Teaching our USGBC Family the Importance of the "Where"

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This week, I've had the pleasure of spending my time in San Antonio, Texas with some of the most engaged members of our USGBC family for our annual mid-year meeting. These folks are the heartbeat of the green building community – the lifeblood of our movement. And the mid-year meeting serves as a way to celebrate their many victories and vision into the future.

I told this audience at my opening remarks on Tuesday night that we have some very important work to do in the coming months. The stakes have never been so high, the opportunities never been so tremendous.

On Sept. 29, the Center for Green Schools at USGBC will host the first annual Green Apple Day of Service. On that Saturday, tens of thousands of volunteers across the world will descend upon several thousand schools across the globe to plant teaching gardens, build rainwater harvesting structures, clean up classrooms and conduct energy and indoor air quality audits. Together we are going to convince the public that where our children learn really matters.

About a year ago we conducted a series of focus groups. And what we found was that the typical parent, when asked what constitutes a quality education, will talk about the *who* and the *what* of education – the importance of great teachers and engaging curriculum – but unprompted, not a single parent will mention the *where*. Now it may shock you to hear that not a single parent we spoke to mentioned volatile organic compounds or thermal comfort; that there was nary a mention of CO2 levels or mold spores.

But that is because the people USGBC works with on a regular basis – architects, engineers, designers and other various and sundry green building professionals – know better than anyone that the where matters. Now we just have to convince the rest of the universe.

We see Green Apple Day of Service as the beginnings of an enormous undertaking to create mainstream awareness for the importance of the work that we do every day. But we've got a big leap to make. It's not that the general public doesn't agree. It's that this stuff isn't even on their radar.

For the first few years that I worked at USGBC, every day when I left my house, my partner would say "play nice with the environmentalists." I mostly just thought that was funny until I started to think about the fact that it was a kind of prediction of what I believe is one of the greatest threats that USGBC faces. I used to think the enemy was the status quo, but now I realize that what really jeopardizes the future of our movement is how comfortable we have gotten talking to each other. I don't want to see us go down the path of so many other environmental non-profits. We have got to stop talking to each other and start talking to everyone else. We have got to step outside of our comfort zone and focus every ounce of our attention on recruiting ten thousand, actually more like ten million, more people to transform our schools, our homes and our communities.

We can't afford to lose another teacher to an unhealthy and poor-performing school. We can't afford to disengage another parent. We can't afford to turn off another student.

And at the heart of it, that's what Green Apple is all about – it isn't just a day and it isn't just a logo. It's a movement. And it won't happen without you – each and every one of you.

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Member employees, USGBC staff

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