

The Father of Green Building Returns: David Gottfried on Regen360 and the Operating System for a Regenerative Earth | Transcript

✓ The Green Impact Report

Quick take: David Gottfried co-founded USGBC, wrote the first white paper proposing a US rating system, and lit the fuse on what became LEED. Now, 30+ years and 30 billion square feet later, he's back with a bigger question: if we can green every building on Earth and still miss the climate targets, what have we forgotten?

👤 Meet Your Fellow Sustainability Champion

David Gottfried is the Founder & CEO of **Regen360**, where he serves as a strategic advisor to leading organizations across manufacturing, software, and Green Building. He spent the two decades before that running Regenerative Ventures and its RegenNetwork, advising hundreds of organizations on sustainable building strategy. He began his career as a real estate developer and contractor.

Gottfried hosts the Regen360 Podcast (80+ episodes) and wrote the bestselling [Explosion Green](#), winner of the Independent Book Awards Grand Prize. **His next book, *Regen360: An Operating System for a Regenerative Earth*, publishes October 2026. [Preorder here](#).**

His prior residence was a LEED Platinum home recognized as the highest-rated in the world. He holds a degree in Engineering and Resource Management from Stanford, where he lectures regularly. His honors include WorldGBC's Global Green Building Entrepreneurship Award, USGBC's Leadership Award, the Net Zero Trailblazer Award, and the USGBC Northern California Chapter "Super Hero" Award (now presented in his name). He's a Green Industry Hall of Fame inductee and a Purpose Economy 100 honoree.

Outside of the office: he's a father, painter ([see his work here](#)), martial artist, fly fisherman, and cyclist, a five-time finisher of the Death Ride. He lives in the East Bay Area of Northern California.

But here's what sets this episode apart: David's business card reads "**Father of the Green Building Movement**," and the title is earned. He co-founded USGBC in 1993 with Mike Italiano and Rick Fedrizzi, having already drafted the first Green Building Standard under his ASTM subcommittee in 1990–91 (the categories that became LEED). **He was USGBC's first CEO, funded its early losses himself, and founded a second nonprofit, World Green Building Council, in 2002.** Today LEED certification exists in 181 countries and WorldGBC counts 85 Green Building Councils worldwide. If you've built a career around LEED, this is the man who built the room you're standing in.

Breaking Ground on Better Building

In this episode, David traces the arc from founding a movement to redesigning the operating system underneath it:

Key Insight #1: You can't scale what you haven't standardized.

- **The Challenge:** In 1990, "Green Building" wasn't a category: no shared definition, no rating system, and no way for developers to prove sustainable buildings were worth more.
- **The Solution:** David's ASTM subcommittee drafted the first Green Building Standard in 1990–91. In 1993 he co-founded USGBC with Mike Italiano and Rick Fedrizzi, and USGBC's committee (chaired by Rob Watson and funded with about \$800K from the Department of Energy) built the pilot program that became LEED, certifying its first ten projects in 2000.
- **ROI:** That standard became the foundation for a rating system now used in 181 countries, unlocking an industry David estimates at nearly a trillion dollars globally.

Key Insight #2: Green Buildings aren't enough if the "ship" underneath them is still sinking.

- **The Challenge:** Even with LEED's global success, the world is still missing its Paris Agreement targets, warming has already reached roughly 1.5°C, and a billion people still lack potable water or electricity. Decarbonizing buildings alone won't fix civilization's operating system.
- **The Solution:** David's new book, *Regen360*, introduces "Earth Codes": 15 principles distilled from over 2,600 pages of dialogue with an AI assistant he calls Zenobia, synthesized into equations for what he calls HOPE: Health On Planet Earth.
- **ROI:** A framework that pushes sustainability practitioners past compliance checklists and toward systems-level thinking, the shift he calls moving from "human" to "humane."

Key Insight #3: AI can accelerate burnout culture or accelerate regeneration. The difference is how you use it.

- **The Challenge:** AI is reshaping every industry, including Green Building's own carbon and energy footprint, and *it's just as capable of deepening bad habits as breaking them.*

- **The Solution:** David built a nine-step framework for "AI for good": using AI as a check on decision-making (surfacing a product's full lifecycle assessment or environmental product declaration before you buy) and even as a nervous-system regulator that prompts reflection instead of reaction.
- **ROI:** Professionals who learn to pair AI fluency with the discipline of asking "what have we forgotten?" position themselves (and their projects) for the next phase of the movement, not just the last one.

Sustainable Soundbite Options

"What we did at the USGBC is build the base camp so us mountain climbers can go up the mountain, and not solo without gear. We climb together."

— **David Gottfried**

"Are we putting solar panels on the Titanic? It isn't the ship. It's what the ship's floating on. It's the underlying operating system of civilization."

— **David Gottfried**

Your Green Building Action Plan

Transform your next project (and your career) with these steps:

1. **This Week:** Try David's AI-as-check move on one real decision: before your next product spec, ask your AI assistant for the EPD or full lifecycle assessment and see what turns up.
2. **This Quarter:** Start asking David Brower's question on your own projects: "What have we forgotten?" Use it to audit a current project for gaps beyond the checklist: health, equity, lifecycle impact.
3. **This Year:** Preorder *Regen360* and explore how the "Earth Codes" framework could inform your firm's approach to decarbonization, resiliency, and regenerative design beyond LEED compliance.

Connect & Learn More

 Access full episode resources: <https://www.gbes.com/podcast>

 Read the transcript: [here](#)

Connect with David Gottfried:

- **Website:** <https://regen360.net/>
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/david-gottfried-75835a2/>

 Preorder *Regen360: An Operating System for a Regenerative Earth*: [Amazon](#)

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