Where Fire Protection Meets Sustainability: New LEED Fellow Ben Roush on Batteries, Refrigerants, and Designing Resilient Buildings Under LEED v5 | 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.

00:33
Speaker 2
Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building matters podcast. Over 10 years, I've been interviewing amazing people all over the world working in the built environment, but especially green buildings. It's always fun in the fall because that's when we have our newly minted class of lead fellows. I'm honored to be in there since 2020. We've got Ben with us today, coming to us from Baltimore. Ben, how you doing, man?

00:55
Speaker 3
I'm doing pretty well. I actually met somebody else who was minted in 2021 with you. One of our. One of the clients we work for, and he said it was the weirdest time because he looked like it's gonna be a party. Oh, wait, Covid, that was weird for you all.

01:10
Speaker 2
We did not have a party. We were in the credits of the virtual Zoom. Mahesh, the CEO at the time, was like, oh, yeah, by the way, here's the new lead fellows. But we want to celebrate this. It's a big deal. We'll get into that in a minute. But for our listeners who are just in and around buildings, but especially green buildings. Hey, take us back. Where'd you grow up and go to school?

01:30
Speaker 3
Yeah. So I grew up in suburban Ohio. Very suburbs. Very, very suburbs. And I was convinced, you know, growing up right outside of Columbus, I was. I was not going to Ohio State. I was getting out of town, and. And then I went to Ohio State. I. Growing up, I gotta think this is like a. Like a, like, uniform among engineers. I love playing with Legos. Loved, particularly, like, the techniques, you know, like, getting into gearing, things like that. Loved cars, wanted to go work for the auto industry. Ohio State did a whole program like your. Your mechanical engineering program at Ohio State was. Was making you an automotive engineer. It's heavy on machine design. I went and did my first internship, and two. Two things happened. I found out I don't want to fill out paperwork that much to do that little.

02:16
Speaker 3
I spent six months filling out forms that was. That was not a good fit. And, like, Filling out forms to do teeny design changes. And I started dating my. The. A woman who'd been my climbing partner for years, one of my best friends, because I missed her more than I missed anybody else.

02:33
Speaker 2
From.

02:33
Speaker 3
Ohio State. Woman I eventually ended up marrying. Yeah. Which is so. So really positive and really, you know,

like, I came back to school, I had already been through three years of school. I was like, oh, no. What I wanted to do with my life is not what I want to do. What do I do now?

02:49
Speaker 2
I love that. And, well, you didn't quite say the Ohio State, but I know.

02:55
Speaker 3
I have trouble with that. I feel like it's like a pretension. Right? Like, it's like.

02:59
Speaker 2
But for those that can't see, this is an audio podcast. You've got the Ohio State colors on. So it's in your DNA.

03:05
Speaker 3
It's in my closet, certainly. And that wasn't even intentional, so that's great to hear. Why, yes. Wait. Yes, I do.

03:13
Speaker 2
So engineer versus architect. So you're playing with Legos. You might like to build things, you know, How'd you decide between those two? Because as I understand it, Ohio State has a good architecture program, too. So how'd you decide which lane to go cut down?

03:27
Speaker 3
They do. I actually had an architect as a roommate, various architects as a roommate from freshman year on when I. When am I. When I. One engineer, two engineers, and one architect in the dorm, and then different architect as a roommate the next two years. I always liked the gear sets. I always liked building cars. I always liked, you know, like, the mechanical design aspect, the problem solving there. I. I think I could have loved architecture, but it's something I only realized, like, half. Like, 15 years into my career, I realized that they really are having fun over there. I started sitting in with an architecture studio at University of Maryland in the late teens, an integrated design studio. So it's one of their master's classes. I'm like, well, hot damn, this is. This is great. They're getting deep into it.

04:14
Speaker 3
But again, I was, you know, I was more than 15 years into my career at that point, so.

04:18
Speaker 2
A.

04:19
Speaker 3
Little late to turn around.

04:20
Speaker 2
That's okay. All right. So I also ask, in that kind of early career development, like, when did sustainability first show up for you?

04:29
Speaker 3
Yeah, so I. I convinced Carrie to marry me. That was my wife, the woman I started dating in Detroit out of college, and she was doing an economic program, so she went off to UC Santa Cruz to do a PhD in astrophysics. And I moved to California. Was like, I got. I Got no jobs here. I don't. And they don't teach you how to look for a job. But I ended up working. I ended up by way of an Ohio State like just like an Ohio State fan event meeting an engineer who said I gotta introduce you to my MEP friends. Took me around to a couple firms and they were

all building design consultants. Ended up working for a firm that did very large scale agricultural and winery food production buildings.

05:12
Speaker 3
You know, like large warehouse size freezers, industrial scale wineries down the Monterey Valley out of Monterey. Axiom engineers. And they're still there, they're still a going concern. And they didn't say sustainability ever. But every farmer businessman or businessman farmer, depending on the person, had sustainability built in. Right? They were composting not because it was a green thing to do, but they were composting because it made financial sense. And they were recycling their wash water for irrigation because it, just because it made financial sense. They paid to get that water. And it was just built in the, into the way of being a farmer. In 2008 I moved to Seattle because my wife took a job at University of Washington, started working for FSI engineers who I still work for. And they had done a fair amount of lead work early on.

06:06
Speaker 3
They also did a bunch of heavy industrial and heavy industrial also. Nobody's saying sustainability, but they're pretty interested in their energy spend and they're pretty interested in meeting environmental regulation that impacts their process or worker safety or a bunch of other things we now recognize as indoor air quality. But in 2008 were more talking about ocean requirements, things like that. So it was a weird world of high sustainability meets high industrial, that I'd already been comfortable in the food production side. And it also led into a whole bunch of lead work as King county and the state of Washington started making lead just that's the standard. You got to hit LEED gold. And later on in the mid teens, they passed a lead platinum ordinance. Basically every project you work on is an ILFI PEDAL certified or LEED platinum.

06:58
Speaker 3
And it's just like the way of doing business in the Pacific Northwest.

07:01
Speaker 2
It is. I mean that's where Cascadia is. You're right. Living building challenge. And you know, we just stack on these programs like leed, but there are some things we can do like regenerative design. So. Okay, so thanks for letting us know the lane you chose, it wasn't called sustainability, but it was happening. I like to ask about mentors too though. Ben, as you look back, sometimes a Mentor someone. You read their material, you see them from afar, but they inspire you. We mentioned David Gottfried here before the call, and then over here. It could be someone, though that challenges you, meets with you, opens door. So have you had any mentors along the way?

07:36
Speaker 3
Yeah, I think of this more as a direct. So, you know, like at Axiom, I was trained to do machine design. I was trained to do like heavy industrial and design widgets for my career. And at Axiom, I turned around and started doing hydronics and airside design. And, you know, like that's the first time I'd ever seen a psychrometric chart. You know, air and humidity on the same chart. I'd always. Like in school we did that by hand with tables. And it's like magic, right? So I like people directly teaching me these things at the beginning of my career that you don't come out of college necessarily knowing unless you took a specialty H VAC design course. That was an optional, not a mandatory. So that's, you know, Ned Loeffing at Axiom, Tim Ryan, who's now retired, like, he was a farmer engineer.

08:25
Speaker 3
He fit well with those farmer businessmen. Ray Cole, who still runs the firm there is in the process of stepping out, I guess who took the flyer in the first place? I was the first engineer they'd hired who didn't have years of experience, you know, first engineer out of school, which is now common practice, but felt like a flyer at the time. And then when I went to Seattle, the two people I ended up working for, eight person firm, teeny going concern at fsi. Ram Danforth and Michael Eshelman. Right. Like, I learned so much under those folks and particularly under Michael. There was a sustainability mindset that just permeated the firm, which is darn neat. They also gave me a free reign to just go out. Like I wanted to keep doing wineries. They said, great, go market it.

09:08
Speaker 3
If you can bring them in, we can do them. I wanted to start doing commissioning as part of sustainability practice. Right. I was already doing a bunch of lead energy modeling. We already did commissioning for our industrial, like our own industrial projects because you started up your own. And they let me just go out and start that group. Right. And it's now a whole thing, you know, whole side service that we do. It's been a neat thing and maybe it's something that you can only do when you're a teeny firm to say, well, all right, you get three hours a week, go at it. But getting that kind of leeway as a late 20s, early 30s, you're a little into your career some things, but not everything. Nobody said no to you too hard. It really opens up some possibility.

09:52
Speaker 2
That's exciting. Okay, now that connects some dots there on the mentors, people giving you a shot to start a whole revenue stream. I mean commissioning so important, not just fundamental enhanced. You know, gosh, we get into envelope. I mean there's so much more we could be doing there. What are some of your proudest achievements? What's on the highlight reel?

10:11
Speaker 3
So lead fellow just happened, right? I'm still like that's now like two weeks old. But as part of the lead fellow application you go through like your highlight reel and you do a pretty long cv, you know, which is modestly different than a resume. And over in the academic world, like my wife started laughing at me because like she maintained her CV full time as an academic. But you know, I'm putting those highlight reel down and it's like highly sustainable projects. I've, I've dual license as a mechanical and fire protection engineer. Like you know, look at looking back, it's just like looks like this big list of wins which it didn't always feel like at the time. Right. Like there certainly struggles in between the wins. I think the biggest win is probably like convincing Carrie to marry me eventually that starts.

10:58
Speaker 3
Well, I think she was probably taking a flyer on a 23 year old without a job. Kind of goofball guy.

11:05
Speaker 2
A leap of faith. I know you've mentioned a few times you must have a great relationship. That's exciting and I'm sure you support each other in your career. So that's great.

11:13
Speaker 3
It's good. Yeah. You have two kids that are just full pride.

11:17
Speaker 2
How, how old are they?

11:19
Speaker 3
2 And 4. We, we started late. We, we started after Carrie got tenure project wise. I like projects that you get to do once and you never get to do again. We did a, a lead platinum chocolate factory, France Chocolates, doing a early 1900s brew house turn and turning it into a chocolate factory. You know like the original Rainier brewery. You know they had like 30,000 gallon tanks they were brewing in that had holes through three stories of building that kind of thing again like projects you get to do once, never get to do again. Transitional homeless housing at the other end. We did some ILFI certified transitional homeless housing that a block project that is now no longer a, like their nonprofit shut down. But we did, I think 11 of those before they shut down accessory dwelling units.

12:09
Speaker 3

But they're just, they're designed like little like ship cabins. They're, they're the neatest, you know, and they're incredibly efficient. They're, they're net zero. It's, it's pretty great.

12:18
Speaker 2
Oh, that's a cool highlight. Real cool projects. Yeah, go ahead. What else?

12:23
Speaker 3
In 2021 was my first real legislative effort working with AIA Maryland and Chris Parks in and an architect, locally renowned architect here does all the legislative outreach for a Maryland Climate Solutions now. Didn't pass. Came back in 2022 and with a big push with a lot of organizations, many organizations pushing hard on it, got it passed. I was testifying for that set up building benchmarking, building energy performance standards. 35,000 Square foot building and over. There's a solid mandate to stop burning fossil fuels. So some legislative wins in recent years. Some defensive beps that like it's quiet. People don't see that, see it that much. But like super proud of those.

13:14
Speaker 2
Good for you, man. That's a great highlight reel. And the family, the careers and all kinds of cool buildings. All right, chocolate fighter, I need to go check that out, man. If.

13:24
Speaker 3
You're, if you're in Seattle, go down to, they call it Georgetown, which is real confusing if you're in my end of the country, Baltimore. But yeah, go down there and check out the chocolate factory. Just don't eat too much. You'll get like.

13:37
Speaker 2
A.

13:37
Speaker 3
Psychedelic weirdness going on.

13:40
Speaker 2
All right, good warning there. All right, so let's talk present day. So tell us more about fsi, your role and tell us about the company.

13:50
Speaker 3
So let's see. 2013, I moved to Baltimore. My wife took a job working on space telescopes, which was like a. Yeah, all right, we're moving wherever that is moved as a remote employee. One of my, now the CEO, who's now CEO of our company. At the time were both just like, you know, like the first step into ownership. Associates said people work remote. We should try this. 2013 Ended up starting an office here. Got multiple staff. I have just passed off. I now have an interstitial. Instead of directly managing all these folks, it's really neat. So I've taken a hard step back into the technical and advisory on our projects.

14:28
Speaker 3
That is, it's a true joy to get back to that, to take that step away from the everyday management still doing a lot of business development, things like that, but it's been really good things that I'm most Excited about project wise. We got a bunch of clients who are starting to speak the language of carbon, who are at least understanding the cost penalty of fossil fuels in Maryland. Over on the west coast we get into a bunch of deeply decarbonized, you know, like decarb projects that are deeply understood and the clients are really speaking the language, particularly at the municipal level. Like it's neat to see a lot of that. Like you feel like you've been pushing for 10 years and it's starting to come to fruition. It's good.

15:07
Speaker 2
And so with your firm, it sounds like multiple offices, you've built up the office there, you've got a great team. Yeah. Remind us two things. What kind of projects in general do you work on? And then you have a unique role. Like you said, you're a fire protection engineer. I mean, and you're also over sustainability. So want to tie those together. But what kind of projects or product types, project types do you usually work on?

15:30
Speaker 3
It is the weirdest mix at fsi. It is, you can say a senior level person has a passion for this and is out marketing it and it's highly complex. Those are the only through lines of our projects. So we've got like incredibly process heavy process specific manufacturing by way of the, you know, the Boeings and SpaceXs of the world. We've got food production because I got a real passion for that. We've got some highly sustainable, you know like Lead Platinum, Ilafi, Passive House because I and another principal have a passion for that. We've got where those meet those other two, you know, like municipal meets Passive House. Is Olin our firm that's his jam is he is most happy getting in that intersection. So it is fun because it keeps it interesting.

16:22
Speaker 3
Particularly sitting in my role of technical advisory, like being a mechanical and fire protection. I get called in to the weirdest projects. Like the most technically oddball, you know, if you've got like flammable environments meets flammable environments, meet some sustainability requirement, I'm in a pretty happy place. And that's a, that's not a, a common thing to go together, but you get it sometimes in food production.

16:47
Speaker 2
Oh. So what I'm hearing is, you know, go to where there's some interest, passions be unique, you know, and then you're going to bake in some sustainability. So, so how do those conversations go? I mean do you sometimes. Is your team sometimes the one that says hey, we know we need to be energy efficient let's focus on decarbonization. But do you bring up lead? Has the architect already like when does certification start coming up in conversation?

17:12
Speaker 3
Yeah. Let me use a project that I love that has gone on the shelf so I think I can talk about it. We worked on a battery electric bus base so that. That was a happy place for me. It was like battery and the fire protection aspects of battery meet heavy industrial, meet civic purpose. Right. And on that the owner mandated. We're going to get lead platinum or it has to be ILFI can be one of those. So you're trying to design a net zero battery electric bus based maintenance facility. Like I couldn't have been happier. Right. Like that was the coolest project that. That's probably like if you pick like the last five years that's. That's some of the best that I've worked on. And again it's been shelved and is. They're currently retooling exactly what they're going to do about that.

17:58
Speaker 3
But yeah. Sorry. So it's often it's client driven out on the west coast. Right. Like they're the one saying going to be carbon neutral or we're. Or we're going to be net zero or we're going to be. Keep going. ILFI pedal certified.

18:12
Speaker 2
Got it.

18:12
Speaker 3
That's particularly for municipal projects. That's just. That's just normal out here on the east coast it's a little different. You're having the discussion. It's often like a developer gets tax incentives or it's state mandated. I. I chair the. The. This is a horrible naming convention but they did it in 2009 so you'd have to give them some. So I have to give them some leave. The Maryland Green Building Council which has nothing to do with USGBC sets all of the sustainability standards for state funded building. I chair that group. I kind of got volunteered back

in 2024. We just incorporated a year ago LEED V5 as the standard that whole standard's built around. That was a bunch of work. But for all state funded building like they're going to build to a LEED silver standard.

18:56
Speaker 3
There's a whole list of mandatory credits including electrification actually implementing some of that Resilien not now talking about in lead v5. And so that's client driven as well. And by way of that standard and the work on that standard like we gotta. We got a local discussion going. When people are really seeking high levels of sustainability or high levels of lead. We're getting calls for this.

19:20
Speaker 2
Sounds like there's a lot of activity there. So educate us about fire protection and sustainability. Where have you seen that? Maybe make adjustments if anywhere.

19:30
Speaker 3
Yeah. No. Oh yeah. No, no. So I was on the energy and atmosphere technical advisory from 2020 to January of 2021 through the five year term through December of 2025. So all of the V5 development cycle and most of what we talked about on energy and atmosphere was energy related. And I'm happy being in that seat like mechanical engineer running our sustainability group. Lots of background in energy modeling. Great. And a little bit we talked about refrigerants and the sleeper of fire protection is our dry agent refrigerant based or they're inert gases that are oxygen displacing and suffocate people. So like our go to for decades had an ozone depletion and a global warming potential similar to some of our old gen refrigerants. Our now go to is like 3M just stopped making it because it's got such a high global warming potential.

20:31
Speaker 3
Its cost in the market has more than double. It's not a thing we're doing anymore. So in fire protection like that, fire protection meets clean agent meets like data center or comm room is entirely changed because of sustainability and because of some EPA targets and because of just market forces. So that's like your biggest. You can point to that. You can also point to you know like foaming agents, afff, aqueous foam, filming forming foam that like you know you had forever chemicals, you had some nasty things in there that sustainability has been really what pushed that out, not the fire industry. And now they're incredibly special to use. You know like aircraft Runway fires they might still be using, using foam but little else. So sustainability has gotten in there and it's a little bit sleeper. Right.

21:24
Speaker 3
Like fire protection engineers aren't out talking about sustainability at conferences, things like that. But it is definitely impacting that practice.

21:33
Speaker 2
It's happened. And I remember I've taught a lot of lead prep classes over my career and you know R11, R22, we get a R134, a 410A. But you're right on the fire suppression side too. And.

21:46
Speaker 3
A.

21:46
Speaker 2
Lot of things we don't think about,.

21:48
Speaker 3
I should do that as a mention as well. So like the Venn diagram overlap now that we have A2L refrigerants, you know A2 light that are just this side. R10 was 410 was just this side of flammable and A2Ls, you know, R34,12,34Y so on are just that side of flammable. You know, suddenly fire prediction engineers are getting up

in the middle of refrigerant discussions. It's, that's been an interesting paradigm shift. And I'm hoping, crossing my fingers for 2027, the mechanical code to have a, a little better rules about multi floor, multi story chases with refrigerant, things like that.

22:28
Speaker 2
Yeah,.

22:30
Speaker 4
You spent months, maybe years earning that LEED certification. Don't let it go unnoticed. Building Plaques creates custom lead recognition plaques that tell the story of your project sustainability achievement and put your design or operation team's work front and center. Their online plaque designer lets you build a fully customized plaque in under 10 minutes. Just enter your lead project number and you're off. Plaques are made from architectural grade anodized aluminum using sustainable materials and subsurface printing. So they're built to last as long as the building itself. Recognize the work, educate the visitors, show the world what green building looks like. Check them out@buildingplaques.com.

23:16
Speaker 2
So, all right, I can tell you love the work you do. The team. Let's talk about the future. So is there anything you're excited about? What's next in this green building movement,.

23:27
Speaker 3
Personal projects. I just had one come in that's doing carbon capture, but involves flammable liquids and acids and it's like fire protection meets mechanical meets carbon capture. And I'm so excited just to be. That's like very preliminary, but I'm super excited.

23:43
Speaker 2
Nice.

23:44
Speaker 3
As far as like, you know, like being on the lead v5 committee definitely gave me like a framework, a window to be looking at this through. And I am looking forward to those first V5 programs. We've done some where we do side by side scorecards, but we haven't gotten too much further yet. But V5 forces a conversation on Decarb and VFAR embodied and operational and transportation if you're doing it. And it forces a conversation on resiliency. You know, living in Seattle, living in coastal cities, let's say that way. Living in Seattle and Baltimore and Santa Cruz, like resiliency is a, like there's a clear one for me, you know, like sea level rise. Maryland is a teeny state with something like 3,100 miles of shoreline. It's just insane what the impact will be of sea level rise.

24:35
Speaker 3
Seattle already built its seawall 13ft higher than they anticipated sea level rise because they see it coming and Santa Cruz keeps having the river you know, back flood into the town. Yeah, it's something to say but having that discussion at least to say, well you're building right on the river. We got it. We got to talk about, you know, your long term impact and just being mandatory. Aia. I'm a local chapters committee in the environment, one of the co chairs. You know, like AIA has had mandate like many things. AIA is out in front of our engineering similar organizations about having these discussions. AIA is a couple years ago changed their professional practice standard, basically their standard of care. So you should be talking about resiliency with your clients, even though not everybody is.

25:22
Speaker 3
Anyways, I'm looking forward to actually being sitting at the table having our portion of the input. You know, MEP fire protection has a thing to say about resiliency and like where you put your electric service and how you deal with flooding events and so on.

25:36
Speaker 2
All right, resiliency. You know, for my last several podcasts we've been talking Ben, about these new umbrellas. Right. Lead used to be the strategy. I've done a lot of lead work. I was fortunate for that when it was the strategy, but now it's just part of a strategy. Maybe now we need to fit under decarbonization or resiliency or regenerative design. So it's interesting these new umbrellas, so to speak. And I think that's what you're talking about. But don't forget resiliency. Just there's so much happening out there where our buildings not only need to last longer, be more durable, but you know, even first responders and how do we get in here? And I know that's some of your world also on fire suppression. So you know for someone listening that they're not quite sure on resiliency. I know Perkins well had the rely program.

26:22
Speaker 2
I don't know how do you look at resiliency? Do you have just some standards you kind of make sure it passes a litmus test or what?

26:30
Speaker 3
I'll give you the bigger answer and then the MEP specific answer. So the bigger answer, you know, that V5 framework, you're just going to have a discussion, you're going to talk about what your local risks are. Growing up in Ohio, I can tell you that's some different climate risks than where I live now in Baltimore or where I lived in Seattle. So it's an interesting one because it's, you know, like, it's like all discussion is local about that. And if I'm dropping into A project from a different locality. I got to think pretty hard about what those risks are specific to the mep. You know, like we're really building scale. We're not tight scale. We're going to be pretty solidly focused on passive survivability, which is just another way of saying energy efficiency all over again.

27:15
Speaker 3
Giving people operational control of their environment, give them operable windows, things like that. One of the things that we're getting into pretty big right now as an industry is just battery storage versus generator. And when you're talking about that discussion and how long that passes, that, that active survivability lasts before you're, you know, a cold dark shell just kind of floating along with whatever temperatures you've got. We've had our first couple of clients, we work on some community focused like resiliency hub things who are doing actual battery conversions and we're getting into deep discussions about what you can run and for how long. It's right in the middle of electrical meets sustainability. It's pretty neat stuff. But they can't run their whole building for days on a battery like you might on a bigger generator. Makes.

28:06
Speaker 2
Sense. Batteries big part of the future. I used to work on a lot of buildings in New York City. I think FDNY was definitely kind of pooing it. Hey, I don't know if we're ready for that. Whereas State of California maybe is like, I get it, hybrid building. Let's figure it out. So I don't know where has there been more kind of progressive look at. Okay, well let's figure out how to let more batteries in our buildings.

28:32
Speaker 3
Yeah, I think we gotta talk about scale there. So like the New York Fire Department is taking a outward looking educational role. Were you at Green Build this year? Walking. It was the first time I'd noticed in New York and I haven't been in New York since before the pandemic. So it was my first time back. Even though I live this close. We.

28:51
Speaker 2
That's okay. Take the Acelo or something. Yeah, I guess.

28:54
Speaker 3
Yeah, yeah, it's easy to get there and I don't ever do it. But for the first time I noticed all the like, no small lithium charging in this building. Right. Like, like a bunch of signage that they've been out in front of the

country on. So like at small battery scales, the likelihood of like a thermal runaway is rather elevated compared to like large installed, you know, like the power walls of the world or the other, you know, battery storage. The thing to say about it is a generator carries its own risk. Diesel is not how much diesel volume is not without its risk. Buyers are less likely with batteries than you have with a diesel generator, but the consequence of those fires is orders of magnitude higher.

29:37
Speaker 3
So you take the two together and it's a discussion to have with every owner that we have with every owner wanting to go to battery storage to be like, all right, let's talk about the pros and cons. This is, this is just like any other decision we make in our building.

29:49
Speaker 2
Is that more for peak shaving or for resiliency or both.

29:54
Speaker 3
Most of our owners are talking about it for resiliency.

29:57
Speaker 2
Okay.

29:57
Speaker 3
Right. Like they don't want to peak shave much because they want that full battery when the grid goes down. And a lot of our, you know, it's like code red days, peak cooling days. They, they want to be ready if kind of thing. We do have some clients who are talking about it in a, you know, but they get to the cost and they look at the cost versus the benefit and it doesn't pencil out for them.

30:18
Speaker 2
Got it. Okay. Well that's a big part of the future resiliency. Your team and you're primed on all the different facets from the mechanical, the energy, the fire protection and of course all the rating systems. So let's get to know you a little more here. Ben, this is great. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

30:36
Speaker 3
This is always a hard one. So pre kids, I would have said prodigious memory and ability to have near instant recall free kids when I was still sleeping a normal amount of time, particularly in this time change week, right. Like, like election week meets time change,.

30:52
Speaker 2
Right.

30:52
Speaker 3
Kids waking up at five because they don't, I don't know, it's five,.

30:55
Speaker 2
No sleep.

30:57
Speaker 3
So that's what I historically would have said. And it is coming back. You know, the two year old's starting to sleep enough. It's great. And that shows up in like I just got. Have just a ridiculous number of certifications and letters after my name. I'm, I'm the designated test taker at FSI and like I can remember the last three versions of

code not verbatim but I know where to go look and I know what it says. The other one is it's almost a luck thing, right? Like landing in with like a company that's your folks gives you a free rein to go and try stuff, fail sometimes succeed more than you fail. But. And you have good colleagues who are following you along. I think there's something there about, like, I'm super enthusiastic about what I'm working on.

31:42
Speaker 3
If I'm not super enthusiastic, I'm probably not. Probably not going to be working on it very long. But it's enough enthusiasm that it carries other people with you. Right? Like, they get excited because you're excited, not because they were already excited. Like an infectious enthusiasm. I think I'd say that's like, not something I always realized as a gift, but as I gotten further in my career and leadership, like, I'm realizing it's a, like a commentary to leaders that was not really, you know, trumpeted, heralded,.

32:12
Speaker 2
Infectious enthusiasm. That's a good one there, man. So, you know, do you have any good habits, routines, rituals that help you stay on point?

32:22
Speaker 3
Our CFO would say, fill out your timesheet every day. That. That's her, like, every week message, right? Like, like, don't wait till the end of the week. You don't know what you did. But really, I, I think it's like something that costs nothing and builds everything. We don't, we don't do a lot of. A lot of, like, we at the leadership level don't do a lot of good. A lot of staying good job or good work or, you know, like praise or kudos or taking time to just, like, thank the people around us for going hard on a project. And again, it doesn't take much. As a firm, we've started doing an acknowledgment slide and we'll sit there at the leadership level, like, whoever's running the meeting that day, we'll sit there until it's uncomfortable. Nobody acknowledges anybody.

33:07
Speaker 3
We're going to sit there for 15 seconds waiting for somebody to say something because we want that that level of, like, public, like, people are doing good work and should be acknowledged for it.

33:18
Speaker 2
Good. Yeah. I work with a coach named Cal that taught me some powerful words. I noticed. So this works with your kids, with your significant others, but also with your team, and especially you've got some remote team members, right? So on Friday, I don't know if you slack or use slack, but shoot them a slack. Hey, I noticed how you handled that client meeting, so just say I noticed. I mean, human nature. We all want to be noticed, so I noticed. That's the EQ touch that needs to be said more often.

33:49
Speaker 3
It's a, It's a retention tool. It. It's a, like committed followers, like, developing your Team tool. And yeah, it does work in your private life. Life also.

33:59
Speaker 2
Yeah, I noticed. That's good, man. So I'm a fan of the bucket list. For some people, it's adventure travel, write a book. What's on the bucket list?

34:08
Speaker 3
Yeah, so this is a, Like, I don't feel like I'm old enough to say that yet because I got some, some, you know, I got like another. If I. Yeah. 20 Years of career. Right. Like, I got some things I want to do between now and then. But, like, I always feel like I have time. I tend to jump around a bunch because I'm, you know, I'm. I've got all these different facets of what I'm doing, what I've studied, what I'm an expert in. I, I think the one I don't have that is like a, A box I want to check in soon is working on a true carbon neutral project. Right. Not just operationally, but embodied as well. It's, it hasn't been on our portfolio yet, and it's not, you know, Even under lead V5, you're talking about carbon.

34:53
Speaker 3
But unless you know, as a prereq, that you don't have to do anything until you. And do you want to get some points for it? It's. It's going to take the right client and it's going to take the right project to make that go.

35:05
Speaker 2
Coming soon. That's important. But on the personal side, is there a place you want to visit or go back to? How about one destination?

35:13
Speaker 3
Yeah. So my wife, being an academic, she travels just for conferences all over the place. I don't know why astronomers have conferences in cool places, but was that 2016, 2017, somewhere in there? We were in the Galapagos and were only there for a week and a half. And like, I don't know how I'm ever going to take a month off, you know, in a stretch and be like, and you can't call me because the Internet doesn't work, you know, But I need to go back for a extended off, you know, off the networks, off the grid visit. It just was a place of incredible beauty.

35:51
Speaker 2
I've heard that. I've not been. Sounds absolutely amazing. Okay, Back on the bucket list. Maybe take the kids when they get older. Yeah,.

36:01
Speaker 3
They got to learn to swim first because it's like part of being there is the snorkeling. They got to.

36:05
Speaker 2
Learn. Okay. Swim first a Little bit. You know, I like to ask my podcast guests, is there a book you'd recommend? It doesn't have to be about buildings. If not a book, like a documentary or podcast.

36:17
Speaker 3
Yeah. So I read like half an hour every night and I've been working hard to make sure that's not on my phone. It's not, you know, like something that's going to get me worked up. The point is to calm down. So I've got David's book sitting on my nightstand, but I haven't read it. I can't recommend it. I have no idea. But a recent one I read, that's industry specific. The Baltimore chapter of the Committee on the Environment had a book night with Carl Elefante, who was a principal for a local firm but is doing like a national book tour on Going for Zero. And it's got a subtitle that you're gonna have to go look up. But, like, that was a perfect read. I. I was not in along with most of it. Didn't get me worked up.

36:55
Speaker 3
It was a perfectly half hour. Easy, easy. And to calm down in the not work environment, I just read the whole Throw in a Glass series. Sarah. Sarah Moss. And it. Like, I read seven books and I did not turn off the light after half an hour. And I read far too late into the night and it turned me into a cranky monster for a month. And it was worth every minute of that. Our. Our current environment. My wife just reread this and it reminded me of it and I went back and read it. Ursula Le Guin, always going home.

37:24
Speaker 3
She wrote it in the 80s, but it's got like a B plot about, like, the computers in the wasteland and what they do and the people who are living a very sustainable existence that are apart from the computers and what they do, and they only interact at these, like, village terminals where the computers help the people align resources. You know, it's a. It's like a apocalyptic and also hopeful future. Everybody living sustainably. Something has clearly happened. You never really learn what, you know, like. Like it's lost to history for the people in the book. But like, thinking about that being written in the 80s and looking at our present moment is like, all right, that's a

potential outcome. How can we have the good parts of that and maybe not the. The wastelands with the computers.

38:10
Speaker 2
Wow. Now those are some cool recommendations. I'll put links to those books in the show notes. Thanks, man. That's good stuff. Yeah. Last couple things as we wind down, as you look back on your career. Ben, is there any career advice you wish you to gotten earlier?

38:26
Speaker 3
Again, I'm like mid career and this one is like some of these people have been telling me and I just wasn't listening real well. But Michael Eshelman, right, one of the founding principals at fsi, one of like my person I reported to starting at FSI and for the first eight years would say over and over again just slow down. Just, just slow down a little. What he wasn't saying, the back end of that is it's a long career. You got time to do all the things you're interested in. Just, just slow down. A. Like you don't have to put the pedal to the floor. For green building specifically, there is like a strong urge like everyone should get involved. Find your local committee, find your people. It can be local, state, national level, but find your people and get involved.

39:15
Speaker 3
I started when I moved here in 2013. Peter and Lorraine Du pulled me into the program committee for USGBC Maryland and then I started working on the board. And as USGBC Maryland integrated with national in the late teens, I worked my way up the board position to chair of the board, working with like working with Ryan Snow to integrate the chapter successfully to have a healthy, vibrant community working on the energy and atmosphere. Tag is going to be honest to go. It's going to be a career highlight. It's going to be a pride that I worked on lead v5 long after lead v5.

39:51
Speaker 2
That's, that's cool man.

39:53
Speaker 3
Get involved.

39:54
Speaker 2
It's so important. All right. Get involved and slow down a little. Look at the lay land and don't be by. Don't be, don't be shy there. All right, so last thing is we're winding down. Let's say there's someone that's just now listening. They're getting inspired by your story and they're like they're jumping into this green building movement. Any words of encouragement for them as we come to a close?

40:16
Speaker 3
Particularly if you're early career. This is going to be future employer. Like this is a. It's good for you, it's good for your career. It's also good for the larger sustainability movement at the local level. There's never enough people for advocacy for those advocacy things I talked about earlier. Like that was a committed group of people but not that many people. More people showing up to testify, more people being at those committee on the environment events. You know, just at the local level there's lots to do and never enough people. At the regional and national level, like you're, sometimes you're applying for those committees and sometimes you gotta apply two or three times. I was, I applied at least twice that I can think of for the energy and atmosphere tag before getting on and like, little persistence goes a long way there.

41:04
Speaker 3
And I already knew like those were gonna be my people. This was gonna be an amazing five years.

41:10
Speaker 2

Oh man, that's great advice. Very encouraging for everybody listening. Make sure you connect on LinkedIn with Ben. Check out the cool work at FSI they're doing. I had no idea. All kinds of projects, man. Different needs. I can tell you like to problem solve but also leave some legacy here as you guide the new versions of lead. So just want to say hey, congrats on Lead fellow. I can tell you love the work you do. And just thanks for being on the podcast today, man.

41:38
Speaker 3
Perfect. Thank you for having me.

41:41
Speaker 5
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