The Building Happiness Metric: My Light Bulb Moment at Greenbuild

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Happy buildings, happy people. (Credit: waferboard via Flickr)

Each year, Greenbuild offers attendees more than 150 educational opportunities.

Beyond the practical learning and CEU credits, however, it's the exchange of ideas, casual dialogue and new expo products that spark excitement and inspiration among attendees.

In fact, networking ranks among the highest-rated reasons for attending Greenbuild. As green building practitioners, we enjoy the time with like-minded professionals, and Greenbuild provides fertile ground for reimagining our world in new ways.

My light bulb moment came last year in a session on building metrics. Coming from a building operations background, I have long admired the ability of architects and designers to delight their clients and create a sense of place or engineer a moment of discovery.

Building operators often feel constrained by a common set of metrics by which our buildings are judged: energy and water consumption, materials purchases or occupant education efforts. While these indicators capture real performance, they fall short in genuinely accomplishing the goals of our clients — building owners and occupants. Owners want buildings that produce happy tenants while maximizing return on their real estate. Occupiers want a sense of place, a space where they can feel good about spending their day.

The goals of owners and occupants extend beyond the objective measures of consumption and point to a *Building Happiness Metric*.

After all, what good is an efficient building if no one wants to be in it? Or as an engineering friend once said, "We know how to make it more efficient, just brick in all the windows."

Although no building happiness index exists today, it provides a fun exercise of the mind to move beyond a meter reading and into the interaction of the building with its occupants. If countries like Bhutan can apply a yardstick to National Happiness, couldn't we learn to design and operate buildings in ways that grow happy users?

Commit to explore Greenbuild in new ways this year and take advantage of cross-industry collaboration. Sit in a session on a topic that may not be pertinent to your industry. Connect with the attendee next to you at lunch. You never know what may grow out of those brief encounters.

Be curious, be brave, explore and enjoy!

Jeremy Benkin
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Member employees, Chapter members

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