



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #20

Seven Lessons Learned from Starting an Engineering Company as an EIT

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/matteit

Anthony's Upfront Intro: You are listening to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast* with Anthony Fasano session #20. In this session I will speak with an EIT who in the past year and a half has graduated, failed to find a job, relocated across the country and now has his own engineering company through which he's thriving and he's working around the clock. Lets do it!

Episode Intro: Welcome to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*, where it's all about helping real engineers to overcome real challenges and get real results. And now for your host, who is on a mission to inspire as many engineers as possible, professional engineer and certified career coach, Anthony Fasano.

Hello everyone. This is Anthony Fasano, your engineering career coach and I want to welcome you to session 20 of *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. For those of you that are listening, I'd like to offer you a gift and thank you as a listener. If you visit my website at engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift I will send you a list of the three top resources that I utilized to become a partner in an engineering firm at the age of twenty-seven. So check that out.

I have a great, great show for you today. I have Matt Mangano, who's going to come on and talk about his amazing journey over the last year and a half, two years. Matt is twenty-four years old. He's an EIT who graduated from Rutgers, right here in New Jersey but now is out in sunny San Diego, where he actually started his own company and he's really thriving. So he's going to talk about seven critical lessons that he's learned in the last year and a half and I also add some information from my experience on some of those points. I think it's really action packed and towards the middle to the end of the show he really gets into the opportunity that he had to start his company and how he attacked it. It was an awesome show and I'm actually going to get to meet Matt in September in San Diego.

So before we do get into the interview let me just mention that I am putting on a very special event for motivated engineers. I know we have a lot of listeners in Southern California but while the event is open to everyone, everyone out there, all engineers out there. The website for the event is iecdfallmeetup.com. Please check it out. We sold out our last event in Austin, Texas and basically the idea is we're going to focus on how you can communicate better as an engineer, how you can better develop your networking skills - giving very specific strategies and we're going to do some pretty awesome sessions on leadership as well.



I think you'll see, from what Matt talks about in this show, all these points are much needed. So please check it out. If you go to that URL there's video that you can watch from engineers that attended the last event in Austin. I think you'll see what they got out of it. Again, that's iecdfallmeetup.com. So with that let's get right into our main segment of the show today, the coaching segment, and let's hear from Matt Mangano.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, now it's time for our coaching segment of the show, where either I'll be coaching a younger engineer or I'll have an expert come on and try to provide some advice for younger engineers and today actually we have an interesting guest. Today we have with us Matt Mangano, who's out in San Diego. Matt, you just heard his bio but Matt graduated in the fall of 2012 with an engineering degree and then in January 2014, as an EIT, he actually started his own engineering company.

Matt and I hooked up on LinkedIn and when I heard his story I definitely wanted to have him on. What we're going to go through for you today is seven lessons kind of that Matt learned from this process of going - and it was a short time period of course - but going from being a graduate engineer to starting a company and kind of through how that unfolded, we're going to take some of the lessons that he learned and we're going to put them out there for other engineers. Really, I think, engineers of all experience levels will be able to benefit from that. So, how's it going Matt?

Matt: How you doing Anthony? It's great to hear from you. Thanks for having me on.

Anthony: Oh yeah, no problem. Thanks for coming on. I appreciate it. Matt's actually from originally out here in New Jersey and he found his way, which is probably a very positive thing, outside sunny San Diego. So it's good to have him on and basically we're going to run through these seven points and we'll go back and forth a bit. I'll add some of my own experience into it as well but I think just by the looks of them there's a lot that you'll be able to take out of it, for our listeners.

Alright, so first of all Matt let's get into the whole idea of, you know you graduate school or whatever age level you are, you're trying to get a job in the engineering world. I know one of the things that you recommend is, the online job app process can be very difficult. Talk to us about that a bit.

Matt: Yeah, so when I got out here, obviously just relocating for geographical purposes, I found a lot that all these jobs were posted online and I really, I want to play the game. If they have it online I think that should be the process and whereby you need cover letters, everything else and what I

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found was my resumes and all the time that I was putting into these cover letters just going into a black hole, if you will, of applications. Very few callbacks, things of that sort.

After the online application process didn't work - I was sending out way too many applications and I keep hearing this from other people as well - I decided to take the networking route, really start assimilating myself into the San Diego community and that's actually where I found the success.

Anthony: Okay, great. That's perfect and we're going to touch on that later. Our point number six is going to be getting into networking and Matt's going to talk about how he did that. But the one thing that I can add to this here, to this point is I've talked to a lot of engineers that are doing the online process and I know it, to be honest with you, it sucks from what I've heard. It's a black hole, like Matt said. It's frustrating. It wears you down. It takes away your motivation. It makes you just really upset sometimes even to be in engineering because you just feel like no-one's listening to you.

So I think the one thing you can take out of this is to avoid the online job app process at all costs and try to do your own networking. Get yourself out there and we'll give some tips on that a little later, on how to do that. Alright, let's push on to point number two, which is from what Matt has told me when we talked before this was going after the PE license. Talk about that Matt.

Matt: Absolutely, it's just something nothing can take away from you. It really proves your sincerity, that you want to be there, that this is the direction you want to take and especially going after jobs as younger engineer, proving that you can come in with that PE license - that would really make it.

Our field is great in that the EIT, as soon as you obtain that EIT license you can put the letters after your name, you look like a professional, you really have some sort of wherewithal to speak on projects, yet you're still working under PE. You have some sort of developmental freedom to go along designing projects.

Anthony: And just to add to kind of what Matt is saying about your PE license; a lot of times I hear engineers either say, "I don't need that license in my field," or, "I don't need to start going after it right away," and I think that you just have to. I mean some fields okay. You may not need a PE if you're a chemical engineer or you're doing something where it's not needed. I might understand that. There might be something better like a six sigma certification or something else that might be better for you. But what you have to remember is that those letters, PE after your name and even the EIT like Matt said, means something.

I mean I remember when I was at a company and we interviewed people we would always look for right away, "Are you a PE? Did you take your PE exam yet? Are you getting the experience you need to get your PE?" Employers think about that. Clients look for that. It's like an automatic credibility boost if you're a PE. I mean I know when I'm just talking to engineers in general one of the

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first things I'll think of or ask them is, "Are you a PE?" because if they say yes then that means a lot. So that's something that you really need to take into consideration.

Even if you're, and I've met a lot of engineers that are older that went through their careers and they just never got it. Get it. Try to go back and get it and do whatever you have to do to get it. It makes a big difference. Alright let's push on to point number three, which I love, which is take every bit of advice that you get but also form opinions for yourself. So Matt why don't you talk about that one a bit?

Matt: Yeah, this is great. This definitely goes along the lines of networking, something I've always done, speaking for my own ideals, really finding that mentor - someone you can really look up to. Believe it or not, if they're impressed with you, if they find similarities in character traits they are always willing to offer advice and it's great to take it in. Always focus it having a goal for yourself. I've always asked for advice or insight not necessarily, "Can you get me a job? Can you tell me which direction to take?" I ask for advice or insight because everyone's willing and then it turns into, "I can set you up with this guy. Let's have a drink. Let's have breakfast or dinner."

But at the same time people will say take the secure route, get in with the company at the ground level and work your way up or take a year off; go back to school and you have to factor all these things in and take them for what they're worth absolutely. Because everyone that I've experienced has a little bit more time in the field than I do but at the same time I know which direction I want to take. That should be a major factor.

Anthony: No, that's an excellent point. So basically - I like what Matt's saying is - get out there, talk to people, ask for advice. I think that point is spot on because I can't tell you how many times if I go to like a engineering event I'll have a young engineer that comes up to me and just literally like says, "Hi, my name is John. Here's my resume." It's like a turn off. You don't want to talk to the person anymore.

Matt: Yeah, absolutely.

Anthony: If a young engineer comes up to me and says, "Oh I'm doing this, what's your advice? What's your opinion? Should I take another course? Should I try to get another certification? Will that maybe help me get a job?" Then I'm going to say to them, "Well listen, I think yes you should do that and also by the way I know this guy in this company - I'm going to hook you up with him. Shoot me an email."

So I think that that's definitely spot on but I think also what Matt says is really important is that when you have goals for yourself and you're really focused on them and you're clear on them -this is one of the things that we talked about in our Mastermind session that we did down in Austin, Texas not long



ago - once you hone in on those goals you can get all the advice you want and maybe some advice will help you to get to those goals faster, maybe some advice won't but you also need to remain true to kind of your goals. And you can't take every piece of advice and then go in a different direction because you're never going to get anywhere. So I think the idea of taking advice, asking for advice is awesome but you have to then filter it and I think that that's key. Alright let's go on to point number for, which is go with the flow but attack opportunities. Go ahead Matt.

Matt: This is something I can really speak from experience about. Like I said, getting out here the options were kind of limited having no friends or family to really set me up on the way out, not too much experience in the work field out of school. I actually thought finding a job as a project researcher, a little cost estimation, a lot of RFP sort of research and just reading through tons and tons of projects that were getting put out there, proposals and that sort.

I was disappointed at first about the idea of not getting straight into the design field. I really wanted to use what I learned in school, everything like that. But excelled anyway, really kind of made a name for myself in this small company. Lo and behold, I actually found a bit of a structural engineering moonlighting position that a lot of working part-time for and since then the RFP research and learning about the proposal process actually in the field has really helped me since. So I guess I can say the moral of that is you take what you can get but again, you want to focus it toward your ultimate goal.

Anthony: So Matt you were, so you got a job with a smaller engineering company and then you had this moonlighting opportunity that just came about from someone that needed some work, some engineering work done?

Matt: Exactly, exactly. I was working nights and weekends. I just needed a little bit of help with design starting to blow up and really stuck with that actually. That was the firm that I wound up moving to that's delivered the current opportunity.

Anthony: So then you ended up kind of starting your own, I guess your own company so to speak from that opportunity and then you can contract to companies. Is that accurate?

Matt: Yes, and that's I guess step two of the attacking the opportunity. I started working with the new firm full-time but I was still contracted for the first three months and then we were going to have salary talks and everything like that. In those three months I met so many people in the field.

I was really excelling as a result of hard work more than luck or background knowledge in the field itself and come January for the salary talks I had a decision to make. I had about seventy-two hours when it occurred to me I could stay on as a contractor and start my own company or I can accept this full-time position and keep doing what I'm doing and that was another thing especially in starting my company.

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Anthony: Wow. So that's when you made the decision, I guess, to stay with the company and then you could have flexibility to contract with multiple people?

Matt: Correct.

Anthony: And that's what you're doing now currently?

Matt: That's exactly what I'm doing and you know it is a risk. Young engineers will have to weigh that up. If they want the benefits, the vacation, the salary with the weekends off or are you able, as a person, to really attack the field yourself with that sense of security on the side; knowing that you have a lot of hours logged consistently regardless of the external work that you can find.

Anthony: So Matt do you work, like you have your own office or something or do you go to these offices and work? How does that work?

Matt: A little bit of both. I have a tiny home office. I have a desk, my filing cabinet, printer. I'm kind of drilling some lights into the wall for my interacting sort of table to lay plans out.

Anthony: Okay.

Matt: I'm really making the most out of it but the majority of the time I am going office-to-office and working with these companies.

Anthony: Okay. Yeah, I think that part of the reason that I wanted to have Matt on I think the beauty of what he's talking about here is that you can pretty much do anything as an engineer regardless of your age. I mean who would have thought. I mean listen, Matt's from New Jersey. He ends up moving to San Diego, can't necessarily find a job or the job market's tough but he does find something. Then he recognizes this opportunity of having a small engineering company and now he probably has - well I'm sure he works a lot of hours; like he said he's on call a lot - but he's got a lot of flexibility and he's kind of doing things the way he wants to do them, got his own little setup, doesn't necessarily have to go to an office everyday, go some days.

So I think it's interesting and exciting actually to see that there's opportunities like this out there because I know that there's a lot of younger engineers out there that might be EITs that wouldn't even think that this is a possibility. So I think that that's a real positive. So let's keep going with that momentum.

Matt: I'd actually like to add to that if I could and this is something for everybody about not getting locked into one state of mind and that the opportunity is out there if you move laterally. I actually

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specialize in environmental storm water runoff in civil engineering in school and I came out here assuming that I'd be getting something along those lines since there is such a runoff problem in Southern California with rains and now I can only really see a future as a residential architectural engineer. So being an EIT people will trust you that you know the calculation, that you can do all the technical work but then you have to really be ready to work yourself into catching up if you do switch fields young.

Anthony: Wow, that's great. That's excellent. Alright, let's move on to number five, which is having a solid work ethic. Why don't you talk about that a little bit Matt?

Matt: For sure. This is definitely the point that's carried me throughout the entire transition. I really think that it's important to, even when you find that job, to not rest on it. Like I was just talking about - I had to teach myself seismology. That's not something that we learn in the northeast. As soon as the opportunity came about I bought a book on seismic design, lateral design, started going through that and then you have to be ready to go above and beyond.

I mean what can I say that Randy Over hasn't mentioned a couple weeks ago. Really it is literally on weekends. I mean I work straight through the weekends but and that's what really does get you ahead. You can, just saying, "Yes, I'll be on call. Yes, I'll run those plans down to the city for you." It's stuff that you can't be afraid to go outside your scope of work and again I'll tie it into what we were just talking about. Everything's a learning experience. So not only will you impress someone else on work ethic alone but there's always something you can take out of it for your industry.

Anthony: Yeah, I agree with you and for those of you that heard Matt mention Randy Over - he's the ASCE National President. He was on the podcast a couple sessions ago and if you want to check that out just go to engineeringcareercoach.com/randy. He gave some good points of advice as well.

But I think I just love what Matt is talking about here. I mean basically if they need someone to learn seismology Matt bought a book and read it. That's how you achieve your goals. I mean that's how you're able to do things that other people aren't able to do. That's how you separate yourself from the field because you have that ability, that willingness to learn and the drive to do it. That's the big difference from people that are super successful and people that aren't is because anyone could talk about something and see an opportunity and look at it and say, "Wow, look at that opportunity," but it's those people that attack the opportunity, they have the willingness to learn anything they have to to engage that opportunity, that's how you go places in your career. So that's a real strong point.

Alright, let's go on to the next point, number six, which is developing your networking skills, something that I talk a lot about all the time. Matt, why don't you talk about that a little bit? We touched on it in point one, where you didn't go the online, traditional job process you kind of got involved in the community. Tell us about some of the things you did.

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Matt: Absolutely. I definitely at one point felt like I was hitting a wall in San Diego having, like I said, no connections but what I did was I started taking part in the local community. I joined the community council for the town that I actually have a public contract with them now for weekends, believe it or not. In fact, like you've mentioned a million times too, you've got to find those professional networks. You want to associate yourself with people that you can really relate to in the industry.

Believe it or not, I've found my moonlighting gig that really launched this entire escalation through soccer. I came out here. I played soccer my entire life. I tried out for a couple teams the first couple weeks I was out here and you know it helps people relate to you when you show your passion for something, whether it's innately related to something in our industry or not and with that said, you definitely want to state your ambitions and you want to keep your goals in mind but showing those passions and skills for anything really will have people gravitate to you and then in terms of your network you start seeing, "Oh, I know my sister happens to be an engineer," or, "I know a guy who's worked for CDN Smith or tenures. Let's see if we can get your resume on someone's table."

Something like that is definitely the key and then a point that I really wanted to make, that I've started noticing recently is helping others. I'm starting to be contacted via LinkedIn a lot actually about opportunities where I'm a small firm, I don't plan on expanding too soon, but being willing to help others and give that advice that I had been looking for for two years, it really you can make yourself important to these people. So I think it is a great cycle but networking is always, always number one from what I've found.

Anthony: Yeah, definitely and you know just like when Matt and I hooked up on LinkedIn, I asked him to come on obviously and share his information. So I think you definitely grow as well when you do things like this and you're able to get out there and take some of the advice that you got and then give it back. It's like a circle and I think that's great.

Matt: That's great.

Anthony: Alright, so lets get into the last point here that Matt's going to touch on a little bit, which is kind of about starting your company. Tell us about some of the ins and outs of that process.

Matt: So starting the company - I'll kind of stay on the networking field. You are really, what I found is that you're really selling yourself. As an engineer, we're the product. We're not bringing anything in, selling anything out and obviously quality of work is number one. You have to be very precise with all the designs that you're handing out. You have to be willing to expand yet you can't lose focus on what's really important and then there are all these traits that I have listed here - ambition, work ethic, quality, efficiency as well as I think it's really important to have pride of product, conviction, certainly saying, "Yes, I am a civil engineer." And you know you'll be on site and a contractor who's been



building houses for forty years will ask me why I put a beam across his kitchen and you have to be ready to answer that with conviction, what I believe.

It's all about perception too and I guess that kind of keeps it on the real business side of starting your own company. Anyone can register a company. I would definitely recommend a tax consultation to start. I went down to a local accounting firm and just kind of laid everything on the table and said, "What do I need to do to avoid messing this up?" And they were really willing to look through everything. I guess the questions that you'd really have to ask yourself are, "Do you have the time to do it?" Like I said, it is full-time, everyday and you don't have the opportunity to just leave work at work. Certainly there has to be a balance but in between learning the field, excelling in the field and working for multiple companies with multiple clients in my sake, you have to make sure that you can do this. Luckily enough I don't have a family that I need to work with or anything along those lines but it is extremely important.

Anthony: Hey Matt?

Matt: Yeah?

Anthony: Let me ask you a question real quick. I'm sure maybe some of the listeners are thinking this as well but what would you say are some of the benefits of having the business and working as a contractor? It sounds like you obviously work a lot of hours. It's a lot of work, like you said it's hard work - "I'll drop the plans off for you whenever you need it," stuff like that. So all that being said, which I mean personally I think is great but why do you like doing this?

Matt: I like it. I'm really glad you asked this actually. I wasn't prepared to answer in this direction but honestly, I like that everything has my name on it. I can put my spin on it. I'd always felt that I was a little bit more ambitious than the bosses that I had worked for and I like that I can deliver it, deliver my designs, deliver my CAD drawings, anything along that line really with how I want to present it.

And then just knowing that I'm twenty-four years old and this has always been a dream of mine to own my own firm, knowing that everything that I'm doing now is building for a future I'm really excited to have started so young, which is really a benefit for anybody. If you can handle, like I said, the time, the stress, the organizational skills, things like that you can really set your own schedule. I mean I choose to be a morning person but at the same time if you're not feeling the eight to five in an office you can show up for four hours at one firm say, "I'm over engineering for the day," four hours at the next firm, "I want to be an architect now."

Things along those lines - it really does increase your freedom and honestly, your confidence as well. When you're delivering quality designs I think it shows. I'm going around business-to-business feeling great about everything, knowing that it's coming directly from my design. So anyone who is

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maybe feeling crippled - I don't want to say crippled, maybe stringent would be a better word - by overhead and you feel you could do it better, go for it. It's been fantastic so far.

Anthony: That's great and just one last question before we let you go Matt. Do you ever feel like engineers that are working in these firms kind of resent you? Or you know because you're not there everyday, you come and you go as you please, do you ever have to deal with anything like that that affects the work?

Matt: I definitely I can see where there is a little bit of - I don't want to call it resentment as much - I get more of a joking side of it, get a little bit of a hard time you know. I'm the young kid but at the end of the day I'm working harder than everyone sitting in....actually, I don't want to shoot myself in the foot. I'm working more hours than everyone sitting in that firm and it's really a lifestyle choice.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: So they know and, like I said, with conviction if you own what you're doing and you do it well people respect that whether they want a piece of it or not. It's really, from what I've seen I'm willing to pay my dues everywhere and I always, I have a lot respect for anyone who's been in the field longer than me, any of my elders basically and even peers as well.

Anthony: Alright, great. I think you can see that one of the things I talk about a lot is doing what you're passionate about. If you do that you're going to be happy and I think that we can all tell that Matt is very passionate about what he does and that's probably why the number of hours he works doesn't necessarily seem to be a negative thing for him because he really enjoys it. He likes building something that is his own and I think when you do that the only challenge becomes this balance issue.

I started the company myself as a lifestyle choice and while it's been great there's a lot of challenges because when you're a motivated person, like myself and like Matt, it could be hard to put a line between the two and you could just want to work all the time, kind of because you love it so much but it also can really wear you down. So that's probably another podcast though.

Matt: I was going to say, it's funny that you said it. If you don't mind I literally wrote down basically the mirrored sentence of what you just said. My only issue is that I was trying to think about what my issues were if we're delivering this to younger engineers - things to look out for. If you really are passionate about engineering it is addicting and then on the business side of owning your own company I'm still battling with knowing when to turn it off, knowing if I could turn it off if I wanted to. So exactly what you're saying Anthony, there's definitely a balance issue.



Anthony: Yeah, and what we'll do is, I don't want to keep Matt too long but on my career changing tip here at the end I'll talk a little bit about balance and some things that all of you out there can do to try to achieve a little bit more of that.

So with that I want to thank Matt for coming on. For those of you that want to check out the notes from the show we'll post them on the session notes, which you can find at engineeringcareercoach.com/matteit. Alright, so check it out and once again Matt thanks so much for doing this. I think our listeners are going to get a lot out of it and I appreciate the time.

Matt: Anthony, thank you so much for having me on and thank you for delivering this podcast.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip:

Alright, now it's time for our career changing tip. And while the session today with Matt I thought was very informational and there was a lot of positive points that he gave out, I think there was one point that was kind of - I don't want to say negative but it was the biggest challenge for him, which was the balance. Right, I mean all the stuff he's doing is great but he doesn't have a lot of time for himself. He doesn't have a lot of time for recuperation, refreshing himself.

So the tip that I want to give you today can help those of you out there - and probably it's nine out of ten people listening to this show - that feel like they don't have the balance that they want in their life. This is something that I've been trying to work on as well. I mentioned this on one of our previous podcasts and this is something that a good friend of mine, Chris Knutson, who was on a past show as well mentioned to me - the whole idea of equanimity, which is basically saying that focus on whatever you're doing in that moment.

So I'm not going to sit here and tell people like Matt that are really busting their butt building a company, doing what they love to do to work less hours. Alright, because that doesn't necessarily make sense or doesn't apply to everyone. But what I can tell you is that the hours that you're not working or the hours that you're focusing on something else, focus on that and don't think about the work.

If you're home and you're eating dinner with your family put the cellphone away, shut it off, focus on the family even if it's just for that one hour of time. If you're putting your kid to bed at night and you know you've got to do some work afterwards that's fine. Worry about the work later. Focus on the process of putting your kid to bed. Learn about what they did that day. If you're in the middle of a big project at work and you're going to go out to lunch with a friend for an hour or even with a colleague, just to catch up, then go out to lunch and focus on that lunch.



It's not always an easy thing to do but if you try it, it can be very beneficial to you and it will bring balance to or it'll bring a sense of balance to a lifestyle that you think isn't as balanced. And one thing that you can do to try to do this really is the whole idea of the cellphone. I mean if you cut that out for an hour, even just one hour a day if you shut it off and say that's like your disconnect time, that could help you to focus more on what you're doing because it's distractions that take us out of that mode.

It's not simple to do but it's kind of a simple thing that I'm throwing out there -- just to disconnect and focus more on what's at hand for you but it's very, very difficult to do so start small. I promise you that if you do this you absolutely can and will be able to bring some more balance to your life no matter how many hours you work.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

So lastly, I just want to say real quick as I end the session today, many of you know that I run a community for engineers. Basically what I'm trying to do is find the three hundred most motivated engineers in the world and put them together into a network so they can help each other. We do webinars, we do different calls, we have our own private network and if it's something that you're interested in please reach out to me at afasano@powerfulpurpose.com. We're looking for the most motivated engineers around to be part of this community, to help each other grow and to experience the best possible career and life that you could possible experience.

So with that, remember to check out the website engineeringcareercoach.com/matteit to get the session notes from today and I'll catch you on the next session of ***The Engineering Career Coach Podcast***.

Thank you for listening to ***The Engineering Career Coach Podcast***, with Anthony Fasano - transforming engineering career development one engineer at a time.

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