

LEED Pioneer in the Philippines - Alvin Tejada | Transcript

Introduction ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cichetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a LEED Fellow. Each week Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee and get ready to find out why green building matters.

Charlie ([00:34](#)):

Hi everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Over five years doing the podcast, 250 and counting interviews and I love it because I get to interview someone in this green building movement somewhere in the world. And today coming to us from Manila in the Philippines, I've got Alvin Tejada with us. Alvin, how are you doing today?

Alvin ([00:56](#)): I'm good. Perfectly good.

Charlie ([00:58](#)): I've been reviewing your background, I mentioned we've got some connections maybe to the Philippines in different ways. I want to learn more about your roots, how you got into this green building movement and what you're up to today. Take us back, where did you grow up and go to school?

Alvin ([01:14](#)):

I came from a fishing village in Metro Manila. The family are fisher folks and the livelihood in our place evolved around fishing until it became too polluted. My parents shared stories of the beautiful beaches and the wonderful sea that they experience within our neighborhood. Sadly I never get to full experience yet because it was rapidly degrading in the seventies

when I was born, when I'm in school grade was almost dead and the family had to find another source of living, which in a lot of ways probably influenced my thoughts and paths. I was the only in the clan to take architecture studies, which were supported by a scholarship foundation and finished in 1996 from Mapo University, which is among the four universities from the Philippines who made it to the 2022 World's best. As usual with young architects, the goal is to be a known architectural designer. But my quest for knowledge and experience led me going into various paths and I've worked from design to property development, facilities administration, project management, construction consultancy and eventually to becoming part of academia.

Charlie ([02:34](#)):What a great background and I'm sure that environmental impact and the stories you heard probably led to some of this great green building work and LEED work you've done and now teaching it to others. I'm always curious with mentors, maybe anyone that you looked up to along the way or maybe someone opened a door for you. Alvin, is there anyone you might call a mentor?

Alvin ([02:55](#)):Yes, I'd like to give credit to Mr. Dean Barone, whom I've worked with in my first green building project. I have very limited knowledge about sustainability. When I got engaged in working at my first LEED project he provided me with the guidance and references that helped me to navigate the certification process and on establishing a career. I've been mentored by a client architect, Otto Torres, who trusted me to support his company and encouraged me to establish my own firm. The confidence that he had instilled in me, he allowed me to venture on different projects and introduced me to clients. He led me to take full responsibility for my first LEED project while allowing me to continue expanding my ventures in project and construction management works. He taught me to keep pushing my personal boundaries and not to limit opportunities that are coming.

Charlie ([03:50](#)):

Sounds like some amazing mentors. I'm curious about those early days of LEED in your region. What was hard about LEED maybe in those early days? Was it the energy efficiency, was it the recycling of construction materials? What were some challenges early on?

Alvin ([04:06](#)): We're having problems with people who do not have contractors, designers not generally knowledgeable about this and availability of compliant materials are not found. We have to import everything. So the cost of construction gets higher because of that.

Charlie ([04:26](#)): No, that makes sense and hopefully it's gotten a lot better in the last 15 or 20 years there. Connect the dots a little bit with this career path. I know while you're doing a lot with academia now you've got a consulting firm. What are some of those other kinda jobs you've had and what are maybe a couple cool projects you've been able to work on?

Alvin ([04:47](#)): I've been doing a lot of project management work and concentrating mainly on interior fitouts. So we've worked with a lot of process outsourcing companies and call centers for big techniques like huawei. Everything that's been located in the Philippines, establishing their big offices was able to work with contractors, especially those who are pursuing LEED certification. So they've been needing support for someone to guide them on the process.

Charlie ([05:19](#)):

That's very exciting. I'd like to kinda just talk about accomplishments or achievements. Sometimes when I have a guest and I ask this question, it's a little bit of a permission to look back on the highlight reel. What are some of your proudest achievements?

Alvin (05:35): Achievements, the LEED Fellow award, the achievement for me, my country and the Southeast Asian region. But beyond that recognition, I am most proud of becoming a faculty for USGBC and IWBIN. Two local universities in 2022. So becoming a builder of builders is like a legacy for me. It is a humbling transition as I move to a really much less in terms of financial returns as compared to working on projects. But the training and mentoring should be given attention so that we can prepare our youth with the bigger challenges that are ahead. And another thing, and I think unquantifiable value is the good life with my wife and daughter has been really with me throughout the journey.

Charlie (06:25): It's so important and anyone's career, especially on the entrepreneurial side too. You need that support, that encouragement. It's been great. You've been able to raise a family too and I see your LEED Fellow certificate behind you on camera. That's an amazing man. Congratulations. Thanks. Let's talk about the present day. So kinda what's keeping you busy today?

Alvin (06:45): I'm back with the academics and working on some big plans for a local university. We're trying to establish a partnership with USGBC higher education and will be supporting to update the first curriculum to develop a center for sustainability learning in the Philippines. That's quite a busy work and I'm also looking into some research projects that are focused on sustainability and green building. Other than that, of course I still have to manage the operation of the company and my workload has probably doubled and on the project we're looking forward to be involved in oil LEED projects both locally and hopefully abroad soon.

Charlie (07:31):

Sounds like you're plenty busy. Give us a peek into academia. So you're spending a lot of time here helping these green building careers inspire this

next generation. What are the names of the classes? Is LEED in the title or just green building best practices, like what does the curriculum look like?

Alvin ([07:49](#)):

It's really more of an introduction to green building and sustainability that focuses on a particular reading system at the moment. I teach in the college of architecture so it's really like grooming these future architects in making the sustainability thinking part of their design process.

Charlie ([08:12](#)):

That's wonderful. Do you find that some of the students go for a LEED credential or LEED green associate? Maybe you encourage that so they're competitive when they graduate. How does that conversation go?

Alvin ([08:26](#)):

Yeah, I think there's really an interest coming from students, especially hearing from me, sharing actual experiences and the developments that are going on. I've seen how they've been performing with the exercises that I've been giving and looks like they're up to the challenge of taking on extra credentials. I've also been encouraging them that this would really support them as they build their career early in life.

Charlie ([08:56](#)):

Thanks for pushing them. I'm a big fan of credentials. Get those letters after your name and it'll help in a competitive job market for sure. Let's kinda look to the future if you had a ball, what do you think next in this green building movement? What do you kind of read?

Alvin ([09:13](#)):

The COVID 19 pandemic has opened our eyes to the importance of health and wellness and we've seen that the project has been more conscious both

for the environment and health. Companies and individuals also have heightened alertness and awareness of carbon footprints and so computations reporting for GHG has become really a normal requirement for the built environment. And over the years of being part of this green building movement, I've seen how the market has been transformed, especially locally here. So from voluntary certification, a number of local codes and ordinances adopted the green building practices. And so I believe that sustainability in green building is becoming more of a standard practice and I can also see that the academia is also catching up and students are really getting prepared early to have them trained and taking the correct mindset and practices.

Charlie ([10:17](#)):

You nailed it. All of that. I agree with everyone listening. Please continue to brush up on everything Alvin just said there about the future so much more but that you really honed in on it. That was great. Let's talk about you a little bit more. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

Alvin ([10:33](#)):

Well my practice had developed in full circle and I really feel old but I see that as a gift. I've been practicing as a professional for over 25 years and now in my middle age. I'm really moving to build a legacy for my name. My family has been the source of inspiration for me and the gift that sustains me to give moving forward. I have many opportunities to build my career around the world but I always keep in mind that my country and my family here needs me. I'm firmly rooted and making a difference where I live.

Charlie ([11:10](#)): I love that. Thank you for sharing. Do you have any good habits or routines, rituals that help you stay on point?

Alvin ([11:17](#)): Not really. Generally I'm a boring person. I enjoy a few friends and limited social activities. I guess that partly helped me to get more focus

on what I do. I've learned to discipline myself and focused on. What I'm venturing on and keeping me grounded is my wife and daughter always remind me the beauty of life and to take time to get outta the work and see the world. So the times that we travel as family refreshes me and get me ready for new challenges. I also get inspired with the developments I see around when I travel and also the stories of the people that I get to meet.

Charlie ([11:58](#)): I see some books behind you. Do you enjoy reading? Is there a certain place you like to read? I'm sure it's a big part of everything you do.

Alvin ([12:07](#)): I do a lot of readings, topics from anywhere but recently I've been reading a lot about bamboo and how to explore this material. I've been joining both camps, putting my hands into the actual Bamboo works.

Charlie ([12:24](#)): I love that I can be used as a building material for food shoots. It's a rapidly renewable material. It is fascinating. Oh that's great. We'll keep talking about books and I'm gonna take you back to the bucket list but books. Is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners?

Alvin ([12:39](#)):

I recently completed reading the book from Bill Gates titled, how to Avoid a Climate Disaster. There's a lot of points that he shares that makes us think deeply and reflect on what actions to take. It touches on every area that we move around and is a really nice book to read and it doesn't take ages to complete it. I've been following Louis Holmes recently and I find a lot of inspiration from the thoughts that he was sharing on social media. Yeah,

Charlie ([13:10](#)): No, those are great recommendations. Podcast. There are two I believe so. Fantastic. Alright, so now let's go to the bucket list. We're getting to know each other a little bit. I'm kinda curious, you mentioned some travel, but any travel adventure maybe you wanna write a book?

What's on the bucket list? I have a travel bucket list and a bunch of bucket lists to share with you on the travel bucket list. I look forward to visiting Scandinavian countries and getting to see the beauty of the country and their buildings. I hope to see the city of Copenhagen one of these years. And on the budget bucket list, I look forward to the confinement of UAP Fellow, that's the local architectural organization in the Philippines, which would be like my graduation from the architectural profession. And then that brings me then to my path of continuing with postgraduate education.

Charlie ([14:04](#)): Well you've got it laid out and some fun travel in between. Thank you for sharing. A couple more questions about career and this industry that's been good to you. It's been good to me. Alvin, is there any advice you wish you'd have known earlier in your career?

Alvin ([14:21](#)): I've always thought that if I had a mentor earlier in life, I would have achieved my goals earlier. I would advise young professionals and students to look for someone to mentor them, be involved in the current news and be part of the green building movement early. The older generational families have thousands of years from them to plan their lives. No, but we are leveraged just a few decades to prevent the global collapse of the environment. We are called on to be heroes and we cannot afford to wait for another person to take the action for us. For those already in green practices, just keep going.

Charlie ([15:02](#)): That's good. I like that. Well and lastly though, let's say someone's listening to this podcast, they're getting inspired by your story and they're just now jumping into the green building movement. Any words of encouragement for them?

Alvin ([15:16](#)): While we're living in a challenging time, this is also an exciting time. The speed of technological development may be dizzying. We know that humankind continues to evolve with rapid changes. Just keep reading,

keep learning, keep sharing, and eventually you get into the habit of this green building

Charlie ([15:37](#)):

Well, this was great. I really appreciate you showing us what's happening in your region. I can tell you're dedicated there. You're dedicated to your family, you're dedicated to teaching others and the green building movement. I enjoyed getting to know you more. Alvin, everyone listening, please connect with Alvin on LinkedIn, let him know what you thought of the podcast. Thank you so much. I just wanna 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 were stoked and just so glad you 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 you are getting straight from us. Straight to you. Thank you for listening to this episode of the Green Building Matters podcast@gbs.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to gbes.com/podcast or any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode, and you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing guests. Please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues and if you really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much and we'll see you on next week's episode.