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2020 Ones to Watch: Michael Sweeney, AKF Group

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Name: Michael Sweeney, BEMP, LEED AP

Company: AKF Group

Title: Energy Modeling Engineer

Education: MS, Energy Management, New York Institute of Technology

Which project, deal, or transaction was the “game-changer” in the advancement of your career?

Building energy modeling is fraught with snags in process and workflow, and it can be very tedious to keep track of all of the components within a model. An introductory data-analysis course in Python was by far the biggest game-changer for my career. Learning to develop automated workflows and leverage existing ones made me a better modeler, allowed me to ask (and answer) more targeted questions about existing models, enabled our team to work better together, and more recently, it has helped our entire organization glean bigger-picture insights into our operational efficiency and the way we work.

What do you like most about your job?

It’s always a treat to work on sustainability-driven projects and to be given the latitude to explore a variety of novel, high-performance strategies. However, I’ve always found it most rewarding to convince a more budget-conscious client—who potentially associates “sustainable” with “expensive”—that carbon reductions and financial savings can co-exist with a little more upfront planning and analysis. The Net Zero Energy developer will always have an efficient building, whereas a more conventional one might end up settling for a design that performs worse on both energy and cost—and only because nobody showed them that the two are not always mutually exclusive.

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