



## The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #16

### Nine Points to Help Prepare for and Get the Most Out of Engineering Conferences, with Christian Knutson, the Engineer Leader

Show notes at: [engineeringcareercoach.com/conferences](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/conferences)

**Anthony's Upfront Intro:** You are listening to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast* with Anthony Fasano session #16. In this episode Christian Knutson, the engineer leader and I will lay out nine points that will help you prepare for and get the most out of any engineering conference that you attend, both personally and professionally. 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.

Hello everyone. This is Anthony Fasano, your engineering career coach of [engineeringcareercoach.com](http://engineeringcareercoach.com). Please check out my website. It is absolutely loaded with free career resources and advice for engineers. I've got a great show for you today and I just want to thank everyone out there for their feedback. This show has really exploded with tons of downloads in the last month or so and I've received some great feedback and also some critical feedback. And actually one of the comments was to cut out some of the talk in the beginning of the show and get right to the good stuff and so to that end I have eliminated the motivational moment and we're going to get into the main part of the show quicker from now on.

I just ask that you keep the feedback coming by either emailing me at [afasano@powerfulpurpose.com](mailto:afasano@powerfulpurpose.com) or by reviewing the show on iTunes by visiting [engineeringcareercoach.com/itunes](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/itunes). With that let's jump into the show, which will focus on how to prepare and get the most out of engineering conferences. You're about to get a lot of information on this topic.

Let me formally introduce my guest and then it's go time. Christian Knutson PE is the author of 'The Engineer Leader' blog. Knutson has over twenty years experience in leadership. He learned and earned it in one of the most demanding professional arenas available, The United States Military. During a career in the US Air Force spanning two decades, earning the rank of Lieutenant Colonel he has led military and civilian teams in the international arena performing engineering, construction, project and program management at locations across the United States, Europe and the Middle East. So enjoy the show today and please stick around for the career changing tip at the end of the show.

Your life may depend on it, literally.

### Coaching Segment:

**Anthony:** Alright everyone, now it's time for our main segment of the show here and today's topic again is preparing for and really getting the most out of attending engineering conferences. I'm excited to have here with me today my friend, Chris Knutson, who is the author of the blog [engineerleader.com](http://engineerleader.com), 'The Engineer Leader.' Chris and I had the opportunity to meet a few years ago. I went out and spoke for his SAME post out there in St. Louis and really had a great time and we've kept in touch ever since. So Chris, welcome aboard man.

**Chris:** Hey thanks Anthony, great to be here man.

**Anthony:** So Chris is, he's spent many years in the Air Force so he's very well travelled. He's been to plenty of conferences and trips all over the world. I've had some time, thankfully, to do some traveling. I spent six months studying abroad while I was going through engineering school. And for those of you out there that are students - because I know we have a lot of engineering students that listen - study abroad if you can. I know people are going to say you're going to miss out on the beers first semester or whatever the case may be, but let me just tell you - and I think Chris would agree - getting out, experiencing other cultures. I mean one of the things about being here in the United States, I know for me I got to Europe, I stayed in Brussels, Belgium for six months and it was like, "Wow, there's another world outside of the United States." There's another language, another currency, there's things to see. It was amazing. And it's probably one of the best things I've done in my life and I think it opened me up, not just from the travel perspective, getting to travel, but just opened up my mind to other things because I saw them. And now it just, it makes you want to travel more and get into that whole side of things. And I think, I'm sure Chris you agree with that right?

**Chris:** Oh yeah man. I mean we can, that's completely another cast that we have to set up. After twelve of my twenty-one years of professional experience has been outside the US. So there's, just like you said once you get the travel bug man it's impossible to get rid of it. And not only the travel bug but being able to get yourself immersed into another culture it opens up all kinds of doors and as we get into this discussion tonight, talking about engineering conferences that's almost like thinking about those as a separate culture unto themselves. So just like you're getting ready to travel to a new land or a new world and you want to do some research I think we can, actually we can parlay that thought of travelling to a new country to how we prep ourselves for conferences.

**Anthony:** Definitely, definitely. And the reason that I asked Chris to come on for this session was because in reading his blog, which I do regularly, I think a year or so ago he had a post entitled,

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'Make Your Next Business Trip an Opportunity to Grow,' and I'm going to link to that post in our show notes. Our show notes for today will be [engineeringcareercoach.com/conference](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/conference), and you can go there and you can get a summary of the show, you can get linked to any articles that we reference. This way you can easily find all the information. So with that, we have nine different points that we're going to go through here and we will try to keep it to our usual time, around twenty, thirty minutes but I want to get through these points because all of us go to conferences, whether your company sends you, your professional association sends you. There's so much that you can get out of them - getting together with other people, there's so much energy there. I just want to, Chris and I want to go through these steps so we can give you kind of a blueprint to get the most out of them.

So just jumping right into the first step is really you have to **set the intention** and think about what your goal is for attending that conference. Really, the one way that I can say it is what's your why? I mean is your why just because your company's sending you? Is your why because you're going there to get specific credits or you're going there to get certain kind of knowledge? From my experiences it's very important to know going into a conference what I want to get out of it. Chris, what do you think about that?

**Chris:** Yeah, I think that's a great lead off. I mean if, we're all - most of the folks here, you're probably listening to this on this podcast and like you and I, we're engineers so quite frankly it's no different than any project that we take on or even solving any kind of a problem, but you've got to know what is it that you're trying to accomplish and that's the first thing that you've got to understand out at the front end of it. So not only just like conference, but really quite frankly, any business trip or any kind of a conversation that you have with somebody, especially if it's important or related to a project or an effort that I've got underway.

It depends on the, probably the level of importance for that is how much time I put into it but I always, I always sit down and I lay out what's my intent, what am I trying to get, what am I hoping to come away from at the end of the week or at the end of the discussion, who is it that I'm trying to meet, who's going to be there. And I know we're going to get into some of these points later so I might be jumping ahead but yeah, if you spend that time - and it doesn't have to be a crazy amount of time, you can just spend even a couple minutes just sitting down, thinking and writing down what it is that you're hoping to accomplish while you're there - you're going to walk away with a wealth more of knowledge that you ever would if you didn't do it.

**Anthony:** Yeah definitely, because it's going to be on your mind. You're going to know what you were thinking about beforehand and you're going to look for those things.

**Chris:** Absolutely.

**Anthony:** So I think that's a big way to start it off. Alright so that's number one. Number two is to

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take a look at the conference agenda. **Review the speakers. Review the topics.** One of the reasons that I thought of this topic for the podcast today was because we're going to be having the **Institute for Engineering Career Development**, the IECD meet-up down in Austin at the end of April and I've been getting some emails from engineers - because we have a long list of real accomplished speakers, very successful engineers - and I want to make sure that our members go down there and understand that they need to come prepared. I mean we've got top engineers there. You should understand who's going to be speaking, what kind of questions can you ask them, how can you maximize your time. A lot of these larger engineering conferences, there's several tracks, four or five courses going on at the same time. So you need to be able to recognize ahead of time what courses do you want to go to, what content is going to help me to reach my goals quicker, so that when you go there you're getting the most out of it. Chris, is that something you do, you look into this ahead of time?

**Chris:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean here's a great story off of this. So a couple of years ago, couple of years ago the Society of American Realtor Engineering had their national conference here in my backyard in St. Louis. I'm not from St. Louis originally. I've only lived here a couple years because the air force brought me here. But just like I've done for all the other ones that I've gone to previously, I went through and looked at who was the keynote speaker going to be, what were the tracks, who were the folks going to be that were going to be actually leading these different sessions. So looking at the keynote speaker I found out that it was going to be this guy, Eric Greitens, who runs this organization called 'The Mission Continues,' which is a nonprofit that provides focus and fellowship to wounded veterans and to get them back, basically back into society, contributing and taking their knowledge from the military experiences and putting them into their communities.

So where all that came from is I looked at that and my organization SAME we were looking at what could we do to help wounded warriors. It just so happened that that year the focus of SAME was on wounded warriors. So by knowing that not only was Eric going to be giving this presentation but he happened to be a St. Louis resident. He had grown up in St. Louis and his, 'Mission Continues' I guess his organization was based here out of St. Louis. I was like, "Hey, this is, this could possibly be a win win."

As it turned out, because I had done that research and did a little bit of background research on the internet about Eric, I actually had the opportunity during the conference to link up with him. That parlayed itself, no kidding, less than three months later into us running our first annual wounded warrior gala event here in St. Louis through the Society of American Realtor Engineers and we ended up raising something like fifteen thousand dollars to support 'Mission Continues' and sponsor two fellowships for wounded warriors that happened to be engineers. So it was an awesome event and the only reason it really happened was because I sat down, took that time to look at who was going to be there, who was speaking and figure out what was their background and then be able to make those linkages with things that I was trying to accomplish.

**Anthony:** That's awesome. That's a great story and again, that's another reason you do your research. I go through the program. I circle the speakers I want to talk to. I circle the topics I want to see and that's proven to be very rewarding for me.

Alright, number three - **identify networking opportunities** and potential people to connect with and Chris kind of just touched on this when he connected with someone at the conference specifically but really just looking at the agenda and saying, "Is there a dinner event I can go to?" I know a lot of these conferences have icebreakers in the beginning of the event so you can get to, right off the bat

get to meet a couple of people. I think it's important to again, identify them. I mean the last thing you want to do is be sitting in your room while there's two hundred people downstairs at the bar talking to each other, exchanging business cards, exchanging stories and you've travelled a thousand miles to the conference and you miss it.

So I think it's important to identify these opportunities. I think it's important that if you think there's going to be some people there, like Chris talked about that he identified then you find a way that you can get in front of them and think about, have some things prepared that you want to talk about with the people. And really - and I'm sure Chris will agree with this - I think some of the most important aspects of conferences is the people that you meet and what you take away from them and then the lifelong relationships you can build with these people. Chris, I know you've told me in the past, you go to these events and you hook up with people and, I know you're real good at doing this, you keep in touch with them.

**Chris:** Yeah, I do. So I may have an out of the norm view of the value of a conference. I mean to me I miss those type of activities looking at different networking opportunities but to me the whole purpose so you can go to a conference is one of two reasons. One - to knock out a whole bunch of continued education requirements for whatever it is, whether it's a, like your P&P, your PE license or whatever it is, you're going to knock out a bunch of continued education requirements. And the other one is, plain and simple, it's to go there and meet people and to network and link up with either people you already know or to meet new people.

And so in order to fulfill that second piece you've totally got to look through and not only look at again, like who's going to be there, who's going to be speaking. Here's a great one - let's say you're looking for a new job. You're unemployed. You're looking for a job or you're with whatever company you're with, you're looking for a different challenge or new opportunity. If it's a tradeshow type of a conference there's likely to be, there's going to be a listing of who's going to be presenting, who's going to be in the, the vendor area, who's going to have booths. And you can start figuring out in advance who's going to be at these different locations.

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LinkedIn for me - and probably Anthony for you as well - is a great resource for doing some of that data mining in advance and finding out who, what companies are going to be there, who's going to be sitting there. Because a lot of these companies are going to either identify who they're going to have hanging out in the booths. So you can start doing your homework in advance if there's specific companies that you want to target when you're going to be at these conferences.

**Anthony:** Oh yeah. I agree with that a hundred percent. The one thing that Chris said that's great is talking about someone if you need a job and what I can tell you right now, if you're unfortunately unemployed and you're trying to find a job and you've only got x amount of money left in your bank account or your unemployment checks are about to expire, if you could trade in the money in that account to get you out to a conference - because I know it's costly - it would be worth it. It would be one of the things that would probably be most worth it for you to do with saving some of that money that you have while you don't have a steady, stable income coming in. Because when you go to a conference and you put yourself in a room with thirty, fifty, two hundred, a thousand other people, it's an amazing experience.

The opportunities are limitless when you go there and like I said, you can take opportunities out of it. You can take lifelong friendships out of it. You can take technical knowledge and experience out of it. There's so many things that you can take out of it. I'm going to have on one of our upcoming calls Barry Cordero, who's the President of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, SHPE. I've spoken at a couple of their conferences and let me just tell you something, the energy there is amazing. Those of you that are members and have attended those conferences, I mean that's what you get out of it. You just get energized. So that kind of covers really the technical, the conference itself. Now let's move a little bit more into enjoying the trip and the culture, the geographic location.

And number four that we have is **research the city** that you're going to. Research the history of it. Read about it. Maybe look into the engineering of it. Depending on where you go. You could be going to a place that has some real amazing engineering feats. I mean I know for me, I went to visit with Chris in St. Louis and of course we went to The Arch and I got to see it, touch it. We leaned up against it and we took some photos. It was awesome. I mean listen, you're an engineer, you're in St. Louis, you better do that. So Chris, of course, explained to me a little bit about the history. We were right on the river there.

You have to research that stuff, which kind of leads me right into number five here. Chris can certainly get involved in this one, which is then investigate beyond the history of the city **some tours, some 'adventures'** that you can do while you're there. And I know Chris this is something that you do and this is what that article that I referenced earlier was about kind of. So talk about that a little bit Chris.

**Chris:** Yeah so we spent a good portion here talking about the nuts and bolts of getting ready on the professional side but I've, for a number of years I've kind of approached life and work as an integrated

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one. There's no firewall between what I consider to be my work and what I consider to be my life. It's just all my life. It's what I do. And because of that it bled over into the way that I prepare myself when I would go to travel someplace. So if I was travelling someplace on business not only was I doing all the homework and the research to prep myself for, if I was giving a presentation or if I was going to be inspecting a project or program or whatever it was, prepare myself on that piece of it but I also prepared myself on the other aspects of it and this was really important.

I lived for a number of years in Europe, travelling around on different activities there with my job and of course I was going to definitely take advantage of the fact that I was living in Europe and travelling the places. And I think even the article that you referenced, I recount some experiences that I had in Greece, as I was prepping myself to go to this conference, it was actually a conference there. But as I was prepping myself to go to that conference I was also doing a ton of research and reading the history of the location I was going to. It happened to be a town called Thessaloniki. I did all this research and not only did I go armed with like this list of awesome restaurants to go visit and where the nightlife was and all these other aspects that opened my exposure to Hellenic culture but on the business side of it, we had the icebreaker and I was able to have pretty meaningful conversations with my Greek counterparts because I had actually done homework about the place I was going to be at.

**Anthony:** Wow.

**Chris:** And so that opened up, it offered a common area and a common discussion train to start getting us into different types of conversations. So you and I have talked about this before and think of all the new podcasts we could come up with man. But it comes to this opportunity for you to take a business or a conference visit and parlay it into something that has more meaning than just slogging through another conference.

There's opportunity to connect with other people. It's an opportunity, like you were saying when you came here to St. Louis for you to learn a little bit more about the history of the city, the history of the icon of The Arch. There's opportunity for you to grow as a person. If all you're focused on is going to this conference and knocking out the continued education credits or trying to get as many business cards as you can, you're selling yourself short.

**Anthony:** I agree a hundred percent. And one of the things that you said Chris, which is great is that, you and I talked about this many times in the past, is that blend between work/life. It's all you, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. There's no turning the switch on and off when you go to work, when you come home. A couple of sessions ago I interviewed Randy Over, the ASCE National President. For those of you out there that want to check it out, you can check it out at [engineeringcareercoach.com/randy](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/randy). Randy's obviously a busy guy and he's all over the world right now as the ASCE President but the one thing that he talked to me about was what he called work/life

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blend and he said, "Even conferences, when I go to conferences if it works out I'll bring the wife and the kids and we make it a trip." So there's a lot of ways you can integrate these things together and really Chris hit it in the head when he said, "I think of everything. There's not a line between things. It's me all the time."

Item number six, which Chris got into a bit already is try to **experience the culture**, the food, the music of wherever you're going. I gave a talk, I guess it's a month ago, two months ago already down at the University of Memphis and I got in about nine, ten at night. I was exhausted. I usually get up real early in the morning. But I was talking to kind of the cab driver on the way to the hotel and I'm like, "Where do I go downtown? I want to hear some blues. I want to hear some music." And I know Chris is big into the blues actually and when I was down there I just told him, "You don't know where I am right now! I'm chilling out here. I'm sitting here listening to music down in Memphis."

**Chris:** Yeah thanks man.

**Anthony:** But the thing is I was in my hotel room. I was exhausted and I'm like listen, it's ten, eleven o' clock at night, luckily I didn't have to be up early for my talk so I was just like, "I'm in Memphis. How often do I come to Memphis?" Some of the greatest music downtown you can get and I'm just like, "I've got to go for it." And I luckily, I did a little, I didn't do a ton of research but I talked to some people there who pointed me in the right direction. So I think really that there's so much you can experience if you go to somewhere for two or three days.

I mean last year we were at the IECD meet-up in Chicago, some of the members and I we went out. We went to the top of the tower there. We went out late. We were tired but we said let's go, we're in Chicago and we got to really experience it. So I think it's really important that you get to experience, like Chris said, get your prep work done for the technical side of things, the people you want to meet at the conference, what you want to take out of it and then go out and enjoy it too. Yeah, there'll be some long days and long nights and you'll be tired when you get home but you know what, you're not going to go back to that city most likely for a long time.

**Chris:** Yeah, amen.

**Anthony:** I think that's a, that's really important. Alright, number seven is **be safe**. We're here, Chris and I telling you to go out adventuring, go have fun and that's true but you've got to remember too you're in a city that you're not familiar with. Some of these conferences could be in remote locations. Listen, every city no matter where you go has the good parts to the city and the not so good parts of the city. So if you're going to venture out either take someone with you or do your research, cab door-to-door if you're not familiar with the area and just be careful because it is important. We get outside of our surroundings sometimes and we can get comfortable or you're out drinking or whatever the case may be, just try to remember to be safe. I think that that's important.

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**Chris:** Yeah that's a great point. I mean Anthony, again for me spending a good portion of my professional career outside of the US that it took on even a more greater concern. So whenever I was travelling I always, if I was staying at a hotel I always made sure that I had that hotel's business card. So I had the, especially overseas but even in the US, it's smart if you've got that card because then you don't have to play twenty questions with the cab driver on where it is you need them to take you back to.

**Anthony:** Right.

**Chris:** But you also have a phone number to get back to them to that hotel in case they've got concierge or you've got questions or whatever. If you find yourself travelling overseas - I'm going to tell you the first place to go to is the Department of State website. Go there and look at the travel advisory for wherever it is that you're going to before you, before I go on any trip especially business related, well absolutely business related, definitely even on my own personal related trips with my family I leave with a card, an actual piece of paper, not on my iPhone, but an actual card that's got all the key relevant information on it, like flight times, flight numbers. It's got my frequent flyer numbers on it, my hotel numbers on it, contact information for the hotel. If it's outside the US it's got numbers for the state department, the regional security officer, all these phone numbers of the embassies and what not. In it's, call it my military background planning but it's making sure that I've got all that information available and that's something that I carry with me wherever I go just so in case something happens. In twenty years of doing this I've never had to use it but who knows. You just don't want to be caught in that situation where you're out of your environment and you don't have the ability there to reach out and get in touch with somebody that can help you. So it's a great point.

**Anthony:** Thanks Chris. And just one more point on that that I've heard too and I've done myself in the past is make a photocopy of everything in your wallet like your credit cards, your license and keep it obviously not around your wallet, on your body somewhere or at your hotel or something so that if anything should happen, you get pickpocketed. This happened to me when I was abroad. I got pickpocketed. If something like that happens to you, you have your information. You have the numbers on your cards. You can call and cancel. You have some information. So just another tip that you can implement there.

Now number eight. I've got two more points. Number eight - ***stretch yourself***. What I mean by that is if you go to a conference sometimes you'll be going with your association or your local chapter. You'll be travelling with a couple other members. Don't just hang out with those people. I mean I'm sure you're friendly with them and you know them, they're comfortable but be uncomfortable. Meet new people. Go to a table that you don't know anyone and sit next to them and talk and meet new people and learn new things.

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I remember once, when I was working for the engineering firm that I worked for for most of my career, we went to a dinner one night down in New York City. And then we had a lot of clients there and we had a lot of people from the company there. And the CEO, I ended up sitting next to the CEO of our company and I remember he looked at me and he's like, "We shouldn't be sitting next to each other," meaning that we're with the same company. The point of this networking event is to go out there and meet other people, talk to people. It was just, I was like, "Yeah you're right." And so it's something to think about. I know it's comfortable to sit next to someone you know and to spend the whole weekend with them at a conference but it's not going to allow you to grow and build some of those other relationships that you have the opportunity to build there.

**Chris:** Yeah, you know Anthony we've had this conversation before and I think I've got even a few posts on my blog about this but it has, you get outside your comfort zone to go to these events. I mean not only for, you know we were talking about going out and experiencing the town or the venue where you're at but at the end of the day it all comes down to the human relationships and developing and building meaningful relationships with somebody else. That's always, there's always risk involved with that and the old adage is that engineers are introverts and we've got this inability to be able to have open and meaningful conversations, which I'll be the first to tell you that I would have probably qualified myself for being an introvert at one point but going through a number of different events through my career and going to these different conferences and events and just pushing myself to meet new people and constantly try to learn something has been absolutely beneficial. So you're absolutely right. Get out to these events. You shouldn't, don't lose an opportunity to be able to meet somebody. And that being said - we haven't touched on this - it's important to do the research upfront to be able to have kind of a plan for what it is that you're trying to accomplish. But if all you accomplish when you go to one of these conferences is that you had an opportunity to pick up some continued education credits and meet some new people and make these meaningful relationships then you have to consider that as success because that should be the, quite frankly if that's all you do that is a success.

**Anthony:** True.

**Chris:** I don't know your thought on that but I think just for the opportunity for you to be able to meet new people, develop a rapport with them and perhaps even a relationship with them. If you can do that then any event that you go to is definitely a success.

**Anthony:** I agree Chris. Hey listen, in some instances getting on a plane and going to a conference can be a success because that might be your first one.

**Chris:** Yeah.

**Anthony:** Especially if you're a younger engineer this is a first thing for you. So just getting there,

getting comfortable with it can be success, big success.

**Chris:** Oh yeah.

**Anthony:** You may not even talk to anyone the first time. You may be nervous. You'll sit through some seminars but you know what, the next time it's going to get better and you're just going to get better at it and you're going to build relationships and that whole idea of stretching yourself. Feeling uncomfortable is a great thing in these situations and I know Chris, some of your posts on the comfort zone talk about this, is that if you don't feel uncomfortable then you're not growing. That's the bottom line.

**Chris:** Yup, absolutely. Absolutely man. Absolutely.

**Anthony:** Alright, so last point, we have point number nine here is to **implement some of the strategies** that you've learned when you get back or maybe contact some of the people that you met. You go to a conference, you pick up some great information but sometimes you don't use it and like Chris said, in some instances that could be considered a success but listen, if you go to a conference and you see a strategy or you go to a seminar and you learn a while bunch of networking strategies, come back, go to one of your local chapter meetings and implement them. Take some notes and implement them. Even if it's just one piece of information that you implement it might be helpful for you. But unless you implement it sooner rather than later you're just going to lose it. And I know that when I went through a lot of seminars and project management training when I was doing my engineering design work, a lot of times I'd sit through a seminar, get the binder. I'd go back to my office. I'd put the binder on my shelf and I wouldn't look at the binder again. I know Chris is big on this too. Now for me when I read a book I've got to get into it. I've got to take notes. I've got to highlight it. I've got to really understand the book and how I can use it and listen if I haven't found it, if I haven't been using it but I really like the content I'll read it again. A couple months later I'll recirculate it. I'll reread it again. I'll just go through my highlights.

And it's the same thing when you go to a conference. You're getting amazingly valuable information. You're meeting people that can not only help you to yield opportunities but they can bring enjoyment to you if you further those relationships. I think you have to take it upon yourself to do that and like I said before, I know Chris that you do this and I know that you keep in touch with people and that's why you have such a, not just a big network but I think you have a network that's really, it's helpful for you because you can reach out to people and you keep in touch with them on a regular basis.

**Chris:** Yeah, you're absolutely right. So one of the things that I do use when I go to one of these events, I'll walk away and I'll walk away with business cards. I mean you always kind of do and truth in advertising, some of the interactions are pretty superficial but there's always interactions that I have with people that are, that we get into talking about our families and life events and things that just

have absolutely nothing to do with what somebody would classify as professional. We get into a person-to-person conversation and with those folks that I meet, those individuals, I make an absolute point of when I get home - and often times I'll do this, quite frankly I'll just do it on the airplane on the flight home - I'll sit down and I'll write them a, I'll handwrite letters just saying, "Hey, thanks. It was awesome to meet you and thanks for the conversation we had about (whatever it was we talked about)."

And then we end up getting connected on LinkedIn. It's a great way to be able to maintain that conversation. So it may be a little bit old school going to that handwritten piece but I've found it to be a strategy that I use, maybe really a technique that I use that has been extremely beneficial because there's, I could probably count on both of my hands people that I've met through these conferences that have become extremely important to me in my professional and personal life, that I've met through these conferences and these relationships developed over time.

In getting to the discussion, the item you brought up about getting back and looking at material that you picked up from the conference. See now you've got the personal piece and you've got this professional piece. One of the things that we do in the military is after any kind of an activity that we do, whether it's a major one that you see on CNN or even just some minor training activity event that we do, we always do an after action report. I've done these, even any business trip that I do related to projects or programs that I'm working on, I always do an after action report. And I even do them for myself now and I've been doing them probably for the last decade on conferences. I use [Evernote](#), which is a great tool and in [Evernote](#) I'll go in and I've got a folder set up that's conferences and after I come out of a conference I'll sit down and I'll spend an hour, two hours just going through and writing down everything I can think of related to that event. Specifically so that I've got for posterity a record of who I met, what were the key takeaways, what are the to dos for myself, if it's related to if it involves other people, what are some of the to dos that I need to delegate to somebody else. So right at the beginning of the call Anthony we talked about preparing for going to one of these conferences.

This kind of brings up a good point - if we're setting this intention on the front end to go and accomplish 'A, B and C' when you go to one of these events, it's really important for you to sit down after you get back from it and do the same - did I accomplish what I went there to go and do?

**Anthony:** Right.

**Chris:** If I didn't, what did I accomplish? What were the huge golden nuggets? Where there any golden nuggets? What were the takeaways that I had from it? And it could be just as simple as, there was a, it was a technical conference and I went there and I picked up seven continued education units. Did I get the certificates? Maybe that's the level of the event.

**Anthony:** Right.

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**Chris:** But taking that deliberate time at the end before you, as we say here before you lose it, taking that deliberate time at the end to say, "Okay, what was it that I actually did? Who did I meet? What did I accomplish? Did I fulfill my intentions on the front end? What were the key takeaways and what are the things that I've got to go do now, based off of what I learned?" So how do you approach these things when you do them?

**Anthony:** Yeah, I think honestly I do exactly what you're talking about and kind of a down dump after the conference of everything that I experienced, people I met. I do my follow-ups. I can tell you right now, the plane ride back for me is such a great time to do that because there's no internet unless you buy it and it just gives me time to reflect. There's just something about being thirty thousand feet in the air and just away from everything.

**Chris:** Yup. Absolutely man.

**Anthony:** And just reflecting. You put a little Native American flutes on, on your iTunes and you just reflect and you just go through it. So much can come out of it. I mean I've had amazing ideas on that reflection trip back from a conference. Even just thinking about some of the things that we talked about and then parlaying them into ideas.

So I think that there's, you're right, I mean not just implementing the strategies but doing that down dump and reflection time to go over everything. So with that let me just run through these real quick so I can sum it up and then I'll keep Chris on with me for a minute and we'll get into our career changing tip to end off the session today.

So we had nine points:

1. **Set your intention or your goal** for what you really want to accomplish at the conference.
2. **Review the speakers and topics.** Make sure that you know if there are certain topics and speakers there, that you get to those sessions.
3. **Identify key networking opportunities,** whether they're dinners, social hours, icebreakers and even potential people to connect with.
4. **Research the city,** the history, maybe some of the engineering features that might be there.
5. **Investigate, potentially book some tours or adventures** that you could go on when you're there.
6. **Experience the culture,** the food, the music. Really get into the city and the life there if you can, if time allows for that.

7. **Be safe.** We covered some tips about how to be safe, some documentation you can keep with you.
8. **Stretch yourself.** Broaden your horizons. Move out of your comfort zone. Don't hang out with the same one or two people for the entire conference. Meet new people. Force yourself to go to a table where you don't know anyone there and just sit there and start some conversations.
9. **Implement strategies** that you've learned from the conference and also do some kind of reflection or some kind of down dump, brain dump of everything that you learned there and then I guess after that point implement the strategies from the conference.

So again, with that, I'm going to keep Chris with me here for a minute. We're going to get into our career changing tip and I'm going to try to really offer you one game changer that you could use in your engineering career.

### **Anthony's Career Changing Tip:**

**Anthony:** Alright, so we're back for today's career changing tip and again, I have Christian Knutson with me today, *The Engineer Leader*, [engineerleader.com](http://engineerleader.com). Check out his blog. There's categories on it so you can really get right into the different topics that he writes about and I think you'll really enjoy it from a lot of his engineering experience as an engineer in the military.

So the one topic that we're going to get into today or the one kind of game changer we want to talk about today does certainly tie back to what we were talking about as far as conferences go, is just your nutrition, your diet, your physical fitness. It's important throughout your life and career in general.

I think that's probably another series of podcasts that we could get into but when you talk about a conference, and I know for me when I go to a conference it is full tilt. I'm up early. I'm at sessions. I'm networking. I'm talking to people. I'm still sneaking in some work and doing some stuff where I have to. I'm going to dinners. I'm going out late. We're networking. We're probably partying some nights if not every night. And it's full tilt. So Chris why don't you just give a couple of real basic, simple tips here in the next minute to kind of keep you physically fit. Obviously this applies to in general but I'm talking about when you're going full, hardcore at these conferences.

**Chris:** Yeah absolutely. So tip number one is drink water. I mean especially during the day. Keep yourself hydrated. It's so easy to just completely miss that piece of it and then you're going to be going and sitting in these long sessions, listening to people talk and then you're going to go and go out, you're going to come back, change and go out at night, probably go out potentially go out drinking, having a good time, eating big dinners. So just make sure yourself that you're hydrated.

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Second thing is before you get there, make that, like we were talking earlier about making intentions about what you're going to accomplish so make it a mandatory thing that's in your list that at some point in that schedule during the day you're going to get some physical training in, whether it's a walk or you're actually going to go for a run, do something. I mean I've, one of my bosses told me early on that you never lack room in whatever suitcase you pack for a pair of running shoes and especially if you're into the minimalist running shoes nowadays. It's easy to get those bad boys packed into your luggage. So whatever it is, make sure that you take some time to go do something physically, to get yourself up and moving because a lot of these conferences - for you Anthony probably like myself man - you're sitting so you need to get up.

And the third one is diet is insanely hard to maintain when you're travelling, especially if it happens to be something that you really, really focus on when you're not travelling. So you've just got to do the planning on the front end and make sure that you're, you don't have to be meeting the USDA food pyramid but you've got to make sure that you do the thinking upfront for what you're going to be able to do to support yourself while you're there because the key thing out of all of this is that you want to go full tilt while you're there but if you don't give yourself opportunity to rebound and recover, you're going to burn out. You're not going to take full advantage of it especially if it's a food conference that you're at for a week. You're just going to drive yourself into the ground. So those would be some of the tips I've got.

**Anthony:** Awesome, I'm going to have to remember that and also I'm going to have to drink a lot of water when I'm down in Austin.

**Chris:** Yeah man hydration. It's all about hydration.

**Anthony:** Alright, you got a bonus today everyone. We gave you, I guess Chris gave you three career changing tips there and they are basic. I read an article the other day that said you should drink a half an ounce to one ounce of water for every pound of body weight that you have, in a day. And that can be a lot of water but again, increases your energy. It does so many things for you. Your body just needs it to operate.

**Anthony's Closing Remarks:** I hope you enjoyed the show today. I think we touched on a lot of stuff that I hope will be helpful for you. Again, check out Chris' website [engineerleader.com](http://engineerleader.com). And those of you that have any interest it's not too late to come to Austin, especially those of you engineers that are in Texas. You can still go to [engineeringevent.com](http://engineeringevent.com) and register to come join us. We have an amazing lineup. I think we have like sixteen plus speakers - Presidents, CEOs, Personal Development Gurus. We've got tours planned. We've got social outings at some of the best restaurants in Austin. It's going to be a blast so come and hang out with us.



And with that I really look forward to checking you out on the next podcast. And remember you can get the session notes for this podcast with any of the links that the, that we refer to, that we talked about at [engineeringcareercoach.com/conferences](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/conferences). So thanks again for listening. Catch everyone on the next show.

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