a global listed office sector leader. So we have leadership, not just in America, but we're The America's listed sector leader across all asset classes. And, and that's, it's a really proud moment, especially this year when GRESB became so much more performance-based, but it's not just, do you have your data and do you have all your policies, but let's see you actually step up and reduce the energy like you should be.

Sara ([15:10](#)):

The fact that we're able to maintain our position has been really exciting. I'm very, very proud of that. We're now a global listed office sector leader. So we have leadership, not just in America, but we're The America's listed sector leader across all asset classes. And, and that's, it's a really proud moment, especially this year when GRESB has also really shaped our sustainability programs. It's our focus on training, our focus on making sure

we have targets in the right ways. A lot of that came out of the things that We're now a global listed office sector leader. So we have leadership, not just in America, but we're The America's listed sector leader across all asset classes. And, and that's, it's a really proud moment, especially this year when GRESB asked us. This policy, that policy and so it's been very mutually beneficial to us relationships. I'm really proud of our We're now a global listed office sector leader. So we have leadership, not just in America, but we're The America's listed sector leader across all asset classes. And, and that's, it's a really proud moment, especially this year when GRESB.

Charlie ([15:42](#)):

On the highlight reel and continue raising the bar there. Let's talk about some projects. You obviously developed some projects too, WELL and then you've also done FitWell and existing buildings. Talk a little more about these certifications you have these bigger sustainability goals, but the certifications, the rating systems, their tools, their validation. What has LEED and WELL and fit well, what does that do for you guys?

Sara ([16:10](#)):

So LEED is the lingua franca essentially of sustainability within the real estate community. One of the reasons I actually came on board is because John and the Kilroy board of directors really recognized the value of LEED and wanted somebody who's gonna be able to champion that internally. I'm proud to say we're at a point where 68% of the Kilroy portfolio is LEED certified. It's really what shows our tenants and our investors that we're walking the walk on sustainability. I'm a big believer in third-party verification. I'm a big believer in, don't take my word for it. Here's someone else who has signed off on the claims that I'm making. So LEED has been really, really important environmentally, and we've grown along with LEED as they just gotten harder. We've had to up our game and I think that's really important.

Sara ([16:54](#)):

Our health program started in 15 and we really realized the importance of buildings and health and the impact of buildings on human health and on productivity. It was the work that Joe Allen did out of Harvard that really opened my eyes to what you can have in a very energy efficient building,

but if it has no ventilation, everybody's getting sick all the time, it is not a sustainable building. We started then and FITWell was a great tool because it was easy to understand, it was aligned with the CDC, developed by GSA. And it had a lot of the credentials that I would be looking for. We've been able to roll that out now. 40% of our portfolio is FITWell certified and then WELL has been a great tool in development for us.

Sara ([17:41](#)):

I know there's overlap between the two but we use WELL in development. So we were able to get the first WELL certified rental units in the world. So there were some condos in New York that beat us to it. But in terms of rental units, we have the first ones, those are in Los Angeles and then we have, I think the largest, WELL a corn shell certified building in California in San Francisco. WELL is a very rigorous standard, no charge, it's hard to get through it, but I think it has driven value. This is especially important to me because I learned firsthand the importance of air quality on health. My younger daughter, who's the sicker of the two kids. When she was around two, started coughing herself to sleep every single night.

Sara ([18:22](#)):

As a parent, it's horrible to be helpless when your kid is suffering, nothing is working, a doctor, put her on all these breathing mask treatments and that wasn't working. She started putting steroids in my kid and that wasn't working and it wasn't until she got diagnosed with asthma, that I finally was like, asthma. I know about asthma as well as environmental triggers. I live, I can't hear it or see it from my house, but I live not far from a busy freeway in Los Angeles. And I went out and the WELL people actually had introduced me to an air filter. I needed it as I'm starting to nerd out and alternative compliance path on some lobby that wasn't long enough for an entryway. I went out and just got the filter and then plugged it in at home.

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

Nora stopped coughing two days later and hasn't coughed herself asleep since. It's not actually that happy of a story because I'm like, I do this for a living. I'm in the middle of a WELL certification at the time, and I didn't make the connection. I've really wanted to have a long focus on building health and the certifications in health are super helpful. I can say maybe as a

breaking item on this podcast, we are pursuing the WELL health safety rating now for our directly managed portfolio. I'm hoping to get that closed down by the end of the year as well, so that when people want to reoccupy our buildings, they're confident that Kilroy has done again, third-party everything to make those buildings safe for occupying.

Charlie ([19:44](#)):

Pandemic response, those new labels just make sense. Before we started the podcast, you and me both, I told you I just bought my treadmill desk home from the office that we leased that I haven't been to in months. So shame on me. We have to vacant on this list these green and healthy best practices at home too. Let's talk a bit about the future and I love asking LEED Fellows, like you, just someone that's really passionate about this. I know a lot of this is probably fused by where you're at in California, I've had Dan Burkoyne on the podcast awhile back and just a lot of people you know there. What should we be reading up on now, Sara, if someone's listening and they're like, wow, this is really exciting. What do you track that we should be reading about? What's around the corner as green building movement.

Sara ([20:33](#)):

Yeah. So it's two things. One is embodied carbon or upfront carbon that is the wave of the future. I think it's one of the things in sustainability for those of us who call up real estate that we pretended that the entire environmental impact of our buildings was within the energy consumption of the building. We weren't really paying attention to the big environmental impact of carbon and as it turns out over the, it takes 30 years, essentially for a building's operations before the carbon emitted in the energy that the building is consuming to equal the upfront carbon. 30 years for the first 30 years of buildings life, the larger impact is the embodied carbon of the construction materials and we weren't paying attention to that. It was only at Greenbuild last year which seems like an age ago with Covid but it was Greenbuild 19 in Atlanta where the C3 tool was formally rolled out, which is a great tool to give us insight into the embodied carbon of our construction materials and help us manage it.

Sara ([21:35](#)):

The tool, it's evolving. It's not always the easiest thing to use. But it's really critically important. So people should be reading up on embodied carbon that is where the environmental work really needs to be happening right now. The other thing you mentioned with where we're located, it's all about the phrase, climate value at risk. How does a company that owns or develops real estate assets understand what of that value of the gross asset value of its assets is at risk because of climate change and over what time horizon. Those are, it's not easy to figure it out and unfortunately there's a bunch of different methodologies that don't always agree that that is the thing to grapple with because that is going to be the major thing that impacts real estate over the next 10 years. So embodied carbon (inaudible).

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

No, I fully echo that and carbon, right? I mean, if we were to sum some of that up too, is that the conversations just change to carbon benefits. You've been having it for a while, that your firm values and puts a price on carbon. You really take a look at that with projects you do. So you heard it here, wellness has already happened, and obviously the pandemics put a push on us to build that confidence back with pandemic response, get everybody back to these buildings. How do you show them? How do you prove that this is a healthy building? One question I might ask someone like you is we've got green leases. Do you think we'll have healthy building leases? Where do you think the conversations are going to go in the next 18 months as tenants want to change the way out of their space and move some desks or say, Hey, we need more collaboration. But now we want our employees to work from home two days a week, and we never thought we would do that. So, healthy building leases, is that happening? Will it happen? What do you think?

Sara ([23:17](#)):

So. I have not seen it happen, but I really would love for it to happen. I talked about this in the TEDx talk I did in 18, which is what I would love to see a tenant come in and it drives me completely crazy that I don't see this given the mountain of research that is out there. Leases will say, you will give me a temperature of plus or minus 72 degrees often. That's just not every lease obviously, but that's often the fact that the least doesn't then in the next sentence say, and you will give me a CO2 account of 550 parts per million,

or less on average taken readings over X number of times per year. Because you, I know do a lot of indoor air quality work with us that needs to be in leases.

Sara ([23:56](#)):

I do not understand why CEOs basically allow their employees to work suboptimally because they're not demanding healthy indoor air from the landlord. So obviously, , I always say that as, as you know Charlie, there's a trade-off between lots of ventilation and energy consumption. That's something, especially in a post-surgery occupancy world that we're going to have to really be balancing. But absolutely I don't see a request for healthy buildings in the lease, particularly. I think it's a really important area and I think CEOs of companies are trying to get an edge. They should absolutely demand in the way that I see many leases, demanding energy stars and many leases demanding LEED that they should demand certain levels of health as well.

Charlie ([24:39](#)):

It's more about you and we'd like to share some tips, so I like to call it here. So what would you say Sara is your specialty or gift? What are you best at?

Sara ([24:51](#)):

Ooh I think I'm a great public speaker and I think that that's really important because maybe the people listening to this podcast will disagree with that. I think the thing that is really important is stability and storytelling. And can you tell the story of why this is important? Can you get everybody inspired and on board in the sustainability work that we all wanted? I think that that's uncomfortable speaking in front of an audience and I'm comfortable telling the story. I think it's really been something that hopefully other Kilroy employees have found inspiring. I think that's my ace in the hole, but then I think the other thing I will actually say is, we talked earlier about my time working in entertainment and people sometimes ask me like, do you regret it? Do you wish you hadn't spent those years doing that and that you've gotten going on your sustainable real estate journey earlier.

Sara ([25:41](#)):

I say no. And I say, no, for this particular reason, which is working in entertainment, really just stomped out of me any sense that I was too good for anything. Like I came out nearly more or less newly-minted from Stanford. Maybe I thought I was a little bit fancy pants and then no, you are making copies, you're getting coffee. You are listening to other people, try to schedule with their ex-wife who's going to the baseball game on the phone. So you can take those notes and it's not glamorous and that was great because when I got to Kilroy and we needed somebody to do a whole lot of data entry off paper invoices on energy to really benchmark the whole portfolio, I had no problems jumping in. I wasn't walking around and seeing where there was an intern to do that work for me. So I think that's the other thing I'm not remotely afraid to get my hands dirty and (inaudible).

Charlie ([26:36](#)):

Yeah, no, absolutely and especially those you lead, you have a team, a sustainability team you build there too, and you have to be well-funded to do the things you're asking them to do. Do you have any good habits, any routines or rituals?

Sara ([26:51](#)):

Well the book I recommend to your listeners is a book called How to Have A Good Day, which is a book on productivity research and one of my so a couple of things. One is don't check emails first thing in the morning. At night when you're ready to stop working and with Covid that's always a hazy time now, and you write down the list of the things you want to get accomplished early in the morning. Be pretty distinct like you can't write, GRESB on that list. Obviously it's a big project, but this GRESB question, or looking at that piece of backup documentation. A list of somewhere one to five things and you get those things accomplished before you open your email. Then that way you're not sort of wasting your most sort of productive brain hours on being responsive. Being responsive is important as well, but you have to be proactive.

Sara ([27:39](#)):

So that's important and then for me, especially in COVID every day, I have to work out in the morning and that is really important for my mental health. I also make sure I walk 10,000 steps every day, and then just doing other

stuff. I also have to read a book 10 minutes every day and I also, my kids go to Spanish immersion school. And I also make sure that I practice Spanish everyday and having those things sort of ground me really makes me be able to really focus when it's time to focus on work.

Charlie ([28:05](#)):

Those are great habits. Thanks for sharing. Bucket list. I'm a fan of the bucket list. So are one or two things you could share that might be on your bucket list?

Sara ([28:14](#)):

Sure. Happy to one, I mean, I love travel and it's been hard in COVID not to be able to do that. I have a couple of places I really want to see Easter Island. I really want to, and my husband and I are wine people. So I would love to spend some time in Chile touring around Santiago and tasting there and going to Easter Island. I have another travel goal of getting to Iceland and there's some other places in the world I really want to see. A personal bucket list. One of the things on the professional bucket list, rather I heard a statistic and it was a couple of years ago so I'm hoping things have improved that there are more men named John on the boards of (inaudible) companies than there are women which drives me crazy. I do have eventually a career goal of serving on a board of directors because that is a major glass ceiling that women have. It's been very hard for women to break.

Charlie ([29:07](#)):

Absolutely. I know you've been very active on that. Those are a great bucket list, adventure and some meaningful work. It all goes back to some of the social upbringing there and those early studies, and what's really been important to you. I'm inspired by that Sara. Books one earlier about productivity, maybe even another book you'd recommend.

Sara ([29:28](#)):

Yes. There are two books I would recommend, I love reading. I'm a big reader. So one book I would recommend it's a bit outdated at this point, because it came out five years ago. So it's based on work that came out a little bit, even before that, but as a book called The Grid by Gretchen Bakke

which talks about just why our energy grid is the way it is. The Grid is something a lot of people take for granted, but, Charlie, you and I work in trying to make buildings more sustainable. How buildings relate to the grid is evolving and I think it's really important to understand sort of how the grid came to be what it is. I love that book and then on the sort of diversity and inclusion side, I could not possibly recommend more the book, Invisible Women, by Caroline Criado Perez .

Sara ([30:15](#)):

It came out in 2019 and it was incredibly eye-opening, especially on the building side of things, basically like we live in a world designed around men. And so for example, in buildings, I am always cold in office buildings because the ASHRAE thermal comfort standards were designed around men in suits in the fifties and men in suits. That's multiple sleeves, right? You're wearing it on each arm and so they don't need as much warmth in their office space as me as a woman who typically again only has one set of sleeves on me. And so just this concept of how the world is designed and what we can do about it. Basically the concept that collecting sex desegregated data is a way to make things fairer. For example, women in America are more likely to die in car accidents because there are no female crash test dummies. We only have a male crash test dummies. We have a smaller male testimony that is sort of female size, but it's not female proportions, but it's only ever tested in the passenger seat. So women are always quoted out of position in cars. This translates to design. How designing grates always trap your high heels. I've seen stairs that are clear. What a woman in a skirt wants to walk up clear stairs. Thermal comfort. There's so many ways that we can make our buildings and not just the bathrooms, right. But we can make our buildings more inclusive. I think invisible women is a great book to read, to really open your eyes about the opportunities you have to make things more inclusive wherever you're influencing decisions in your life.

Charlie ([31:54](#)):

Wow. That's great. We'll link to those books in the podcast, show notes. Those are solid. Thank you for even just the visuals. It's like, okay, we didn't think about that. We have to do that. So as we come to a close here, two questions. Is there an example of a piece of career advice you wish to have

earlier? It sounds like you, luckily you had a great mentor for some of it, but is there any career advice that you wish you'd known earlier?

Sara ([32:18](#)):

Wow. I have been very, very blessed in my career, I would say to a lot of people to really consider, if not business school but a background in business. One of my major career regrets is I didn't think I was going to work in real estate and I didn't take any real estate classes in business school. This is an embarrassing, but true story. I really thought I was going to end up in renewable energy project management on a utility scale. And that's what I was interviewing for when I ended up at Kilroy. I took far too many classes on social enterprise, on good nonprofit management. Those are all really important and I use that information, but I really wish I had had the foresight to really get into the business fundamentals. I mean, you have to make sustainability make business sense.

Sara ([33:04](#)):

That makes great business sense. So I really am eternally grateful that Columbia made me take accounting and maybe take corporate finance because I didn't understand the fundamentals behind how the books are created. I wouldn't understand how to make the business case for sustainability. I had to learn that on the fly. The background in that from business school, but I didn't have enough background in real estate from business school. It was just understanding what a cap rate is, what compresses cap rates, what's NOI, how does this operational costs, how does cap X affect that? Having to learn that on the job was harder than if I'd been able to learn it in school, but I was too focused on thinking that I would only need to take classes around saving the world that I didn't get the business fundamentals. So my major piece of career advice is take the time to understand the business fundamentals. Environmental people tend to just only want to talk about sustainability. You have to speak the language of business and in our field of real estate to really be able to be successful.

Charlie ([34:06](#)):

Nice, good business sense of great career advice. All right, last question. Let's say someone's listening right now. They're just jumping into this green

building movement. You've been a while I have is what words of encouragement you have for someone that's just jumping in right now,

Sara ([34:21](#)):

There is so much room for improvement and you would be surprised by how much low-hanging fruit. There is. One of the things that's hard about my job is I've been squeezing energy efficiency out of Kilroy's buildings for 10 years. And for somebody who's just jumping in, the great thing is I have envy for companies like that because what investors really want is to see, they want to see that Delta. They want to see progress. They want to see those big numbers, especially if they can attribute influence to it. And so that's what I want. When you are able to go get that low-hanging fruit, you immediately make this big splash on the scene and it's great. It's the right time. They want you to come in. Don't stay on the sidelines anymore. It's funny because we're there with embodied carbon right now.

Sara ([35:05](#)):

I mean the first 10 to 15% reduction in embodied carbon, you can do for a completely cost neutral basis just by being a little bit smarter about your concrete, on your steel. I mean, it's sort of reminds me, Charlie, if you remember, the early days were like people discovered occupancy sensors and everybody just giving each other awards for reductions for just not keeping a lights on all the time as if that's like anything, except the no-brainer, that's really where we are on the carbon side. I'd say for people on the sidelines come in, it is not too late. Tons of people are joining. I'm doing probably an informational every other week for a new company that wants to join. Want to get in on sustainability and want to know where to get started. Yeah, don't worry. There's plenty of plenty of room in the pool.

Sara ([35:48](#)):

Also inspiring conversation. We'll put some links down in the show notes, but I just want to say thank you and keep up the great work. You're an inspiration, not just to commercial real estate, but obviously women in sustainability, women in leadership positions here and you're making change. And just glad we were able to hear a little more of your story. So thanks so much for your time. Great. Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Charlie ([36:15](#)):

I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the green building matters podcast. Me and the entire team were stoked and just so glad you continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you. Thank you for listening to this episode of the green building matters podcast@gbes.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to gbes.com/podcast for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode. And you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing, yes. Please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues, and if you really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much and we'll see you on next week's episode.