

## Three LEED Credentials Before Graduation With Architecture Student Jacob Lehrer | Transcript

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

Welcome to Green Building Manners, 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. I'm your host Charlie Cichetti and every week I get an interview of a green building professional somewhere in the world today coming to us from Boston, Massachusetts. We've got Jacob Lehrer and he's an architectural student in that area there at Wentworth Institute of Technology. And we can't wait to unpack the fact he's already passed multiple LEED exams even as a college student. Jacob, welcome to the podcast.

Jacob ([01:03](#)): Thank you so much. It's great to be here and I can't wait to talk about it.

Charlie ([01:08](#)):

I know you've been a fan on the education side, we've worked together on Paterson some exams. I want you to give tips on that but we gotta get that origin story. Where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

Jacob ([01:17](#)):

Yeah, so I grew up outside of Boston in Newton, Massachusetts and my kind of origin story for architecture as you could call it was that in middle school our high school brought some of the students to talk about some of the programs that they had. Some of them were career focused technical

education programs and one person talked about how the architecture department had just gotten a 3D printer and this was kind of unique because I had never seen one in person. I'd heard about it but it's really exciting. I kind of jumped into that and that's kind of how I started my architecture journey and it's a little bit unconventional but I think that it really worked out because I've really enjoyed the mix of not just design but also the engineering side of architecture and kind of figuring out how to make something work I think is really exciting.

Charlie ([02:17](#)):

I love that and that'll get you into the built environment as we'll discuss, but what about sustainability? When did that start showing up in your life maybe now with your studies?

Jacob ([02:28](#)):

Sustainability started when my high school architecture teacher, Ms. Lift, she was actually a Leadman associate and worked on one of the first LEED certified homes in all of Massachusetts and she actually went to a conference and met GBES and had G B E S actually sponsor a bunch of students to get the LEED Green Associate test. It started as just kind of studying and not super exciting because it's a class and et cetera. But then when we started to get closer and closer she talked more about how important it is and how it's not just look at these numbers, get this efficient. It's also the kind of process of understanding architecture and design through the idea of sustainability. Bringing that idea of sustainability kind of into the root of the design. And then that summer I actually passed the LEED Green associate, which was so exciting because it was really unique.

Jacob ([03:40](#)):

I was the only person I think who had the LEED associate at the time and I think now there's two others who have it. It was really awesome to kind of bring that knowledge into college at that kind of first and second semester

Charlie ([03:58](#)):

Thank you for connecting the dots. I know some are maybe making a career change and some are maybe a young professional that's just looking for the

little inspiration and say which way should I start leaning with my studies? Maybe I could take a credential, maybe an intern or see that here with you. One thing that fascinates me to our audience, 40% of those who signed up for the LEED Green associate exam are now in either high school or college. So we're starting to see it. Maybe you helped start that trend.

Charlie ([04:28](#)):

We're starting to see more signups here, just get started earlier. It's a resume building. But I'm hearing from you more than that. It's just an early discovery, what do I wanna do? And I think that's amazing. Let's talk about these exams. You've already passed multiple LEED exams but what made you say, okay, I'm gonna go for it? This feature inspired you to pass the LEED grant associate. Any pro tips though? How do you study best?

Jacob ([04:51](#)):

We did a lot of the practice tests, which was really helpful just because it's getting used to that test taking process, getting into that mindset and being able to kind of be cool under pressure, which I took at a Prometric test site. There's two dozen other people taking different tests, different things. Then you could feel the tension in the room, you could really cut it with a knife. What we did in that class was, I think it was 15 students taking the test and there wasn't really pressure on it because it's just our teacher we're not getting grades. The results of that practice test didn't actually impact our grade, which was I think the best thing she could have done. And it really made us feel like this process of test taking specifically for the LEED test wasn't as intense. I would recommend taking the LEED test in an environment that the practice tests in an environment that is relaxing so you're home or with some people that you know who are also studying. Making sure to not hype it up as the only time you're answering these questions in a testing format is in this very stressful environment. I also took my other two LEED tests at home, which I think did help a little bit, but I think it's making sure to kind of bring the pressure down during practice tests so that taking the real test doesn't actually have that weight. I was also in the middle of the test, took a pause, took a breath, relaxed

thought, just paused, didn't even think about LEED for a second and helped reset myself. And I think that was another strategy that is super helpful for any testing.

Charlie ([06:15](#)):

Lastly, you can only take the LEED exams, the in-person testing center pandemic hits. Now they have two options in-person or like you've done a couple times now, right. You can take it virtual at home or if there's other rules around that. Let's build on that. You've passed these exams, you've got some great internships so far while you've been studying there at Wentworth. For those not familiar with your college, tell us a little bit about it.

Jacob ([06:59](#)):

Wentworth Institute of Technology is an institute of technology. There's a famous one you might have heard. It's a pretty small school. MIT who knows, not that many people really know about it, but it's MIT is focused on the kind of innovation, exciting research, et cetera, wing of an institute of technology. Wentworth is a little bit different because we do some research and kind of focus on the emerging technologies. For example, my concentration throughout college was the emerging technology concentration, but Wentworth has an internship program, so co-op program where you have to mandatory take two internships to graduate. So you have this industry experience that's also brought into your education. So in architecture for example, some people did it in project management, some people did it in architecture firms traditionally, some people did it in sustainability consulting firms, some did it in other kinds of work. But they have this industry experience that I think is invaluable and that's the main advantage of Wentworth versus many of the other architecture programs that isolates you in its educational environment, which is a great environment, a learn a lot, but you don't have that real world tie-in of an actual building process that I think Wentworth really gives you.

Charlie ([08:28](#)):

Man, that was a great overall endorsement to make sure others know. Let's talk about mentors. You have a shout out to your high school teacher there that was a LEED green associate. Who else? Either did you look up to? Maybe he's opened a door for you, who would you call a mentor?

Jacob ([08:45](#)):

Well I have two professors at Wentworth who really pushed me beyond my imagination. There was one professor who I really enjoyed having last semester. His name is Rob <inaudible>. He was our studio professor for emerging technologies and one of the things that he helped us do was really push our ideas of what architecture means and how we can kind of explore new meanings and his background does have more art kind of lens so he can kind of bring in that more design eye.

Charlie ([09:21](#)):

So it really helped us kind of imagine these architectural ideas. And for example, we were designing a facade that used additive manufacturing with ceramics. So a six axis robot that can print ceramic and it really pushes helps us really open our eyes up to like what is this thing pos, what does this thing do? What's possible, how can we use it to our advantage? And helps us kind of build this process of looking at the tools we have from every different angle and trying to build something new out of that. So not just looking at what is our final design and using the tools, how can we get there? It's looking at the tools to eventually get to that final product.

Charlie ([10:13](#)):

Let's keep moving here as we kind of get to know you more and some of your influences? You work your way through college obviously to graduate. I'm curious what's next, but as you look back so far, what are some of your proudest achievements and life or so far in your work, the college career?

Jacob ([10:30](#)):

Ah, that's a tough one. One of my proudest achievements is probably the club I've started. It's the Wentworth Sustainability Society. We're focused on helping students learn about sustainability in the industry. Focusing on more on what are the kind of aspects of the industry that are focused on

sustainability, what are some that are not, that should be pushed farther. One of our recent activities was actually looking into a bunch of the other sustainable rating systems and exploring how they can be used to influence our designs. So for example, one student looked into the living building challenge. So he kind of talked about how the living building challenges incorporate beauty into the design process that for example, LEED doesn't. Another group of two students looked into, WELL. Where we are in LEED, there's only one or few credits focused on interior quality that are kind of acoustic based but LEED but WELL has a whole section on and it's kind of learning how to adapt the industry to these sustainable standards. Another thing we're doing in that club that I'm really excited that we got to partner with is a LEED green associate prep course. So we're teaching students about the LEED green associate, getting them ready and hopefully taking the LEED green associate exams by the end of the month, which is very exciting.

Charlie ([11:59](#)):

Well, lemme know when I need to hop on and give all the super secret tips on how to pass. I'm there for you. Okay, that was great. It's impressive man, not just the starting of this club but passing these credentials. But some great internships. I'm looking at your LinkedIn, what are you up to right now? What's keeping you busy today and what are you hopeful for next? Do you wanna become a practicing architect? Do you wanna double down on sustainability and green building? So what's keeping you busy today and what are you hopeful for in the next chapter of your career?

Jacob ([12:22](#)):

Yeah, I think for now I'm kind of in the only position I've been in since I started college where I don't have work at the same time of school. So I've kind of stepped back from my internships focused on school for this last semester and kind of looking towards the future. But I think the main goal for me in the future of my career is I want to use these sustainable technologies and stable rating systems in parallel with things like

computation and research and these innovative technologies that do exist but haven't really been involved in architecture that long.

Jacob ([13:04](#)):

So finding out ways to kind of combine those two worlds in a way that makes buildings more economical, more viable, more useful for people who use them where, because the way we use our buildings has changed a lot with the pandemic too.

Charlie ([13:18](#)):

We've got all the LEED certifications, you've got LEED credentials and there's the healthy building movement. I know you'll probably pass some of those exams too, but yeah, how we're using our buildings is changing a lot. I think you're really onto something there. So let's talk a little bit about maybe just this industry. You've already into that, but what else are you excited about that's coming out? What are you reading up on? What's next in this green building movement?

Jacob ([13:44](#)):

One of my main gripes with a lot of the LEED rating systems or many of the rating systems that we're starting to see tackled in education is this idea of equity. Something that's not really built into a lot of these rating systems. It's really hard to kind of discover how they would be built in and et cetera. But it is such an important aspect of sustainability because it's not just can this building act efficiently? It's, is it ecologically viable, is it sustainable, is it socially viable, is it sustainable in the way of, is it economically viable? So one of the main things that I'm seeing that might kind of come to the forefront in the next couple years is how we build equity into, for example, LEED V five or another rating system that comes out or something like that can really address these issues of systemic injustice. So I think that's one of the main things that I'm really hoping to see from the industry in the next couple years.

Charlie ([14:52](#)):

Thank you so much for bringing that up. You've read up on that LEED version five, you're supposed to definitely incorporate more points around

not just the SG but especially equity. Arguably right now for you to get a LEED gold or a LEED platinum project, you have to get cars off the road and save a lot of energy. LEED has been, since it started 22 years ago, first projects weighted towards carbon emission redemption. So we still need to do a good bit of that. As you know, we're gonna start seeing a little more embodied carbon weighting and then equity weighting just this time and I'm glad that you're gonna be a part of that. For most curious LEED version five, we'll be drafted by September Green Build or Washington DC and then really next year make some adjustments, vote on it and it'll probably roll out sometime late next year, but we'll just have to see if everyone can chime in now.

Charlie (15:43): That's kinda what I've seen. It's not just sustainability, such as green buildings, but it is all rolling up into these bigger kinds of groupings like ESG and indefinitely equity. Anything else to add there?

Jacob (15:56):

I think one of the big points about them all rolling up together is that it's hard to separate a lot of these things because whether it's kind of systemic injustice compared to economic and viability, they're all connected. So bringing these rating systems together that seem different or these categories that seem unrelated and bring them into these kind of synergized categories or synergized credits, I think is going to have to be the next step of, for example, you get these two credits that synergize well you get an extra point or something like that. There needs to be this kind of focus on combining strategies, making things work together that isn't just based on does your HVAC system work well with your heat pump system a little better?

Charlie (16:44):

Yeah, don't just chase some points or even the, what you've heard, it's like, hey, when you combine, I like that. Any good habits, you really can compound. That's all my favorite books. Atomic Habits are James, clear. So let's unpack and get to know you a little more and what's kind of giving you some inspiration here, but what would you say is your specialty or gift?



Jacob ([17:04](#)):

I think one of the things that I've focused on a lot through school is focusing on learning because it's not just about how you learn a need to credit or something like that, but learning about how to quickly adapt. So for example, when I was interning with tbi, I worked on I think 18 projects in three months and it's being able to adapt to different things, different specifics, different unique elements, different kinds of points in a project. And being able to learn to adapt I think is something that I've kind of grown to kind of focus on. It's learning new softwares, learning new technologies, learning new, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So that ability to adapt I think is something that I've focused on a lot of how to perfect that even though there's no way to,

Charlie ([17:41](#)):

If you gotta stay curious on the way to hearing that with you. Do you have any good habits or routine though Share orders? That's a good question. One of my routines that I like to do is every morning I take the train to school and I like to read the news. It sounds so simple, but being up to date on what's happening in the world is so important. Whether it was the crash in East Palestine a few weeks ago, or the war in Ukraine, all these things, it's important to be kind of educated on these worldwide events that really affect not just you but so many different people that can affect your industry.

Jacob ([18:45](#)):

So every morning I use this I have called ground news, it basically allows you to have the same story but from every different news source that is reported on it in the same place. So you can kind of see biases, you can see how different kinds of backgrounds report on it, et cetera. And it's a great way to kinda get different perspectives on the same news that everyone can see. And I'll check that every morning and then at night I usually check it once again just because it's better than dooms scrolling Twitter.

Charlie ([19:14](#)):

Oh man, that's good stuff. I'm in Atlanta, Georgia, I've always admired those trains and cars as we switch channels. I'm a fan of the bucket list. Hey wonder one or two things maybe on your buckets, think for my bucket list it focuses a lot on that idea of inspirations.

Jacob ([19:35](#)):

I know you brought that up of, I know people are trying to get inspired for their careers and et cetera, but one of the things that I wanna be inspired by is architecture around the world because we've been building architecture for a very long time and it's only in the past hundred years that we've had things like Central Air and et cetera. So what if the really interesting things that I took two classes on at Wentworth was passive design and what I'm excited about and what my bucket list is exploring architects around the world. So this summer I'm so excited I'm gonna be going to Europe and exploring some of the techno techniques they use there and kind of learning about the architecture there and how to design for passive heating and cooling and passive airflow and et cetera. Because you can make your system as efficient as you want, but ha, designing your building for passive is the best thing you can do.

Charlie ([20:37](#)):

Man, that's good stuff. Even more studies you got lined up and tying it in your bucket list, look at that. I think I like a bucket list. A mentor of mine several years ago challenged me, Charlie, what's on your bucket list? And I was a little arrogant. I said, Tim, don't you think I'm a little young for a bucket list? And the next day I'm like, you know, that was foolish. So I sent 'em 10 items and now I've got about a hundred and am trying to do about five a year. There's all different things on it. So I just travel and adventure. There's all kinds of things that I think these things would be like. I think these things would help me grow and so I admire the bucket list. All right. Well I'd like to ask intellectuals like you. Is there a book you'd recommend or a TED talk or a podcast?

Jacob ([21:25](#)):

I think one of the books that I read recently said that I took structures classes that were very focused on the numbers of structures and how it calculates the live flows and et cetera. Which for an architect it's helpful to know but it's not the whole picture. But there's a book called Built that's by Roma, IRO Wall. I think she is a civil engineer or structural engineer from London who talks about the process of designing structures. And as that's something we don't really focus on, we have a couple semesters where our studio project has to have a structure and et cetera. But it was a great way for me to kind of get a lens into how to design structure and how to design for different types of inhabitants, different types of loads.

Jacob ([22:12](#)):

There's a really good way just to learn more about architecture. It's not the most glamorous, exciting book. There's a book I just picked up that I'm really excited to read called The Rum Punch, that's like a neo noir mystery novel that's about, I think it's a hitman who trying to get out of it, trying to run away from his old enemies, which seems exciting but if you really wanna learn about structure and you didn't really learn a ton about it builds I think is a great to take.

Charlie ([22:38](#)):

Great recommendation. We'll put that in the podcast show notes. A couple more questions here as we start to wind down, maybe so far in your university and work career. If you were to look back even more relatively young here, I'm impressed, but if you were to look back a little bit, what's something you wish you would've known even a couple years ago?

Jacob ([23:00](#)):

I wish I would've known the software. I think that's one of the main things that I wish I would've learned is how to do all these things with software. Because if you have an idea, for example Rhino or Grasshopper, which I'm just getting up to that speed now you're able to conceptualize ideas much faster and you're able to iterate much quicker. And one of the things I wasn't really able to do in my first couple years that especially didn't help cuz of Covid was iterate. So my ideas were very similar, this is the idea. I

have to move on because I have to do something else. But being able to be more proficient in the softwares, it makes it like a tool that almost disappears. Like when you're using a hammer, you don't think about the hammer, it's just an extension of your own arm. Using these softwares or these tools as an extension of your own arm or your own brain, it really gives you a way to express your ideas much more succinctly and much more with much more clarity. You really can't get from just explaining off the top of your head. And it also allows you to kind of design more and iterate more with your own designs and stuff.

Charlie ([24:23](#)):

Man. Thanks. Last question. Let's say someone's listening to this podcast and they're just jumping into the screen building movement. It feels like you pretty have a head start, but what words of encouragement do you have for them?

Jacob ([24:35](#)):

Nine words of encouragement would probably be the same thing I wanted to hear when I was about to take the green LEED green test. What's the worst that could happen? Fail take it can happen, fail taking a, again, the great thing about the LEED test is that there's no maximum amount of times you can take it at least I don't think you can correct me if I'm wrong, but what I realized is that the important part is not, it's great to pass the test, but the best thing you're getting out of these tests is the learning and the information that you're gaining from studying. I know someone who didn't pass, but she still was able to learn so much about green building. Honestly, if she took the tests on a different day with a different set of questions, she definitely could have passed. But it's one of those things where you learn so much about the basics of green building, the core values, the core fundamentals, and what you need to know from especially the LEED Green associate that it's honestly, even if you're not taking the test, it's good to learn it. It's better to study and fail than to not study. That's what I would say. I mean it's giving, people need to hear that so they do shuffle up the questions, what a hundreds said random from a larger pool,

but you're gonna be forced to do some rapid learning that will stick with you for a long time.

Charlie ([25:53](#)):

That's what I'm hearing. So everybody listening, go for your LEED green associate. You're gonna start with that Jacob, click that adding a couple more and gosh man, what a fun journey. I'm gonna keep an eye on you as your career plays out. I'm just glad we've been able to do some education stuff together, man. Keep up the great work and I think you've inspired a lot of people today. So thanks for being on the podcast.

Jacob ([26:15](#)):

Thanks so much. Thank you so much. I had a great time and it was really exciting to talk about my LEED journey that you could call it. You're rocking it, man. Thank you.

Speaker 3 ([26:24](#)):

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 podcasts@gbes.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best-in-class education and encouragement.

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