

Sustainable Design Expert and LEED Fellow Lindsey Perez | Transcript

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

[Inaudible].

Speaker 2 ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to green building matters, the podcast that matters for green building professionals, learn inside and green buildings as we interviewed today's experts in 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 lead and well credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti,

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

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Charlie ([00:58](#)):

Yes. Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the green building matters podcast. I'm your host Charlie Cichetti. I'm based in Atlanta, Georgia, but I've got a guest coming to us from Orlando, Florida. Lindsey Perez is joining us. She's an architect, elite fellow a fit one ambassador and so much more. Lindsey, thanks for being on today. How are you doing? Great. Thanks for having me.

Charlie ([01:20](#)):

I can't wait to get into our discussion on I know you've worked in sustainability for a while, but really a lot of different building types too. And, and you know, I think when we talked before we even hit it off talking about education and higher education. Can't wait to talk about that more and how do we teach, not just about lead but just sustainability and this green building movement even even in higher ed. So I always like to get that origin story. If you would take us back, you know, where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Lindsey ([01:47](#)):

Sure. I grew up in the metropolis of St Peter's, Missouri. Many have not heard of it. It is a bit of a suburb of St Louis. Pretty normal upbringing. I used to garden at my grandparent's house and things like that, but I went to college at the University of Kansas because, and perhaps it's still true, but at the time there was no publicly funded architecture program in the state of Missouri. So I got reciprocity in the state of Kansas. So University of Kansas is my Alma mater. Not once but twice go Jayhawks. And then during that time I was very fortunate enough to study abroad for nearly a year and a half of the University, Stuttgart, Germany.

Charlie ([02:33](#)):

You're year and a half, I'm sure between the gardening growing up that time in Europe. And I understand your thesis too and K through 12 and sustainability, just, you know, where, where'd you get that kind of aha if you had an aha or just where'd you finally figure out, you know what, I really like sustainability and I want to lean that way.

Lindsey (02:51):

You know, I think it was a bit of my upbringing. My grandparents, I never really knew it at the time that that would be considered sustainability. But we did composting as a child. So just the way I was brought up on how we diverted waste and utilize everything, which is ingrained in my upbringing. And then when I was at K U I had a plethora of professors and peers that were, it was just talked about and our relationship as an institution to some of the firms in Kansas city area, especially BIM, they were great mentors to all of our students at KU. And I got to partake in our design build studio at KU called studio eight O four. And my class really was pushing how far could we go and not only a low income handicap house that we were building with our hands, but how far could we go in terms of sustainable practices. So that's where I just had my aha moment and then all that got really reinforced with my first job out of school, which was with the general services administration.

Charlie (03:59):

Yeah, I mean that makes a lot of sense. And you know, I'm curious kind of going that route kind of governmental first and then, you know, later getting back into architecture you know, tell us, tell us about a little about what you did there, come out of school with that master's. What was your role like there? And then how'd you know later on in your career to get back to architecture?

Lindsey (04:18):

Right. So when I went to general services administration or GSA, I actually was coming out of my bachelor's program at KU and it was in my brief time at GSA that I really started to learn maybe the business of architecture or even more than just a design perspective. I got a really great design theory base and my bachelor's studies, but at GSA with our design excellence program and the push for our perspective level funding projects, meeting a certain lead threshold that's where I was really heavily introduced to lead sustainability. So when I went back to the university of Kansas for their masters of architectural management program, I really pushed my education of that towards sustainable project planning and management. So that really is the driver and reinforcement. And then from there I was fortunate enough to finish my master's program while when I switched to my current firm, DLR group, which is the drive behind going from government to private practice was really because I needed my architectural intern hours and I could only get so many in the format at GSA.

Charlie (05:32):

That makes sense. Thanks for connecting the dots and you're going to deal out for about 15 years, so that's amazing. Tell us about some mentors, if any, along the way. Did anyone have any influence, somebody you looked up to or you followed their work or maybe someone a little closer to you that opened some doors? Any mentors along the way?

Lindsey (05:50):

I have so many mentors. I don't know if I can name them all by name, but I really was really to have almost this 360 approach of mentors, both peers. KU, you have the matching program, so I had a mentor matching program and Phaedra's. Avik was one of my very first mentors. She was with BNIM at the time and she helped reinforce my passion towards environmental stewardship. Just doing good. I had mentors at GSA, at DLR group on just how, how to keep pushing for, in my mind what's good and what true design is, which is not only sustainable but it's healthy. And just what I thought I went into architecture for, I never thought it was something separate. So I have, my peers are women design

Kansas City and women in architecture or Orlando or some other peer mentors I had along the way. I'm just pushing in a sustainable agenda along my entire career.

Charlie ([06:50](#)):

That's so great. And you know, as we get a little further along in our careers, we gotta make sure we're looking back and trying to try to help some others there. Also tell us a little more about your company you've been at 15 years. What are some things you do there and what are some things your company works on?

Lindsey ([07:07](#)):

Right? So DLR group is an international firm. When I started back in 2005, we were probably 8, 10 offices, roughly 4 to 500 people. We have grown tremendously in my time and I actually started in Kansas city and our Overland park, Kansas office. And then about 10 years ago I moved to our Orlando, Florida office sectors that we serve. K-12, high-end hospitality, justice, you know, multitude of sectors. And then we overlay that with what we call practice forums, if you will, sustainability falls into a practice forum where we add to our sector expertise, expertise related to energy sustainability and things like that. So I sit on our sustainability forum and I also get to work in our higher education practice. So by being both sustainability forum for the Southeast region, I get to touch a lot of our different project types that I mostly have a focus on our higher education project types.

Lindsey ([08:10](#)):

DLR group, the, one of the best things that I love about it is that we're employee owned. And I feel like I've had a lot of advocates along the way. If you know, there's naturally things that I'm pushing something or I want to push for something further then maybe as a firm we're ready for. But I have a lot of advocates to help me craft my message of what I would like to push better. So I think we tend to elevate one another and elevate ideas to do good. So I think that's what I like best.

Charlie ([08:40](#)):

Sounds like an awesome place to work. And you've seen a lot of growth and I know you're a principal there and it really that sustainability leader in the Southeast. So you know, looking back on this career and even Greenville and career, you know, Lindsey, what are some things that you're most proud of? Could be work-related, can be personal, but I always like to ask the question to kind of give my podcast guests, which I just love having everyone on here. Kind of permission to look back on that highlight reel. So what stands out for you? What are you most proud of?

Lindsey ([09:07](#)):

One of the other aspects of our firm that we have going on probably for the last five to six years, maybe longer, but in 2017 I was able to apply for a professional development grant, which is PDD here where applicants can propose an idea that they want to study, get 80 hours of our time paid for and up to \$5,000 towards our grants. So during the application process I was like, well, the point is to understand what are you passionate about and what do you want to study? Well, when I got to go through the application process, I am very passionate about education, sustainability, the built environment, how they all come together. But I'm extremely passionate about being a mom and how am I raising my kids to be more thoughtful of the environment in which we live, in the communities in which we are living, working, learning.

Lindsey ([10:04](#)):

And so I got to apply for a grant and I explore the concept of garden to table in our schools. So I got to implement a food garden at my daughter's preschool through eighth grade at the time school. And worked with the chef on harvesting the food from the garden and implement it into the food stream, serving kids from one years old to eighth grade. And it's been such an honor to be able to explore that and then take that home and implement the garden and that into our process. So that was like this nice bridge between sustainability, personal and architecture built environment. And so the first harvest we offset a third of the produce that they used to purchase from a food purveyor. They grew it on site and well, one year olds go and pick the weeds out of the gardens. Like it. Every single early childhood education standard was met through the garden. So it was just this really amazing story and it was awesome to be part of it.

Charlie ([11:07](#)):

You know, those kids are never going to forget that they're coming home and that's rubbing off on their families. And I'm a dad, I've got three young boys, they're 11, 8 and 6. And so I just you know, it's kind of a challenge to all of us listening that, you know, gosh, look at, look at what Lindsey's done here. We, we can spend some time on this. We can really share not just some of our expertise, but just our passion for this. I can hear in your voice. You really, that meant a lot to itself. I'm glad you shared that. That's awesome.

Lindsey ([11:32](#)):

Yeah. And then I just had some really amazing projects. I also got to be a part of, not just from a sustainability, but also maybe from a healing standpoint. I think one of my most memorable projects I was on was Joplin, Missouri was hit by F five tornado back in 2011, may of 2011. And I got to be a part of the team that there and we helped them have school later August 17th, 2011 they open doors for school, even though their high school was completely destroyed. We opened an interim high school at the mall while they were figuring out how to rebuild. So just using gifts that was given by being an architect or whatever. To help a community heal was really powerful to be part of a team that did that. And then just other projects that you know, relate to social justice path to net zero, you know, those are all the things that I could spend hours talking about. But I have a handful of top five projects and that grant and then the thing that I'm coming up from a volunteer standpoint that's coming up in my life. I'm on the AIA Florida board and have a new committee related to resiliency and I'm just getting really passionate about committee we have formed and stuff that we're hoping to accomplish. And I think that that's kind of a driver right now. What I think I'm going to be proud of in the future.

Charlie ([13:00](#)):

Well definitely making change. Any other really cool, you know, maybe lead projects that anyone could kinda relate to. I mean, if they all stand up there, they're just really fun project.

Lindsey ([13:10](#)):

It's not lead yet. We just are through the design review, but it's on track to at least be high silver if not gold, depending on how the next phase of submittal goes. But yeah, we have a two buildings that sit side by side across from the university of Florida campus. They're owned by the university of Florida. There's the Institute of black culture, the Institute, Hispanic Latino culture. And so it was just a very integrative process. We were also able to go after some pilots credits related to social justice that we

were able to achieve in that first round of review comments. So I'm excited to see where it ends up that they are open, but we are still hashing through some credits, but they're on track. But for me that was one of those other top five projects. That is one of those projects that you look back in your product helping each Institute address their agenda around social justice, not only on the campus but in the community in which they serve as well.

Charlie ([14:14](#)):

Wow. Thank you for sharing that. And you know what, it's the second or almost third time this week I've been talking about pilot credits. So I'm really happy to hear. And for those listening that may be curious about some extra bonus points and innovation points. Make sure you look up pilot credits on USG VC website and you know there's over a hundred great pilot credits for you to try see if you can apply and they don't have to be extra costs. They can be something very meaningful like Lindsay's walking us through. So go check out those pilot credits on your projects.

Lindsey ([14:43](#)):

What other pilot credit we did on that was the bird deterrent collision. Yeah.

Charlie ([14:47](#)):

Oh yeah.

Lindsey ([14:48](#)):

That was also another interesting approach that we and the team really enjoyed how to implement design into it and also this aspect of it. So it was really cool to come up with, I remember when we were first talking through it and we had done it on another project for Valencia College and I presented on it, some people were like, I thought you were going to come in here and talking about bird spikes and things like that but there's a lot of great design strategies towards it that people got really excited about.

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

Yeah, that's one of my favorites. We have a continuing ed course just about that, not bird collision deterrent. So, so neat. So happy to do the applied that, I love to ask this question to a green building expert like you, you know, where do you think sustainability or the green building movement is shifting next? What should we,

Lindsey ([15:34](#)):

It's already shifting but it's already has shifted. But I think gaining bigger traction if you will, is that the movement is like, even if you're just building a building, you have to think beyond the building and the resiliency factors that you're adding to that community. I think so. And we know we're get to think about it in our project boundary that we have to think about the impact of it. And there's a, there's credits and there's other aspects related to resiliency that require it. So I think for me that's the biggest shift. And then just see the environmental justice aspects of it. I remember in my studies some notion of unintended consequences. Something that might be sustainable for you and your locale may not be sustainable elsewhere. And what is your impact someone across the world. So that environmental justice piece is definitely growing in awareness. I think it's a shift that we have to go towards.

Charlie ([16:31](#)):

Wow. Thank you. That's awesome. I totally agree. A few rapid fire questions here. Lindsey is always wanting to make sure everyone listening kind of get a peek into, you know, what's helped you be successful, you know it's things like that. But first I'm curious, you know, what's your specialty or gift or what do you think you're best at?

Lindsey ([16:48](#)):

My colleagues joke all the time on I'm a human calendar. I don't know if that's as good as gift or not, but I have like a calendar memorized and I can go back to like May, 2011 and I associate what I was doing at that time. So I have a affinity for calendars and dates and memorization that helps in understanding and remembering why we made a decision. So that might be my gift. It's also a curse. Okay. Same thing with faces. I have to pretend I don't remember meeting someone years ago because it looks creepy.

Charlie ([17:26](#)):

It's so funny. Maybe it's a little photographic memory, you know?

Lindsey ([17:29](#)):

Yeah, I have a bit of that.

Charlie ([17:32](#)):

Good. Well tell us about any routines or rituals you have that help you stay productive, successful. Do you have any, any good habits or pro tips in there?

Lindsey ([17:40](#)):

Well, I can tell you I'm definitely a work in progress when it comes to this and I have recently, discovered that probably in the last four months I have really taking, put my foot down if you will, of taking time to address my own self care. And that includes, I have like a five minute journal in the morning and evening I do. That helps me with trying to find a good way of dealing with stress. I guess working out it's always helpful, but like that mental release is also really good. And then taking time for something that's interests me beyond constantly dealing with home life kids, work, and teaching. So I studied abroad. As I mentioned before. I don't know if I've mentioned that those classes were in German. So reinforcing my German language knowledge from 20 years ago by spending time on my Duolingo app on top of it, my husband's from Mexico, so I'm learning Spanish and then on top of it, my seven year old wants us to go to France for her 10th birthday. So I'm learning French. So taking that time to do things besides the building industry helped me address stress related Twitter, things like that. So that's the my routine sort of thing. Those two things besides just trying to protect my weekends, I do all I can to protect my weekends for family.

Charlie ([19:07](#)):

Good for you. That's great thank you for sharing. You know, as we get to know each other more, Lindsey I'm a fan of the bucket list. I actually got about 110 items on my bucket list. No pressure, but I'm curious what are one or two things maybe on your bucket list?

Lindsey ([19:22](#)):

My husband and I joke about that our bucket list is, our a fixer upper house, we have like a list of 1,001 renovation projects. We are on item five so I have a long house renovation bucket list as a family, a

bucket list. I think I just mentioned the 10th birthday celebration to Paris, taking my family to see where I studied and things like that as a bucket list. And then just, I don't know, like I have a bucket list for everything. I have this dream of opening in a summer camp because my daughter goes to summer camp and I love education and kids, but it's kind of like my idea towards what's my retirement job going to be because I can't fully see myself fully retired and this is kind of what my parents do. They have their own like retirement job. So I have like, you know, wine shop owner, summer camp, sort of like just all sorts of different things to prioritize it.

Charlie ([20:21](#)):

Yeah, I mean no pressure. You get time and it's good to know what you like. It's good to know what you want. And I think that's so great that you're already thinking ahead about something that you spend your time with and you going to ask on the home renovation. Obviously you're an architect I'm not sure what your husband does, but does that slow down the process or does that help the process?

Lindsey ([20:41](#)):

Well it, I think I'm a project manager also as an architect. So I do a very good job of making decisions in the timeframe I have to make the decisions and move on. Sometimes I may not always like the decision I made, but for the most part it's been going well. My husband's a web designer, so our biggest add was solar to our house. It came with apps that my husband is enthralled with and like, it's amazing. Like if he thinks our consumption is too high at the moment, he'll go around and try to figure out what's causing it, lights on something plugged in, I have the dishwasher going. So I think that was my biggest home renovation win was convincing him of things that I'm passionate about.

Charlie ([21:31](#)):

That's so great. No, thank you for giving us a peek there. It sounds like a lot of fun. Well let's talk about books and learning and I do want to circle back a little bit on, on higher ed. So why don't we why don't we go higher ed first. So tell us a little bit about some of the work that you do, you know, and some of the teachings and just, just give us a peek into some of the university work and, and how is sustainability may be taught there and your area?

Lindsey ([21:53](#)):

I am an adjunct professor for Seminal State College of Florida. I teach essentially one class now mostly online and it's for construction managers. So I teach construction materials and methods too. So essentially a bridge between the first class and then high performance. So why are materials selected, what are, how do they work in conjunction towards a performance goal? What are some operational concerns related to materials? It's centered around lead and other rating systems, but it's a really quick intro, but applying it to materials. So right now we're really talking a lot about EPDs, HPDs and stuff like that. That's something new, but there's a great discussion going on in the, in the class right now about indoor environmental quality and just acoustics in general and how it's tied to learning. So it's just really infusing the why behind some things and connecting the dots right now with students that are on the construction site, typically just building it and following the plans, their biggest joke is they follow us, they build what's on the picture, but now they are starting to question it a little bit. They're starting to question, well, is this product actually healthy for me to install and really starting to bring that back. They're nontraditional students, they're all students that are working and a lot of them are working for major general contractors in the area. So it's great to see the light bulb, the aha moments go off even in online. I can't visually see the light bulb, but they write about it.

Charlie ([23:31](#)):

Yeah. Just curiosity and that unjaded learning, good for you. Talking about learning and books, I'm not sure if you'd like to pick up a good book in your hands or listen to books or podcasts, but is there a book or two you'd recommend?

Lindsey ([23:47](#)):

Quite honestly, I'm not much of a book reader. I have a, I have dyslexia, so I struggle screening, but I do read a lot with my kids. I would recommend my brother Martin. Great. But for seven year olds. I did recently go on vacation and I cracked open and reread a book, The Wine and War. I'm a history buff, especially a world war II history buff. And so it was really about a French wine makers protecting their greatest treasure from the Nazis. So it was very interesting book related to history of wine and world war II. If you're interested in that.

Charlie ([24:27](#)):

Great recommendations. I'll put some links. Podcast show notes. Yeah.

Lindsey ([24:30](#)):

One of my favorite books is still the devil in the white city.

Charlie ([24:34](#)):

Right. Well, we're gonna put links to that. Actually my oldest son is dyslexia and my wife who grew up in Florida, actually, she, she grew up with that too. So I'm just curious about it. I might, I might need to ask you some questions, but great books and thank you so much for making those recommendations. I'll put the links in the podcast show notes. Well Lindsey, as we, as we start to kind of wrap up, I get kind of a two part question. You know, the first part is, is there any advice you wish you had earlier in your career?

Lindsey ([25:00](#)):

I think, I wish I listened to the great advice I had earlier.

Lindsey ([25:06](#)):

It's only now later with this opportunities somewhat reflecting a great advice. I think I somewhat touched upon it earlier that, and I had a conversation today with a peer here in Orlando. We talked about not being the lone Wolf, that we can always have the ability to look for allies and inspiration and the things we're doing, especially the green movement isn't always necessarily the easiest movement. It comes with challenges sometimes, but we don't have to push the agenda and education and things like that alone. We have the ability to look for peers and then I had a mentor back an early DLR group mentor and I didn't always understand what he meant, but it's really great advice. Now looking back on it, he said it isn't always about going over the wall that you come up to. It's about finding ways around it. Sometimes you don't have to find the way alone, so I think just not doing things alone is probably my biggest advice, especially when it comes to just this industry and the green building movement in general.

Charlie ([26:15](#)):

No, that's a great nugget and you're right. It's maybe a pride thing, but there's just so many like minded folks out there and do more so just, yeah, just kind of in closing, you know if there's someone listening right now that's just now jumping in, maybe they're studying for their LEED green associate, they're maybe making a career change, a who knows? Anything else they need to know about the green building movement as they jump in.

Lindsey ([26:39](#)):

I've personally found it. If you can find a personal connection to concepts with the green building movement, I think the, they have the desire to dig deeper comes naturally when you can connect it to something personable. I think just continue to, you don't have to know everything about the green built systems, but find that one Avenue that's relatable to you and your personal life and then just look for allies, help you understand the rest. It is a big movement, big concept that you'd never, I don't think you never, you're ever going to know everything. You've got to have a lot of allies, so don't be overwhelmed by it, I think is the moral of that. Don't be overwhelmed by it.

Charlie ([27:21](#)):

Oh, that's good. And the opposite of overwhelmed is gratitude. So gosh, all kinds of good nuggets there. Lindsay, just want to say thank you for sharing some of your stories, some of your expertise here on the green building matters podcast and I just really want to say thanks for being on here, but just keep doing what you're doing down in Orlando and where all your projects. Take you I really appreciate your time today. This is great.

Lindsey ([27:43](#)):

Thank you. I appreciate being them.

Speaker 6 ([27:46](#)):

[Inaudible].

Charlie ([27:48](#)):

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 or 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.

Speaker 7 ([28:13](#)):

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