

From One Building to the Whole Company: Scaling Sustainability to the Boardroom with Marianna Palmour | Transcript

00:02

Speaker 1

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. Green Building matters. Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. I'm still lucky. I've done this for over 10 years. I get to interview someone every single week that's just doing their part in this green building movement.

00:44

Speaker 1

Maybe we call it decarbonization now, maybe we call it resiliency, maybe it's esg. But here's the thing is we're trying to make our buildings better and it nets out it's good for the environment. This is a special guest because we worked together when we were just starting our green building career. So I've got Mary Babies in the green building movement. Green cloth diaper babies, tree hugging. I love it. So Mariana is with us. She's here in Atlanta. I'm in Atlanta. We've known each other a long time. We have mutual friends too, outside of this hard green building work. But. Hey, Mariana, how you doing today?

01:19

Speaker 2

Wonderful. Thank you so much for having me.

01:21

Speaker 1

Well, we've kind of watched our careers expand ever since those early days at Sustainable Options. And so for our listeners, if you would take us back. So where did you grow up and go to school?

01:33

Speaker 2

I am actually a Georgia native. I grew up in northwest Georgia on Lookout Mountain in a little tiny, small town. And I actually moved to Atlanta to go to

Georgia Tech for college. My undergrad was in architecture. I wanted. I was obviously a very like, tech minded person, but I really was drawn to the artistic side of it, so I thought architecture would be great for me. And that's how I landed in the green building movement was really between growing up in, really surrounded by the trees and the environment and then going to tech is how I got my start.

02:22

Speaker 1

To become an architect. So I'm also from North Georgia, maybe North Central. You were northwest to our listeners that aren't real familiar. It's not too far from like Chattanooga, Tennessee. Right. So you're just a couple hours north of Atlanta. The North Georgia mountains are pretty special and not too far from where the Appalachian Trail starts. So. All right, so you move off to the big city. You want to become an architect. And you know, that was hard work. I switched degrees because I didn't want to do studio and all that hard work. So tell us about those days and the architecture program. Georgia Tech though is pretty special. Tell us about that time.

02:56

Speaker 2

Yes, architecture is definitely a wonderful community at Tech, but it is a lot of hard work. There were a lot of all nighters. Actually a fun fact is that the, that pilots use the Georgia Tech architecture building as a landmark because the lights are always on.

03:20

Speaker 1

That's awesome. Always. They're on all night.

03:22

Speaker 2

Mentally, they're always on. So it in the past has always been used as a very recognizable landmark in the city of Atlanta. So you could tell where you are. But coming out of Georgia Tech, I was introduced to a great little program called LEAD that was starting to get a lot of traction. And I was like, yeah, the environment interests me. Maybe I'll like take this test while I'm look starting to look for a job. A very close friend of mine also was that was in architecture with me, was also looking into it. She, we took the test together. And the first job I went to out of college was for this tiny little firm that did sustainable design.

04:19

Speaker 2

One of the partners had developed residential standard for South Face and the other one was very into doing zoning, like sustainable zoning and community building. So I got a lot of really unique and deep exposure because I was in a tiny little six person firm.

04:47

Speaker 1

And they were like, okay, you kind of like sustainability, you're the lead person, so that's the best experience.

04:53

Speaker 2

Yeah, I got thrown into the deep end. I, you know, I really quickly ended up at like community meetings and zoning meetings and I got to work on a development standard for a county in Georgia. And it was just a lot of really unique great experience that gave me a really wide breadth of knowledge as far as the sustainability went.

05:21

Speaker 1

So that was maybe 2006, going towards 2008. 2009.

05:25

Speaker 2

0608.

05:26

Speaker 1

Yeah, this thing, you know, called the recession was sitting in two. But luckily sustainability and lead just kept growing. And that's close to. And we met too. But before we go there. All right, so anything else with sustainability early on? I mean, were you maybe it wasn't quite called LEED when you were getting your underground at architecture? Maybe it was because, you know, it was early to mid 2000s. Just what else kind of just drew you over that way and did you realize, okay, I want to do something with sustainability from here out?

05:59

Speaker 2

Yeah, sustainability wasn't really taught in school at that time. Now we do a much better job of introducing students to sustainable design and what that really means. We did have a, we did have classes that focused on, you know, how to orient your building for light and energy. So that was probably like the little dip in the pond, so to speak, that we got. But it really was that community

building as I came out of college that really got me into sustainability. I will say that I, because I had taken the lead exam, I got, I started going to a lot of events for usgbc and I ended up holding a couple of positions with the Emerging Green Builders, which was their young professionals group. I ended up serving as, I think I ended up vice president, past president.

07:13

Speaker 2

So I got really involved for a couple of years and got to know a lot of people in the industry that way because all of us were kind of, you know, trying to network, get to know each other, get to know what opportunities were out there. Like you said, the recession came along around that time. So really having a network even if you weren't working was really important.

07:42

Speaker 1

No, we had to support each other. And yeah, I passed my lead exam kind of in that period of time. And then, you know, then we ended up working together on a consulting firm. But, but I love to ask about mentors though first. So for some, Mariana, excuse me. For some, a mentor is somebody you read their material and you see them on stage, they influence you. Sometimes it's someone that challenges you. You meet often they might even open a door for you. But have you had any mentors along the way?

08:09

Speaker 2

Oh, yes. I was really lucky in college to. I had joined a sorority and our, I think what they refer to as usually like a house mom was actually a Georgia Tech graduate that had been in architecture school. Her name's Liz York. She went on to work to develop programs with the CDC like Fitwell. And she was a huge or is a huge champion of equitable design. So putting mothers rooms in offices, that sort of thing. So I really have leaned on her through my career and especially as I've made changes in my career. She is such a force in the architecture community in Atlanta and I was really lucky to have her as a sounding board early in my career and even late in my career I still chat with her about things.

09:20

Speaker 2

So it's good to have a mentor that you can learn from, but also that can give you encouragement to pursue what you're really interested in pursuing, whatever that might be. So she was the in person one that I really,.

09:41

Speaker 1

Oh What a great mentor. And, and that connection there, that's, I can tell you can just, just so much gratitude there. Okay, so that's mentors. We know how you got into sustainability. You did become what you wanted to be when you grew up in architect. But next thing you know it's like, hey, I don't want to work one or two buildings, I want to work on hundreds of them. I want to clean them all up. So we ran into each other and we worked for a couple years at a green building consulting firm called Sustainable Options. Right. They're during the pandemic, small team. Right. Maybe less than 10 people. And that I know for me I gotta learn a lot of different rating systems and so it's even one of my favorites, ebom.

10:19

Speaker 1

But tell us about that time and then connect some dots on how you ended up where you are now and you've been for a long time.

10:26

Speaker 2

Yeah. So Sustainable Options was where we connected and it's where I really started doing consulting full time. And instead of doing building design, I was advising on how to design sustainably or build sustainably or as you said with ebom, operate sustainably. It was really great. You got to really focus one area and really support your clients, support the design team. And it was a huge learning experience that I got to be a part of it.

11:11

Speaker 2

It really was a turning point in my career that I, I really moved to consulting now after Sustainable Options, I went and worked for a company called Epstein Group and they, I worked, I came in as a consultant there, but also as a reviewer for lead projects because that's something that they have always done and they've had a wonderful relationship with GBCI as third party reviewers and it gave really deep knowledge of how third party certification worked. And of course from there it expanded outside of leed and we worked with, you know, all of the big rating systems, whether it was green globes fit well, grasp three M, you know, we, it, you know, it expands and different countries favor different rating systems, different parts of the country favor different rating systems. I think Georgie even had, what was it? Peach.

12:27

Speaker 1

I know what you're talking about on those points.

12:30

Speaker 2

Something but so you learn a lot. And different rating systems also have different focuses. So depending on what the, you know, goals of your client were, you would focus on, you would recommend different things. Now while I, while I was at Epstein Group, I really, through those exploring new standards, I really got interested in how to look at sustainability beyond the built environment and how do we let like guide companies to make good decisions, just not at the individual project, but across their entire organization. So that was really, while I was there, was really when I got interested in corporate sustainability or ESG or corporate responsibility or whichever acronym you would like to use.

13:34

Speaker 1

All similar good work.

13:36

Speaker 2

Yeah.

13:37

Speaker 1

Because you had all this building experience. And for those listening, if you get a chance to do a little bit of the lead review side of it, I mean, you were able to review buildings all over the world, different shapes, sizes, different rating systems, and it's amazing peek into just what is happening and different challenges on how do you actually green up this building? But I've done you a while and I could tell you did want to take that and go zoom out and say, hey, how can we get some really impactful organizations and the corporate side to make big change? Because lead, as you know, I also ran a Lee consulting firm. Is lead used to be the overall strategy. Just. That was good enough. But now it's like, no, that's like one of like 20 things we could do.

14:17

Speaker 1

It's still a great program, but it's. It's got to be a part of the new mix, right?

14:21

Speaker 2

Yeah. And also how do you take maybe energy saving strategy or water saving strategy or an indoor environmental quality strategy, and how do you make that standard across your organization instead of maybe writing a policy just for one building or one office? So how do you make that work across different cities, different countries, where you have different cultures, different regulations? So it becomes a different side of the same challenge. Right.

15:03

Speaker 1

Yeah, no, it really does. Okay. So yeah, we had our time together at a consulting firm and launched. You. You went to Epstein Group, which, you know, as I understand it. Right. It's a mix of an architecture division. Great commissioning over here, lead review. And then. Oh, by the way, we know a lot about buildings. We're going to do all kinds of consulting too, and even zoo work and all kinds of stuff. But as I. And as you were stacking your career there now Silas o', Brien, we can talk about that. Is like you really kind of built out the ESG and corporate side of the house. So, you know.

15:35

Speaker 2

Oh yeah. We what started as really like bridge support for our clients that we had, we worked on portfolios for them. So our clients that had, you know, between anywhere from like 10 to 100 buildings that were in their portfolio and we, you know, I built out that service line. How can we help you do this efficiently and make it successful across your organization? And a rant right after that happened brings Us very close to present day. Because about. So that was like, I don't know, six years ago.

16:22

Speaker 1

Yeah. Pandemic, I think might have set upon us, but I'll skip one part. Then you also went back to our wonderful Alma, Georgia Tech mba, learned a.

16:31

Speaker 2

Little more about technology.

16:33

Speaker 1

So why'd you do that?

16:34

Speaker 2

I did. I did go back because I was working more on the corporate side.

16:39

Speaker 1

Okay.

16:40

Speaker 2

I thought that it would really help me to understand how businesses worked a little better. And I was also going through this exploratory time in my career where I was like, is this really what I want to keep doing? Are there other things that I might want to explore? And it was also around the pandemic where we're all sitting at home. And I made the very sound decision of having a small child at home, starting kindergarten, going working, and going back to school and getting my mba. And like you said, I went back to Georgia Tech. So now I am a double jacket. They have a wonderful entrepreneurship program and they have a great sustainability program in their business school, the Racy Anderson center for Sustainability. So I did the. An MBA focused on entrepreneurship.

17:50

Speaker 2

I was able to build a startup, which was a wonderful experience. And then I also worked very closely with the Racy Anderson Center. I was a fellow with them. I was later through that program, I ended up as a fellow for inclusive design.

18:14

Speaker 1

Nice.

18:15

Speaker 2

So I worked a lot with. That's something that gets overlooked in technology a lot is, you know, people with disabilities may not be able to use our technology that we're developing. So we really need to think about all people when we design things, whether it's technology, whether it's a building, whatever that is. You know, we want to make sure everyone can use it to the best of their ability. And that really solidified me wanting to stay in the corporate space. I knew it solidified that I wanted to stay in sustainability, that I wanted to be in the corporate space. And right after I got out of school, I was very. The opportunity presented itself perfectly in that Epstein Group was purchased by Salas o', Brien, who I now lead corporate sustainability for. And they are an engineering and technical services firm. So we.

19:23

Speaker 2

The sustainability end was a big augmentation to the services that they already provided. And it also allowed me to continue to build that consulting practice for corporate sustainability, but also gave me the opportunity to build an ESG program pretty much from the ground up or a quickly growing organization. And that kind of takes us to where I sit now on that leadership team.

20:00

Speaker 1

Well, and we want to talk more about that and just how it's expanded. It was a good segue to kind of talk about accomplishments, too. For my podcast guest, Mariana, I like to say, hey, what's on the highlight reel? You mentioned the fellow there. And one quick visual to our listeners. There's a building at Georgia Tech, I would argue top five greatest buildings in the world, the Kendeda Building. Sean Aurora runs that. He's been on the podcast and his dad was actually in a wheelchair and it was so important to him. There's an equity pedal in the living building program that the ramp not only was reclaimed wood and beautiful is in the middle of the building. It's like, no, we're not gonna put this around back. Like, it goes right here, you know, and so pretty cool. And just what's still happening.

20:39

Speaker 1

And it's so important with inclusion and equity. So, okay, you got lots of credentials. You've moved up the ranks. You've been a great mentor to others. Anything else, though, on the highlight reel as you look back so far?

20:51

Speaker 2

Oh, goodness. I don't know. Those are. Those, I think were pretty big stepping stones.

20:59

Speaker 1

Those are big ones. I work projects. It's like picking your favorite kid or dog. But I order one or two projects. They don't have to be massive. It could be just this little simple project. One of mine was the First Congregational Church downtown Atlanta. It just meant so much at the time to that. That historic church. But I don't know what a couple fun projects.

21:20

Speaker 2

Oh, goodness. So the project that always sticks out for me, and I think it's because, one, I built such a wonderful relationship with the team that I worked with. But it was actually one of the last projects I worked with you on was right when version 2009 came out for lead ebom, I took the Georgia Pacific building downtown through their first LEAD certification. And it was the first, like, one of the first big EBOM projects under that rating system. It was. We were the team on the ground that was doing property management, was a huge proponent for it. But. But it was the first time that I really had to convince a board or C suite that, you know, what were doing was the right thing to.

22:29

Speaker 2

Not only the right thing to do, but the from a, you know, values perspective, but also the right thing to do from an economics perspective that it was like, that it would save money and resources by, you know, shifting their policies and how they did certain things within the building. And I think that always stands out to me, and I always kind of come back to it because I. It was a lot of. It was more that it was a lot of lessons learned than it was a. I mean, you know, over a million square feet, but. So it was a big project, but it was less that it was a big project and more of the lessons learned.

23:14

Speaker 1

I love that.

23:15

Speaker 2

I still carry.

23:17

Speaker 1

I love that building. Those who visit Atlanta is downtown Atlanta. Pink marble stair step building. I think Ian Hughes was maybe the property manager. So you've known me for a while, and for our listeners, you've hopefully known me for a while, 10 plus years. I'm pretty positive. Ian, who's retired now and real active in the Boma community, told me, charlie, if I ever needed a doctor to tell me, like, some really bad news, like, I'm not gonna make it, I want you to tell me because you're gonna make it sound great. So pretty good at spinning stuff and genuine. But, hey, look at the silver lining way. So that's a great project. Okay. And it just goes from there. So. Okay, that's the highlight reel back to present day. Now you're part of a. How do we know how many people.

24:06

Speaker 1

4,000 Or more employees.

24:08

Speaker 2

We're over 5,000 people.

24:09

Speaker 1

5,000. So big impact. Everything from design consulting and all this corporate work. So what's changed? We hinted at it earlier. Right. Is it used to just be lead. And I was grateful for that. You were. But that's just kind of, you know, not to be too cliché, but an arrow in the quiver. So what's changed? And if a client calls you and says, hey, want to do something? What should we do? How do you handle that?

24:32

Speaker 2

I think the same basic principles still apply. You want to really understand what their goals are, if there are any regulatory requirements that they have to comply with, depending on. And in the US the regulatory environment is very fragmented. Like, we don't have many federal standards when it comes to buildings. It's much more localized. So, you know, things like, if you're working in New York, you have to make sure that you adhere to Local Law 97. If you're working. And on the corporate side, if you're working with a company that does business in California, you have two ESG regulations that you have to make sure you stay on top of. So that's kind of the first thing, like, what are your values? What are your goals, and what are you required to comply with?

25:33

Speaker 2

Because both of those have to kind of fit into this, be woven into a bigger strategy. Right.

25:40

Speaker 1

Well, and I know where you're going with it. It still is Going to make good business sense. But yeah, there's something in corporate sustainability. Right. Called a materiality index. And it's like, hey, let's talk to the stakeholders and like what's actually important to you first before we just think so and so is doing it. So maybe that's what we should do. So a lot of that's evolving, right?

26:00

Speaker 2

Yeah. Doing a materiality assessment is basically the formal way to ask all of those questions and not just to the decision makers in the organization, but to all stakeholders in the organization, which may be the communities that you operate in. They may be your investors, your board, your clients have, you know, regulations that you that are important to them or policies that are important to them, your suppliers. It has become more a bigger web that you're considering. And also in corporate sustainability, we don't just look at how you're impacting, like how this is impacting business, but also how your business is impacting the environment. So we call it double materiality when we're look actively looking at both and that symbiotic relationship which is really important because it's not, you know, it's one. It's not always an easy answer.

27:12

Speaker 1

Yeah.

27:12

Speaker 2

To come to a solution of what's best for a particular building for a particular organization in the community.

27:20

Speaker 1

Right. I see With Leap version 5 we have new categories like quality of life and community. And how is this building really going to impact the community? So like this for some, been doing it a long time, but for others it's like, oh, this is a prerequisite. I have to start doing this. I think it's moving in the right direction, still leading. It's been good to me in my career, it's been good to you. But it's just now a big tool here to achieve these kind of corporate sustainability goals. And even sometimes when our country ebbs and flows on the Paris Climate Accord and stuff, it's like, hey, don't forget city, state and oh, corporate mandates. At the end of the day, so many great companies are like, oh, really? I'm not going to wait on them.

28:02

Speaker 1

I'm just going to go ahead and do it. I think it's important to us. So tell us more about that and tell us about your team as the director of sustainability impact there at Salis o'. Brien.

28:12

Speaker 2

Well, that is a great point that you bring up that there, depending on what organizations you work with, they have things that you have to comply with. There are policies that you have to sign or they may include these as part of your Contract agreement. For example, I was sent an email yesterday that for a new project, we have new supplier standards that we have to agree to for the organization that is our clients. And so I spent, you know, the late afternoon reading through them, making sure that they were in line with our supplier code of conduct and our code of conduct that we've developed for our organization. And, you know, I have to attest to the fact that our organization will follow their supplier code. Right.

29:14

Speaker 2

So we, that is an active part of my role is making sure that we can comply with those requests from our clients. And they are getting more prevalent, those requests. I will say that we do a lot of business with a large, a lot of large global organizations. So even if maybe we don't have to worry about compliance in the eu, regulatory compliance in the eu, our clients do, which means that they're starting to worry about extended producer responsibility. They have to report their scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions. So they're going to be encouraging their suppliers, which are us, we fall into that bucket. They're going to be encouraging their suppliers to comply and support them in their compliance. Right. Especially after you do a certain dollar amount of work with them.

30:31

Speaker 2

You know, if you're only doing like one little, you know, \$20,000 project, then you're low enough on the list that they, you know, they may not be concerned about you, but when you're doing millions of dollars of work for a client, then you impact their scope 3 emissions, and they would like you to report on that and make sure that you, as your organization is heading in the right direction or the same direction as them.

31:05

Speaker 1

All right, real talk, you just delivered a LEED certified building Saved Energy, Reduced Carbon, Optimized daylighting, and then you slap a tiny generic plaque on the wall like it's a participation trophy. Come on. With buildingplaques.com, you can actually show off the brains behind the building.

Your scorecard, your strategies, your team, the stuff that made the project great. Architects, engineers, contractors. This is your mic drop moment in plaque form. They're fully customizable. Look sharp enough for your lobby and take like a few minutes to design. If you did the hard work, don't hide it behind a boring plaque. Go to buildingpla.com and build a plaque that actually earns lead and inspires twice. So let's talk about scope one, Scope two, Scope three.

31:57

Speaker 1

I haven't talked about on the podcast for a while, but, you know, I think to our listeners, some have been doing this a long time and lead Fellows and some are newer to this movement and early in their careers. But it just seems like for the longest time, okay, we got scope one and scope two, but it's that scope three that just no one really knew how to capture and measure and so could you. And just real quick, in layman's terms, how do you define scope 12 versus 30?

32:23

Speaker 2

Well, I think the easiest way to think about scope one, two and three is that. So scope one is when you burn it yourself. So if you're, if you have a, if you're using natural gas or fuel oil or even in your home, like if you have a propane grill, you are burning the fuel there on site.

32:50

Speaker 1

Yep.

32:50

Speaker 2

Right. So that's your scope one. That also includes like gas in your vehicles. It does include things like refrigerant, that op, you know, the fugitive emissions from that. So that's kind of all in scope one. Right. You burn it yourself and it's considered a direct emission. Scope 2 is an indirect emission, but it someone else, another organization is burning it for your direct consumption. So when you have use electricity in your home, in your business, that means that a utility company is creating that energy and either through whatever means they may and for your direct consumption, your direct use. So that is your scope 2. Scope 2 also includes renewable energy sources. So if you are have on site solar or wind or geothermal or you're purchasing wrecks for offset of energy use, that'll all sit in scope two.

34:04

Speaker 2

Now everything else stream and downstream of your operations is scope three. So everything from when a material gets taken out of the ground, so at the beginning of its life to the end of its life when it goes back to the earth is scope three. And it's so tough because one, we don't have the data to really understand what all those impacts are throughout the life cycle of a product or what goes into a service. But also we're trying to avoid double counting. Right. So, you know, is another organization responsible for reporting this? Are we responsible for reporting it? Like how whose impact is it? Is it our company's impact? Is it another company's impact because they're providing the service to us? But because we are doing work for clients, we are considered their scope 3.

35:18

Speaker 2

So if, even if you're, you know, a consulting project, the energy, the carbon, let's say the carbon that it takes for you to produce that project for your client is their scope 3.

35:37

Speaker 1

Emissions, makes sense because I mean, a lot of us have heard of, you know, EPDs environmental product declarations. We got HPDs. How does this material interact that material off gas? It's bad for me. But. But you're right, double counting, right, is I use the example of some carpet or something, right? And it might estimate how much energy is going to be needed to just vacuum it and shampoo it and maintain it. But wouldn't it better to have the actual. So. So you're right, it's try to capture it but make sure you're not double counting and just make territory.

36:08

Speaker 2

And there are so many variables that could change, like where a raw material comes from or what a person does with something at the end of its life. Like, are they, you know, are we taking anything from like, are you recycling it? Are you returning it to the like, material stream? Is it being reused? Can. So you'll see a lot of product organizations that have, you know, container return policies so that it can like, things can go back into the supply chain. So it mitigates their, you know, end of life scope. 3. You have all sorts of different strategies that can be used, but it really is a complicated problem to solve.

37:11

Speaker 1

Well, and you're right in the middle of it working with some big organizations.

A lot of it comes back to the building side. So. So anything else, Mariana, on present day and then we're going to start to go talk about the future.

37:22

Speaker 2

Yes. So I think if you want a little insight to what my day to day is, it's of course supporting our teams and making sure they're compliant with or meeting the goals of our clients. But also we I doing regulatory reporting and also voluntary reporting for things like ecovadis and cdp, which is the, those are the ESG versions of, you know, lead. So we're showing how we're demonstrating how we're doing from a corporate side instead of maybe how the building's doing. Right. And as my role has expanded and as our company has gotten bigger, you start to have a lot more conversations around risk and community impact or, you know, let's see, what else do I work on? You know, I work with our procurement team, I work with our safety team, I work with our integration team.

38:39

Speaker 2

We are a big, we are a mergers and acquisitions based organization. We right now are acquiring around 10 companies a year, which is aggressive. And integrating those new organizations into our company and making sure that they have the support that they, you know, also falls under my belt. So I get to, I joke that I have my hand in a lot of different cookie jars, but I'm, you know, I just go in all of the directions. So it's. It's good that I like a challenge, and it's good. Good that I like to multitask well.

39:22

Speaker 1

And you still love this. This work, and that's exciting. That's pretty aggressive. 10 A year. And you're right, because I, as I understand it, part of your job, too, is not just to make sure, hey, you're helping clients with their impact and their footprint, but also the growing company you're a part of. So, yeah, it's like, oh, wow, we bought another company. All right, I hope they're. Let me take a look. We'll see what we got to do.

39:47

Speaker 2

What. How can we help them?

39:49

Speaker 1

Good.

39:49

Speaker 2

What are they doing?

39:51

Speaker 1

So that's exciting. But. But I know that technical core that came with salsa. Brian, who many years ago had bought another MEP firm here in Atlanta. And it's just been interesting to see the growth. So, okay, so let's talk about the future. I love to ask my podcast guests, hey, what's next? What are you reading up on? What's next in this green building or just this overall, you know, environmental movement?

40:14

Speaker 2

Charlie, what is next? The sustainability is so wonderful because it's always changing. Available technology is always changing. Where we are from a regulatory standpoint or what technologies are available to us, like, that's always changing, and it's always something new and amazing, and how we approach things changes because of it. So it's a really dynamic field, and you're always learning something new. And I think I'm just going to continue writing that way. I love what I do on the corporate side. I love building new programs for companies that are really tailored to them. So I think that's. I think that sustainability will be in my future for a very long time.

41:11

Speaker 1

That's exciting. Well, yeah, for me, it's just that mix of, hey, we're post pandemic several years now. Healthy buildings are back. But call it resiliency, call it decarbonization, there's just, you know, there's just more and more people saying, here's what I want to do. And I'm just glad we're having this conversation. To our listeners, it's not just about building a speculative building. Maybe it's LEED certified so you can get some anchor tenants and sell the building. And it's sure it's going to be less impactful over time. It's, hey, there's companies out there, small, medium, and large that say, this is important to us. I realize we have a large organization. Okay, so let's keep going here. Do you have any? No, no. Let's go here. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

41:55

Speaker 2

My gift, you know, early. And I don't know if you'd consider this a gift, but at Epstein, I remember I was kind of known for two things. One, new employees

tended to be scared of me because I was very direct in emails. So before they met me in person, they were a little nervous about working with me. But the second thing was I was known in meetings as the diplomat. We're always going to find a solution. So I think that would be my superpower, is that I can really step back in a room or in a meeting and really hear maybe not always what's being said, but what the bigger mood is and kind of figuring out how to go forward from there. I also don't really take no for answer. It's just an opportunity to do things a different way.

43:06

Speaker 2

So I'm very persistent. Well, diplomat and persistent would be my two things.

43:14

Speaker 1

That's good. I think that's a good mix because, you know, sometimes those that are persistent might just bulldoze through their agenda. So it sounds like you're must be a good listener one side to. To maybe come back with the diplomat part. I. I was trying to connect the dots, though. Why did the new. New hires. Why are they intimidated? I was trying to connect the dots on that one. Oh.

43:34

Speaker 2

Because I think I'm much better in person.

43:37

Speaker 1

Oh, that makes sense. Instead of like a written email might be stuff.

43:40

Speaker 2

Yeah. And I've really learned. Okay, I. I will. And this is going to seem very like old school, I think, to some of your younger listeners, but I am always get on a video call or meet somebody in person for coffee or, you know, say, let's chat through this. And even though, like, you can get the points across through a written email, I think that in person connection is. It is really important for me to do my work successfully, and I lean on it as a strength.

44:21

Speaker 1

All right. These are pretty fun specialties or gifts, and I know it's helped you along the way. And I'm sure a lot of people said, man, I love working with you

and for you and there's some great leadership in there too. So. Okay, how about habits? Do you have any good habits or routines to help you stay on point?

44:37

Speaker 2

Let's see. I live and die by my calendar. If it's not on my calendar, it probably doesn't exist, but. And I get pretty detailed. I'll write, you know, notes for a call that's coming up or what I want to tackle on a particular project. So they can get pretty detailed, but it helps me keep everything organized, especially because I tend to work on a lot of projects at the same time.

45:11

Speaker 1

Okay, I do too. Well, earlier were catching up. I know you had mentioned that sometimes you ride on a bike with your daughter as she's going to school in the morning. So that's kind of a special eco friendly kind of commute. So tell us a little bit about that.

45:27

Speaker 2

Oh, I am very lucky. My daughter started middle school this year and I live on a bike path or a walking path, and that's right next to my condo. So we are able to bike between home and school. And it's really great because. And it's not necessarily just the environmental aspect of it. It's also, it gets you kind of moving at the beginning of the day. And it's, you know, in middle school they don't have recess like they had in elementary school. So getting her moving and your body working and your brain working in the morning is good, right? Or I think it's good.

46:20

Speaker 1

So.

46:21

Speaker 2

And I love living in a walkable area of town. That's always been really important to me. Now, where I grew up, I spent a lot of time in the car because I lived in a really beautiful but rural place that you had to get in a car. I drove 45 minutes to school, so that was a pretty significant part of my day every day. So it's a very different experience for her. But we love just when the weather works with us to just be outside.

46:59

Speaker 1

I love that and I hope that's a good memory she'll have looking back on all of this. How about Bucket list? So I am a fan of the bucket list. For some people it's travel or adventure or maybe write a book. I don't know what's on the bucket list.

47:15

Speaker 2

I don't know that I'm that talented to write a book.

47:18

Speaker 1

Well, now we have AI, so we used to AI. We can write a book.

47:21

Speaker 2

No, no, no. I've seen things that are written by AI that you can definitely tell, and I don't. I'll wait until that technology is a little better. A little better. Trust and verify when it comes. Yeah, no, I think I would like to travel more. I haven't traveled as much as I used to. And also I think I need to always be open to trying new things. Just want to try something new, like, or try something again that I haven't tried in a long time. Like this year for my baby sister's birthday, I cross stitched a little thing for her. And the last time I had picked up cross stitch was when I was in elementary school.

48:14

Speaker 1

Oh, wow.

48:16

Speaker 2

And I was like, this is something new. And like, it exercises my brain and, you know, you just. I like to always be open to trying new things. Sometimes I go too far and do things like getting back on roller skates when I could easily break apart as opposed to when I was much younger. But yeah, always doing that and you know, always spending time with. Spending time with friends, spending more time with friends, traveling more.

48:51

Speaker 1

I love it. All right, these are great. Any destinations you want to get to or go back to?

48:56

Speaker 2

Well, I was an exchange student in Paris in college and so I will always go back to Paris. I consider it my little second home. I love that city. But as far as places, I'd love to go to, one I'm checking off this year. I'm going to Scotland with a couple of girlfriends. We are celebrating a successful round of cancer treatment for one of my really good girlfriends.

49:29

Speaker 1

Amazing.

49:29

Speaker 2

And that's our celebration trip. But I've never traveled to Asia and I would really like to experience that culture. I've also always wanted to go on a safari. Photography safari, not hunting safari, but I've always wanted to go on a safari. Just that wilderness seems so. Just otherworldly to me.

50:02

Speaker 1

Never been there. Did take my family 2024 to Japan. So highly recommend. It was a magical place. So, all right, we got the good bucket list out of you there. And I love the. Hey, try something new. But in that case, the cross stitching something you had done before and it just came back to you. So just a couple more things here. Mar around as we wrap up. It's been fun. Reminisce a little. Is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners? If not a book, maybe a podcast or a documentary. Just. Hey, just a pro tip and this is pretty neat.

50:33

Speaker 2

Oh, goodness. Right now, books wise, I am listening to all of the Jane Austen books with my daughter and that's one of my. They're one of my all time favorites. But. But that's not really environmentally focused, just a general.

50:54

Speaker 1

I mean I've gotten from my guest, Sci Fi. It doesn't have to be about building.

51:00

Speaker 2

So I, yeah, I, I love reading. I love read all different types of genres. So my

recommendation is to find what you really love and what really interests you and just read it. If you don't like the book, go to another one. Read all the time. Use your library app. You can do it on your phone. There are worlds out there just waiting.

51:29

Speaker 1

For you to discover many books and yeah, I appreciate Audible too. And go ahead.

51:34

Speaker 2

Yeah, I would say that. Me personally, I read a lot for work, whether it's regulations or, you know, news articles. You know, there are a breadth of different things that I read that are technical for work. So when I read for fun, I tend to go in the exact opposite direction.

52:00

Speaker 1

And adventure and scientific data.

52:03

Speaker 2

Yes, I want, I do still love sci fi, but I, yeah, I want something fun and, you know, entertainment.

52:13

Speaker 1

Well, great tip on the library card too. I mean, just make sure everybody knows that it's not just for the physical books, but they have an entire library of audiobooks for free at your local.

52:23

Speaker 2

Audiobooks, magazines, videos, movies, everything. Use your public services and a lot.

52:33

Speaker 1

Of LEED certified libraries in Fulton county, where we live here in Atlanta.

52:38

Speaker 2

So I'm sure you've worked on some. I've worked on some. Some through my career.

52:43

Speaker 1
Good ones.

52:44

Speaker 2
Yeah.

52:45

Speaker 1
So last couple things here as we start to wrap up. If you look back on your career so far, is there anything you wish you'd have learned earlier or maybe just some career advice you wish someone would have told you earlier?

52:57

Speaker 2
I would say, that's a good question. I think I would have. I would. If I was talking to my younger self, I would tell her to take more chances and trust her instincts more. I think you can achieve great things when you're willing to take that leap, which I'm sure you know, I mean, you've built business, you know, sometimes you just have to not be afraid and take the leap. And I tend to be more risk averse, less so as I've gotten older, but I would have, you know, I would have encouraged that a little more because it's amazing what you can do if you are not afraid and you lean on your community.

53:46

Speaker 1
I love that. And I think what goes hand in hand is just that self confidence, right? It's like, hey, I'm a young professional for this season. I want to kind of point in this direction. I think that's what I want to do. But don't put a time frame on it. Just see if it's somewhat pointed in the direction you think you want to go in, that you hear the. What's the worst that happens? Like, no, you're resilient. You'll figure things out, you know. So, yeah, you're right. I Love that. All right, well, last thing as. As we wrap up. You've been in the screen building movement for a while. You've seen all kinds of evolutions. I've been there, too. Any advice to someone that's just now jumping in or really just words of encouragement and then we'll wrap up.

54:27

Speaker 2

Yeah, well, I am lucky that I am now in the position that I can mentor more instead of be. Just be a mentee. So I would say lean on your community, meet people, go to those networking events, reach out to people on LinkedIn, do all of those things. And, you know, stay apprised of current events where this field is always changing, Even acronyms are changing. When I started, corporate sustainability was csr. Corporate Responsibility.

55:08

Speaker 1

Well, yeah, I forget Corporate and social responsibility.

55:11

Speaker 2

Social responsibility, and now. And it's gone to esg. Environmental, Social Governance. So, like, as we've expanded what, you know, what we mean by different things, the acronyms even change. So just lean into learning new things. Lean into meeting people in your community. I don't think that I've ever gotten a job that I didn't know someone at the firm that I went to work for and, I don't know, take chances, go have fun. It's a great industry to be in.

55:48

Speaker 1

It is. And gosh, this is a ton of fun. I think our listeners are really enjoying this. So make sure if you're listening, connect with Mariana on LinkedIn. Check out the really cool work her and her team are doing. And I know I've been wanting to do this for a while. Life's about timing. Now was the right time to check in on your career. Congrats on all your success. Hope to see you at a Georgia Tech football game coming up. Or. Yeah, mutual friends too, you know.

56:16

Speaker 2

Yeah. Go Jackets.

56:17

Speaker 1

Go Jackets.

56:19

Speaker 2

Thanks, John.

56:20

Speaker 1

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