

Sustainability Manager at Recycle Track Systems (RTS): Hannah Moskowitz | Transcript

Introduction ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to Green Building Matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals learn insight in green buildings. As we interview today's experts in LEED and WELL. We'll learn from their career paths, war stories and all things green because green building matters and now our host and yes, he has every LEED and WELL credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti .

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

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

Welcome to the next episode of the green building matters podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti. Today I've got Hannah Moskowitz on, she's a LEED AP ONM. We're going to talk all things recycling and waste streams, but Hannah is sustainability and sales operations that RTS and the DCR. Hannah, thanks for jumping on. A pet peeve of mine is actually just recycling in big buildings. I can't wait to talk about some of that and what are the pro tips we all need to know. Hannah take us back. Where'd you grow up? Where'd you go to school?

Hannah ([01:36](#)):

Sure. I grew up in central New Jersey in the suburbs. I had a pretty typical suburban childhood with my two older brothers. We had tons of pets, played outside, focused on school and stuff. From there I went to George Washington University for undergrad and grad. I got my bachelor's in environmental studies and public policy and my master's is in environmental resource policy.

Charlie ([01:59](#)):

Oh, fantastic. Did you have any kind of aha moment along the way? It's not like you have a love for animals and probably a love of nature too, but just how did you kind of first get exposed to sustainability?

Hannah ([02:12](#)):

Kind of a funny story or my dad is an environmental scientist. So my family has generally been outdoorsy and of course, growing up, I had him to see what he did and I always looked up to what he did, but I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I knew that it would be in the environment of field. At that point sustainability really wasn't on my radar and it wasn't really a buzzword yet. So I kind of had to navigate that as I went to college and kind of figure out what I want to do in the environmental field. So that kind of lead me to where I heard sustainability was actually my first internship, at peace Corps headquarters here in DC. It was in the sustainability office and it was my first introduction to LEED policies. LEED building sustainability in general and how that positively impact tenants. And from there, I just was focused on sustainability and trying to find a career path that could bring you there because it wasn't really as defined as some are today.

Charlie ([03:10](#)):

What a great internship there PeaceCorps. It looked like you had a few internships and then kind of chose your career path. Public policy and sustainability environmental policy when I talk to someone that's maybe getting out of college, I kind of said, Hey, you can go this route with renewables or this route policy or this route with like real estate, because what we do with like, say LEED, what was it like with those degrees you got and what made you want to decide to maybe later get into the building side of it. So can you compare the environmental policy coming out of school?

Hannah ([03:45](#)):

Yeah. So it's a really good question. I get that a lot because I do have the policy degree, as I said at the time sustainability wasn't really a career path yet at least when I was in school or at my school. So I kind of had to mold it. When I went into the environmental resource policy masters, I spoke with a lot of my advisors and I told them I know a lot of people are here for federal policy, but I want to work on internal policy. I want to work on policies for

companies, for buildings. I was able to mold my degree in a way that I took engineering courses. I took a lot of different courses that helps me kind of mold it to one that was more internal company policy compared to my cohorts who were working on federal.

Charlie ([04:30](#)):

A lot of sense. Still being in that DC area, I can see both sides of it. Along the way, did you have any mentors or influences you looked up to, did anyone maybe open some doors for you on the way?

Hannah ([04:43](#)):

That would have to be my dad? I always gravitated towards his interests growing up. He also helped me a lot early in my career to help explore the different aspects of the environmental field. He pushed me to try to find something that I loved for myself in the field, not just kind of fall into what he did in the environmental field. I think that was really important.

Charlie ([05:02](#)):

Interesting. You're right. Growing up our kids they definitely mimic and just pick up on so much, that really sounds like that really did influence you. Tie together a little bit of the career path, because I know you've also worked in commercial real estate with like Cushman Wakefield and you worked at a couple of other kind of universities. Tell us a little bit more of that career path kind of fell in the middle part for us.

Hannah ([05:27](#)):

Yeah. I've kind of jumped around. I didn't know exactly where I wanted to be. I knew I wanted to be in the environmental field, but there's so many different aspects, as you said, you have the green building, you have commercial real estate, you have universities. Every one of my jobs or internships, it wasn't exactly the right fit for me, but it helped lead me to where I am now. I worked with Cushman and Wakefield and I helped certify tons of different buildings and worked on their LEED. That was great, but it wasn't exactly what I wanted. So I worked at American University in the sustainability office. From there again, it wasn't exactly what I wanted, but it was so close. I was still doing the LEED. Okay. Doing, , all the aspects of sustainability, but I want to kind of a broader reach. I worked at the international monetary fund and again, it was a great opportunity. I was

working on LEED. I was working on energy and waste, but it was still kind of too focused for me. Then I found the job now at RCS where I kind of do all of those things, focusing waste, but then I can touch so many different people because we have so many different clients and I can problem solve in a different way. Then I was able to do with one specific client.

Charlie ([06:43](#)):

Be willing. I think that's what you're giving everybody here on this podcast that's listening some permission to not settle in and find what you love. Can I get that here and it's okay to say because you have a job, you have a career and then you have a calling and sometimes you got to try on a couple different routes, but we'll talk to us a little bit about what you do at RPS and recycled track system. So kind of bring us up to today. Tell us about the company.

Hannah ([07:12](#)):

Yes. So, RTS, Recycle Track Systems. We are kind of a one stop shop, as we say for waste calling services and sustainable waistline services. So we take care of the trash, recycling, organics, things like that but we also have the sustainability team that focuses on making sure that all operations are as sustainable as possible. So with our clients, we do sustainability walk throughs, we provide recommendationsthings like that. We also specifically here in DC because we have a lot of certified buildings that kind of operate with LEED policies. A lot of what we do is also working on donation and reuse projects. They had a renovation or something, or they're just clearing things out. They'll come to us and say, we have this many binders or 20 chairs or something and we want to divert it from the landfill, but what can we do? And that's when the sustainability team comes in and we try to find a new home for it before we try to recycle it. We just try to do our best to divert from landfills as much as possible.

Charlie ([08:15](#)):

I get to work in commercial state a lot and I really do see the large volume of materials and not just normal, ongoing consumables that come out of a large office building. But to your point, maybe a tenant has a bulk of something and they wanna do the right thing it sounds like they could call someone like you all the way down to maybe a tenant's moving out and they have their space. Sometimes real estate gets wiped clean. So with waste and

recycling, what do the listeners need to know that maybe we don't know about just waste and recycling in 2020. Are we doing better in real estate? Are we doing better manufacturing? Are we seeing improvements or is it kind of hit or miss if you're in New York, DC versus say somewhere in California? What are you seeing out there? Are we doing better?

Hannah ([09:06](#)):

I think it definitely depends where you are of course in the United States. But I think that we are doing better in terms of people starting to realize that it is important and it can also help them save money. I think that previously it was kind of more of a battle and sometimes it is a battle. It should be more sustainable. But I think that now it's kind of in the back of everybody's head. To the manager head that we should be sustainable because its better for image one thing and also it can help save us money in the long run, which is really important. It is interesting because of course, 2020 we know we're now in a pandemic. So it kind of changes everything because a lot of the waste that was coming from commercial real estate is now inundating the residential waste haulers. So it's kind of an interesting switch now, and it'll be interesting to see as this rounds out the year where the waste goes and what happens next.

Charlie ([09:58](#)):

Wow. You're right. I hadn't thought about that too much because so much of that has shifted back towards the moments and working from home. With families at home that waste has spiked. Through the industries your team serves, I have a lot of interest in say green stadiums and it looks like university work. And I know there's the green sports Alliance, so they're typically kind of product think, right? And then someone comes to a sporting event that influences them to do better at home and in their business. But talk a little bit about, say some of the stadiums and some of the larger scale stuff you do. And then maybe compared to say just a one off office building, tell us about some of your clients.

Hannah ([10:39](#)):

Yeah. So we do have a really broad range of clients, which is really exciting to work on. We have stadiums like national appear in DC. And then we have the one off office buildings. It's kind of the same process. We do a sustainability walkthrough and look at what's going on. Of course it's

completely different because the audience for an office building, you can kind of focus on different education compared to the stadiums when you have a fan coming in for two seconds and just wants to throw out their hotdogs. There's definitely more challenges, but I think they're both exciting and they're different ways with their stadiums. We kind of focus on back of house trying to train the staff as much as possible and then make signage. That's very clear, but somebody can just tell in an instant where to put something and then went to office buildings. I think it's more of kind of a longterm education program because we can come in, you can do lunch and learns and you can have these presentations and work hands on with these tenants, for the longterm to try to increase their diversion rates.

Charlie ([11:39](#)):

You mentioned education, that's going to be a big part of what you do. Some markets like glass, for example, maybe it was not accepted. Other times we would walk into an office building in New York and some still think you're only really doing paper if it's clean paper. So I don't know how much of what you do and maybe your day to day Hannah, is on the education.

Hannah ([12:00](#)):

I think a lot of the education kind of comes down to what the client will allow us to do. Of course, some clients just want back of house training, some do want the tenant education. So it really depends. Sometimes it's creating material for back of house and making sure that all that signage is there and having a presentation that just shows that this bag goes here. This is what goes in here. And then the kind of education is kind of more fluid and now we can focus it more on the actual tenants that are there. So we go in and we can do this walk through and we can see, Oh, like, it looks like a lot of the paper towels are going in recycling and we need to make sure that we're educating them why we can't do that? Where it should go, and go on to the next step. So a lot of the times we like to focus our education on examples that we've seen firsthand so that it's not just, , broad scale sustainability, it's something that they can learn from and they can make the changes based on what we tell them.

Charlie ([12:58](#)):

That's exciting. Well, where do you see your industry waste and recycling recycling systems, maybe some technology, where do you see it kind of

trending? Is there any cool technology that's getting overlaid in what you do?

Hannah ([13:12](#)):

There is definitely a lot of technology that's coming out. There's a lot of like contamination cameras that you can put on your compactor uses artificial intelligence to show you that it is contaminated and to take it out before it goes wherever it's going through the transportation so you don't get charged. There's meters so that you can either your compactors that doesn't get pulled as often. But I think for the industry in general, I think that yes, definitely going to be a focus more on the circular economy as we continue as a big picture. Of course, you kind of hear it in social media. You see people demanding that companies are more focused on the bigger picture of their products. There was the shift to the companies having to be focused on sustainability in general. But I think now it's kind of moved past that. They don't just want to see the greenwashing. They want to see what these companies are doing in the long run to help with the plastics problem, to help with our waste issues in general.

Charlie ([14:15](#)):

Yes. It's moving fast and then plastic's been a big focus, right? I mean the Earth Day, plastic straws and just make more awareness, right. I can see your industry speeding up. Looking back on your career so far and in personal life and business now, what are you most proud of? What really stands out on the highlight reel?

Hannah ([14:42](#)):

Oh, that's a hard question. I think for my career, I would say it was when I worked at American University in the sustainability office. I was on the team that helped the university reach carbon neutrality two years ahead of the 2020 target. That was really exciting time to be there. I was able to work on the carbon footprint myself and I helped with the LEED certification for the buildings and just generally did the sustainability work. It was so exciting to be there two years ahead of schedule and we were the first university in the United States to reach carbon neutrality.

Charlie ([15:16](#)):

That's a pretty big one because there's many that are still working on that. Is it a combination of energy efficiency, upgrades, some other offsets with some policy? There was probably a pretty comprehensive plan that,

Hannah ([15:31](#)):

Yeah, so it was a mix of everything. You can't reduce things like university study abroad travel completely. We want people to study abroad. So we use kind of focus, offset projects, built a solar, farm, local rep, and of course energy efficiency projects to make energy use in general on the campus as reduced as possible.

Charlie ([15:52](#)):

Wow. Where are you going? That is a big highlight. Anything else stand out then work or personal wise. It's okay to look back on that. Highlight reel. I don't think we do it enough.

Hannah ([16:02](#)):

Charged to say. I think I think I, when I was in college, I got an internship, a pathways internship with the department of justice, environmental and natural resource division. Looking back, it was not my favorite job and it helped me figure out where I wanted to be, but yes, being able to get that internship made me really proud and I was really excited to be able to, , work in the government and, and try to get to a position where I wanted to be.

Charlie ([16:28](#)):

I can tell you really are excited about the different things you've done so far in your career. You've tried out and you're truly going all in here with RTS, you've got a big reach because it looks like you are in like six different markets and in growing. It's always fun to be part of a company that is really making a difference and also growing, adding jobs and locations. One of my favorite questions, I kind of hinted at earlier with what's in the future for your industry with waste recycling. But how about now when just zoom out and look at sustainability or buildings, what are you reading up on? What do you think this kind of green building movement sustainability movement is?

Hannah ([17:07](#)):

I kind of see a shift happening maybe and one that's not just in sustainability and green buildings, but one that's kind of focus more on the bigger picture. What I mean by that, I think is one, that's not just focused on environmental sustainability, but sustainability in general since it's often overlooked. It's just focused on environmental, but there's so many different assets. We have environmental justice, we have cultural sustainability and all other aspects, but I think people are finally realizing that until we look at all of these, we don't have true sustainability. I think that ties into green buildings really well because I think that there will be a greater emphasis past LEED. I think that people will start trying to achieve and to achieve their WELL certification and things like that because they're looking more at the bigger picture of how they're buildings impact the environment and the people not just the environment.

Charlie ([18:00](#)):

You're absolutely right. I mean, equity and justice maybe that's not as many LEED points as we want, if we were to simplify it but it does show up in a lot of different programs, but even more than that, I mean, that's our communities or society itself and that sustainability tie. So I appreciate you taking us there. Well, let's talk a little bit more. What would you say is your specialty or gift? The tough question?

Hannah ([18:28](#)):

I think it would probably be I'm creative in my personal life and my career. I think that it helps with problem solving a lot and thinking kind of more in a multidimensional way to come up with solutions or ideas. And I think that it kind of extends that it's not just for the sustainability team that I like to work with. Kind of all of the different teams and departments and work together to find a solution that works for everybody.

Charlie ([18:58](#)):

You have a place where you would go and you can think, and you can be creative. I don't know if you're so quarantine or going to the office a little bit, but I know for some it's important to have a place where you're not just down in normal work mode, but you can stop and they can be creative. Do you have like a place where you like to go and be creative?

Hannah ([19:19](#)):

A place, but I think that just in general, if I need to try to get an idea or an angel to work something out, I'd like to definitely go outside and maybe go for a walk and just kind of try to, I think about the problem, but be out in nature.

Charlie ([19:34](#)):

Thanks for sharing that. That's a good segue to the next question is maybe that is one of your routines or rituals. Do you have any other really good habits or pro tips you could share with us?

Hannah ([19:45](#)):

Yeah, I'm not sure if this is a pro tip, but I'm really big list maker. I don't think it might be appropriate is because I would write a list on anything. It could be a scrap of paper or in a text or something, and sometimes I don't even revisit those lists. I don't need to, it's just a way to get all my ideas out and kind of visually look at the list of things that need to get done. Uand sometimes I will check them off, but sometimes I just need to write it down so I can kind of just visually look at it and then move on and continue.

Charlie ([20:17](#)):

Totally just get it out of your head, but have some head space a little, if you do check it off and kinda gives you momentum, totally can associate with that. I think that is a good tip. Well, Hannah, as we get to know each other more, I'm a fan of the bucket lists. So just kind of curious, are there one or two things on your bucket list you could share? I don't know if there's any adventure in their, travel, write a book? Who knows what's on the bucket.

Hannah ([20:43](#)):

I'm not really a bucket list type of person, but this is going to be a weird one probably, but I've always wanted to have an animal sanctuary some day. I have no idea what capacity would be in or how it works, but I already have two rescue pit bulls and a parrot. I definitely want more so I think an animal sanctuary. It'd be a perfect place to continue.

Charlie ([21:06](#)):

So cool. Well, I picked up on that was a big part of your childhood, right? With all the animals so that must've had some influence there. I've got three young boys and that Matt Damon movie comes to mind, We bought a Zoo.

Have you seen that movie? I loved that movie. Good luck with that. It's important that you talk about these things so they can happen. We are in the pandemic and quarantine and at the time of this reporting, but is there a place or two you definitely want to make it to travel?

Hannah ([21:39](#)):

Yeah, I've always wanted to go to Australia. I kind of wanted to study abroad there, but I ended up graduating a semester early, so it just didn't work out. That's definitely on my travel bucket list and I've been to Iceland. I did a short term study abroad. They're studying renewable energy, but I would love to go back for an extended period of time. It's just so beautiful.

Charlie ([22:02](#)):

That's amazing. I haven't been there yet. It's on the bucket list. Let's talk about books. I'm not sure if you'd like to pick up a book and your needs and read it or if you like to listen more or maybe just do podcasts, ? So is there a book you'd recommend?

Hannah ([22:17](#)):

Yeah, I actually just started getting into audio books, which I've really been enjoying. I'm sure this book is already probably been read by everybody or they've looked into it at this point, but I love to recommend, Educated. I Always gravitate towards memoirs in general, but Educated just reads like a fiction story and somebody who overcame these incredible challenges, but what's amazing about it is it's the true story. It's amazing if you haven't read it yet,

Charlie ([22:46](#)):

That link in the podcast show notes so everybody can check out that book. What a good recommendation, or as we start to wrap up here, Hannah two part question. One, you have a career in sustainability, so anything you wish you would have known a little earlier in your career?

Hannah ([23:03](#)):

I think that if it's okay, I might spin that question a bit. Best advice I did receive early in the career if that's okay. And that is kind of what I've touched on probably a lot, but to try out all different aspects within the field, whatever field you're in, before jumping in. If you're focused on

environmental studies field, there are so many different aspects and it's just so important, I think, to just try them all out and it's okay if you didn't like a job, it's okay. If you don't like an internship, but it's so important to try it out because you'll never know and it's okay to switch. It's even okay to switch industries if it's not what it's cracked up to be for you. But I think that it's so important to try everything out and kind of figure out what's passionate for you.

Charlie ([23:51](#)):

That's great advice. And I've heard it a couple times here in this interview with Hannah that you can give yourself permission. That's okay. And it sounds like someone had kind of told you that and that probably helped you so well now, as we come to close any words of encouragement for someone that maybe is just now jumping in to this sustainability movement.

Hannah ([24:12](#)):

Yeah. It's an exciting time to be here as we continue. There's so many people interested in sustainability or starting to focus on sustainability. What's exciting now is that you can find a job basically anywhere in any industry that's focused on sustainability. And I think that that's such an exciting time to be. If you're interested you can find a sustainability in sports job, find a sustainability education job. There's so many different ways that you could be part of the green building movement in all different aspects. I think that's really exciting,

Charlie ([24:46](#)):

Super exciting. I'm so you've got me excited here today on our conversation and I'll make sure everybody go to Hannah on LinkedIn, check out what RTS is up to. And this has been Hannah Moskowitz, in the DC area. She's the LEED APO and M and a sustainability manager at RTS. Hannah, thanks so much for your time.

Speaker 6 ([25:07](#)):

I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the green building matters podcast. Me and the entire team are stoked. And just so glad to continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that

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