

Thomas Grinnan on Revolutionizing Waste Management with AI-Powered Technology | Transcript

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cicchetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a lead 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. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and get ready to find out why Green Building matters. Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Lately, I've had guests on about technology because it's literally happening. It's happening fast, and it will continue to help in our sustainability movement and our green building movement. And that's one of the guests I have today.

00:49

Charlie

Tom, thanks for joining us today. I know you're based in the Virginia area. Richmond. How are you doing today?

00:55

Tom

I'm doing great, and thank you for having me on. I look forward to chatting today.

00:59

Charlie

Oh, excited to learn more about your journey, your career, but also, of course, talk about what's keeping you busy today. I know you've connected with some of my colleagues in this green building movement, and we'll connect all the dots. I like to ask my podcast guests, Tom, just take us back. Where did you grow up and go to school?

01:17

Tom

I grew up in California as a very young person, but then spent middle school, high school in South Florida, of all places. I went to mainly public schools there. I enjoyed my time there. Was one of four kids, but all four of us were looking forward to getting to the Northeast, getting to the east coast to go to universities, and none of us actually went back, but anyway, I guess Florida has a warm place in my heart, but definitely spent a lot of time in Virginia, and this is my home now.

01:47

Charlie

You went to UVA, is that right?

01:49

Tom

It's the first time I actually lived in Virginia was when I went there for undergrad. I was a French major, French and biology, kind of double major, and took Japanese. I'm a bit of a linguist Love my time there. It's a really tremendous kind of green space. Good place to expand the mind. Lots of smart people from. From all over still probably one of the most impressive kinds of people that I've met and that going from a public school in Florida, I definitely had to stress myself a little bit. I wasn't maybe as prepared as some for. For all that stuff.

02:19

Tom

But I got my stuff together and after that chose to work in Northern Virginia, just outside of DC for a management consulting company that did a lot of work in strategic planning. M and A. They hired me really for probably for my language ability, but also for my life science background, because those were two areas that were super important. At that time, Europe was just kind of opening up in terms of creating the European Union. There were U.S. Companies that were trying very hard to establish a place there, learn that market, and then vice versa. European companies are expanding and

trying to get North American markets. I developed a bit of a niche working in, believe it or not, packaging kind of in the life science space.

03:02

Tom

Again, particularly focused on kind of this cross trade and kind of understanding the players and helped to close a couple of pretty big deals where we brought acquisitions or provided kind of market research for key players in those spaces. And that really set me off on eventually going to business school three years later down in University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, which is a tremendous school, the king of Flagler School, and kind of took on a new career after that.

03:27

Charlie

Keep it in the acc. That's good business. But you had that biology and maybe some of that helped with later in your career. Sustainability. I'd like to ask you, did you have a sustainability moment at some point in the career or. I don't know, when did you realize, you know what, I really enjoy sustainability? Maybe down the road, green buildings like today.

03:48

Tom

When you work in packaging. Packaging in general is probably not an incredibly environmentally sustainable field, however, because it's required. I worked a lot in medical, pharmaceutical stuff where the packaging is absolutely critical. Sometimes it literally delivers the drug. If you think about a syringe, some of those expensive biological drugs represent \$4,000 a month. The package is absolutely critical. It has to have directions for use, needs to be easy to use, and everything's kind of self contained within a device. So that was one of the areas I spent a lot of time in. But you're always working at what's called lightweight there. You're always working to find alternative materials that are less expensive, that are lighter, thinner, and have the same kind of technical capability. So that was a constant requirement from our customers.

04:38

Tom

Requirement from S.C. Johnson P&G, Unilever, L'Oreal, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Sanofi. These are some of our Top clients. And every single one of them had at the time, maybe a fledgling sustainability department that sometimes was associated with procurement. But they began to get super organized over time. This is going back in the. Even the late 90s, early 2000s, and trying to provide a less expensive product overall sometimes enhanced their margin, of course. But as a supplier, we were required to be efficient. So sustainability was absolutely critical. And the way we ran our operations as well. If you look at how some of those companies that I've worked for, Midwest, Faco, Westrock, Silgan, are some of the most sustainable entities in the manufacturing space. Because they have to use water. They sometimes are using quite a bit of injection molding, sometimes they're processing paper or paperboard. And so they have a lot of their facilities kind of reuse quite a bit of the organic energy. For example, when you make paper, you basically produce something like charcoal. Well, they had a whole part of the plant, for example, that simply reused all that so that they really didn't need to take any power from the grid. It was basically self-sustaining. So that's where I kind of learned about that concept. It wasn't necessarily called sustainability then. It was just kind of part of operations. And sometimes it was part of kind of the consumer requirements. But I certainly, from a packaging perspective, really understood that. And because it became part of our engineering design and manufacturing process, I got into it.

06:19

Tom

Now I'm also a beekeeper. I live in the middle of Richmond. I have a big place. I have my top of my kind of a garage in the back. I do a lot of compost. I've always the way I grew up in Florida spent a lot of time outdoors and the way we kind of ran our household because we originally from Marin County, California, was really sustainable. So that's kind of stuck with me. So when I had an opportunity to jump into and leverage my

packaging background in AI with Data Company One or DC One, it was a really, really good fit.

06:51

Charlie

You connected the dots here. I love beekeeping. I didn't know that. We'll have to come back to that one, too. Okay, so that's the sustainability influence. Peek into packaging, which has been a big part of your career. Life sciences, health. And now we can talk about some other materials. But before we go, a little look back. Did you have any mentors along the way? Sometimes mentor someone, you read their material, you see them from the stage and they inspire you. Sometimes it's someone you meet with, they challenge you, they open the door. But there's others I've interviewed that maybe didn't really have mentors, but they kind of peer mentors. I don't know. How would you define mentors? And have you had any along the way?

07:26

Tom

A couple of folks who had a big influence on me are a guy named Luke Constantino and a guy named Bruce Thomas who has worked for decades with the Gates foundation. And Luke Asantino worked with me at. At Westrock and has had a distinguished career on his own. Both of them really kind of pushed me to be an innovator, but they also really grounded me in a lot of the the business principles that I certainly picked up in business school and consulting. How you kind of maintain your integrity in a very dynamic large corporate environment. They helped to get me overseas twice. I did two overseas expats' stints in London and Paris. Those were absolutely critical for my career, but also they were on my bucket list, which was great.

08:11

Tom

It's nice to have a career objective as a young person and kind of get those done. That was really fun for my family. My kids. And I love spending time

overseas and working with teams. But those folks in particular took an interest in my ability to understand the complexity of, say, a market or new technology and begin to kind of. I took on a lot of business development roles, more kind of in the US Sense. This business development really means a kind of sales in a lot of areas of the world. But business development for me is. It's. It's an entity or a group or department that kind of links normally innovation, design, new product development with customers. So it's kind of that link between.

08:53

Tom

It's not just somebody who's maybe got the design degree or the engineering degree or is completing all the patents. But as someone who's saying, all right, hey, that's cool technology. Let me go see who. Who we can. Who can we sell that to and begin to develop both the contractual, but also a lot of the research issues of, okay, I'm showing you this thing, Mr. Customer. It's not perfect. Can we develop that trust where you can give me the feedback so that I can make it better? That's what both of those folks kind of did. Did for me. And I still take those. Those learnings today as. One of my favorite books is the Lean Startup by a guy named Eric Ries. I think that's how you pronounce it, maybe rice, R, I, E, S.

09:35

Tom

And basically you read that book and you get the same thing right off the bat. Again, working for a smaller company now, which is, gosh, please don't spend months or years trying to perfect your particular solution in the sustainability space. Get it out there, get people to give you feedback on it very quickly because they're going to solve your problem, they're going to find your warts, they're going to find what's exceptional about it so much faster than you can within your own four walls or your head.

10:02

Charlie

All right, a lot of wisdom there. And I'm going to get some of that influence

when you need it. I'm sure you're a mentor to others now. One more look back, then we'll talk about the present day. Just what are some of your proudest accomplishments so far? What's on the highlight reel?

10:15

Tom

I would say that I really became an expert in a field within the pharmaceutical industry called patient adherence, which was basically all about taking drugs correctly at the right time. And so if you think about that, all right, that's a psychological issue. That's do you trust the doctor to prescribe that, do that. He actually is, he or she is giving you the right drug and are you going to take it correctly? But what I found is that there are lots and lots of systems that you can use. You can use systems smart systems and apps on your phone. You can change it dramatically. If you think about bottle packaging in the US since it comes in those little vials that you get at CVS or Walgreens, not much information there.

11:00

Tom

Doesn't really tell you how many are left. Doesn't really tell you really well to take it every Monday, Tuesday. So that was certainly true. I'm really proud about becoming an expert in that field where I spoke internationally, where I understood not just my company's product line, but I was respected for evaluating new technologies and providing advice to a lot of global corporations in that space. I don't work as much in that space anymore, but that's certainly a highlight. Secondly, the ability to go into a brand new market and develop it, which was around adherence Packaging over in Europe. I started that kind of major effort in 2005, was in London from 2005 to 2008, grew a substantial business over in Europe, moved manufacturing from North Carolina to a smaller company we bought in Dublin.

11:48

Tom

That facility is still around today despite the fact that there's been lots of consolidation and the main reason why is because it still has this very

interesting, happens to be high margin. It's difficult to make this high margin kind of adherence business that's focused on clinical trials. So that's, that's also a big highlight. And then maybe the the third for me was getting into the the plastics business and the medical device side of the business for Silvan and Westrock because there was kind of a split off where slogan bought my division of Westrock at one time when I was in Europe from 15 to 18. Those are highlights because again we grew the business extremely aggressively. We won national kind of sales team of the year, national team of the year, national leader of the year.

12:30

Tom

And it was really a difficult kind of process for me jumping in there. The business was flat when I got there. We got it very, yeah, we got it to not quite 20%, I guess 16, 17% growth per year and even much more, greater growth on the gross margin side. that was a, and it was a team of a couple guys from France, couple guys from Germany very disparate customer base all around from Eastern Europe to major, major customers in Germany and France. Those are the three kinds of highlights for me that I that I still rely on today and try to impart the wisdom that I got. I'm lucky to be able to have those experiences so I both try to leverage them today.

13:12

Tom

As you point out, I do like being a mentor. Hopefully if you talk to the people who work for me, they would say that. But I really believe in trying to teach what I've learned. I'm not going to be on the earth forever and might as well try to do what people did.

13:26

T those are the highlights. Let's talk about the present day. Tell us some more about DC1, the company, what you're really good at. Sustainability, of course, and then a day in the life Dome.

13:42

Tom

I joined in March 2024, became CEO in December of 2024. It's still a small company, but we've done well out of Richmond, Virginia. We are a company that provides AI based technology that's cloud based or cloud native. And basically what we do is we help to drive recycling and composting. We're focused on this issue that's called landfill diversion. So the idea is to reduce the amount of stuff that's going into your trash and landfill and find a way to create more of a circular economy on the rest. Some really neat kind of customer groups and markets that appeared under that.

14:21

Tom

Universities, major venues for concerts, arenas for sports stadiums, and then also some owners of buildings as well, which some big corporate sites that we're working with that happen to be in the lead space because they're super interested in making sure that they have the available points to upgrade if they're certified, maybe to silver, gold and platinum. And rather than trying to completely take apart their building, which you probably know, Charlie, the difficulty of doing that, once you've already got it built, it's a lot easier to go and look at your waste stream, clean it up, use some technology to help you there. So the long and short of it, our green scanner solution provides both infrastructure as well as an. The infrastructure is basically a smart sorting kiosk, and doesn't require you to change your bin structure at all.

15:08

Tom

It's basically a smart television, a screen television, that whole bunch of tech. It's got an Nvidia chip on the back, it's got cameras on it has a barcode scanner, and it's running a system both within the Nvidia chip. Because sometimes Wi fi is not awesome, whether you are a hotspot or not. And then it's connecting to the cloud, but it's basically identifying whatever you put on in front of it. So you put a glass bottle in front of it and

say, hey, that glass bottle. And then it's doing a lot of calculations behind the scenes.

15:37

Tom

And that's kind of where we started with the business two years ago, prior to my arrival, which was we wanted to develop a data set for kind of the carbon footprint of these kind of packaged items that were going into the waste stream so that when they recycled, people could understand, hey, actually I recycled kind of 10 bottles. If they went and went into the landfill, it would have been this carbon footprint. When you recycle it drops quite a bit. You know your best. And we call that carbon avoidance. So we calculate carbon avoidance and carbon footprint and we'll tell you how much aluminum you've recycled and all that's available in real time. If you download the app, you can get points and rewards as well.

16:14

Tom

We're not doing as much of that for say, kind of big stadiums and buildings, but because that's more oriented around our smart sorting infrastructure, normally our clients are looking to put that on every floor a couple in every concourse, et cetera. Not looking to put them above every single waste bin. I mean, that's impossible. You know, the Kansas City Chiefs, who we're in touch with have 273 different waste containers. But you know, for them probably maybe 10 to 15 of these strewn throughout the stadium is going to create a much bigger hype around what they're trying to accomplish. You can leverage it with their big boards, you can create contests within.

16:53

Tom

We did that recently with a university where you know, we're able to kind of track some of the users and provide rewards. During a basketball game at vcu they got a penance, a bobblehead and some free tickets by recycling the most through our system. You can imagine how all that kind of works and how kind of brands are interested in that because that was a brand

sponsored event too. They sponsored us in terms of the placement at that basketball game. They got quite a bit of impact on society. But also their name as a major local supplier was out there and associated. But yeah, so that's our product. It's Green Scanner, which again is the smart recycling kind of kiosk. And then we also have an app that accompanies that. So we're excited about kind of future.

17:40

Tom

But as I said, the major markets are more kind of venues, buildings. And then obviously we've got some things going on with universities. That's interesting because they've got some really aggressive, maybe some of the most aggressive goals that I've seen in terms of landfill diversion.

17:55

Charlie

They do a passion project of mine is we do some waste and recycling audits on building. Sometimes it's part of your lease certification. But just so there's just common outlooks there. And we before the interview had talked about the Green Sports alliance, so let's come back to that. But it sounds like you can really apply this to different types of buildings. But stadiums, you've had some success. So can you talk a little bit about that and your connection there? What is the Green Sports alliance for our listeners? It's a great opportunity to get connected with Green Sports Alliance.

18:27

Tom

Yeah, yeah, Green Sports alliance is awesome. So it has a really kind of interesting history with a group that actually owned and ran a lot of buildings in the past. But the reality is they're an organization that really welcomes anybody that's trying to drive sustainability in sports. So if you think about the major components of the carbon footprint. You really want to start with energy. So there are some really interesting large companies that put up lighting, large companies that supply energy, say to University of Michigan Stadium or and then say the Miami Heat. All of those types of

entities are members and then they're major suppliers and then they're technology suppliers like us. So we're trying to be disruptive. A lot of the things that are achieved on the wayside in the sports world today are labor driven.

19:21

Tom

A lot of them are driven by how many people you put by your waste containers that do something called waste goalie. So the Green Sports alliance does a tremendous job of linking technology companies with these major, I guess, building and venue owners, also with university and athletic and both pro and amateur sports. And they have a number of really interesting kind of interactive events. I think they have probably about today, maybe about four different conferences. One of them is of course their major dental one, which was in LAst year, every single year. And we love to attend, we meet our colleagues, but we also tend to learn a lot about how to, how people are attacking waste, how people are tapping landfill diversion how that links back to energy, how things are being funded.

20:08

Tom

And they even do training on for, if you're a professional sports team you're not necessarily rolling in money if you're a minor league, say soccer team or baseball team. And those folks are there because they get taught as to, okay, if you're going to go talk to Coca Cola, if you're trying to get a sponsor, this is how you need to present yourself. So again, really tremendous organization. Can't say enough about them. They also help their members write case studies. So they're helping us to write a case study on our Virginia Commonwealth University basketball game. We had quite a big impact. Upwards of 17 kilograms of carbon diverted by our efforts over 700 scans. And again, that was only with two stations. So pretty helpful overall. But that's an organization that I really recommend.

20:53

Tom

It's also not unbelievably expensive. So if you look into it depends on the size of your company, of course, but generally it's quite an economical way to expand your network and really learn at a super duper fast pace. If you want to understand what's going on in sustainability, it's tremendous. And then if you understand on top of that athletics are not going away, the interest in athletics in terms of financial return as well as an access to audience is just huge. And they're stepping away from necessarily worrying about solely about kind of results and fans to, hey, how do we impact the community?

21:30

Tom

I mean it's incredible to hear what the Patriots, what they, what, for example, the Atlanta Falcons are doing, or even the Kansas City Chiefs not all of whom are in blue states, by the way, and yet they are. They are. They're putting front and center. You know, we need to be a corporate steward. And they're bringing that back to the Green Sports alliance and teaching us, hey here's the best practices that we're. We're doing here. Go ahead and steal from us. Go ahead and kind of take our best ideas and bring them forth. That's really why we're here. So that's a sorry to go on and on about, but I'm a pretty big fan and as a small company, they've been great for us.

22:09

Charlie

I really feel the same way. So everybody check out Green Sports alliance, who. Not just all the good work here, Tom and his team are doing. So. All right, so let's shift a little bit to talk about the future of sustainability. Green buildings could be also just related to technology, some things you're seeing. So what are you reading up on, Tom? What's coming at us next?

22:28

Tom

Yeah, I mean, I made a very deliberate choice kind of in my career not quite

late in my career. I wouldn't say I'm late in my career, but maybe. Maybe late mid my career to get into AI, to try to learn it, to try to understand how it works, to try to understand what's the good, what's the bad, maybe what's the ugly a little bit, and try to focus on the good. So, yeah, I think the use of AI technology is going to be extensive, both in terms of auditing, both in terms of finding new technologies, but also in trying to find less expensive ways to create a lower footprint in the building and built environment.

23:05

Tom

I also spend a little bit of time, and it's kind of a total side thing, but I happen to have a lot of exposure when I was in business school to some friends that got heavily in the building industry and got into concrete. And so I still got to keep up with them. And one of them ended up working in Thailand, which is interesting. A lot of concrete for Asia comes out of there. But the long and short of it is let's just take concrete. I think people need to understand that's 8% of the world's carbon footprint. Right now. And the reality is there are a lot of technologies that can be deployed in that space to actually reuse some of the raw materials, including limestone, which actually requires fossil fuels for the most part to be made into concrete. But that's a space.

23:49

Tom

I won't get into all the nth degree on that, but keep your eye on that particular space because we think about trying to build things out of say, steel or wood. Yeah, I mean, that's going to happen. But you know, when you really look at a lot of green buildings, I'm sure you can see there's normally in terms of the overall integrity as well as making sure that they're sustainable going forward. Yeah, but that's certainly one area to really take a close look at. I do think that the idea of back to work is really important, and we're seeing that. So we've seen corporate clients that have leap buildings, tremendous investments that they've made in putting those together. Sometimes they didn't necessarily come in at say, the gold or platinum level.

24:32

Tom

So they're looking to get those certifications, recertifications as they go up. They came in as certified or silver, but they want to get people back to work. And so what can you do in your building to make sure that you're appealing to kind of gen Y and Z? I think leed, I think green buildings accomplish that. People want to live in a building, want to work in a building, sometimes live as well in a building that they're really proud of. And we're really seeing that in some of the the work that we're doing. We're very close to a pretty big contract with quite a large corporation that's expanding their campus by upwards of 2,000 people. They want to bring those people back to work.

25:08

Tom

And one of the ways they're trying to do that is to have a really interesting and engaging recycling system so that people understand that hey, we're making an investment in you. You know, not only is this a green building that has an incredibly low energy footprint, look at the solar panels on our building. And by the way, this is how we handle our track. You know, we're very careful. We want to teach you recycling. Super confusing. And so I think that's important about all the dynamics in terms of the financials of LEED as well. You know, the buildings are normally more valuable. You normally can get a larger loan from a bank they rent for higher, they normally last longer, their occupancy is higher, et cetera.

25:50

Tom

So in addition to all those things, I think doing some things on the inside of the building that really appeal particularly to gen Y and Z, but not alone. But that's where a lot of your your new kind of labor force is coming from is also something that I would keep my eye on because everybody wants people to get back to work, but the work environment's got to be appealing. It was

pretty nice working from home during COVID How do you make sure that you really provide something extra when they come back?

26:15

Charlie

That's good stuff. You had a good read on it and I love that. All right, so that's what's next. Let's get to know Tom a little more here. This is kind of our rapid fire part of the interview. I'm really enjoying our conversation. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

26:29

Tom

Yeah, I think it's understanding complexity. I think it's something that that I got. I remember my dad telling me as I don't know what I was. He was talking to me and my brother, who's just a couple years older. You know, they're exceptional specialists and they're exceptional generalists. I'm more probably an exceptional general meaning I can see complexity and I can kind of figure out, okay, that's the path we gotta go down. Or that little piece that isn't quite developed yet actually is super important. I really enjoy kind of managing complexity both in terms of teams and businesses.

26:57

Charlie

Okay, there you go. That's good stuff. Do you have any good routines, rituals, habits? What helps you stay on point?

27:03

Tom

Yeah, I'm a cyclist, so I certainly kind of keep myself in good shape. I tend to do more of the adventurous kind of style of cycling. That's a lot of kind off road stuff. Not necessarily on a mountain bike, but on something called a gravel bike. So. But yeah, I really like getting on, getting outdoors. I think that if you're having trouble with sleep, some of the latest research says that you have at least 10 minutes of sunlight a day, particularly earlier in the day. That tends to reset you. So I, I built habits around being outside

normally in the morning that really have helped me to kind of one, get going even before work, but also really establish kind of healthy, both sleep and eating habits and tried to.

27:43

Tom

So I'm not a professional athlete I'm not awesome anymore maybe at what I do, but I've kept That up and that. That's probably one habit. Probably the second is keeping it up with my languages. You know, I still fluent kind of French speaker my French, my Spanish is pretty good. Still don't know a lot of Japanese and German. So I try like that to to keep those things up. It's not necessarily always business focused. Right now is working for a small company in Richmond that's mainly focused on the US Market. I don't use all that stuff every day, but it keeps your brain. Brain going.

28:13

Charlie

Sure. I'm fascinated by languages. My middle son, Landon is studying Japanese on Duolingo. And I'm just impressed by it. And we actually, as a family went to Japan last summer. We had a wonderful trip. What a magical place.

28:26

Tom

I'd love to go back. I was there as a student many years ago and a couple times the business. But yeah, I'd love to spend some more time there.

28:33

Charlie

Let me know. We scouted out some really great cities there for you.

28:37

Tom

Oh, gosh. I really want to spend. Having lived in London, I never kind of made it down to Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. That's kind of this southwest

corner whole lot. Anyway, I'd love to. I love to spend some time down there. Anyway. That's the mini kind of travel bucket list. I'd also like to teach. You know, on my bucket list is definitely to perhaps not full time, but I'd like to hit that point. I probably got a few more things in terms of my career and hit a few more financial goals to get there. But yeah, I'd love to love the T shirt. Not quite sure which. Which area, but either probably business or history or something like that. But yeah, I would also love to. I'm looking forward to having grandchildren someday.

29:14

Tom

I know that's a. That's a fairly prosaic thing, but would love to be in. Be in that. In that position someday.

29:22

Charlie

So those are.

29:23

Tom

Those are kind of three pretty minor things. I also have my bucket list to do our. There's a really, a couple really long swims out, kind of a swimmer in the summertime. They're like three to five miles long. Couple in Europe, Arizona, one in Virginia. So I'd like to be able to kind of complete one of those. Normally you're in open water, not very warm normally. Normally not a wetsuit thing either. But yeah, I'd like to maybe get in shape so I could kind of dig you one of those someday.

29:46

Charlie

There you go. Open water. So a long time ago I did sprint, triathlon, swim, bike, run. So we'll compare. Is there a book you'd recommend? It doesn't have to be about buildings, just a book that you'd recommend to our listeners.

29:58

Tom

Yeah, I mean, I think if you're working for a smaller company or if you're in a group, an innovation group, even for a larger company the Lean Startup by Eric Ries. I recommend that. A really cool book I read recently was recommended by a bunch of folks. I think it's Naomi Novik, his book called Unplugged. It's called, Excuse me, Uprooted. Sorry, Uprooted. So. By Naomi Novik. So it's a fantasy book, but it's really interesting, has some parallels today, has some parallels to maybe international politics and whatnot. But that's a really fun read that will make you think a little bit differently about kind of nature and power while at the same time telling a tremendous kind of story that's more kind of based in fantasy. Those are two of the things that I've recently really enjoyed.

30:45

Charlie

Well, I'll put links to the books in the podcast. Show notes. Great recommendation, Salm. Thank you. As we start to wind down, just two more questions. One, if you look back on your career, is there anything you wish you'd have learned earlier?

30:57

Tom

I'll tell you one thing I wish I'd learned kind of really early maybe, is that the link back to customers and clients is actually where a lot of value is created. I did fine in my career. I did well. But I kind of wish that I'd understood how I have such a skill in that and how important it is. Think that when you come out of, say, UVAA or business school, you're thinking, oh, I got to be in strategy or I got to be in finance, or I got to be blah, in charge of this, that and the other. The reality, the people who can actually talk to customers, find out what they want develop those relationships, man, they are. Those are some of the rainmakers and small, large companies all around the world.

31:40

Tom

I wish I kind of got that advice earlier because I, I think I didn't quite respect it enough to be honest with you about salesperson. But in reality, man, those are some of the geniuses of the business world. And sometimes it's subtle. Yeah, sometimes they're going to basketball games at Madison Square Garden and that's part of their shtick. But in a lot of ways they're the people kind of paint the lights and respecting them and understanding how they perform their art and making sure that you participate and help them and become an expert like them. That's what really kind of makes or break you. At the end of the day, even if you got custom technology like we've got or you got AI behind you or got great manufacturing behind you, that's probably one thing that I definitely don't.

32:22

Tom

I wish I had kind of got that advice maybe a little bit earlier.

32:26

Charlie

Yeah, if you notice, that's how I asked the question. It's not about regrets, it's about this would have helped if I just kind of knew that a little earlier. So a little more. So last question as we wrap it up. Let's say there's someone jumping in right now to the green building movement. Maybe the technology side of it. Just in general, it's like, hey, I want to work at these buildings, I want to do good. If someone's just now jumping into something you've been doing a while. I've been doing a while. Any words of encouragement for them as we come to a close?

32:54

Tom

Yeah, I mean, I would say, first thing I would say is please maintain your flexibility. You know, be really careful about thinking that your particular expertise or even field is your endpoint. Unfortunately, it's super dynamic

out there and so I think that your ability to scan your industry, scan the economy in general, scan sustainability, scan building in general, understanding who owns the infrastructure, who manages it, because those are two very different entities as you know, and they sometimes have different objectives. So I think that's the first thing is to make sure that you're flexible and that you are maintaining a knowledge set. Maybe you get that through Slack. I mean, Slack's got some unbelievable groups for kind of green tech, the green building environment, maybe you're going to get some of that through LinkedIn.

33:43

Tom

But I think that's number one is to kind of be flexible and scan. And the second thing I would say is just make sure that you are constantly learning from that and trying to take that back into your day to day business. AI, for example, can be super scary. It means lots of things to lots of different people. But there's some ways to start super small there. Just spend a little bit of time on ChatGPT, trying to learn about something that you're doing. Write a letter to your friend and have ChatGPT rewrite it for you. Then you'll understand what the power is. My company, we use some open source for image recognition. For example, like I said, we can recognize almost anything, a pizza box, etc.

34:26

Tom

Some of that's open source where we say, hey what is the, what's this a picture of? Some of it we train our AI on. And so the fact that I have a knowledge and my team has knowledge of what are those open source technologies and companies and available databases out there has helped us to all of a sudden, as a small company move so much faster in recognizing like thousands and thousands of things and calculating carbon footprint. We just wouldn't have got there from where we started, which was we started training a computer system to recognize things with a camera. So some examples there.

34:58

Charlie

There you go. And just connect the dots. Things are speeding up. It's a great time to jump into sustainability and green buildings. Even while the federal government might ebb and flow with some of this, there's so many state, city and corporate mandates. And that's what I hear is you work with a lot of great corporates. Those that are in buildings for a long time. They're not just flipping a building, they're not relying on it quite as much from the federal government. It's what's in our control. This is still important to us. I'm just going to add that to our listeners as we come to a close. Lean into state, city mandates and definitely just companies that still are like, hey, I don't care what's going on over there. This is what's important to us. And we see a lot of that business right now.

35:36

Charlie

It's good.

35:37

Tom

I agree.

35:37

Charlie

Well, Tom, I just want to say thank you for being on the podcast. I know my Brian, my colleague Brian Bollinger connected us. You've met Nicola. I look forward to spending some time with you. Everybody listening. Make sure you connect with Tom on LinkedIn. Check out the good work they're doing there at DC1. And thanks for being on the podcast.

35:54

Tom

Thanks so much, Charlie. You have a great day. Appreciate it.

35:58

Charlie

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