

Podcast Episode

Season 2, Episode 3: Katherine Beisler, Head of ESG Consulting, Hollis (The Netherlands)
From the ULI's New Real Estate Vanguard

Date: May 12, 2025

00:00:02 --> 00:00:03: Hello and welcome.

00:00:03 --> 00:00:05: My name is Robin Marios of Property EU and I'm

00:00:05 --> 00:00:08: delighted to be hosting this second edition of the Urban

00:00:08 --> 00:00:12: Land Institute's Van Card POS podcast series following last year's

00:00:12 --> 00:00:13: successful launch.

00:00:14 --> 00:00:16: As many of you will know, the ULI brings

00:00:16 --> 00:00:19: together real estate and land use experts from around the

00:00:19 --> 00:00:21: world with a clear mission to shape the world via

00:00:21 --> 00:00:25: the built environment and have transformative impacts in neighborhood cities

00:00:25 --> 00:00:26: and communities.

00:00:26 --> 00:00:30: And this podcast series will focus on that future and

00:00:30 --> 00:00:31: that transformative impact.

00:00:32 --> 00:00:36: The ULI Young Leaders Group recently selected 10 outstanding young

00:00:36 --> 00:00:40: professionals already making waves in the industry, calling them the

00:00:40 --> 00:00:41: new Real Estate Vanguard.

00:00:42 --> 00:00:45: And today I'm delighted to welcome one of them, Catherine

00:00:45 --> 00:00:49: Biesler, who's head of ESG Consulting at Advisor Hollis.

00:00:49 --> 00:00:50: So, Catherine, welcome.

00:00:51 --> 00:00:51: Hi, Robin.

00:00:51 --> 00:00:52: Good to see you.

00:00:53 --> 00:00:54: So thanks for taking part.

00:00:54 --> 00:00:56: I think as ever, let's talk a little bit about

00:00:56 --> 00:00:58: how you got into real estate.

00:00:58 --> 00:01:01: People may be able to detect an American accent as

00:01:01 --> 00:01:03: you speak and in fact you're operating in in the
00:01:04 --> 00:01:04: Netherlands.
00:01:04 --> 00:01:06: But first of all, how did you get involved?
00:01:07 --> 00:01:10: That is right and not very good picking up on
00:01:10 --> 00:01:10: that.
00:01:11 --> 00:01:13: Well, first of all, I think you mentioned you were
00:01:13 --> 00:01:16: you were speaking to outstanding people in real estate.
00:01:16 --> 00:01:19: So thank you for for that name.
00:01:19 --> 00:01:21: That's really kind of of you guys in ULI for
00:01:21 --> 00:01:22: inviting me.
00:01:22 --> 00:01:23: So thank you for doing that.
00:01:25 --> 00:01:25: Yeah.
00:01:25 --> 00:01:26: How did I get into real estate?
00:01:26 --> 00:01:27: Good question.
00:01:27 --> 00:01:30: I guess for a long time, very early on, I
00:01:30 --> 00:01:33: knew I had an interest in the built environment and
00:01:33 --> 00:01:35: I wanted to be an architect.
00:01:36 --> 00:01:39: And also very odd, early on, I kind of had
00:01:39 --> 00:01:42: an interest in sustainability, environmental science, and I was
00:01:42 --> 00:01:45: always
00:01:42 --> 00:01:45: looking, how can I bring those things together?
00:01:46 --> 00:01:48: And I guess I first knew that I had an
00:01:48 --> 00:01:51: interest in architecture in the built environment when I was
00:01:51 --> 00:01:51: a young kid.
00:01:51 --> 00:01:54: And I used to really enjoy going to open houses
00:01:54 --> 00:01:55: with my family.
00:01:55 --> 00:01:57: So I'd always begged them if I saw a sign
00:01:57 --> 00:01:59: for an open house on the weekend.
00:01:59 --> 00:02:00: Oh, can we go?
00:02:00 --> 00:02:00: Can we go?
00:02:00 --> 00:02:02: Can we spend Sunday going from open house to open
00:02:02 --> 00:02:03: house?
00:02:03 --> 00:02:04: And I loved it.
00:02:04 --> 00:02:07: I just loved seeing kind of all the different houses
00:02:07 --> 00:02:09: and imagining what I could do to change them or
00:02:09 --> 00:02:11: alter them or what would I do if I was
00:02:11 --> 00:02:12: designing them.
00:02:14 --> 00:02:16: And yeah, so that was kind of the background is
00:02:16 --> 00:02:18: I always knew I wanted to be sort of in
00:02:18 --> 00:02:20: architecture, in the built environment.
00:02:22 --> 00:02:26: And yeah, I went to school for architecture, as I
00:02:26 --> 00:02:29: mentioned that I knew I wanted to be in sustainable

00:02:29 --> 00:02:30: architecture.

00:02:31 --> 00:02:34: And the year that I was applying to universities, there's

00:02:34 --> 00:02:37: a competition in the US called the Solar Decathlon, which

00:02:37 --> 00:02:39: is now actually also in Europe and Asia.

00:02:39 --> 00:02:41: And schools from all over the world participate.

00:02:43 --> 00:02:46: And the year that I was playing universities, the University

00:02:46 --> 00:02:49: of Maryland came in second in the Solar Decathlon, which

00:02:49 --> 00:02:51: is a competition to design A sustainable house only to

00:02:51 --> 00:02:52: Germany.

00:02:52 --> 00:02:54: So they're the best in the US So I chose

00:02:54 --> 00:02:57: to go to the University of Maryland for the Solar

00:02:57 --> 00:02:58: Decath for university.

00:02:59 --> 00:03:01: And luckily when I was there, they competed again in

00:03:01 --> 00:03:02: the Solar Decathlon.

00:03:02 --> 00:03:05: And this year I joined the competition and we won.

00:03:06 --> 00:03:08: So we came in first, which was great.

00:03:09 --> 00:03:10: Yeah.

00:03:10 --> 00:03:12: And kind of just continued on from there.

00:03:12 --> 00:03:15: You somehow wound up in the Netherlands, but perhaps you

00:03:15 --> 00:03:17: could explain how that all came about.

00:03:18 --> 00:03:21: That is a long story, but to make a Long

00:03:21 --> 00:03:22: story short, indeed, yes.

00:03:22 --> 00:03:26: So I graduated from the University of Maryland and went

00:03:26 --> 00:03:29: on to be an architect in in Washington, DC, which

00:03:29 --> 00:03:32: University of Maryland was just outside of Washington, DC

00:03:33 --> 00:03:36: and

00:03:36 --> 00:03:40: again, was always focused on sustainable architecture.

00:03:40 --> 00:03:44: But I did a lot of international projects, so mostly

00:03:44 --> 00:03:48: in Asia, Africa, in the Middle East, and always again

00:03:48 --> 00:03:51: focusing kind of international sustainable architecture.

00:03:50 --> 00:03:51: And after doing that for a few years, I said,

00:03:51 --> 00:03:53: you know, this is great and working life is, is

00:03:54 --> 00:03:56: fun, but it's something I can always come back to.

00:03:56 --> 00:03:58: So I decided to take a gap year sort of

00:03:58 --> 00:04:02: a sabbatical and do something completely different.

00:04:03 --> 00:04:04: So my aunt is Thai.

00:04:04 --> 00:04:06: She suggested, why don't you go and teach English with

00:04:06 --> 00:04:07: my sisters in Thailand?

00:04:08 --> 00:04:10: So I looked into it and I thought, OK, this

00:04:10 --> 00:04:11: is a, this is a great idea.

00:04:12 --> 00:04:14: So I did that for a year, absolutely loved it.

00:04:14 --> 00:04:17: Would definitely recommend it to anyone who's kind of

00:04:17 --> 00:04:19: looking
 00:04:21 --> 00:04:23: for a good sabbatical or sort of gap year.
 00:04:23 --> 00:04:25: Where I met my now Dutch husband.
 00:04:25 --> 00:04:26: And of course we hadn't decided are we going to
 00:04:27 --> 00:04:29: move to the US or move to the Netherlands?
 00:04:29 --> 00:04:33: And we chose to move to the Netherlands.
 00:04:33 --> 00:04:37: And from there, I started working in corporate real estate
 00:04:38 --> 00:04:43: with Cushman and Wakefield, really focusing on investors
 00:04:43 --> 00:04:46: and high
 00:04:46 --> 00:04:48: level strategy decisions on the sustainability strategy and
 00:04:48 --> 00:04:51: innovation team.
 00:04:51 --> 00:04:54: And that was great because this is a whole other
 00:04:54 --> 00:04:56: side of things of architecture, as you know, on one
 00:04:56 --> 00:04:59: end of the spectrum, really doing projects and kind of
 00:05:01 --> 00:05:03: getting, getting things done on the ground, working with
 00:05:03 --> 00:05:05: investors
 00:05:05 --> 00:05:08: in these sort of high level strategy decisions.
 00:05:08 --> 00:05:12: It's completely the other side of the scope.
 00:05:12 --> 00:05:14: And it's also good because I really wanted to kind
 00:05:14 --> 00:05:17: of move up the decision making ladder.
 00:05:17 --> 00:05:18: I think I noticed as an architect wanting to get
 00:05:20 --> 00:05:22: involved in sustainability and making sustainable projects,
 00:05:22 --> 00:05:25: you don't get
 00:05:25 --> 00:05:25: to make a lot of decisions as as the designer,
 00:05:26 --> 00:05:29: you know, you're always doing what your, what your client
 00:05:29 --> 00:05:33: is asking.
 00:05:33 --> 00:05:34: And yeah, sort of working more with investors, you got
 00:05:35 --> 00:05:39: to kind of drive the, the decision making process a
 00:05:39 --> 00:05:39: bit more.
 00:05:39 --> 00:05:42: But again, I sort of really missed projects getting into
 00:05:42 --> 00:05:45: kind of getting things done, implementing things, seeing,
 00:05:45 --> 00:05:48: seeing projects
 00:05:48 --> 00:05:49: come to fruition.
 00:05:49 --> 00:05:51: And, and I joined Hollis and that Hollis is exactly
 00:05:51 --> 00:05:54: where I sit.
 00:05:54 --> 00:05:57: So kind of in the middle of the projects team
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: and the designers who are making the changes on the
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: ground and kind of designing the projects from scratch and
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: the investors.
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: So a lot of our clients are investors who are
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: looking for kind of a steer on how they can
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: make sustainable investments and that's something that I get
 00:05:57 --> 00:05:57: to

00:05:57 --> 00:05:58: advise them on every day.

00:05:59 --> 00:06:01: But I can't let let the early part of your

00:06:01 --> 00:06:04: story go without just digging in a little bit because

00:06:04 --> 00:06:07: OK, so you, you're over in Thailand, you meet your

00:06:07 --> 00:06:10: future husband, you decide to move to the Netherlands, but

00:06:10 --> 00:06:11: without a job, am I correct?

00:06:12 --> 00:06:14: So, and there's a lot of people that do that,

00:06:14 --> 00:06:15: of course, but it's not easy.

00:06:16 --> 00:06:19: So I'm just wondering, how did you actually go about

00:06:19 --> 00:06:22: landing something in the realm that you wish to work

00:06:22 --> 00:06:22: in?

00:06:23 --> 00:06:24: Yeah, that's a good question.

00:06:24 --> 00:06:28: So definitely moving to a new country, losing my network,

00:06:28 --> 00:06:32: you know, kind of losing everything I'd built up previously

00:06:32 --> 00:06:36: was something I was really nervous about and kind of

00:06:36 --> 00:06:39: what I was most nervous about actually moving.

00:06:40 --> 00:06:42: And then also kind of selling this this year abroad

00:06:42 --> 00:06:44: that I had, you know, it's you're taking a step

00:06:44 --> 00:06:47: away from using kind of your hard technical skills for

00:06:47 --> 00:06:48: a year.

00:06:48 --> 00:06:50: So I was a bit worried, well, how would that

00:06:50 --> 00:06:52: gap year be sort of perceived by by the market

00:06:52 --> 00:06:53: or by future employers?

00:06:54 --> 00:06:56: But I think what's really important for that and probably

00:06:56 --> 00:06:58: for you and anyone else who who does something like

00:06:59 --> 00:07:00: that is it's all about, you know, it's a lot

00:07:00 --> 00:07:02: of soft skills that I learned as well.

00:07:02 --> 00:07:06: So exactly like you mentioned, how to interact with different

00:07:06 --> 00:07:11: cultures, how to, you know, undertake new situations, feel comfortable

00:07:11 --> 00:07:14: and new surroundings, all those sorts of soft skills that

00:07:14 --> 00:07:18: you pick up in an experience like that really do

00:07:18 --> 00:07:21: carry over into, you know, future technical work.

00:07:21 --> 00:07:24: But it's good just to kind of highlight and understand

00:07:24 --> 00:07:27: how maybe you've grown or, or how we're impacted from

00:07:28 --> 00:07:29: that experience.

00:07:29 --> 00:07:31: So when I moved to the Netherlands exactly, I had

00:07:32 --> 00:07:34: no, no network, didn't know anyone in real estate, didn't

00:07:34 --> 00:07:36: know anyone in architecture, was very keen to kind of

00:07:36 --> 00:07:38: pick up my career where I left off.

00:07:38 --> 00:07:41: And luckily I had some friends in in the real

00:07:41 --> 00:07:45: estate industry who suggested, hey, you're moving, you're

moving here.

00:07:45 --> 00:07:47: And the next week is Pravada.

00:07:47 --> 00:07:51: Pravada is the biggest real estate conference in the Netherlands.

00:07:51 --> 00:07:54: All the big companies come together and I thought I

00:07:54 --> 00:07:57: would be walking around in a hall, maybe everyone would

00:07:57 --> 00:08:00: have a table and be standing behind their table and

00:08:00 --> 00:08:02: I could introduce myself there.

00:08:03 --> 00:08:04: But it's much bigger than that.

00:08:04 --> 00:08:06: It did takes up a whole 3 halls of the

00:08:06 --> 00:08:08: Conference Center in Amsterdam.

00:08:08 --> 00:08:11: Everyone has sort of a whole room or a giant

00:08:11 --> 00:08:15: kind of booth developed for for their company.

00:08:16 --> 00:08:18: And I basically just walked around for three days and

00:08:18 --> 00:08:20: introduced myself and told everyone sort of a bit about

00:08:20 --> 00:08:22: my background and that I just moved here.

00:08:22 --> 00:08:24: And then I was looking for a job.

00:08:25 --> 00:08:27: And this is really scary for someone who just just

00:08:27 --> 00:08:28: moved to this country.

00:08:28 --> 00:08:29: You know, I didn't speak the language yet.

00:08:29 --> 00:08:30: I didn't know anyone.

00:08:30 --> 00:08:33: So it was a bit nerve wracking, but it was

00:08:33 --> 00:08:34: very fruitful.

00:08:34 --> 00:08:36: I came out with a few offers, which was great

00:08:36 --> 00:08:39: and was able to find a great position with customer

00:08:39 --> 00:08:42: Wakefield really jumping into exactly my area of interest.

00:08:42 --> 00:08:47: So sustainability and strategy and innovation as I mentioned with

00:08:47 --> 00:08:48: their team there.

00:08:50 --> 00:08:52: Yeah, that was that was kind of how I got

00:08:52 --> 00:08:52: started.

00:08:53 --> 00:08:54: But you, Catherine, you make it sound so easy.

00:08:54 --> 00:08:55: I, I've been to provider.

00:08:55 --> 00:08:57: I know what that event is like.

00:08:57 --> 00:09:01: It is quite intimidating when it comes to the companies

00:09:01 --> 00:09:04: and their gigantic sort of showcase zones.

00:09:04 --> 00:09:06: Now it takes some courage to just go up to

00:09:06 --> 00:09:08: strangers, introduce yourself.

00:09:08 --> 00:09:10: Was it like that or was there a little bit

00:09:10 --> 00:09:13: of pre planning involved that listeners can sort of learn

00:09:13 --> 00:09:14: from?

00:09:15 --> 00:09:16: Yeah, I guess the pre planning I did was I

00:09:16 --> 00:09:18: sort of researched which companies were going to be there,

00:09:18 --> 00:09:20: which companies should I definitely reach out to?
 00:09:20 --> 00:09:23: You know, some of them were no names to me
 00:09:23 --> 00:09:25: as I've known them from their global players.
 00:09:27 --> 00:09:29: But I also tried to do some research on, you
 00:09:29 --> 00:09:31: know, who had strong names in the Dutch market, who
 00:09:31 --> 00:09:33: are people I definitely wanted to reach out to.
 00:09:35 --> 00:09:36: But I'll then.
 00:09:36 --> 00:09:38: And so I sent some emails ahead of time.
 00:09:38 --> 00:09:39: So is there anyone I should meet with while I'm
 00:09:39 --> 00:09:40: there?
 00:09:40 --> 00:09:42: Which I had some feedback on and some success with,
 00:09:42 --> 00:09:43: which was good.
 00:09:43 --> 00:09:45: But no, a lot of it was very much just
 00:09:45 --> 00:09:50: just walking around and introducing myself to people, which
 like
 00:09:50 --> 00:09:52: you said was, yeah, it was a bit of a
 00:09:52 --> 00:09:54: challenge at the time.
 00:09:55 --> 00:09:56: But I think it's, you know, it's the best thing
 00:09:56 --> 00:09:58: that you can do and it's what you have to
 00:09:58 --> 00:09:59: do when you're in a situation like that.
 00:09:59 --> 00:10:02: And to anyone who kind of comes and any international,
 00:10:02 --> 00:10:05: the expats who move to the Netherlands now and reach
 00:10:05 --> 00:10:08: out to me with similar questions, how can I find
 00:10:08 --> 00:10:08: a job?
 00:10:08 --> 00:10:10: Or do you have any suggestions for finding a job
 00:10:10 --> 00:10:11: in the Netherlands?
 00:10:11 --> 00:10:15: I always say the same thing and just to put
 00:10:15 --> 00:10:17: yourself out there and to reach out.
 00:10:17 --> 00:10:19: So even if there's not a position open at a
 00:10:19 --> 00:10:22: company, just reach out because you never know what kind
 00:10:22 --> 00:10:25: of openings or vacancies that they might have.
 00:10:25 --> 00:10:28: They don't have advertised and there's no other way you're
 00:10:28 --> 00:10:30: going to gather the information.
 00:10:30 --> 00:10:32: So might as well just get in touch and see
 00:10:32 --> 00:10:33: what comes out of it.
 00:10:34 --> 00:10:36: So you walked away from provider with a job offer
 00:10:36 --> 00:10:38: from a blue chip company, Cushman of Wakefield.
 00:10:38 --> 00:10:41: You spend some time there and then you take a
 00:10:41 --> 00:10:44: decision, as I understand it to join for a brief
 00:10:44 --> 00:10:47: period of time this the student hotel company.
 00:10:47 --> 00:10:47: What?
 00:10:47 --> 00:10:49: What was that move about and how did that, how

00:10:50 --> 00:10:50: did that happen?

00:10:51 --> 00:10:53: Yeah, so I guess also when I when I moved

00:10:53 --> 00:10:56: to the Netherlands, I started doing my masters at TU

00:10:56 --> 00:11:00: Delft in management in the built environment, which is something

00:11:00 --> 00:11:02: I always knew I wanted to do.

00:11:02 --> 00:11:05: I wanted to do my master's, but not specifically in

00:11:05 --> 00:11:06: architecture.

00:11:06 --> 00:11:09: I wanted to learn something a little bit different and

00:11:09 --> 00:11:12: like I said, kind of move up the decision making

00:11:12 --> 00:11:12: ladder.

00:11:14 --> 00:11:17: And so while I was at Delft, I was writing

00:11:17 --> 00:11:22: my master's thesis on circularity in hotels, so specifically hotels

00:11:22 --> 00:11:24: in the built environment.

00:11:25 --> 00:11:27: And the student hotel was doing the same thing actually.

00:11:27 --> 00:11:30: So they were developing a project in Del that they

00:11:30 --> 00:11:32: had goals for to be a circular project.

00:11:34 --> 00:11:36: And so I was looking for a company to write

00:11:36 --> 00:11:36: that thesis with.

00:11:36 --> 00:11:39: And they were actually a perfect fit, you know, researching

00:11:39 --> 00:11:41: the exact same thing at the exact same time.

00:11:41 --> 00:11:43: Also nearby.

00:11:43 --> 00:11:45: So where my university was is where they were developing

00:11:45 --> 00:11:46: their new hotel.

00:11:46 --> 00:11:48: So it's worked out very well.

00:11:49 --> 00:11:51: And so I spent some time with them kind of

00:11:51 --> 00:11:54: researching what goes into a circular hotel, what are the

00:11:54 --> 00:11:56: considerations that should be had.

00:11:56 --> 00:12:00: And circularity is a specific form of sustainability, but it

00:12:00 --> 00:12:03: was just kind of the way that I researched sustainability

00:12:03 --> 00:12:05: in the built environment for this project.

00:12:06 --> 00:12:08: And what we learned from that is, of course, there's

00:12:08 --> 00:12:10: a lot of things that we should consider for energy.

00:12:10 --> 00:12:12: There's a lot of things that we should consider for

00:12:12 --> 00:12:12: water.

00:12:13 --> 00:12:15: There's a lot of things we should consider for materials.

00:12:15 --> 00:12:18: But was really most important to, to the business, to

00:12:18 --> 00:12:21: the student hotel was kind of the, the image that

00:12:21 --> 00:12:24: it sold or the way that the effect that it

00:12:24 --> 00:12:25: had on their brand.

00:12:25 --> 00:12:27: So while yes, of course it was a bit more

00:12:27 --> 00:12:29: of an investment on the energy side of things and

00:12:29 --> 00:12:31: it was a bit more work on the saving water

00:12:31 --> 00:12:32: and considering the materials.

00:12:33 --> 00:12:36: What was most important for them was really their brand

00:12:36 --> 00:12:39: image and and kind of how this coupled with that

00:12:39 --> 00:12:43: and we realized that, that really had a much bigger

00:12:43 --> 00:12:46: impact and return than any of the kind of really

00:12:46 --> 00:12:49: technical inputs that we could have had into the project.

00:12:50 --> 00:12:53: And they make changes or investments for, for much kind

00:12:53 --> 00:12:57: of lighter decisions or much easier decisions than this.

00:12:57 --> 00:13:00: So it was that was kind of the the biggest

00:13:00 --> 00:13:03: take away from the project was really the effect that

00:13:03 --> 00:13:06: it would have on sort of the brand image.

00:13:07 --> 00:13:09: Yeah, it's all about brand, of course, so important.

00:13:09 --> 00:13:12: So after learning about the hotel industry and how it

00:13:12 --> 00:13:15: all fits together, you then end up with the Hollis

00:13:15 --> 00:13:17: and, and perhaps you could tell us first of all,

00:13:17 --> 00:13:20: what your role was there, because I understand that just

00:13:20 --> 00:13:23: earlier this year you've, you, you've received a promotion.

00:13:23 --> 00:13:26: Congratulation on that head of ESG consulting now.

00:13:27 --> 00:13:28: So what, what, what?

00:13:28 --> 00:13:30: How has your role changed in in the time that

00:13:30 --> 00:13:31: you've spent there?

00:13:33 --> 00:13:33: Thank you.

00:13:33 --> 00:13:35: Yeah, there's been a lot of changes in the last.

00:13:36 --> 00:13:38: I've been at Hollis for now 2 1/2 years.

00:13:38 --> 00:13:41: So I think probably for many people going through through

00:13:41 --> 00:13:44: COVID and Corona, but I started out at Hollis as

00:13:44 --> 00:13:45: a project manager.

00:13:45 --> 00:13:47: So a member of the project management team based in

00:13:47 --> 00:13:48: Amsterdam.

00:13:49 --> 00:13:52: Again, always wanted to do sustainable projects, kind of

00:13:52 --> 00:13:55: working

00:13:55 --> 00:13:58: a bit with the then it was called the Energy,

00:13:59 --> 00:14:02: Environment and sustainability team at Hollis as well.

00:14:02 --> 00:14:05: And of course my interest in that kind of grew

00:14:05 --> 00:14:09: or you know, I really wanted to focus a bit

00:14:09 --> 00:14:13: more, more time in that about two years ago, the

00:14:13 --> 00:14:17: position for the head of the the then E environmental

00:14:17 --> 00:14:21: energy and sustainability team became available and I

00:14:21 --> 00:14:25: actually was

00:14:17 --> 00:14:21: working to try and find a replacement for that position.

00:14:21 --> 00:14:25: So doing interviews together with with one of the directors

00:14:25 --> 00:14:28: to try and find a replacement for that position.

00:14:29 --> 00:14:33: And after about six months of searching and doing interviews

00:14:33 --> 00:14:36: and selecting and not having it work out for whatever

00:14:36 --> 00:14:39: reason, I was speaking to my boss, then Roland in

00:14:39 --> 00:14:43: the head of the Amsterdam office, and he said, well,

00:14:43 --> 00:14:44: why don't you go for it?

00:14:44 --> 00:14:46: I thought, well, you know, I'm a bit busy right

00:14:46 --> 00:14:46: now.

00:14:46 --> 00:14:48: I've got a lot of projects going on.

00:14:48 --> 00:14:50: And, you know, it'd be great to just kind of

00:14:50 --> 00:14:51: build the team a bit.

00:14:52 --> 00:14:54: But in the end, I kind of decided, well, I've

00:14:54 --> 00:14:55: got to choose one.

00:14:55 --> 00:14:57: I can't spend time on both.

00:14:57 --> 00:14:59: You know, if I'm going to keep working on projects,

00:14:59 --> 00:15:02: I won't get to focus my time on the sustainability

00:15:02 --> 00:15:02: team that much.

00:15:03 --> 00:15:06: So put together a pitch pack and a presentation about

00:15:06 --> 00:15:09: kind of how I thought that we could develop this,

00:15:09 --> 00:15:12: the service and rebrand it to the ESG consulting service.

00:15:14 --> 00:15:17: Presented that to our board of directors who luckily agreed

00:15:17 --> 00:15:20: with my plan and found the presentation quite clear and

00:15:20 --> 00:15:23: a clear description of what is ESG in real estate,

00:15:23 --> 00:15:25: what can it mean for our business and how can

00:15:25 --> 00:15:27: we take it forward.

00:15:28 --> 00:15:30: And I think the biggest kind of thing that I

00:15:30 --> 00:15:32: identified there was that we already had a lot of

00:15:33 --> 00:15:35: opportunity laying on the table that we weren't kind of

00:15:35 --> 00:15:38: picking up and a lot of skills in house that

00:15:38 --> 00:15:41: we weren't fully utilizing to answer these questions for our

00:15:41 --> 00:15:41: clients.

00:15:42 --> 00:15:45: And so, yeah, so luckily that was accepted and approved

00:15:45 --> 00:15:47: and I started a new role about a year and

00:15:47 --> 00:15:50: a half ago as the head of the ESG consulting

00:15:50 --> 00:15:52: team and built the team over the year from 2:00

00:15:52 --> 00:15:55: to now over 20 people that we have throughout the

00:15:55 --> 00:15:57: UK and Europe, which we're very proud about.

00:15:59 --> 00:16:01: And yeah, it's just grown, grown since then, and we

00:16:02 --> 00:16:04: expect it to grow a lot more in the future

00:16:04 --> 00:16:04: as well.

00:16:05 --> 00:16:08: So ESG to my mind, it's still kind of a

00:16:08 --> 00:16:11: bit of a nebulous area in a way.

00:16:11 --> 00:16:13: When you when you are thinking of ESG and when

00:16:14 --> 00:16:17: your clients are talking about it, are they mainly focusing

00:16:17 --> 00:16:19: on the environment side or is it the S, the

00:16:19 --> 00:16:21: social and I imagine it's much less on the G,

00:16:22 --> 00:16:22: the governance.

00:16:22 --> 00:16:25: So what actually are people talking about?

00:16:27 --> 00:16:28: Yeah.

00:16:28 --> 00:16:31: So I think traditionally people were definitely most focused on

00:16:31 --> 00:16:32: the EN.

00:16:32 --> 00:16:34: I think that's kind of the most tangible part.

00:16:34 --> 00:16:38: So people are definitely up to speed with in the

00:16:38 --> 00:16:39: UK.

00:16:39 --> 00:16:42: You have to have a certain EPC understanding what their

00:16:42 --> 00:16:46: energy uses, understanding what their carbon emissions are, understanding what

00:16:46 --> 00:16:50: the water use is, what materials go into their buildings,

00:16:50 --> 00:16:54: what their biodiversity plans are, can they improve their biodiversity

00:16:54 --> 00:16:55: on site, things like that.

00:16:55 --> 00:16:59: I think people have a strong understanding of now and,

00:16:59 --> 00:17:02: and they really are kind of sort of tangible aspects

00:17:02 --> 00:17:05: that you can see a firm output for.

00:17:06 --> 00:17:08: I think definitely what we've seen in the last year

00:17:08 --> 00:17:11: and with COVID as well is a lot more focus

00:17:11 --> 00:17:13: on sort of the S and the, the social factors.

00:17:15 --> 00:17:17: And it's interesting because that can be harder to measure,

00:17:17 --> 00:17:19: but there are some good tools in the UK.

00:17:19 --> 00:17:23: There's the national Tom's, which comes from the social

00:17:23 --> 00:17:27: profit

00:17:27 --> 00:17:30: calculator to really measure kind of what the social return

00:17:31 --> 00:17:34: on investment is for a project or for a company.

00:17:34 --> 00:17:37: But we get more and more questions from clients who

00:17:37 --> 00:17:40: are interested to understand how can they increase their social

00:17:41 --> 00:17:44: impact on a project or on their on their company.

00:17:44 --> 00:17:46: And yeah, what, what can they exactly do and what

00:17:46 --> 00:17:48: can they measure and what should they be doing to

00:17:48 --> 00:17:50: kind of be the best in the market.

00:17:50 --> 00:17:51: So that's been really interesting to see and also shows

00:17:51 --> 00:17:55: the development of the market.

00:17:55 --> 00:17:59: So I don't know, let's say 5-10 years ago, if

00:17:59 --> 00:18:00: people were focused on me getting a BRIAM certificate was cutting edge.

00:18:00 --> 00:18:02: Now we see the clients get a BRIAM certificate and

00:18:02 --> 00:18:04: they also want to look at health and well-being.

00:18:04 --> 00:18:07: So they're also considering maybe a fit well certification or

00:18:07 --> 00:18:10: you know, something to kind of push the boundary a

00:18:10 --> 00:18:13: bit further and to differentiate themselves in the market.

00:18:14 --> 00:18:16: And then G we get, we get questions on as

00:18:16 --> 00:18:17: well.

00:18:17 --> 00:18:19: And I think that's something that's even more abstract for

00:18:19 --> 00:18:20: people.

00:18:20 --> 00:18:22: It's kind of how are they managing their risks?

00:18:22 --> 00:18:26: How are they making sure that there's good business ethics

00:18:26 --> 00:18:29: and components like that into their their buildings and their

00:18:29 --> 00:18:30: projects?

00:18:30 --> 00:18:34: Do they have a reliable and a strong and a

00:18:34 --> 00:18:35: vetted supply chain?

00:18:36 --> 00:18:38: You know, all of those things are a bit more

00:18:38 --> 00:18:41: difficult to manage and to to measure, but certainly I

00:18:42 --> 00:18:45: think, you know, companies are trying to to incorporate all

00:18:45 --> 00:18:48: of that into their projects into their business.

00:18:48 --> 00:18:51: And yeah, we increasingly get questions about kind of what

00:18:51 --> 00:18:53: should I be considering in terms of the the S

00:18:53 --> 00:18:55: and the G aspects as well?

00:18:56 --> 00:18:58: Yes, very well, explains Catherine.

00:18:58 --> 00:19:00: And and just on the micro level when it comes

00:19:00 --> 00:19:03: to the development, where the where is the industry going

00:19:03 --> 00:19:06: when it comes to ESGI think I've heard you mentioning

00:19:06 --> 00:19:08: down to the levels of lifts what, what can be

00:19:08 --> 00:19:12: done to improve the sustainability of lifts within buildings for

00:19:12 --> 00:19:12: example.

00:19:12 --> 00:19:14: Can you just tell us a little bit about more

00:19:14 --> 00:19:16: more about that, but also where the industry is headed

00:19:16 --> 00:19:17: in general?

00:19:18 --> 00:19:19: Yeah, and I think it's great.

00:19:19 --> 00:19:23: You know, the sort of attention that's been paid to

00:19:23 --> 00:19:25: ESG in the last year or so.

00:19:25 --> 00:19:27: I think it used to be something that was kind

00:19:27 --> 00:19:28: of a nice to have or maybe just a bonus.

00:19:29 --> 00:19:32: And now it's really become kind of the the leading

00:19:32 --> 00:19:34: driver for a lot of projects or a lot of

00:19:34 --> 00:19:37: our clients, if they won't buy a project, if it

00:19:37 --> 00:19:40: doesn't have the right ESG credentials or they're really going

00:19:40 --> 00:19:43: to consider what investment is needed to bring it up

00:19:43 --> 00:19:46: to up to speed and to meet their requirements, which

00:19:46 --> 00:19:47: is fantastic to see.

00:19:48 --> 00:19:51: And I think for me, what's been really interesting as

00:19:51 --> 00:19:53: well is to kind of see the way that other

00:19:53 --> 00:19:55: aspects of our business get involved.

00:19:55 --> 00:19:58: So like I mentioned before, we have kind of one

00:19:58 --> 00:20:00: team is one of our mottos.

00:20:00 --> 00:20:03: And so it's not just the ESG team working alone,

00:20:03 --> 00:20:06: but we really work very closely with the project management

00:20:06 --> 00:20:10: team, with the technical due diligence team, with our

00:20:10 --> 00:20:14: mechanical

00:20:14 --> 00:20:18: and electrical engineers and everyone else to, to incorporate

00:20:18 --> 00:20:19: ESG

00:20:19 --> 00:20:21: into their services, into their projects, with their clients into

00:20:21 --> 00:20:24: their products.

00:20:24 --> 00:20:26: And I think what's been really great to see is

00:20:26 --> 00:20:29: it's not, you know, again, not just us and not

00:20:29 --> 00:20:31: maybe even just these sort of main services that, you

00:20:31 --> 00:20:34: know, might seem obvious like they would be working

00:20:34 --> 00:20:37: together,

00:20:37 --> 00:20:40: but really how everyone has done it.

00:20:40 --> 00:20:43: So we've seen how tenant alterations when they're looking at

00:20:43 --> 00:20:46: the proposal that a tenant might bring to a landlord

00:20:46 --> 00:20:49: to make changes to a building, they'll start to ask

00:20:49 --> 00:20:52: questions like, well, what effect will that have on the

00:20:52 --> 00:20:56: EPC?

00:20:56 --> 00:20:58: And have you considered using recyclable materials and how

00:20:58 --> 00:21:00: will

00:21:00 --> 00:21:02: you dispose of the waste when you're, when you're doing

00:21:02 --> 00:21:06: this project?

00:21:06 --> 00:21:09: And so really, I think you know, every aspect of

00:21:09 --> 00:21:11: the, the real estate industry and the built environment can,

00:21:11 --> 00:21:14: can do something to sort of support the ESG story

00:21:14 --> 00:21:16: of a, of a building or a project.

00:21:16 --> 00:21:19: And that's been really, really great to see.

00:21:19 --> 00:21:22: And as you said, just demand is just really off

00:21:22 --> 00:21:25: the scale now for all, all advisory services to do

00:21:25 --> 00:21:28: with the ESG, just just for we want to help

00:21:28 --> 00:21:31: the younger members of the ULI and others in thinking

00:21:31 --> 00:21:34: of coming into the industry.

00:21:34 --> 00:21:37: Is there anyone particular route that people should follow if

00:21:37 --> 00:21:40: they have a particular interest in that area you should

00:21:40 --> 00:21:43: they be going to one particular university following one kind

00:21:25 --> 00:21:27: of course or is there sort of another way of
00:21:27 --> 00:21:28: doing it?
00:21:29 --> 00:21:32: I think I probably get this question maybe three times
00:21:32 --> 00:21:34: a week from people who say, what can you send
00:21:34 --> 00:21:34: to learn about ESG?
00:21:35 --> 00:21:37: I want to be an ESG expert, but I think
00:21:37 --> 00:21:39: the biggest thing I can say is just first, to
00:21:39 --> 00:21:40: follow your passion.
00:21:40 --> 00:21:42: So when I went to university and I had this
00:21:42 --> 00:21:45: passion for sustainability in the built environment.
00:21:45 --> 00:21:48: And that wasn't really a specific thing at the time,
00:21:48 --> 00:21:50: but I just, like I said, I tried to find
00:21:50 --> 00:21:52: a university that was doing something in that area.
00:21:53 --> 00:21:55: I tried to take courses that were focused on, you
00:21:55 --> 00:21:57: know, sustainability in the built environment.
00:21:58 --> 00:21:59: And now there's many of those.
00:21:59 --> 00:22:00: Actually, it's, it's great.
00:22:00 --> 00:22:04: There's plenty of programs that offer pathways like that,
which
00:22:04 --> 00:22:04: is great.
00:22:05 --> 00:22:08: But for people who are maybe out of university, there's
00:22:08 --> 00:22:10: some really concrete things that you can do.
00:22:10 --> 00:22:13: So I have my lead certification.
00:22:13 --> 00:22:15: You can do your brand certification, you can do your
00:22:15 --> 00:22:18: well, your fit well certification, which even if you don't
00:22:18 --> 00:22:21: want to become an assessor, those are all kind of
00:22:21 --> 00:22:24: good basis areas for, for learning kind of what goes
00:22:24 --> 00:22:26: into a sustainable or maybe a healthy building, which is
00:22:27 --> 00:22:28: all really, really helpful.
00:22:29 --> 00:22:30: But I think the best thing you can do is
00:22:30 --> 00:22:31: really just read up on it.
00:22:31 --> 00:22:34: You know, there's so many articles these days on LinkedIn
00:22:34 --> 00:22:37: based on who you follow, if you're following people who
00:22:37 --> 00:22:41: speak about sustainability or ESG in the building
environment, which
00:22:41 --> 00:22:45: businesses you follow, which organizations you follow,
everyone's talking about
00:22:46 --> 00:22:46: it now.
00:22:46 --> 00:22:48: So there's plenty of articles out there to read.
00:22:48 --> 00:22:51: There's lots of good guidance on the RCS website or
00:22:51 --> 00:22:54: on the UK Green Building website or the World Green
00:22:54 --> 00:22:56: Building Council's website.
00:22:56 --> 00:22:59: And on the subjects of staying current, who do you

00:22:59 --> 00:23:01: actually learn from Catherine nowadays?

00:23:01 --> 00:23:03: Do you thinking widely?

00:23:03 --> 00:23:06: Do you listen to podcasts or are there any books

00:23:06 --> 00:23:09: that you can recommend to to to help people along

00:23:09 --> 00:23:10: the way that you find useful?

00:23:10 --> 00:23:14: I'm an avid listener really I, I use audiobooks of

00:23:14 --> 00:23:18: memoirs just to see kind of how other people have

00:23:18 --> 00:23:22: succeeded or run their business or, or developed their business

00:23:23 --> 00:23:26: and specifically kind of yeah, from business people.

00:23:26 --> 00:23:30: So I'm reading right now Shoe Dog from Phil Knight

00:23:30 --> 00:23:32: who started Nike.

00:23:33 --> 00:23:36: And there's a podcast I listen to that I could

00:23:36 --> 00:23:39: really recommend How I Built This with Guy Raz.

00:23:39 --> 00:23:41: And Guy Raz interviews a different person for each podcast

00:23:41 --> 00:23:43: about how they built their their company.

00:23:43 --> 00:23:47: And he always asks, asks a question of of everyone

00:23:47 --> 00:23:49: at the end about was it luck or was it

00:23:49 --> 00:23:52: skill that got you to where you were?

00:23:52 --> 00:23:55: And so it's always, yeah, interesting to hear their answers.

00:23:56 --> 00:23:59: So Catherine greenwashing has become somewhat of a topical and

00:23:59 --> 00:24:01: controversial subject, hasn't it?

00:24:01 --> 00:24:03: Just in the last few weeks, actually.

00:24:03 --> 00:24:07: What is Hollis doing to tackle this kind, this area?

00:24:09 --> 00:24:13: Yeah, it's really important that you know, as we are

00:24:13 --> 00:24:17: remain as independent objective advisors and we really only speak

00:24:17 --> 00:24:20: on or comment on what we see and what we

00:24:20 --> 00:24:22: what we can evaluate.

00:24:23 --> 00:24:27: I think especially as sort of ESG, BIC certified professionals,

00:24:27 --> 00:24:31: we're really kind of sort of touching the subject.

00:24:31 --> 00:24:33: We don't want to say anything that isn't true.

00:24:33 --> 00:24:35: We don't we don't want to make any assumptions unless

00:24:35 --> 00:24:36: we have clear evidence of it.

00:24:37 --> 00:24:41: Increasingly companies are being called out for that and that's

00:24:41 --> 00:24:45: really big importance or aspect of of governance as well.

00:24:45 --> 00:24:49: And good governance is, is not making claims that aren't,

00:24:49 --> 00:24:53: aren't accurate and not being unethical about kind of our

00:24:53 --> 00:24:55: yeah, sustainability claims.

00:24:55 --> 00:24:58: And that's something that we're definitely very, very cautious of.

00:24:59 --> 00:25:01: So, Catherine, if you could just give one piece of
00:25:01 --> 00:25:04: advice to listeners in terms of entering the industry and
00:25:04 --> 00:25:06: being successful, what would it be?
00:25:08 --> 00:25:10: I would say to do what you are, follow what
00:25:10 --> 00:25:12: you are passionate about.
00:25:12 --> 00:25:14: South for me, of course, I mentioned it was I
00:25:14 --> 00:25:18: was passionate about a sustainable built environment where
when I
00:25:18 --> 00:25:21: was in university and when I was getting started, that
00:25:21 --> 00:25:23: was not a, a very hip or popular thing to
00:25:23 --> 00:25:23: do.
00:25:23 --> 00:25:26: But very luckily it's kind of become come to the
00:25:26 --> 00:25:28: forefront of the industry.
00:25:29 --> 00:25:32: And so whatever you're interested in, follow that because
that
00:25:32 --> 00:25:36: will keep you motivated and inspired and, and enjoying your
00:25:36 --> 00:25:38: work, whatever that might be.
00:25:38 --> 00:25:41: And even if it's sort of a niche topic, probably
00:25:41 --> 00:25:44: there is a demand for it and you'll become a
00:25:44 --> 00:25:46: specialist in your in your field.
00:25:46 --> 00:25:49: So follow that, follow what you're passionate about.
00:25:50 --> 00:25:51: Catherine Bizer, thank you so much.
00:25:52 --> 00:25:53: Thanks, Robin.

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