



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION # 3 Overcoming Stagnation in Your Engineering Career

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/session3

Anthony's Upfront Intro: This is *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast with Anthony Fasano Session # 3*. In this session we are going to help a thirty-two year old engineer put together a plan to overcome stagnation in her career and hope to help all of you out there who are stagnant to do the same. 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.

Anthony: Hello everyone, this is Anthony Fasano and I want to welcome you to the third session of *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast* and I want to welcome all of you. I want to thank you for listening to my shows and supporting me. I do hope that this show will inspire thousands of engineers, all over world.

And today's topic is one that is really big one, it's a big challenge that a lot of engineers fall into and that is career stagnation. I know that in my career, because of my supervisor, because of the setup that we had working, his mentality, I became very stagnant and that actually inspired me to go to coaching school and inspired me to start to do what I do now. So sometimes stagnation can bring about the opportunity to do great things in your career. And in today's coaching segment, coming up in a few minutes, we're going to help a younger engineer really set herself up and put together a plan to overcome stagnation in her career and also building some more flexibility and benefits into her career, alright. But this is something that unfortunately a lot of engineers fall into and that's why we're going to focus the show around that.

Also, of course, I will give you a career-changing tip at the end of the show. It's something that you can do right away to start to break stagnation in your career and in your life. Alright, so I just want to remind everyone that our website is engineeringcareercoach.com I recently finished a comprehensive guide to creating an extraordinary engineering career. It talks about a lot of things in my book, *Engineering Your Own Success* but it also gives you seven video tutorials and you could find, its totally free, it's right on our site.

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And the easiest way to get to it is just to type in engineercareerguide.com and it will take you right to that comprehensive guide so please be sure to utilize that.

Alright so I am going to start the show now off like I always do, with a motivational moment and give us a powerful quote to get us going, then we'll jump into the coaching and then we'll end up with our career-changing tip, alright. So let's start it off.

Anthony's Motivational Moment: For today's quote I selected a quote by John Lennon. It's one that I actually used about a month ago in one of my Monday morning motivators that I send out to engineers all around the world. And it was such an awesome quote that wanted to use it again today. It goes like this, "When I was five years old my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down happy. They told me I didn't understand the assignment and I told them they didn't understand life." And once again that was by John Lennon and I think that's a great quote and the reason that I want to open us up with that quote today before we get into the coaching segment is, part of this show, part of the goal of this show is not just to help engineers succeed, but its to help engineers have the best careers and lives that they can have.

Many engineers that I work with in the one-on-one coaching or through my ***Institute for Engineering Career Development***, they become very successful and they climb up the corporate ladder very rapidly. And then what happens is they have lot of work, they have a lot of responsibilities so then the next thing that happens is I get another call or e-mail from them saying, "Anthony I've advanced a lot now, but now I'm overwhelmed and I don't have time for family life and there's no work-life balance." And so when you do your career and lifestyle design you want to try to take all that into account and you want to build flexibility into your career so you can do the things you want to do, and kind of have the life you want to have and ultimately you want to be happy. And that's something that I want all of you to think about as you go through your engineering career, as you listen to this podcast, as you read my blog or other articles on engineering career development or just personal development.

It's not just about getting to the top of the corporate ladder, it's about having a very happy, enjoyable career and life. And that's why I love working with engineers because you talk about solving problems, that's a huge, I don't want to call it a problem or a challenge, but that's a huge challenge that a lot of engineers have, 'How can I be successful to the point where I'm doing very well at work but I'm also having a life outside of work.' And that's something that I hope to help many engineers tackle in their careers and I hope that this quote helps you to kind of maintain that thought process in your mind.

With that lets get into our coaching call and start helping an engineer who's out there right now struggling in her career and I hope that some of the thoughts, recommendations shared in this show will help you. And for those of you that are commuting, not at your desk right now listening to the

show, all the show notes for the show will be on our website engineeringcareercoach.com/session3. So we'll summarize the show and we'll list any resources that we listed in the show time.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, now it's time for our coaching segment of the show and today my guest is Daniela from Virginia. She is a land surveyor and civil engineer, graduated in 2007. She's thirty-two years old her biggest challenge is that she doesn't feel that she's being utilized for the skills that she has. And I think that's a challenge that a lot of engineers face. They feel like they are being underutilized and I think that that's a great, great topic for us to discuss today. What I'd like to do is just read you a portion of Daniela 's application for the show before we get started here and bring her on so you can understand exactly where she's coming from - "I've been working in the engineering field for about eleven years I have a lot of experience, but not so much experience in the areas that I would like to due to always being stuck in the same type of work. I have three degrees, and I'm currently pursuing my fourth, which comes with a considerable amount of research and projects that I could potentially use, but was disregarded in my current workplace. I did not go to school to become an AutoCAD technician. I want to do design work, but somehow it seems my title for the last eleven years with the exception of a two year PM role has been CAD drafter. I am now thinking of pursuing different careers in project management but I am very scared as to where to start, how to begin and most especially, will I get stuck back in the niche of drafting again once a company hires me and finds out that I can do it?"

And I should also mention that Daniela 's Masters degrees are, she has an MBA. She has an MS in geotechnical engineering and is pursuing a Masters in engineering management. So with that I want to say hi Daniela, welcome to the show.

Daniela: Hi, thank you for having me on.

Anthony: Oh absolutely and I want to tell you first of all congratulations, you've accomplished an awful lot by the age of thirty-two, I congratulate you for that.

Daniela: Oh thanks.

Anthony: So I understand your challenge and I certainly want to work with you here to help you move forward on it a little bit and I think that it's a challenge that a lot of engineers fall into, where you develop a lot of skills whether it's through schooling, and both experience and then unfortunately the skills are not always used and you can get pigeonholed into doing something that you don't want to do. So before we get in to it specifically let's talk a little about some of your goals.

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I mean you have, you're working on your third Masters degree, the MBA, the MS in engineering and the MEM. I'm assuming that you know you're doing those things, you have certain goals in your career. So tell me about some of your goals as an engineer.

Daniela: Well, I want to get my BE and I probably want to get my PMB and I might, because it's becoming more of a necessity to get lead certified.

Anthony: Okay, now tell me beyond those certifications, where do you want to be in your career as far as, in a few years from now, if I were to tell you, what would it take for you to say to me I'm doing this and I'm happy in my career. What are the things that you want to be doing as an engineer?

Daniela: I want to have more of a project management role and more of a design role instead of being just stuck doing work that's redundant, just drawing lines over and over again.

Anthony: Okay, that makes a lot of sense to me, especially as an engineer myself, so tell me, tell me why. What's the why there for you? Why do you want to do project management role, design? What is it about it that drives you? Why do you want to do that?

Daniela: For the project management role I just like the, just from the one time that I had that huge job where I got to do global work, I worked with an Italian firm and I worked with firms from five other states, it was just a huge job and I did a really good job on it and I really enjoyed it, just having to work with all the different people and staying organized and having to get people...

Anthony: Yes it's fine take your time, this is an important question. And for those of you out there listening this is a question that you always want to ask yourself when you think about your goals and I probably mention this on almost every show. When you think about your goals and the things you want to accomplish in your career, you always need to ask yourself why because the why is really what's going to tell you your reasoning for chasing something your reason for doing something and we can hear from Daniela here is that she had a great experience as a project manager with a good company. She learned a lot. She enjoyed working with people so that's led her to realize that that's something that she wants to do more in her career. Is that right Daniela?

Daniela: Yes, that's correct.

Anthony: Okay, Alright so that's good, that tells me that you have a very strong 'Why', which is great and I can also see that your Masters in engineering management makes a lot of sense to me based on your goal of getting involved as a project manager and having big project manager roles. It would make sense to get a Masters in engineering management, so that's something that I certainly commend you on as well.

A lot of engineers out there- and I know some of you that are probably listening might be in this position - are either pursuing a Masters, are considering pursuing some kind of masters, but it's not necessarily helping them towards their career goals alright. So if Daniela was telling me right now that she's going for a PhD in engineering and she wanted to become a project manager and I would tell her that's probably not going to help you but in this case, it's a good thing because it is helping her alright, so that I'm happy to hear.

So now that we understand kind of Daniela's goals, where she wants to go in her career and we've learned a lot about her, let's try to address this issue of you getting utilized for the skills that you have Daniela because you do have skills you do have experience you do have knowledge from the courses and the degrees that you've earned. So let's talk a little bit about this. In your current role have you made it clear to the company that you want to take on these types of responsibilities?

Daniela: I have. Originally I was signed on as a subcontractor because they weren't sure they would have enough work due to the economy and then after I'd worked there for a year I had a meeting with them and said, 'These are my goals, I want to mentor, I want to be able to do more design work and have some project management jobs.' And they said, 'Oh, okay we'll do all that,' and they made me a full time employee because they wanted someone who could be there to do everything but, you know, I still am stuck in the position and I'm just doing everybody's dirty work.

Anthony: And that was two, three years ago, you had that conversation?

Daniela: Correct.

Anthony: Alright, so what I would recommend Daniela is, I would recommend that you initiate another conversation with them, but I recommend that you prepare well beforehand and we'll talk about that right now, some preparation.

The one thing that you have going is you obviously have a wonderful resume here. You've had some varied experience over the last few years, you do have some experience in different areas, which I think is always a good thing, especially in the civil world because a lot of projects involve a lot of different things. So if I'm looking at you as a project manager. I'm saying to myself, 'Okay, Daniela has, she has surveying experience, which is great, that's usually the first part of a project. She's got her Geotech experience, she's got that MBA and a Masters in engineering management. She's got all the stuff going for her as a project manager,' which is great and I think that's something that you need to bring to the table when you have a talk with them. You need to make it clear to them that, 'I have a lot of experience to put me in a perfect position to become a project manager and I've already been a project manager for a few years in another role and I was successful at it and I'm very interested in

taking on more responsibility in this role,' and I wouldn't just say it like that, I would ask them for some dates. I would say something to the degree of, 'This is something I am truly passionate about, I'm wondering from you what kind of a timeframe can I expect to get more involved with this because this is something I really want to do,' and I would have that open conversation with them, and I would see what the feedback is.

I mean you should be able to tell right there if they're serious about it or not and if they give you some kind of timeline, whether it's six months or a year then at least you know for yourself that you're going to have a clear decision on when you need to make the next move in your career. So for example if they tell you that you're going to see some results in six months and you're not there then six months from now you're going to be able to say to yourself, 'I've got to make a move. I've got to make a transition.' Because this show is not just about obviously telling people the solution is to go work for another company because anyone can do that. My philosophy is, let's get to the bottom of your goals, let's see what's going to help you and if you can become a project manager at this position in the next six months to a year, then obviously that's getting you to where you want to go, but the question becomes is, we can't just hope that that's going to happen. We need to try to make that happen. You understand where I'm going with this?

Daniela: Yes.

Anthony: How comfortable are you having a conversation with them about that?

Daniela: Well, I mean at this point I'm ready to move on anyway so if I can give them a timeline I think that that would give me more time to prepare what I need to do as well as far as research into other companies, just to have a backup plan. The thing is, is that it's a small firm, it's like six people.

Anthony: Okay.

Daniela: I don't really have a lot of faith I guess.

Anthony: You don't have a lot of faith that it's going to happen, you think that you're going to keep falling into the same role.

Daniela: Yes.

Anthony: Okay, well that's a good thing and let me tell you why, the fact that you've already mentally decided that it's over here, in a sense that kind of means that we're playing a little bit with as they would say house money in other words you're already expecting this to be over so you can you have a lot of flexibility and leeway here to go in there and have an open and honest conversation with them,

because the worst thing that could happen is it could end, the position could end and in your mind you've already said to yourself, 'This is over anyway, I'm not going to be staying here.' Okay?

Daniela: Right.

Anthony: So in that case that makes it even easier to put together a very strong, a very strong case for yourself to become project manager. Okay, be prepared, have a conversation with your supervisor, your boss. If you can get out to lunch with them and get out of the office it's even better and I would say to them, 'Listen I've accumulated all these skills, all these different experiences and even some of these degrees that I think are very helpful in towards being a project manager. I really want this kind of work and I really want to do it soon.'

Daniela: Right.

Anthony: 'Is there any possible way that can happen and if so how soon can it happen?' And if they say, 'Alright, we think we can get you to work in six months,' then what you say to them is, 'That's great. I'm really looking forward to it. Is it okay if I plan on having another sit down with you in about six months to review the progress?'

Daniela: Okay.

Anthony: Alright and if they say yes, absolutely then six months goes by, you can do your research and get your plan B ready and then you sit down with your supervisor in six months. If it's happening and there's transition going, then great and you're on the right track. You can talk to your supervisor about how it's going and how you want to continue to increase these responsibilities. If it's not happening then that's kind of the final call you just say, 'I haven't seen anything yet. What are your thoughts, where am I going here?' and you see what they say. But either way if that's the case, you'll have your plan B ready to exercise at that time.

Daniela: Okay.

Anthony: What are your thoughts, what are your feelings on that?

Daniela: Yes, I can do that. I was just ready to start looking this month so if I can go to them this week and have a sit down meeting and talk about my goals again and show them my projects and say, 'Here this is what I can do, this is what I have done, this is what I can bring to your company, we can do a lot more,' and then see where it goes from there.

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Anthony: Yes, I mean, the bottom line is that, and I don't want to stop you either from going to look right away for another job. I think you should do that and if you find one that's going to bring you closer to your goal of being a project manager immediately then it's certainly something that you're going to have to strongly consider but the job market right now is not at its peak.

Daniela: Right.

Anthony: So if I were you I would go in there next week prepped and ready to have the conversation we just discussed and in the background you're looking for other jobs, you're looking for other opportunities. This way you're keeping things going on both tracks for yourself and both tracks are still hoping to help you to get to your goal of being a project manager.

Daniela: Alright, okay.

Anthony: Alright. That's the big key and for all you listening out there, big key to being successful in your engineering career is having a lot of flexibility. So what we're doing for Daniela is we're building some flexibility into her next six months in her efforts to get closer to her goals we're trying to give her different options and different avenues to do it. Option A is obviously the possibility of doing it with her company that she's worked for and she doesn't think it's the best option, but it's still certainly an option. And then option B would be to go out there and find a better fit with a company that's going to hopefully utilize her skills right away and allow her to take on that project management role immediately, be successful and enjoy it. And that's what we're doing here and one of the main lessons that I want everybody listening to take out of today's show is the idea of flexibility. You've got to give yourself flexibility. You can't put all your eggs in one basket and if Daniela were to start looking for the job and something were to happen in her job and she lost her job, then she might be looking for a job for a long time, but by going to her company and committing again to it and looking for more responsibilities, if anything it might just buy her another six months or it might make something happen. So this is something that I want everybody to, everyone to think about in their careers. Daniela, is there any other questions that you have today on this topic that I can try to help you with?

Daniela: As far as finding a mentor to do my BE work, I've found that that's also a struggle with a small company I guess I could go to them with the same sort of timeline with that as well.

Anthony: Well, what I would do if I were you, honestly, if you wanted to find a mentor I'd try to go through either a local professional Association or I have some other avenues that I can talk you about and send some resources to you for doing because one of the things you've got to be careful about with a mentor - and this is important for all of you out there listening, especially for those of you listening in smaller companies - is if you have a mentor within the company. Sometimes in order to be successful, and with a mentor, you have to be able to you have to be able to be totally open and

honest with them. Okay, so in your situation that could be a little difficult to do because one of the biggest things that's hindering your career development is the company, correct?

Daniela: Right, yes.

Anthony: So that's why for you. Regardless, I would recommend getting a mentor outside of the company and actually what we're going to do is a couple of shows from now I'm going to have an engineer come on and we're going to strictly talk about how to find a mentor, how to get the best mentor, so I can also refer you to that show and I can send you some other resources on that.

Daniela: Okay, great.

Anthony: Alright well I want thank you Daniela for being here with us today. I hope it was helpful for you and I hope that you can start to utilize the skills that you have and reach your goal of becoming a project manager.

Daniela: Alright, well thank you for all your advice. I appreciate it.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip:

Okay everyone today's career changing tip is very simple and in the next twenty-four hours I challenge you to do something that you usually don't do in your daily routine. Whether it's career related or personal. For example, let's say that you drive your car to work every day, but it's feasible to bike, then bike to work. Let's say that you never listen to audiobooks, listen to an audiobook on your ride to work in the morning tomorrow. The reason for this is because in order to break stagnation, you need to be able to change in your career and change is a very difficult thing and the only way to do it is to start to change. Start to change right away, do something that you never thought you would've done in your career. If you bring lunch to work everyday, go out to lunch tomorrow. If you never walk on a daily basis at lunch tomorrow or today go out for half an hour walk, do something different.

What happens with stagnation is you get into a pattern or habits, patterns, habits, however you want to think of it in your career and you do the same thing every day and that's what causes stagnation. Now part of it may be your company, your supervisor, different situations that you're in but the bottom line too is that you get used to it and you get comfortable in it. So what I want you, what I'm trying to help you to do through this show today is break it, break the patterns break the habits. One of the things I've been doing in my life personally, is I've been trying to go through this personal development journey, I guess you can call it of doing this exercise called 'a year without' I was inspired by the zenhabits.net blog written by Leo Babauta and he came up with this idea of giving up



one thing each month over the course of a year. So far in my first month I gave up TV completely and the second month I gave up sugar and the point is, is that when you focus on a change like that every day. It's a lot easier to accomplish it.

So I want you to just start off with one day and something very easy for a day and I want you to try to use that to develop new habits in your career, new habits in your life and overcome any stagnation that you have in your engineering career and in your life and if you do that, I promise you it's the first step and it'll be hard but if you can do that then you can start to make some serious changes in your career and life and you can create that extraordinary engineering career.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

I want to thank everyone for listening to the show today and I want to remind you that if you go to engineeringcareercoach.com/free_gift you can download a list of the three top resources that I used to help me become a partner at an engineering firm in the age of twenty-seven and I hope you enjoy it and I hope it helps you to do the same. Until next time, everyone, this is Anthony Fasano signing off.

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

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