The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST
SESSION #47
Five Keys to Success from a 29-Year Old Engineering Project Manager

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/bailey

Anthony's Upfront Intro: In this episode, I'm going to interview a 29-year old engineer who's had success in his career at a young age, and he's going to detail some of the steps that he has taken to get there. Let's 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 the show. This is the podcast for engineers that want to create extraordinary careers and lives. And I have an interesting show for you today. It's actually the first time I'm doing this. I'm bringing a young engineer on the show today, who is going to talk about some success that he had in hopes that you can implement some of the same strategies that he used. He's a 29-year old civil engineer who works for consulting engineering company "BIG RED DOG" down in Austin, Texas. He's a friend of mine, Bailey Harrington. Bailey is a friend because we met down in Austin when I gave my *Engineer Your Own Success* talk down there. And he joined my institute for engineering career development way back then and I've gotten to know him really well since then his transition down to the military, that he's had a lot of success at a young age in his career. And I'll give a little bit more of an intro when we get into the main segment of the show.

But before I do that, let me give you a quick two announcements. First of all, I want to acknowledge the sponsor for today's show, which is Purdue University's Master of Engineering Management Program. This program allows you to earn master's degree specifically designed to advance your career in the industry with on-campus or online study options available. For details on the program, you can call 1-877-598-4233 or email promasters@purdue.edu. I get this question all the time from engineers so they get a master's in engineering, a master's in business administration. There's programs like these, the Master of Engineering Management, that are definitely interesting and can be extremely helpful for you if you know you want to stay in engineering but going more of a business route. So definitely contact Purdue University. I know this program. I've met the people. I've spoken to students there and they are having success and I will try to get some of them on the show as well.

And the second announcement I want to make and then we'll jump right in is registration is now open for *The Engineering Career Success Summit*. This is a conference that I'm putting on in Washington D.C. in late April and is the only event that's focused 100% on transforming engineers into powerful leaders. The event will focus on helping you do improve your communication skills, become a better networker so you can build powerful relationships and overall become a leader.

You've got some amazing speakers, Jonathan Fanning, who's the keynote. If you go to engineeringevent.com, click on the Schedule and click on the Keynote Session. You can actually watch a quick video of Jon Fanning, and he's a really powerful inspirational speaker. And then we've got an amazing amount of engineering career experts that are going to be there. So please, check it out. We also have a special tour that we added, the U.S. Capitol an engineering tour with very limited seating. So, again, that's engineeringevent.com. I hope you'll join us down the Washington D.C. If you have any questions about the event, simply email me at afasano@engineeringcareercoach.com.

With that, let me give you a quote, and that'll bring us right into the main segment with Bailey Harrington. The quote I have chosen for the show is from Vince Lombardi and it goes as follows: **"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of a will."** And I've chosen that because Bailey really inspires us in this show as you'll see in the main segment coming up to push your limits, push your boundaries. So with that, let's do it.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Now, it's time for the main segment of the show. And I'm excited to have with me today a friend of mine, Bailey. He is a civil engineer down in Austin, Texas. He's actually recently promoted to project manager at the civil engineering consulting firm. And I want to talk to Bailey a little bit about what steps he kind of took to make that leap. He's a young guy, 29 years old and he's had a lot of success already. So, Bailey, welcome to the show.

Bailey: Thanks a lot, Anthony.

Anthony: So, Bailey, this is kind of the first time I'm doing this on the show. We've had about almost 45 episodes and, you know, most of them we focused on kind of coaching engineers on different challenges they've had and also, I've had a bunch of experts on the show. But I want to try to get more into talking with some engineers that have had success in their careers so they could share some of the things that have been helpful for you.

So before we start, Bailey, why don't you give the audience a little bit of your background and how you got to where you are today?

Bailey: Yeah, sure definitely. I was the army brat grown up. My dad is a surgeon and went to West Point, graduated in the 70s. And so as a kid, we bounced around all over the time or all over the place. And I graduated high school in El Paso. And then I myself went to the Military Academy at West Point. I did four years there, got my Civil Engineering degree from there, and I'm going along, sorry about that, but I was about a day away from choosing the German major. So I guess I picked the right major and did civil engineering and then graduated from West Point in 2008, spent five years in the army as an engineer officer with the year of that being deployed in Afghanistan, in Regional Command South like RC South kind of the Pakistan border. I got out of the army, got my PE license, and I started working for a company called BIG RED DOG Engineering. We do land development and consulting back in the summer of 2013. So it's been about a year and a half now.

Anthony: And just to give the listeners some background the way Bailey and I met. Basically, I was giving a talk in Austin, geez, a few years ago now and Bailey came up to me afterwards, explained to me that he was going to be transitioning out of the military. We spoke a little bit. Bailey ended up joining the *Institute for Engineering Career Development*, the community I run for engineers and we've been able to stay in touch through the community. He's been through a couple of the events I put on, actually helped throughout the one in Austin, which was a great event. And so we've kept in touch quite a bit and I know that he has obviously successfully transitioned out of the military and where he was started out primarily in the field on projects and has now kind of made the transition.

So Bailey, why don't you talk a little bit, I'm sure we have lot of listeners that start off whether they're in the field or, you know, they're doing some of the tasks that typically you do when you start your career and then they're either trying to make a transition or thinking about a transition? Why don't you share some of the things that helped you to get that project manager promotion which a lot of engineers kind of covet?

Bailey: Well, first off, I did a lot of exposure to the vice president and the president of our office just based on the position I was at. And we're a smaller firm there. Right now, we have 30 people in the Austin office that do civil engineering, but when on a daily basis, I was interacting with those two people and they're the ones that basically make those decisions of who promote you. So I think just by the nature of what my job was, and even though I was in the field, I was having to talk to them all the time. My desk is right next to theirs. So I guess that helped, too. But having face time with those influential decision makers in your company is crucial even if you're an IT that works at one of these giant companies. I mean, and obviously, you're not going to have chances to meet the CEO every day. If you have that chance, you need to definitely take it and make the most of it. But you need to identify and think who are the people that make those hiring decisions and promotional decisions, and really trying to get in front of them as much as you can and just show your worth and just show that you're not afraid to get out of your comfort zone and solve problems. And I think if you can do that,

and I think the rest will take care of itself as one of your team player and demonstrate those kind of strengths that you have.

Anthony: Yeah. No, that's a good point. I think that that's a really important point because I think what happens to a lot of engineers that I know is that even if you're really good at your job, they just kind of do their job, keep their head down, plug away project after project. And I think sometimes what you need to do like Bailey is saying is you need to talk with some of the influential people in your office and then none of the way where you're bragging - but I think you need to make sure that they understand the value that you bring into the table, then they can see what you're capable of doing. And they can see that if they need someone to go out to a site and talk with a client and kind of like a crisis situation that you can step up and you can go do it and they just see you doing it. Well, that's kind of what that face time is they see you making the move. So I definitely think that's a great point.

Bailey, talk to us a little bit about like skill development, like what are some of the skills that you think that you had or that you've developed over the last few years that helped you also with this – not just with the promotion, which you got, but also that you see helping you with this transition.

Bailey: Well, I'll start off by saying I'm not the smartest guy ever. I mean I understand Math and Science and I got the grade in school but I don't know everything there is to know about engineering and I don't pretend to. I think if you feel like you know everything about your field technically, then you're kind of selling yourself short. And so being able to understand that you don't know everything, almost if you go with the lines that you don't know anything and you do let yourself be humble and almost vulnerable to your coworkers and you subordinates to be able to answer kind of questions and be confident when you need to but, you know, be willing to ask for help. And if you're in a company that you want to stand or in a situation that they think is beneficial for you in the long run, people aren't going to look down on you from being able to ask questions. I mean they're going to see that as, oh, my God. This guy wants to keep better if you want to make the team better, and they're going to put their arm around and help you out. And if nobody is wanting to do that, then honestly I think you're in a bad situation and should think about leaving.

So I would say being able to be humble is one thing and being able to grow yourself become more competent through that, being willing to get out of your comfort zone, which kind of grows along with that, and if you're comfortable behind the computer doing that, try again now your comfort zone and go talk to people outside of your company, outside your discipline.

And then finally, I mean, I would say try to balance everything. Try and make sure that for every, you know, second you're spending, they're doing work, you spend maybe non-equivalent second, but you spend kind of like the guy that spoke at your awesome meetup. I would say, you're never going to get equal portions of the pie, and it's never going to happen at least with wise.

Anthony: Right.

Bailey: But if you can really get depth into stuff that you want to, so if you spend time with your family and might not be 20 hours a day obviously, but if you get a couple of hours a day with your family, get down into it and make it worth your while and, you know, make that slice of the pie deeper as opposed to wider.

Anthony: Yeah.

Bailey: And I think that's pretty important stuff.

Anthony: Yeah. That was such a good concept. That was Brett Howard for those of you listening. He wrote a book called The 5 Laws That Determine All of Life's Outcomes. And I distinctly remember that, too. I think about that a lot. And we're talking about time management and balance and all of these things that people are just trying to find in their life and this guy said, "All the pieces of the pie are never going to be equal when you cut the pie." But if you're at home, let's say, then make sure that you're engaged in that piece of the pie even if it's as small as liver that it's deep and that you're engaged in it. So I'm glad that Bailey brought that up because I think about that often.

So, Bailey, one of the things you said a few times so far tonight throughout the call is to get outside of your comfort zone. That's something obviously that you think is important and that you tried to do and you gave a couple of quick examples, but talk to us a little bit more about that. How can an engineer push themselves to get out of their comfort zone?

Bailey: I can tell you kind of the funny goal that I have and people make fun of me all the – not necessarily all the time – but I like to set a personal goal that wherever I go in the City of Austin, I want to know one person there and it's a completely unattainable goal, I'm going to go anywhere in Austin and I'm going to know everybody there. So I would that being able to make a little game with yourself almost and do something where you can turn it into a game with yourself and push yourself to – and if it's to meet more people, go out, meet more people that way, go to other organizations where like kind of like pet circles and passions that you like to do. But I would say that deny your comfort zone kind of depends on – you know, it's always going to be different from person to person stereotypically. And a lot of engineers obviously, their comfort zone is going to be doing technical things.

Anthony: Yep.

Bailey: And that's obviously not really what you need in order to progress in your career. Unless you want to stay on the technical side, you have to be willing to work on your soft skills, your people's

skills and things that can help you find what makes people tick in how you can turn those things into motivators and then match them as a team and push people forward, so if it's joining an organization and going out and meeting another people, whether it's ASCE, if you like joining other engineers. Or, one of the things I do on a monthly basis, I'm a board member on Food and Wine Foundation and I love to eat. I mean I can talk to you probably longer about the food chain in Austin than I can about soft skills in engineering.

So I can match my passion for food and, you know, local food and beverage scene to going out and meeting people. And, you know, I was in a party the other day because of that organization. I met a developer and might go have dinner with her husband and her and then my wife, which could lead to more business. And if you can find kind of your niche passions even though it might not correlate directly to what you do on a daily basis, it can help lead to more opportunities for you.

Anthony: That's definitely a really good example along the same line. So what I always tell engineers is, if you go to a networking event, make it a goal to walk out of the room knowing one person that you didn't know. When I say knowing him and having their contact information and having a conversation with them where you learn something about them and having an intention to follow up with them because, you know, what tends to happen is you go to a networking event and you sit around with all the same people that you know and that you talk to all the time. And that's not pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone, that's just staying within your comfort zone.

And one of the things I can tell you, too, about your comfort zone, if you really want to push your comfort zone is set goals for yourself that are probably, you know, loftier than you think but then tells people about them. Commit to them with people or your boss, you know, like can you tell your boss, "I'm going to bring in $50,000 with the work this year, and I'll give you a report once a month," and, you know, then you can bet your butt even if you're not a big networker, you're going to be out there. You're going to be connecting with people trying to bring in business because you got to tell your boss like once a month that you've brought in, you know, $4,000 or $5,000 a month.

So doing something like that can be a big push for you. One for me that I mentioned on the podcast a few episodes ago was that I get so many requests this week with my book from Spanish speaking engineers that I decided to show that I want to learn Spanish enough to the point where I can give my *Engineer Your Own Success* seminar in Spanish by the end of the year. I mentioned them on the podcasts. I'm going to be putting them on my website for some time in December and I'm taking two courses right now and I'm really, really working hard at it.

And then primarily, one of the reasons is because I put myself out there committed to people. And if you don't do that, then you're not going to make change. So that's something that you really need to focus on in your career and just in life in general. I mean if you want to just to improve yourself,

you're going to have to get outside of your comfort zone. And I'm glad that Bailey spent the good portion of the time in the advice that he is giving here today on that characteristics.

So, Bailey, what's next for you? I mean you've got this promotion now as the project manager. I'm sure now you're in the transition phase kind of getting yourself into it. What are your goals kind of from here? Where do you want to go?

Bailey: I'm kind of a bit more focused on this year in the short-term to just try to make this team take it to the next level and that sounds too cliché. But he had spoken at an event I put on. His name is Tony Burgess and I got a good chain contact with him honestly. But he started the leadership development program at West Point like a formal program for it. And now, he runs a company here in Austin called Task Force 144. And he goes and teaches corporate leadership and stuff like that. But one of the things he talked about when he talked where he is, the event, is team building. And he talked about, you know, bunch of different things.

But one of the things that really stuck with me was he said, "Anybody on a team has talent." We all have talents. They're all different talents and they're all unique but they're all talents. And our job as leaders is to turn those individual talents into strengths and there's a difference between a talent and strength. And once you can take it to that level, you can then take your team to the whole new level. So my goal right now and I'm starting it within the next two weeks, I've given my team a little papers to fill out and I know, you know, like several steps to this whole process. But I'm trying to find out where my team members individually want to go, where they think their strengths are, and trying to identify those talents – I'm sorry, I used strengths – but it's just a talent, so try to find those talents and then utilize them as a team to take us to the next level, both physically but also in a way that we have fun while we're doing it.

Anthony: That sounds like a really awesome approach you're taking there. And one thing that I'll offer up, you know, for you certainly and for the listeners is that I've stumbled upon this in doing some research on kind of strengths and teams. But I believe it's a book and also an assessment called StrengthsFinder or StrengthFinder. I'll link to it in the show notes here, and the show notes for the show, I'll just make engineeringcareercoach.com/bailey, B-A-I-L-E-Y. That will be easy to remember.

And basically what this assessment is - and I haven't taken it up but I planned to take it and have the people on my team take it - it ranks all your strengths but then also ranks kind of – and it shows your strengths and your weaknesses and it lays them all out. And I forget how many measurements it does, but basically, the point of it is that if the whole team takes the assessment and you can see what everyone's strengths and weaknesses are, then you can build it off for them. Because I think one of the challenges for me I know is a lot of times, you know, I'm fairly fast-paced person, aggressive and I like to work with people like that so I tend to build the team with people like that but then if there's too many people that are really aggressive, then other things that can happen that

aren't so good like you can miss things, you can miss some details or, you know, you don't necessarily look at some of the details. So I want to use this StrengthFinder I think to do exactly what you're talking about, which is look at everyone's strengths together and try to match them together and use them kind of I guess to reach kind of a common goal. So…

Bailey: Yes. It was really interesting what you said. All I could think about was the NBA finals last year where you had the Heat versus the Spurs. I know I probably, you know, stir up some feathers for any engineers down to Miami but I'm a Spurs fan. But I remember specifically in the final game of the series, they showed a zoom in of Lebron and then a zoom in of Gregg Popovich, and Lebron goes, "We're going to win this, guys. Just follow me." And then I heard Coach Pop say, "We're going to win this, guys, but we got to work together." And that just summed it up for me right there because if I'm an engineer and I can say to myself for my team, "Okay, I'm going to take on about majority of this burden because I know how to do XY and Z and that's the only way we're going to get things done." a) You're going to get burnt out; but b) You're not going to lift everybody up around you. But if you can find like I now is or make that connection with the Spurs again, if you can find what everybody on the team can do pretty damn well and put it together, you're going to be so much better than the one dude that does, you know, a few things pretty well, too. So that just summed up the entire NBA Finals for me right there and that freeze.

Anthony: Yep.

Bailey: But just basically like teamwork and leadership right there. It's just embodied right doing that.

Anthony: I think that's awesome. And I think that that's a great way for us to kind of sum up with this episode. So just for me to recap here, a couple of points that Bailey gave us that real helpful for him in making a lot of progression at a young age in his career is, first, he mentioned being able to communicate with the managers and the influences having face time with them and letting them see that, you know, you're the kind of person that can go get something done and go after something.

And the second that you mentioned was, don't pretend to know everything, may ask for help, stay humble and no matter what level you're at, and I agree with that 100%. You can always learn from that. I recently connected with an engineer on LinkedIn and I replied saying kind of, "Thanks for the connection. I have a lot of resources on my site for engineers on building soft skills," and his reply to me - and that he was like a young EIT - his reply to me was, "Thanks, but my soft skill is I feel really strong. I don't really need to improve and I'm too busy really to look at any of that stuff." And I was basically just thinking to myself, "I feel bad for this engineer because he's not going to be open to change or improving," which is not a good thing. But that's something that's important you should maintain throughout of your career.

And then the last thing that we talked about or the last point he gave us was to get out of your comfort zone, which we spent some time on which is huge. You have to continue to push yourself out of your comfort zone to grow. That's something you got to focus on.

And then the last point that Bailey just mentioned to kind of sum it up, which was excellent I think, is build the team, build a strong team around you as a project manager, as an engineer. You're going to work on teams your whole career. There's no doubt about that. So, if you want to build strong teams, learn everyone's strengths and try to put them together and almost like a puzzle. Make them fit together so you could succeed.

So with that, I want to thank Bailey. You know, he's a busy guy. Bailey, thanks for coming on, man, and giving out some advice.

Bailey: Thanks, Anthony. Stay warm up there.

Anthony: Yeah. Well, thanks.

Take Action Today Segment:

Anthony: For the Take Action Today segment of the show, I want to – instead of giving you some actual tip – what I want to talk about is a little bit more about one of the points that Bailey mentioned in the main segment, which was, you know, his access to high-level people in the company. And we kind of have a lot of discussion about this in the IECD in the forums lately about office politics and things to that nature. The way I take that point is, I don't take it as kissing up, so to speak, to executives or to people that can give you a raise or a bonus. I take it as just being around those people and being known as the go-to person. That's how you get noticed. That's how you succeed. That's how you advance. It's not about just telling someone what they want to hear because that's, and now, what you should do at least from my perspective. But having access to those people that are decision-makers, being around them, being able to jump on an opportunity when they offer one to you, I think that that's very important. And I think that that's kind of the perspective that I took from when Bailey was talking about that.

So for those of you out there that thought maybe, well, you know, I don't know, I'm just be kissing up to people, I don't think that that's what that means. And I do think you should try to associate with those higher level people trying to get to the meanings that they're at, try to help them where you can, and be a value to them because that's how you're going to grow and that's how you're going to move up to the position that you want to get ultimately.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

Anthony: So with that, I hope you enjoyed the show today. It's kind of a little different show. So, please, shoot me an email and give me some feedback and if you'd like, afasano@engineeringcareercoach.com. And lastly, if you want to build some of the skills that Bailey referred to today, if you want to push your comfort zone, push you so bad in your comfort zone, and you really think about coming to *The Engineering Career Success Summit* at the end of April in Washington, D.C., get all the details @engineeringevent.com. There's also a virtual ticket that you can get if you can't make it. So check it out. We're going to help engineers to build their communication skills, learn how to be powerful networkers and also, become leaders in the industry. You're going to have all the tools you need to do those things and you're going to meet a lot of amazing people and speakers in the process. So please, check it out @engineeringevent.com.

And until then, I hope that you continue to engineer your own success!

*If you want to hear more episodes of **The Engineering Career Coach Podcast**, you can subscribe on iTunes or go to engineeringcareercoach.com, where you will find tons of free engineering career resources. Just click the 'start here' button on the site for an easy to navigate index of all the resources available.*

You can also follow Anthony Fasano on Twitter @anthonyjfasano or Facebook at facebook.com/engineeryourownsuccess. Until the next time, thanks for listening!