

STUDENT INTERVIEW / LEAH ZULKOSKI

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Leah Zulkoski, a recent 2020 graduate from Columbia Business School and CoreNet 2020 Scholarship recipient, has had an interest in real estate her entire life, influenced by the work her father did in private equity. Leah's unique childhood also makes her an example of how to embrace change and be flexible to find success in life.

Leah's father's career took the family from Connecticut to Singapore when she was young. In Singapore, Leah enjoyed a "wonderfully international upbringing... of the many things I loved about living in Singapore was the melting pot culture and the amazing food." Leah says she will forever fondly reminisce about the "fantastically delicious, cheap food" that was available at Hawker Centers, open air food courts that have a wide variety of Asian food stalls.

After returning to the US, Leah Zulkoski attended Bates College, where she double-majored in Economics and East Asian Studies. There, she focused her studies on the dynamism of the Chinese economy and wrote a senior thesis titled "The Socioeconomic Implications of Interethnic Marriage in Rural China." Upon graduation she joined Moody's Investors Service, where she spent two years assigning ratings to Commercial Mortgage-Backed Securities. Immediately prior to starting at Columbia Business School, Leah worked on an economic development-focused real estate development in Burlington, Vermont. She spent her MBA summer internship working with the Real Estate Transaction Services group at New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC).

The lessons on flexibility that Leah learned in her upbringing, living internationally and developing skills to fit and immerse in new cultures, have carried over with her to adulthood. First, she experienced graduation in the peak of COVID lockdown and had to readjust her expectations. Now, entering the workforce, she has taken on a unique position with a firm that embodies flexibility at its core: The Plant.



Q1 Nice to meet you, Leah, and and congrats on your CoreNet Scholarship Award!

Nice to meet you! I want to extend my genuine gratitude to CoreNet for the CoreNet Scholarship, as well as to those who have been so generous as to select me for this award. Receiving this scholarship has allowed me to give back to my loved ones who have made pursuing my MBA possible, and it has provided me with affirmation that I am fully capable of contributing to the real estate industry in a meaningful way.

Q2 In what other ways have you pursued real estate ventures while still in school?

At Columbia Business School, I found joy and fulfillment serving as the community chair for my cluster, as VP of Trips for the Real Estate Association, and as VP of Marketing and Events for Microlumbia, a student-led nonprofit impact investment fund. I have been looking forward to contributing real solutions to pressing social, environmental, and economic issues through innovative and creative real estate developments

and investments after graduating, and I recently started an exciting new career at The Plant.

Q3 **Leah, tell us about the fascinating project you are currently on, The Plant.**

I'm working on a groundbreaking development project called The Plant. It's a home for climate solutions that will consist of two incredible buildings along the Hudson River in Yonkers, NY. Together, they will be part Climate Solutions Incubator, Convening Space, flexible office space, Maker Space, Art & Culture Exhibitions, Lodging and the Earth Data Observatory. The Manor is being upgraded to host world-class Climate conferences and events as well as provide lodging for guests and luminaries. The PowerPlant will be a flexible office space for climate-focused accelerators, providing maker space, a vertical greenhouse, and industry-relevant programming around environmental technology and justice. We envision the campus as a vibrant hub for clean energy as well as something exciting for the community.

Q4 **What were the buildings previously?**

These two historic buildings have a powerful back story: the one called The PowerPlant, is a decommissioned coal-burning power plant that was built in 1906 to electrify Grand Central Terminal. The Manor was a stunning estate built in 1912 for a mining tycoon. Now they will have an entirely new purpose as we work to reinvent and clean up our industrialized planet.

Q5 **And what is your role?**

These days I'm steeped in start-up mode addressing finance requirements like complicated tax credits and abatements that will help make this innovative center a reality for its projected opening dates of 2022 for The Manor and 2024 for The PowerPlant.

Q6 **What's the best part of your job?**

Honestly, I love that I'm having an early impact. Because we're still a lean team of 12, I get to go beyond the scope of my job title. I get to try a lot of hats and jump in to help problem-solve. Right now, I'm dealing with budgets and I'm deep in the weeds of the real estate. Also, the actual mission of this development is deeply satisfying to me-- and because of the rising water levels of the Hudson River, we actually need to take that into consideration during the renovation for both of our buildings which could be impacted. Our mission carries through every level of the project, from the physical space to the capital stack.

Q7 **How is this commercial real estate project different from others?**

Unlike other corporate and commercial real estate projects, The Plant is home to a diverse group of stakeholders. It includes corporations, local government, entrepreneurs, thought leaders in climate, investors, indigenous communities, local citizens, climate refugees and artists who will co-create lasting solutions for the climate crisis.

