



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #34

How a 5.5 Year Prison Sentence Inspired Author Matt Tenney to Become a Servant Leader

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/service

Anthony's Upfront Intro: In today's episode I will talk with Matt Tenney, author of *Serve To Be Great*. Matt will explain how he took a five and a half year prison sentence and used it to transform his life and his career to where he is today. 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.

Welcome to episode 34 of *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*, one of my favorite episodes to date because I was able to talk with a gentleman, who I'll introduce shortly, who was actually in prison for five and a half years and has transformed his life and he really inspired me in the interview that you're about to hear.

So before we jump right into that I just have one announcement to make. I'm going to be putting on an event in Washington DC at the end of April and I need your help to fund the event. This is going to be the event for years to come on helping engineers to develop both personally and professionally. It will be called *The Engineering Career Success Summit*. It's going to be two days of intensive sessions for engineers of various experience levels and in order to fund this event and to bring in the caliber of speakers that I want to bring in, including Julie Cohen, who is a work-life balance expert who was recently on our show, I need your help.

So we're going to be funding the event through Kickstarter and for you as a gift for funding the event you're going to be able to actually get tickets to the event at discounts of up to 40%. But we only have about 40 days to fund it and right now the campaign is in process. Simply go to engineeringevent.com and please check it out. And even if you can't attend the event, if you could support in anyway, there's an option to get an ebook from me or just make a donation. I'd really appreciate it. We need to start closing the gap in the engineering world on training for professional development for engineers and this event is going to help us to do that. So with that, let's get right into today's show.

I want to introduce my guest for today, who is just an amazing individual. I want to read to you an

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introduction for him so I make sure that I cover the different aspects of who he is. Matt Tenney is a social entrepreneur and the author of ***Serve To Be Great: Leadership lessons from a Prison, a Monastery and a Boardroom***. He is also an International keynote speaker, a trainer and a consultant with the prestigious Perth Leadership Institute, whose clients include numerous Fortune 500 companies. Tenney works with companies, associations, universities and non-profits to develop highly effective leaders who achieve lasting success by focusing on serving and inspiring greatness in people around them. Matt envisions a world where the vast majority of people realize that effectively serving others is the key to true greatness. When he's not travelling for speaking engagements he can often be found in Nashville, Tennessee. So in the show that you're about to hear, in the interview that I'm about to do with Matt you're going to hear about how he spent time in prison and transformed himself, and it's so inspirational. I hope you take so much out of this interview. Let's get right into it now.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, now it's time for the main segment of our show today and I'm excited to have Matt Tenney here with me. You just heard an introduction and a little bit of a background about Matt. And I want to get into kind of Matt's story with him and you know how he went from a real challenging place in his life and his career to where he's at today, author of a book entitled *Serve To Be Great* and doing a lot of great things; speaking, programs to help people kind of transform. Matt, thanks so much for coming on the show here today.

Matt: It's my pleasure Anthony. Thanks for inviting me.

Anthony: Oh absolutely, and why don't you start Matt by giving us a little bit of background about yourself and kind of how you got into the precarious situation that you did, where you did have to spend some time in the military prison. Why don't you start with that and then we'll get into how you went from that situation to where you are today.

Matt: Sure. The situation was, you know I was a little bit too focused on money at a certain time in my life. I've always been a very like type A, you know very driven person. I tend to get a little bit obsessed with goals. And I set this goal for myself of being financially free by the time that I was thirty and so I spent a whole ton of my time just studying, investing in real estate and stocks and bonds and options and all these things.

And it almost seemed as if the stars were aligned just perfectly when I was on deployment, serving as an officer in the marine core and this opportunity just kind of fell in my lap, that would allow me - to

trick, I guess, is probably the best way to put it - to trick the US Government into delivering a pretty large sum of money wherever I asked them to.

Now up to that point in my life I'd been a pretty straight shooter. I was a Marine Officer. My friends in college had called me a prude because I would never break the rules. So at first I didn't think, there's no way I would ever actually try to do something like this. But over the period of a couple months, that's three, four, five months, somewhere there my attitude started to change and I, I think it was because I was just so focused on money and I did all this rationalizing. I told myself things like, "Oh yeah well you don't have to take anything from a person. This will be a victimless crime." And this is all garbage right but I started believing this garbage that I was telling myself.

And I eventually arranged the unauthorized delivery of almost three million dollars of US Government money. And once I had the delivery arranged and I realized there's actually no way that I can steal three million dollars. I did not want to be a criminal. I didn't even have a plan for picking the money up. But it was too late. I had already, by arranging that delivery I had already broken the law. I had committed a bank fraud. So I was taken to court marshal. I was found guilty of bank fraud and I ended up spending five and half years confined to a military prison as a result.

Anthony: Wow. Wow. And let's stop there for a minute. And everyone listening, I know a lot of engineers that I talk to on a regular basis, what people do. And not just engineers, this goes for everyone. There's a lot of times where we do attach the idea of money to the word success and I think it certainly can be problematic. Like I mean listen, we all need to make money, to survive, to some degree but my approach with a lot of engineers in their careers has always been let's find out what you want to do as an engineer, what gets you fired up about engineering, what discipline that you want to be in and let's go after that and if you do that the money will follow.

But I think what Matt's describing here as I think it's almost something that we, a lot of us grow up with here in the US, that idea that to be successful you have to make a lot of money. And I think you can see from what Matt has talked about here, because of that mentality he was basically self talking with himself and justifying doing something that was a crime basically to try to bring him towards, I guess what you would say Matt, was kind of your definition of success at the time, right?

Matt: That's correct, yeah.

Anthony: Okay.

Matt: And I agree with your sentiment, you know I think there's a tendency to equate success not only with money but just with the achievement of goals. You know we place these carrots out in front of us and think, "Oh I'll be content, I'll be happy once I achieve that goal," and what I've noticed is that you know from a leadership perspective, from a business perspective, which I'm sure we'll get into

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later, but when we're trying to focus on these goals that I call 'do goals', you know like making money or having a certain level of career, what happens is we tend to neglect the relationships that are actually the driver of long-term success. We tend to do things like I did and rationalize a decision that is a terrible decision and we might take a short cut to do something and end up burning bridges, cutting off relationships that are very important.

Anthony: Mmm, wow that's really interesting. And when I work with engineers I do try to get them to focus on a goal but what I've been trying to do as well is to help them to, even though they might have a goal of reaching a certain level in their company, I try to help them really enjoy the process of getting there.

Matt: Yeah.

Anthony: And like you're saying, the relationships that go into it instead of just trying to blindly speed ahead and get to that endpoint, which I think is kind of what you're saying right?

Matt: Exactly, yeah. There's absolutely nothing wrong with having goals. I mean you know I have five year goals, one year goals and I have all these things written out but what I've learned is that if that becomes the focus to the point where I'm more concerned with achieving a goal than I am with doing the right thing along the way and treating people right along the way, then one, I don't enjoy it at all and even if I achieve the goal I won't be happy for long when I achieve it, but I will have done things along the way that don't contribute to long term success or happiness.

Anthony: Got it. Alright, so before we get into the next part, where we talk about Matt's transformation while he's in prison, I just want to mention quickly, you now Matt does have his book and what he just talked about, from what I understand, is basically in the first chapter of his book because I'm going to link in the show notes here to where you can get Matt's book. And I know on the Wiley site, Matt, they have the first chapter available if people want to read it and it kind of explains Matt's story that he just talked about in a little bit more detail. And you can check that out and then of course if you're interested you can get the book.

So that's how we got to this point. Now Matt, you're in this prison, where you serve five and a half years and what I really want to understand from you is, you went through this process, what happened in that five and a half years that really transformed you to kind of turn into the person that you are today?

Matt: Well the, kind of the short answer is it really had nothing to do with me I guess. I mean I feel just very fortunate that kind of the right things were in place that allowed me to turn what was initially the absolute worst thing that ever happened to me into what has become the foundation for everything that I do.

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Now I would say that maybe one portion of it is just a trait that I have. I think I got it from my mother, which is that to kind of always be asking what's the good in a situation, what can you learn from things even when it's unpleasant? So I feel like maybe having that attitude of what's good about this, what possible good can come out of this, what can I learn that would help me to be of service to others? I think I did have that attitude within a short time and I think that's an attitude that can be cultivated, which again, if you like you can jot a note down and we can talk a little bit more about that as well.

So what happened for me was the first couple months were just miserable. I was actually suicidal for a while. I had been told by my military attorney that I was probably going to spend seventy-five years in this brig cell and at the time I was actually in solitary confinement in a 6x9 cell, that was about the size of a closet, spending twenty-two hours a day alone. And I was just thinking, "Oh my gosh, I could possible spend seventy-five years in this closet. This is terrible."

Anthony: Yeah.

Matt: You know and I really didn't see any hope and then, you know after a couple months I found out, okay I'm not going to be there seventy-five years, it's going to be more like five or six. I could at least wrap my head around that and I started to adjust. And I think that's where that kind of positive attitude started to kick in, where I started to think, "Okay, I've got all this time on my hands, what could I possibly do to make this something positive, where I grow, where I use what I learn to help other people?" And I started asking some of the deeper questions in life eventually and I started wondering well why are we here, what is happiness about? And eventually the question came to mind I wonder if it's possible to be happy in this place with nothing? No possessions, no money - is it possible to be happy here, just equally as happy as I could be any place else?

And very fortunately for me I started learning, about a year into my time in confinement I started learning about this very simple practice called mindfulness training, which is just a very simple way of training the mind, which I imagine we'll probably discuss in more detail as well. And within about six months of beginning that practice I noticed that I was actually thriving in one of the most stressful environments in the world.

And I remember there was one day where it really clicked, where I was in a yard, I was no longer in solitary confinement but I was still confined. And I was in this yard with some grass and I remember just looking at the grass, seeing the sunlight hit it and I was just standing there smiling and I was just completely content and completely happy and I realized, "Oh my gosh, I think I'm actually happier here than I've ever been in my life, with nothing." And so that gave me this tremendous amount of faith in the practice and I decided I'm going to go all the way with this. I'd been learning principally for monks and everything they said had been working. So I decided I'm going to live and train exactly as

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a monk and so I kind of transformed the prison into my own monastery, my own training center for personal development and I spent the last three years of my time there living and training exactly as monks train.

Anthony: Matt, let me stop you there for a minute.

Matt: Sure.

Anthony: How did you, I thought it was really amazing how you had that moment. You know we're talking about in prison and Matt's telling us here that he was the happiest that he's ever been and I want to go back to where you said that you were learning from monks. Explain that to me. Where you reading stuff or was this actually someone there?

Matt: Oh no, yeah so yes I was very lucky I just happened to stumble upon mindfulness in a book in the prison library and it made a lot of sense to me so I asked my mom to send me, you know I said, "Can you send me three or four books on mindfulness?" And she just happened to send me some books that were fantastic and really inspired me to practice and gave some really practical ways to start practicing.

So I was learning principally, well actually entirely through books for the first couple years. Eventually when I was transferred to Fort Leavenworth there was some people that came in that were familiar with the practice. They helped as well. But the people that I was learning from principally were monks who had given talks that had been recorded and turned into books.

Anthony: Okay, and I ask that too because I, personally one of my favorite books is *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* by Robin Sharma.

Matt: Oh yeah.

Anthony: I talk about it a lot and I've actually distilled the book down into a journal for me and I read a lot of the stuff on a regular basis and it's very helpful. It helped me to start to do some meditation in the morning and start to do some other things. It's been very helpful. So the fact that you mention that, and I know that was a real basis for how you found this happiness so I just wanted to kind of elaborate on that. So I appreciate that.

Matt: Sure, yeah no problem.

Anthony: So you hit this part where you, you got to this part where you were feeling really happy and basically it sounds like you just were able to spend so much of your time on kind of developing yourself in this mentality.

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Matt: Yeah, and what came out of the being more rigorous about the actual monastic training is, monastic training is very simple. It's basically giving up all of your own, following your own desires and seeking pleasure and devoting yourself one hundred percent to becoming the most kind, compassionate, service-oriented person that you can become and helping other people to be free from their suffering. So it's a life that's completely and entirely devoted to the service of others.

And so that for me was as transformative or perhaps more transformative than realizing that you can train the mind to be happy even in a pretty terrible situation because that just provided so much meaning and that's what's informed everything that I've done since. You know everything that I've done since has been focused not on what goals can I hit in terms of revenues or things like this but what can I do to make the biggest impact?

And to give you an idea of how much meaning that gave my time there you know I could see what I was doing, my practice and the fact that I was interacting with people and helping them to manage the situation in more skillful ways. I could see that I was having an impact, not only around me but as people left and guards went home, I was having an impact even outside of the facility. And I just realized how meaningful our lives are, how meaningful even just the most simple interaction can be with a co-worker or somebody that, maybe even just in passing, you know how meaningful just each interaction is.

And it inspired me so much and gave so much meaning to the time there that - we were required to get up at five in the morning, there was an alarm that went off - I actually set an alarm for four, to get up an hour early. You know most people there were trying to sleep their day away. They were trying to go back to sleep as soon as they could to pass the time but I was actually waking up an hour early, adding an hour to my day because I was so inspired to get up and train and do the practices that I know would help me become a better persona and help the people around me.

Anthony: Wow, that's amazing.

Matt: So that's what's kind of fueled everything and after leaving confinement I almost became a monk actually and then I kind of realized that for me that wouldn't be so challenging you know. I was totally happy with no possessions. So if I wanted to grow more I should maybe follow that same direction but maybe do it in the real world, you know kind of influence there.

And so I just started looking for ways that I could be of service. I ended up co-founding and leading a couple of non-profit organizations and then starting my own speaking and training company. And what kind of fueled that is that I was realizing how powerful it is when we make serving others our top priority and prioritize that above our own personal ambition, realizing how that was affecting my own personal life, you know the organizations that I was a part of.

And I started realizing that if businesses operate in this way and if leaders operate in this way on a consistent basis, they'd probably have tremendous success. I mean it's kind of intuitive right. If you're really serving the people around you then you build these highly collaborative teams, you know people will have your back. People who are followers of a team, if you're a leader you have so much more influence with them so they come to work much more engaged or productive.

And so that's what's kind of fueled the work that I do and with leaders of different organizations is to help them making the connection between making serving the people around you a higher priority than short term goals, like profits or revenues or expenses, you know things like this, and how that translated into better long term success. And there's countless organizations that prove that that's the case, where if you focus on serving and caring for your people over the long term, the numbers are better.

Anthony: Yeah.

Matt: And also providing people with realistic tools that help you to be more effective at that, that help you to be more effective at being resilient in situations that are highly demanding and still be able to go through with this sense of composure, this sense of calm where you're able to be effective at not only doing your job but serving the people around you.

Anthony: Sure that's, again I think the whole story is extremely powerful and before we get into your kind of life after prison, just a question because I had an expert come on the show a little while ago, his name's Leo Gura, and he had an interesting story. He has a great website that he called actualized.org and he does a lot of videos on personal development and different aspects of personal development and the reason that I had him come on specifically was to talk about willpower.

Matt: Uh-huh.

Anthony: Because that's such an important thing if you're trying to make transformations, as you know, or make changes in your life. You need to have willpower to be able to create these new habits. And one of the things that Leo discussed is the biggest way to build willpower was meditation because of how it strengthens a certain part of your brain and because it gives you some of that clarity. And I'm just curious, I'm sure obviously that you meditate based on the whole idea of monks and what you did. Can you talk about that?

Because one of the things that is a struggle for a lot of engineers and corporate professionals is that meditation is often a word that people frown upon or it's something where they say, "Listen, I'm a type A (like you said), I'm a type A, hundred mile a hour type of person, how can I actually start to do

something like that and what are the benefits it can have?" So maybe you could just address that for a few minutes.

Matt: Oh I'd be happy to. Yeah, well one is that I think a lot of people hear the word meditation and they think of some Yogi in a diaper sitting on some mountain with their legs crossed, you know, and that's not at all what mindfulness meditation is. Now you hear of meditation as this very broad word and it can mean so many things, but what mindfulness practice is very, very simple. And it is referred to as a form of meditation but it's all science based, extremely practical. So the idea is you don't need a diaper sitting on a mountain, you don't need a Guru, all you need to do is train your mind.

And to me what is amazing about what you just said, and I do mindfulness workshops all the time, other times I'll do a keynote at a conference and then I'll do breakouts on mindfulness training specifically. I ask this question all the time. I say, "Okay, so who here would agree with me that all success and failure began in the mind?" And everyone agrees. I've never had anyone disagree with me. Right, we all know this. We know that everything that we either do or fail to do originates in the mind. And then I ask, "Okay, well I'm glad we all agree on that. Now how many people do you know personally that take time everyday to make their mind function more effectively, to train their mind to function more effectively?" And almost no-one raises their hand.

Anthony: Yeah, that's interesting.

Matt: And I think this is so amazing. So if you are a type A person, like me, and you want to achieve better results, to me it's pretty logical that the key to achieving better results is a mind that functions better. I'm not talking about adding knowledge and reading books. That's great. I'm talking about how the mind actually functions, how cognition works, how we deal with all these different aspects of mind. And for most of us, because we don't train our minds, for most of us the mind is actually our greatest obstacle to success. Right, it's a source of anxiety. It's a source of limiting thinking. It can be the source of conditioned habits, how we relate to people that kind of unconsciously undermine relationships or undermine our ability to succeed. So I think this is a huge paradigm shift, is that if we put a little energy into training the mind we can shake this thing that's normally our biggest obstacle and transform our into our biggest tool that actually becomes the fuel for continuing the greater success.

So again, coming back to this word meditation, people think, "Oh I have to sit still with my eyes closed thirty minutes a day or something." And that may be something that you do eventually but I always try to get people started just without changing anything that you already do in your life. You don't have to change anything. There's all these things that we have to do everyday anyhow, that we do in a totally heedless way, that just perpetuates our lack of mindfulness. And if we just shift our approach to those things that we have to do anyhow, we can start to train the mind. Because really all the training is, is it's learning to sustain attention in the present moment. It's not focusing on an object.

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It's not like you're trying to concentrate on looking at a candle or something like that. It's just how long can you be aware of the present moment without being distracted by your thinking. And research would tell us that for the average human it's eight seconds.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: the average human being can only sustain attention for eight seconds before they get distracted by their thinking. By contrast, the average attention span for goldfish is nine seconds. So that just let's you know that we have some work to do. We're smart but we don't know how to hold attention very well.

Anthony: So Matt, just real quick, would an example be on that point let's just say washing the dishes. If you were going to wash the dishes every night after dinner, which I'm sure many people do, to practice mindfulness you would just make sure that you were focusing on every single thing you're doing there a hundred percent.

Matt: Yeah, and what I would suggest is - that's a great example Anthony - you wash the dishes or you wash your hands or you make the bed or brushing your teeth. I hope everyone can agree everyone brushes their teeth at least once a day.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: But whatever the activity is you just maybe start with very small, just start with one or two of these activities. And to come back to your example of washing the dishes. If you think about how do we normally wash the dishes? You know it's we're maybe ten percent there while washing the dishes and ninety percent we're kind of talking to ourselves in our mind right. And so the idea of mindfulness training is not that we want to get rid of thinking, it's not that we want to have this empty mind because that to me is like being a zombie.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: The point is this very subtle shift in perspective, where instead of being that voice in our heads and being in these images that we create in our heads, it's that we are aware of those things. And a very simple way to become aware of these things is to be aware of what the body is doing. So it's kind of like just getting out of your head and just being aware, "Okay the body is here, standing in this kitchen, washing the dishes."

And a simple way to do that is just kind of ask the question from time to time, "What's happening right now? What is this moment like?" And that could include, "Okay there's soap suds on the hands, my hands are wet and warm, there are some thoughts going through my mind." And that's fine. The

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point is to just be aware of that. And you will notice that if you can, it's almost as though you're observing yourself washing the dishes, like you're just kind of like this passive observer watching yourself wash the dishes.

Anthony: Yeah.

Matt: If you can sustain that for a couple of minutes what you start to see is that all of a sudden you're fully in your body, you feel what it's like to be there, you're no longer being pulled into your thinking. You can watch thoughts come and go almost as though you're watching a television screen. And that is what the perspective of mindfulness is. It's just that where you are aware of the state of mind, you're aware of the emotional state of the body and you're not being those things, you're not caught in them. And that's it.

So if you can start with just little activities like that. You don't have to change anything. Just if you think of all the things you have to do everyday anyhow, walking to your car, brushing your teeth, drinking water, washing the hands, getting dressed. There's so many things that we have to do that we normally do in a way that's totally heedless.

And if we switch it, if we say, "Okay, I'm going to try to be fully present with these activities and practice in the way that Matt just described," what happens is a couple things, one is you find that you're much happier in your life because you're starting to live more of your life instead of always thinking about what's coming next and missing ninety percent of our lives because we're caught in our heads and then the second thing that happens is not only do you become happier but you're actually training attention. I mean you can just imagine all of the areas of your life you can make more effective if you can sustain attention in the present moment without being distracted for longer periods of time. Right.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: And then that's the basis of the training and then what comes out of that is you start to develop wisdom, which is another topic that we could talk about if you like.

Anthony: Another podcast.

Matt: Yeah.

Anthony: I really wanted you to touch on that because I do think it's important and I appreciate that. But let's get into now, you come out of prison - and we know a little bit already, that you have doing the speaking and the training now, which we kind of understand the basis for that, which is service and serving others.

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But just, the one question that I have for you is, you were in prison, you told us that you tried to arrange three million dollars that you were trying to extort and you come out of prison now and you need to or you want to do something of service, and you have this book now that just came out with Wiley, which is amazing, which I congratulate you on, but how do you go from someone who comes out of prison that obviously the first judgment from people is going to be like, "You know this guy tried to steal three million dollars, he was in prison," to someone who's now being able to go around? You have this book with Wiley and you're doing speaking, you're doing training, you're going to conferences. How did you overcome whatever judgments or whatever people thought about you? I mean that must have been challenging. I'm just curious as to how you did that.

Matt: Interestingly it wasn't that challenging. What I've noticed is that if you're transparent and vulnerable and completely forthright with people that builds so much, it creates such a connection you know and so I just kind of realized my story, and this is not my tendency, my tendency is to hide my faults and to not talk about them and to kind of put on this persona of, "I'm this great person, I do these great things." So it's very out of my nature and it was, in that respect I guess it was challenging but I realized I had no choice. I mean my story was on the news you know, people were aware of this and it's very easy to find if you just Google my name. It's not like I could hide this.

I just kind of almost by default, I had to just, I realized I had to be completely honest with people and so whether it's a friend, a potential employer or - now I hire people so - potential employees, this idea of, "Hey, here's something that I want you to know about me and here's what I did wrong and I own that and here's what I learned from it this is how I think what I learned can help not only me but others to be better." Of course that can be a completely different conversation depending on who I'm talking to.

Anthony: Sure.

Matt: But the idea is just by being completely, trying to get that out in the open as quickly as possible I notice that people really appreciate that and I actually just wrote a blog post about this for a site in Australia, that I think will come up in a couple weeks. But what I've noticed as I work with different leaders is that that's an extremely powerful fate, to own failure, to own faults for several reasons. One, if you're the leader and you're setting the example it lets people know that they can do the same and it helps them to be more self aware and also to not fear failure as much.

I mean you've probably seen this in the engineering world. If there's this culture of fear of failure then no-one's going to innovate, are they? No-one's going to take time to work on a project that could fail because they're so afraid of failure and that they could get fired, whereas if you know failure is something that people talk about openly, faults are talked about openly, then it creates this space where people are willing to work on something to challenge the status quo and innovate.

What I've noticed is that people just connect more. They see you as a human. They see you as somebody they can trust. Even though I did something that was dishonest and dishonorable, I think people just see that they can trust me because I'm not going to hide anything from them. I immediately tell them "Look, this is the worst thing I ever did and this is why I did it and I was dishonest, I took a shortcut," and people say, "Well, I guess there's no skeletons in your closet."

Anthony: Right, right, right.

Matt: It's almost like it kind of opens the air you know. And I've actually had people come and tell me after speeches, "I've connected with you so much more than I have with other speakers that only talk about how successful they've been, how great they've been because it just, I felt like we all fail and I could connect with you as a human being." And I just think that that is so powerful.

And again, I've seen that with leaders who are very effective with large organizations, they're very transparent. So I think that's one aspect, is just being completely forthright, open and honest about failure and fault. The second is that everything that I've done has been motivated by the aspiration to serve.

So like for instance my company, there's no shareholders accumulating wealth. I pay employees a fair salary. I haven't paid myself a salary yet but when I do it'll be fair and all of the profits go to charity. So there it is. I'm not going out, creating a speaking business to make a million dollars. I think I deserve to have a roof and food.

Anthony: Right, right, right.

Matt: And I'll pay myself enough to do that. But it's completely motivated by the aspiration to serve, to help create organizations that are more successful in the long-term by focusing on serving and caring for their people because I know that makes our world a better place.

And so I think what happens is when you combine that, the willingness to completely talk about, to freely talk about fault and failure with a genuine aspiration to serve, people pick up on that and I've had so many people just reach out to help me because they believe in that message. They believe that we need more people in our world that are focused on serving instead of getting rich.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: And so they want to help you know. And I've just had, there's so many people that have made, I couldn't have done 1/10th or 1/100th of what has happened without the help of so many people. It's all based on relationships. I mean my book with Wiley, that happened because I met one of their



bestselling authors who was just inspired by the non-profits that I'd done and the fact that I was working on a book to inspire serving leadership. And he was passionate about service and he said, "I want to introduce you to my publisher."

Anthony: Wow, that's amazing.

Matt: Three weeks later I had a book deal with Wiley. Normally it takes you like two years to get a book deal you know.

Anthony: Oh yeah, I know.

Matt: But I think it was because he could genuinely see that the main focus was service and so the way he sees it is I'm helping to further his mission, which is to inspire service.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: So if he helps me he's helping himself, he's helping everyone. And I think those are kind of the two things that have made it so that not only has it not been an obstacle, it's actually been something that I think has improved relationships with people. Because I think a lot of us have faults that, "Oh sure if I tell somebody about this it's not that big a deal but I have a major, major fault, major failure."

Anthony: Right.

Matt: And so it's bringing that out in the open. I think it's just, it really creates resonance with people and then when they see that the aspiration is to serve that people tend to resonate with that and connect with that as well.

Anthony: Again, I think that the story's inspiring and for those of you listening, I'm going to be putting the show notes up on the website at engineeringcareercoach.com/service, and you can get the access of all the notes and I'll put links to any of the references or resources that Matt and I spoke about here. And I'll also, I'll reach out to Matt and get a couple of the books that he read on mindfulness so we can put them into the post so that you can find those books as well.

And I just have one more question for Matt and then Matt, I'll ask you to hang out for a minute and we'll do the last portion of the show. I try to give one actionable piece of advice to the listeners and maybe you can help me out on mindfulness, maybe we'll focus on today.

But before I do that let me just ask you this one last question, which is when you're in prison you don't really have anything to do. In other words, there's no cellphones, emails, responsibilities. You had a lot of time to focus on mindfulness and personal development, which is great. Now you're running an

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organization. So now, like all of our listeners out there, you have a lot of probably different things that can pull at your time like your emails and phone calls and other kinds of requests.

And the question is, is how have you been able to maintain mindfulness and still practice some of these things that you had once had x amount of hours a day to work on solely, now that you're in this business? Because I think the one thing a lot of engineers struggle with, and I'm sure a lot of more than just engineers, is how do you accomplish all the stuff that you're trying to do in a day and then also make the time to develop yourself and your brain, like you spoke about the mindfulness. Maybe you could speak on that for a few minutes before we wrap up.

Matt: Sure. Well yeah, even before I get to anything personal there's a company that I talk about quite a bit. They actually hire tons of engineers, computer engineering at least. But they're a company called Next Jump and to give you an example of, I think the idea what you're getting at, I think is a very powerful point. I think it really comes down to, we have to define what productivity means and we have to be really clear on what being productive means because I think for so many of us, we get caught up in what seems to be very urgent and we tend to neglect what's really important.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: And so if we get really clear on what's most important to us, then it makes it so much easier to prioritize that. You know if we remind ourselves everyday, "Okay, this is what's really important, this is what I really value and I want to make sure that the things I do everyday are in line with what's really important to me and what I really value," not just for tomorrow but think of like a five or ten year plan like, "What's really, really important to me." And then productivity is then determined based on whether it's aligned with that.

Anthony: Got you.

Matt: And so I'll give you the perfect example of that. This company, Next Jump, they actually have gotten to a point where their employees are spending 50%, and yes that is 50% of their time, so half of their paid time is spent on personal development.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: Half. And this company has absolutely unbelievable business outcomes. Their revenue, since they started doing that their revenues have far surpassed anything that they have done in any year previously and it's been continuing to grow. They have a hire rate of around .5% or less. I know in 2012 they had 18 000 people apply for 35 open positions. So I mean they're achieving just absolutely incredible business outcomes.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: And the reason I mention that is because sometimes we think, "Oh if I just do more, do more, do more, if I get through all these emails, if I do all this to-do list that's productivity." And what they prove is that that's usually not the case. What happens is, if you try to things, to-do lists of what seems urgent for eight hours a day, most people can't sustain that. They end up getting distracted. They get burnt out. And they might be able to do it for a day, maybe two days, maybe a week but then they spend a whole day on Facebook or something.

Anthony: Yeah, yeah.

Matt: Because they're just burned out.

Anthony: Right.

Matt: But what happens is if you spend half of your time, in this case they're spending half of their time developing themselves, then during the half of the time when they're doing the to-do list they're so focused, they're so productive, they get so much more done. So it's just this shift in priorities of their priority is more what can we do to develop people over the long-term versus what can we get out of them over the short-term. And the side effect is that they get more out of people in the short-term.

Anthony: Yeah.

Matt: Because they're not trying to suck the life out of them. And I've kind of noticed that in my own life as well, is that this may take, and not everyone I think is going to grasp this concept immediately but what I've noticed is that I've had a shift in why I pursue goals. I think goals are wonderful but it used to be I wanted to pursue goals just so I could do it, you know I got that done. It's like I want to accomplish this thing. And now I realize that I set goals because I think they're going to make an impact in our world, that they're going to make a difference and I do them just because why do anything other than that. I mean that's an awesome way to live. You know you've got to do things that inspire you and inspire others. But I don't do them with the thought that they're going to provide satisfaction.

So that's what's really helped me, is that I realized that satisfaction is, "Am I enjoying the work that I'm doing right now? Am I treating people well? Am I present with people? Am I so caught in my head that I'm in this anxious, miserable, stressed out state all the time or am I actually enjoying the moment to moment process of doing the work that I do."

Anthony: Right.

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Matt: And what I've noticed is that you can have both. You can have the goals, it's just I've realized through my own experience that if I focus on the goal and I think that they're going to make me happy and bring satisfaction, they never do. So instead of having the goals, thinking that they're going to bring me happiness and satisfaction, I have the goals because I think, "Well I have to make a living, if I'm going to do a living I might as well do something that inspires me and helps other people," because I set goals based around that.

Anthony: That's awesome.

Matt: But I don't see that as this is what's going to bring me fulfillment. What's going to bring me fulfillment is actually having a state of mind that's contented and satisfied in this moment, enjoying the work that I do, enjoying the people that are around me and doing whatever I can to help the people around me suffer a little bit less and be a little bit happier.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: That makes life really enjoyable. It makes it really easy to not lose sight of the practice because that's what the practice is. You're practicing in each moment to do those things, which helps you to do those things better in the future.

Anthony: That is powerful. And it's funny that you talk about exactly that because just a couple of weeks ago on one of my past episodes, episode 32, which I'll link to in these notes, I did something called, I challenged everyone and all my listeners to one week just work four hours a day. And the reason for it, because I tried this myself and when you cut your work time down what it did for me, exactly what you were talking about, is it forced me to identify the things that were really critical and the most important to what I wanted to achieve. And it was kind of really like mind blowing to me and so I kind of challenged everyone else to do it and one of the things that I pointed to in the show is a book that I'm just about finished reading, which is called *The One Thing* by Gary Keller, where he talks about the way that he's achieved amazing results and helped companies to do that is have identified those main things.

And that's one thing necessarily but in each of the projects you're working on you can say, "What is the one thing in this project that I can do to make it the best possible project that it can be?" And I think taking on that mentality really helps to do what you're talking about. Instead of going through a to-do list everyday of a million little things that you're doing, identify those key things that you can do that have amazing impacts. And if you take that approach you'll find that your days are much more fulfilling, your results are extraordinary and you're not, so to speak, a slave to the idea of the grind - of like do this, do this, check it off, check it off, check it off.

So that's been powerful and that's been helpful. And again, I'll link to that episode for those of you out there that want to give that a shot. So what I want to do now is before we let Matt go, I'm going to ask Matt to stick around for a minute and we're going to go into the final segment of the show today, which is the take action today segment. And Matt and I will try to give you one action that you can literally do today or tomorrow to try to make some shifts in your career and your life, based on some of the topics that Matt spoke about. So let's get to that now.

Take Action Today Segment:

Anthony: Alright, so now it's time for the take action today segment and I'm going to set this up for Matt. I'm going to give him kind of this example of I'm an engineer and this is something I do throughout my day, and I'm going to see if Matt can come up with a couple of tips here to try to help me become more mindful.

So Matt, as an engineer what my day might look like - and it'll be varying for different engineers, I'll do my best here - I'm going to come into the office and I'm going to be working on a project, whatever that project may be. And some of the thing that might be involved in that day might be managing people and meetings around this project, looking at project plans and specifications and reviewing them, having correspondence with some of my clients or some outside agencies.

So between plan review and specifications, correspondence with clients, maybe team meetings just give me a couple of actionable things that I can do as an engineer to try to be more mindful, try to immediately try to implement some mindfulness into my day.

Matt: Sure, that's actually, that's a great scenario. Because a day like that, one of the things that I think people get really confused is they think, "If I'm trying to be mindful then I should not be thinking." And that's definitely not the case because with the scenario you just described there's going to be tons of information that needs to be processed, right. There's going to be, the brain is going to need to work a lot during that day to organize data in reasonable ways in the mind.

So one very, very simple thing to do is that what most of us tend to do is that we don't realize that there are times where information needs to be actively processed, where maybe it's better if we're in there like actively working on a problem in the mind and times where we don't need to do that. And what happens is that if we create some space around that then the times when we actively need to process data, the mind processes data more effectively. And when we don't need to process data we let it go and we allow the mind to kind of process in the back subconsciously but we're not in there actively involved in it.

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And so here's a very simple, practical way to make this happen. So let's say you just had a conversation with a couple project team members and now you kind of need to make a transition to go back and do some of the things that are your part, your tasks for this project. So what I think a lot of us would tend to do is that if we're walking from the phone to where we need to be to work on this project or maybe we don't take a break at all, is that we're just, we're in there just talking to ourselves, talking to ourselves constantly.

And what I recommend is, whether it's that particular moment or any moment when we don't need to actively be thinking on a problem, where we don't need to be processing information actively, is to kind of let go of that tendency to be in there talking to ourselves all the time and to just ask this question of, "What's actually happening right now and what is it like to walk? What does it feel like as my feet hit the ground?" And there could still be tons of thoughts going on but the thing is we don't get in there and mess around with it and talk to ourselves. It's just we're aware of the fact that there's thinking but we're also aware of what the body is doing in this moment.

Now here's where it gets kind of interesting. Have you ever had 'tip of the tongue' phenomenon, where you're trying to think of something or think of somebody's name and it's right there and you can't get it?

Anthony: Right. Yep, absolutely.

Matt: When do you get it?

Anthony: Later, some later time.

Matt: When you're not thinking about it right?

Anthony: Right.

Matt: The moment you stop thinking about it the solution comes. And so this is what you might notice is that not only does this help bring down stress levels so that you think more clearly, you have more energy throughout the day. Because you're taking time, when you're not actively thinking, working on a problem to let go of just continue to chew on it and obsess on it and just say, Okay, what is it like to walk?"

Maybe take an intentional five minute break, go outside, get some fresh air and just be fully present with it. And what you might notice is that boom, five minutes into your break this idea comes up and you say, "That's the key idea for the project." That's not the goal. The goal is just to start training the mind to realize that you don't need to be in there chewing on stuff all the time. But one of the side effects is that in addition again to being less stressed, is that sometimes you'll find that the best



solutions that you ever have come more easily to you because you've trained to kind of intentionally let go of the thinking process. Does that make sense?

Anthony: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense and that's very interesting and I hope those of you listening can try that in your engineering careers. I hope that you can try to be fully engaged in the moment and try some of the strategies that Matt spoke about just now and also throughout the rest of the show.

So Matt with that again, I want to thank you again for coming on and spending some time with us. The story was really inspirational and I'm going to continue to use what you said for me, to help me move forward. And before we go here, what's the best way for people to take advantage of some of the stuff you have? Is it check out your book or what do you recommend?

Matt: Well it depends on what people are interested in. You know there's so much out there on servant leadership so if servant leadership inspires you, you could definitely, you could check out my book. There's also a whole Institute called the Green Leaf Center For Servant Leadership, where you can find more information on the topic.

Mindfulness is a huge topic as well and I touch on it a little bit in my book but one of the best books I've ever read, my top ten, is a book called *Search Inside Yourself*. It's actually written by an engineer.

Anthony: Wow.

Matt: He's employee number 107 at Google.

Anthony: Oh, *The Jolly Good Fellow*, is that?

Matt: Exactly, yeah. He's a good friend of mine and his book is absolutely excellent. It's a book on mindfulness and emotional intelligence that's based on the program that they've run at Google now for five or six years. So that's a great resource as well.

Anthony: Okay, excellent. So with that, you can check out Matt's book. I'll link to it in the show notes and his website.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

And before we go today too, I just want to mention real briefly I'm going to be putting on an event for engineers in Washington DC, late April, early May that's intended to help engineers to create extraordinary careers but also develop yourselves. It's going to be personal and professional



development and fun in one weekend and I'm trying to fund the event through Kickstarter because we want to bring in some real high caliber speakers and I need your help to do that and I hope you'll consider coming there.

If you go to the Kickstarter page, you can get there by engineeringevent.com, you can get really, really heavily discounted tickets to the event because you're funding it in advance. So please check that out. I hope you can come down. I'd love to meet with you and help you however I can to create the best possible engineering career you can have.

So in the meantime, I hope I'll catch you on the next show and that you continue to engineer your own success.

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