**The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST
SESSION #27
How To Stand Out From The Crowd**

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/podcast

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, hello, hello! Anthony Fasano here. Welcome to the show. I have a full show for you today. I am going to give you, in today's episode, six actions that you can take to differentiate yourself as an engineer and stand out from the crowd. And probably at least half of those options are things that people would tell you not to do or to do the opposite of but I'm going to challenge you to be different, be unique and be the best you can be.

Before I dive into these action items, just a couple of quick things I want to make you aware of. Our engineeringcareercoach.com website has so many resources at this point that we're trying to make it easier for you to use. So we created a 'start here' page you can visit at engineeringcareercoach.com/start and it very simply categorizes all of the posts, the guides, the podcasts on the website so you can find the resources that you need right away.

Secondly, I just want to mention the *Institute For Engineering Career Development* meet-up that I'm putting on in San Diego, coming up in a few weeks. It's not too late to register. There are still seats available. You can visit iecdfallmeetup.com to check it out. If you're wondering what the event is about, the event is meant to help engineers to develop better communication skills, build better networking skills so that they can build relationships and become leaders. And we're going to have successful engineers throughout California coming to speak on panels. We're going to have myself and other leadership type speakers giving sessions. We're going to have some tours and we're also going to have some great dinner and networking parties.

So I highly recommend that you get out there, especially if you're in Southern California. And if money is a challenge for you, if you're having trouble paying for the fee of the event please send me an email on afasano@powerfulpurpose.com and we will certainly work something out. The last thing I want is you not being able to come over a hundred or two hundred dollars when this can be a career and life changing event.

So with that, what I'd like to do to take us right into the main segment of today's show is I'm going to

read you a quote by Seth Godin from his book *Linchpin*, which I believe really helped me to get on the track of trying to be different and standing out in my career. And the quote goes as follows:

"*The job is what you do when you are told what to do. The job is showing up at the factory, following instructions, meeting spec and being managed. Someone can always do your job a little better or faster or cheaper than you can. The job might be difficult. It might require skill but it's a job. Your art is what you do when no one can tell you exactly how to do it. Your art is the act of taking personal responsibility, challenging the status quo and changing people. I call the process of doing your art 'the work'. It's possible to have a job and do the work too. In fact that's how you become a linchpin. The job is not the work."*

I love that quote and I love that book. Again, it's called *Linchpin* by Seth Godin and if you want to get fired up in your career and really try to differentiate yourself, check that book out. Alright, let's jump into the main segment and start to tackle these action items.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, let's run through these six action items that will help you stand out as an engineer regardless of what discipline you're in. This is a topic that I'm super passionate about because I believe that anybody can differentiate themselves, anyone can be extraordinary in their careers if you follow some of these steps that I'm going to lay out here, but you have to do it.

Number one - Give an unbelievable amount of value to your clients. Service your clients in a way that you're giving them everything you've got. This is so important. If you were to stop this podcast right now and just do this one thing your career would shift.

So what I mean by that is be responsive to your clients. Serve them. Be honest with them. If something is going wrong on a project tell your client about it. I know a lot of people that like to hide things from their clients but come on, that's going to catch up with you. Go out of your way to fight for a client on a project if there's something going on.

Communicate extremely clearly with your client and often. How many times have you talked to an engineer, maybe it happened to you where you're halfway through a project and the client says, "We didn't really want the design to look like this. We didn't really want the layout to look like this," because you failed to communicate with that client.

Do random acts of kindness for your client. If you have a couple of extra tickets to a football game or a hockey game call up the client and say, "Hey did you want to go to the game? I've got a couple of extra tickets," or, "would you and your wife like to go to the game? I've got some tickets that you

could use." Think about your clients in whatever way you can. But if you do this everything will change for you; the relationships that you build with your clients, the effect that it's going to have on your company, the effect that it's going to have on your staff or the people you work with when they see the way that you're treating the clients. It's contagious. It's not about doing the minimum so you can go on to the next thing. It's about giving people value.

And one of the books that I always talk about, which is *The Five Laws That Determine All Of Life's Outcomes* by Brett Harward, who I got to meet at our last meet-up in Austin. That was the one thing that he said, out of all the stuff that he learned, he said giving people value, providing value to people is what's going to change your life and their life and what's going to help you to achieve your goals. So I kind of can't stress number one enough.

Alright, the second action that you can take to differentiate yourself - Don't always follow to the letter the typical design mentality in your field. There isn't a right or wrong way necessarily to design something. There's a lot of different ways to come up with an engineering solution so don't just force yourself into always following the same routine.

And one example that I'll give you, just because this kind of comes out of my background a little bit, if you're designing a parking lot it's easy to use a standard asphalt parking lot with a standard type of layout. But what if all of a sudden you decide to investigate porous pavement for a more sustainable design and you were communicating that to your client? Maybe it's going to work, maybe it's not but the point is that if you just follow the rules with your design all the time then you're not going to differentiate yourself.

Of course I'm not talking about the rules of, you know if you have to design something to a certain spec of a certain standard that's one thing but a lot of times there's different ways to achieve that same standard and I would challenge you to be open minded to that. When someone sees you come up with a new, fresh, different way of designing something that's 'the work' that Seth Godin was talking about. That's your art and you've got to take that seriously as an engineer because that really can have a big impact on your reputation and the way people see you.

Alright, action item number three - I would say that this one is one that a lot of engineers don't do and everyone should - Come up with a niche for yourself. Identify a very specific niche in your industry and become one of the best at it. Doing this can be a massive game changer for you in your career. It can bring you so many opportunities you have no idea.

And unfortunately what happens is a lot of people don't do this because they're afraid to put themselves in a corner, box themselves into a corner because they feel like if they can only do one thing then maybe their flexibility will go down and their marketability goes down and how valuable they are to companies go down. But I've seen always the opposite.

If you can identify something, for example let's say it's a certain kind of computer program for structural engineering and you become the go to expert in that program first of all in your company, then maybe in your region, then maybe in your whole association, then maybe in the country. What that will do for you, for your company will be amazing because people are going to know that, "If you need a project on a NAT program you've got to go to Anthony Fasano - he knows that program inside and out, he's the person to go to." And I've seen this so many times in people's careers that it's just, like I said, it seems to be obvious but then for some reason it's not.

And I'll give you two examples of this. One of them is me. When I started doing the career coaching and speaking I went to one of the top coaching schools in the world. And I believe and I know that I can coach any person on any challenge that they have and I can help them overcome it or I can help them achieve any goal, however I decided to focus on engineers 100%. And when I started the business and when I started doing this a lot of people told me, "That's a stupid move to focus on engineers because there's so many others of millions of people that you can help with your skills. Why would you take all that off the table?"

And my answer to them was that if I can focus so much on engineers it'll help with everything I'm doing. All of my content will be better. It'll be more pointed. Anything that I can develop would be more pointed to them. Marketing will be much easier for me because I know who I'm marketing to. I'm marketing to engineers. I mean look at the podcast - *The Engineering Career Coach*. It doesn't say the career coach or career coaching. And it's definitely been a game changer for me.

And another example that I'll give you, more in engineering context is one of the speakers for our fall meet-up in San Diego coming up in a few weeks is AJ Whitaker, who I've gotten to speak with on a few occasions and we'll finally get to meet him. But he is certainly an entrepreneur as an engineer. He has his own company and he based a lot of it around this technology called SITEOPS, where he uses this technology with limited information about a jobsite to quickly develop like a three dimensional model and provide real time information to clients. So he's kind of built his company and his reputation around being an expert with this program. So people now come to him because he's got this program that can come up with these models that can be very helpful to people.

So that's just an example of how powerful you can be and I know other engineers that have done the same thing and I really want to stress that because I know a lot of you out there are thinking, "I need to be a jack- of-all-trades," and I would disagree with you. You can make a career either way in engineering. You could be a jack-of-all-trades. You could be an expert in one niche. I would tend to favor the expert in one niche although I do know people that are successful in both.

Alright, action number four that you can take - Go against our standard corporate mentality, which is climb the ladder and kick people off on the way to the top. That's what the standard mentality is in the

corporate world. And listen, there may be some of you out there listening that don't subscribe to this mentality, which is great. You might work for companies that are not like this, which is great. But I can tell you, from talking to a lot of people, that the majority of companies and people, not just in engineering but the whole corporate world operates under this mentality and it's sad. It's a shame to see it. But what I'm here to tell you to do is to do the opposite of that.

So instead of kicking people off the ladder help people up. Get underneath people and push them to the top. That's something I really try to focus on in my engineering career and still do to this day and not only has it helped me to reach my goals but it's helped me to feel much better about it and feel very engaged and fulfilled in what I do and build a lot of great relationships because when you can help someone succeed and you watch them succeed it's very fulfilling. So go the extra mile to help people. And again, the positive effect that that's going to have on the people around you is going to be so overwhelming for you.

Instead of thinking about how you're going to get your next promotion sometimes it's better to think about how you can get your team promoted because if your team's doing well you're going to be fine but you're going to experience all those other benefits that I just kind of listed for you. And I know this is tough because I know some of you are out there thinking, "Yeah right, I'll be spending all my time helping people and I'm not going to get the promotion that I want and I'm not going to get the salary increase that I want," but that's really not the way it works. If you're just out to get a salary and get your own promotion, it's going to be a long career for you and it's not going to be enjoyable because there's not going to be anyone there to enjoy in your success with. So please consider that.

Action item number five - Speak as often as you can in front of people. Get out there in front of your audience on any topic, whatever your expertise is. I know a lot of engineers will be like, "Oh I don't like speaking. I don't want to get out there," and I've told a million engineers to join *Toastmasters*, which is a great organization that helps people with their public speaking, and those engineers that listened to me have had a lot of success in their career. So I don't care if it's your colleagues in the conference room, if it's a couple of clients that you're making a presentation for or if you're going to volunteer for your professional association and speak in front of fifty engineers, but whatever it is get out there and speak and present in front of people on the topic of expertise that you have. And I'll tell you why - this is going to do three things for you.

One, it's going to improve your public speaking skills and your ability to present and we all know how critical that is for engineers. We're constantly making presentations whether it's to a town, to a client, to a group, for financing, whatever the case may be. So it's going to help you to present better.

Secondly, it's going to boost your confidence tremendously. When I started speaking I was awful. I spoke about a million words a minute. I was nervous. I was fidgety. Now when I go up there I'm extremely calm, I feel super confident and I know that I'm going to change the lives of anyone that I'm

speaking in front of. And that took time. That took probably three to five years of speaking once or twice a month to get there but you know what I started off and I was awful. I didn't like speaking and I didn't really want to speak but I knew that if I wanted to change the lives of engineers I had to get out there and speak. So it's going to boost your confidence tremendously.

And lastly, it's going to improve your communication skills. You're speaking. You're forcing yourself to not only communicate with people but do it in a way that they understand your message or the information that you're trying to communicate to them. So getting up in front of people and speaking is powerful on so many levels and it's also going to help you to boost your reputation and your credibility, like when I talked about action item number three which was to really niche yourself.

So if you've got that niche now write some papers and get out there and present them. It's all tying together. And I know a lot of people might say, "Well my company doesn't like me to go out and speak and take time away from the office and go to conferences." You've got to do the opposite sometimes of what people want you to do. That's what this show's about. I said that right at the beginning of the show.

So sometimes you might have to pony up yourself and pay for a conference and get out there and give it. In fact if you ever want to come to one of the IECD meet-ups and you feel like you have something you want to present that would be helpful to engineers, simply email me - afasano@powerfulpurpose.com. I'm always willing to give people the opportunity to speak if they think they can deliver value.

Alright, the sixth action item that I have for you is attend networking events and talk to people that you don't know. This is one that we as engineers struggle with often. I know I did in the beginning of my career. You go to an event and what you normally do is you look around the room and you try to find people that you do know. That's just human nature. You gravitate towards them. You talk to them and you end up hanging out with them the whole time and then at the end of the event you didn't really get to meet other people. You didn't build any new relationships or start to. You didn't really expand your network and really that's the point of a networking event. That's the point of a social outing, to get to meet other people.

So I challenge you to go to the next networking event for your company, for your professional associations, something in your community, find a table with nobody that you know and sit there and force yourself to talk to people. Get to know people. Understand where they're coming from and then of course hopefully you'll follow up with them because going to an event is just the beginning of networking, the beginning of building relationships. Then you have to take it to the next step.

So let me summarize the six action items I've given you to try to differentiate yourself as an engineer:

- First of all, give as much value as you possibly can to your clients. Over service them. Be super responsive. Perform random acts of kindness.

- Number two - don't always follow the typical design mentality. Be creative in your designs. There's more than one solution. Think about your client. Consider all things but be creative.

- Number three - Come up with a very specific niche for yourself. Within your engineering discipline there's probably something you can really focus on. For example let's say structural engineering. Well there's concrete. There's timber. There's steel. What can you really, really pinpoint and focus on?

- Number four - Go against that corporate ladder mentality that you have to climb to the top of the ladder and kick everybody else off to be successful. Instead, get underneath everyone and push them to the top. Buck the trend.

- Speak as often as you can, especially in the areas of your expertise. And if you do a niche yourself then get out there and speak on that topic. It's going to increase your confidence dramatically, boost your credibility. People are going to recognize you and it's going to really help you with your communication skills, both speaking in public and just conversational.

- Lastly, number six - Go to networking events and talk to people that you don't know. Probably the hardest of all the items to do because human nature is just to gravitate to your friends, get together in a corner, huddle up and talk for the whole event with someone you know. So I want you to push yourself on that and expand your network, expand your horizons. That's how you stand out.

I hope these six action items help you and most importantly I hope you implement at least a few of them. I'm going to come back with our 'take action today' segment and I'm going to give you just one action out of everything we spoke about that can cause a big shift in your career if you do it today.

Take Action Today Segment:

Alright, now it's time for our take action today segment of the show. I used to call this segment the career changing tip but I decided to change that because I want to make it more actionable. My goal with this podcast is that you're going to listen to it and then act on it because if you don't then nothing's going to change for you.

So I talked about the six different action items to differentiate yourself but I want to focus on one thing you can do today and that one thing is to call up one of your clients, any one of your clients, and ask them how you can help them - "How are things going? How's business? Is there anything we can do for you today? How can I help you?" Very simple. This is a very simple challenge for you but who knows what's going to come out of it and if nothing else comes out of it, it's just keeping that relationship up, keeping in contact with someone. And I bet you a lot of you are thinking, "Geez yeah, I really owe him/her a call, that would be a good idea."

Because what happens is if you don't talk to people, even if you're not working with them and you don't have a project going on with them, then they're going to forget about you. That's no way to stand out. I know some engineers that have really good call cycles where they'll go through every couple months on the calendar and just reach out to all their clients and see how they're doing and contact them. I'm sure some of your companies encourage that. But forget about all that. I want you to do it today. If you're in your office pick up the phone right now and make a call. That's how you change your career and change your life. You take action when you learn something new. And that's something that I want you to do today.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

So with that I thank you for listening. On the next show I have a special guest and we're going to talk about how to write proper and powerful emails. On the last episode I talked about how to overcome email addiction and I did get some good feedback on that session. Thank you for that. But the next session's going to be about writing emails, which is a very important skill these days. From subject lines to content to the CC, BCC rules, all kinds of stuff like that. So I'm looking forward to that. And if you want to get the show notes for today's show, for any of the links to any of the resources that I mentioned simply visit engineeringcareercoach.com/podcast and scroll down to session #27. With that I wish you the best. Please continue to engineer your own success.

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