



**The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST
SESSION #26
A Five-Step Process For Overcoming Your Addiction To Email**

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/beatemail

Anthony's Upfront Intro: You are listening to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast* with Anthony Fasano, session #26. In this session I'm going to give you a five-step process that I used to overcome my addiction to email in hopes that you can 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.

Hello everyone, this is your engineering career coach, Anthony Fasano. Welcome to session 26 of the podcast. I have a wonderful show for you today, something that I'm so excited to share with you. Email has been something that has trapped me from being more productive than I am and I've struggled with it a bit and finally after a couple of years and many trials and tribulations I think I've overcome my email addiction and I'm going to sum it up for you in a few steps today in the coaching segment of today's show.

Before I jump into that, real quick just a couple of quick announcements. Those of you out there that might be new listeners I want to thank you for listening and offer you a free gift. By going to engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift, you can put your name and email address in and I will send you the three top resources that I used to become a partner in an engineering firm at the age of twenty-seven.

The other announcement I want to make is my book, *Engineering Your Own Success*, I have rewritten it, an updated and expanded edition. It is now going to be published by IEEE-Wiley, which I'm really excited about and many of you have been emailing me about the release date and I don't have that yet but I do know it will be in the fall and it will be soon. We're going through the final production of it right now. I'm really excited.

I want to just thank my editors at Wiley, Tracy and Mary because they pushed me to give so much more information in this version of the book and you're going to benefit from it, really. I mean there's screen shots of my schedule. I give you my hour-by-hour schedule, my productivity tricks. There's a whole new section on resumes, interviewing. There's just so much in this book to make it better now because they pushed me and I'm excited for it. And I want to thank all of you for your support through

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the process and as soon as we have any information on it I will let all of my listeners know and you will also get a discount code from Wiley so you can purchase the book at a discounted rate.

So with that let's get into the good stuff here. Let me try to help you to overcome your addiction to email. I'm sure not all of you are addicted but I'm sure most of you, like everybody else. It's just a habit we've all picked up on, checking our phone a hundred times a day. And right now it's time to go to the coaching segment of the show and give you the process that I used to overcome it.

Oh and by the way, before we get into the coaching segment, I hope that this is a show that you're going to want to go back and listen to over and over to cement this process down so you can access the show notes and the audio for this show by going to engineeringcareercoach.com/beatemail, that's /beatemail, no hyphens, no dashes.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Now it's time for our coaching segment of the show and during this segment of the show I am going to give you a five-step process that I used to overcome this so called addiction to email. And this is something that I'm very excited about doing and it's very meaningful to me because this is a challenge that I've been struggling with for a while.

There'd be some days where I'd just sit with my email inbox opened and I just couldn't get out of it and I couldn't get productive. I couldn't focus on the 20% of the things that were going to get me the 80% of the results in my career. So finally I've got this beat. At least I think I do. It's been over a month now and it's gone very well. For me when you do something for more than a month it becomes cemented and I'll talk a little bit more about that later. So let me jump right into this.

The first step to overcoming the whole email addiction - checking your phone all the time, checking your email all the time, leaving it open on your desktop - is to come up with a daily schedule for yourself, a regimented schedule where you lay out the times of the day when you do different things. And I have a very detailed schedule for myself from the time I wake up to the time I go to bed. And I don't want to sound like I'm a robot because I'm not. I mean there's built in flexibility there and I get to do a lot of different things, which is great. But it's something to fall back on. It's a base to work off of. Alright, it's like an engineering project. No project is the same right but you have standards that you use for every one. So it's the same idea.

Now the biggest, I'm sure, complaint or challenge that I'm going to get from listeners on this one - I'm sure I'm going to get a lot of emails - is in the daily schedule I recommend that you have specific times where you check your email. Call them email sessions, if you will. I know there's going to be engineers out there that tell me that, "I can't do that, I'm on call every second of the day." I don't

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necessarily but that. Now I'm not telling you that you need to spread your email sessions out for days or even hours. For me the way I set it up is a quick check in the morning and then an 11:30 session and a 15:30 session and that seems to be working extremely well. And I can modify it if I'd like. However, you could do it every 45 minutes. I mean for some engineers that I know that would be a major, major improvement for them. They're checking their email every five minutes. And if you can't go 45 minutes without checking your email then I think you've got bigger problems than worrying about trying to lose a client or something.

I mean listen, if you're on a construction project and everything is time critical then I can understand that and you might have an argument there. But if someone's emailing you about a million dollar problem on a construction site I would really hope that they would pick up the phone and call you after they sent that email. Because I know if it was me I wouldn't email someone about a big time project problem and just sit there and wait for them to get back to me. So I think part of it is our own perception and our own conditioning of people. Because trust me, I think responsiveness is important - and I talk about it in my book - but what does that mean? What does responsive mean?

Again, I'm not talking about going days here without checking email, I'm talking about maybe 45 minutes or an hour. And if we can't get a pocket of 45 minutes to focus on work then I don't know what this world is coming to. So have a daily schedule. I'm not going to go through mine hour by hour here. It's going to be in the new edition of my book, which is coming out. But the important part to know for this session is I have certain times where I check my email, also when I return phone calls.

And the thing to understand about those two things is that if you're responding to emails as they come in or taking every phone call that rings on your phone as it comes in, you're essentially letting other people dictate your entire day and essentially your life. You're living when they want you to live and doing things when they want you to do it and if you want to do that, that's fine. I got to the point where I didn't want to do that anymore. So now I do things when I want to do them. I respond to people on a certain schedule and it works very well.

Now there's certainly some people I have that if they call I take the call on the spot. I do have a couple filters - that I'll talk about - where I can see that if a client or member or someone is emailing me that I need to respond to. But for the most part my productivity has increased tremendously and email is something that is just part of my regular schedule now. It's not something that I do on a consistent, all day basis.

Because the one thing that you have to think about too, for those of you out there that are engineers saying, "Well I've got to service my clients, I've got to be available every second." What happens if by being available every second, you're sacrificing the quality of your engineering design because you're getting pulled away every five seconds? Is that fair to your clients or the community that you're serving? Or what if because you're getting pulled away every five minutes you're blowing the budget

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on that project? Is that fair to your company? So these are things that you have to think about when you say to yourself, "I can't go without my emails, someone's going to fire me," or whatever the case may be. It's up to you to decide but this is the first step that I've taken and again, this process worked for me.

Alright, let's jump over to step number two now. You have to establish a habit of checking email at the times of the sessions that you set in your schedule. It's very easy to create a schedule and say, "I'm going to check email three times, four times, five times a day at these times." I've done it a million times. But it's another thing to be able to stick to that schedule. And I want to give you some tips on this point that helped me do it, finally, after years of trying to do it.

I decided to try to get some help with this. I looked for a program or application. And I belonged to a Mastermind group of people that help each other in business, in their career and somebody gave me this tip and it's an application. I use Gmail. I use two different email applications. One, I use Outlook for my association work and secondly, I use Gmail for everything else. I found out there was an app called Pause, p-a-u-s-e, Pause. It's an app for Gmail. I think it might only work with Chrome but it's an amazing app and what it allows you to do is literally pause your email whenever you want.

Just think about this concept. There's a big blue button on the top of my email - it says Pause - and if I click it my email pauses and no messages come in. Now you could set the pause up so that your inbox is paused but your emails get delivered at standard times throughout the day. So I have it set up to deliver five times throughout the day now and I told you that I did a session from 11:30 and 15:30 so for example those are times that email would get delivered.

Now this is a brilliant application and I love it but the most important thing about this application is not necessarily the functionality of it, which is tremendous, but it's the idea of creating new habits mentally for yourself. Because just after a few days of having this pause on I would take out my phone, I would check it and I would see that nothing came in because then I remembered, "Oh yeah, it's paused so I'm not getting any new emails." And after a few days of doing that I wouldn't even take my phone out anymore because I knew that my email was paused and this was the biggest difference for me. Because in years past or months past, when I tried to do this I would always succumb to the urge of checking the email, getting on the phone, looking at it and then I would see what was there. I would get into it and I would answer something. But this way you don't have to do it. You can't do it because there's nothing there. Another great example for me was just the other night I was at my daughter's soccer game, coaching the game and I went down in my backpack to get something and I saw my phone there. In the past months I probably would have grabbed it and took a look but the first thing that came to my mind was the email's paused.

So this has been the one biggest thing that I'll mention on the whole podcast for me today that's helped me to get this schedule cemented and get into this habit, is being able to pause my email. I

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don't know if there's an application for that in Outlook. I've researched it a bit. I haven't found anything yet. Somebody told me that there was one for it a while ago and I haven't confirmed that yet. So that's something that I'm looking into and if I find out that information I'll certainly let you in on that and I'll bring it up on the next podcast or post it on my site.

But there are applications out there that can help you do that and for me, even though I don't have it in my Outlook, because I have it on my Gmail and I've established that mental habit it's carried across both. So you have to do whatever you have to do to be able to get on that schedule of habitually checking your email at the times that you've set.

One big thing obviously is to turn off your email notification that pops up. Maybe a simple thing for Outlook is to close your email down for 45 minutes. And I'm saying 45 minutes because even though I go a few hours I know a lot of engineers have given me grief on that because you're concerned, especially consultants, which I understand. So just cut it down a bit.

Alright, step number three. Keep your filters and your folders and your labels simple. This was a big challenge of mine. I used to have, in Gmail they call them labels and in Outlook it's folders. I used to have folders and labels for everything, everything. I probably had a hundred plus labels and I would put my email in the right label, in the right folder. And doing some research on it someone said something brilliant and it was like, "Just eliminate your folders. Have a couple of folders that you need." Because essentially anytime I need an email all I do is type it in or the name of the person or the project and I hit enter, all the emails come up and I find the one that I need. So all the time that it takes to filter these emails is really a waste of time.

So I'm not totally done revamping my folders yet although I've made a lot of headway. But eventually I'm going to end up with essentially a personal folder, a business folder, probably like a finances folder (if I have receipts and stuff I like to put them all in one folder so I can look at them), maybe a newsletter folder (I could filter some of my newsletters too and read them when my schedule dictates) and that's it. I mean maybe a couple of other ones.

I do have a couple of folders set up like a client or member folder, where certain emails get filtered in there. So this way if I do want to glance at my email I just have to look at that folder. And that might be the only time that I would pop in between a session, to click on that folder and see if it was like an urgent email. But this is really an important one because especially as engineers. I mean we'll overanalyze everything. We could come up with a hundred different email folders. Don't do that. And if they're project emails I understand they're legal and they're sensitive. Save them out to the network if you can, to the project folders, instead of keeping them all in your inbox.

Alright, now we're on to step number four. This is a big one and I would say that of all the people listening 95% of you don't do this so I hope you do after listening to this. Step number four is to

process your inbox daily. So what that means is when you do have those email sessions go through every email in your inbox and get rid of them.

There's several different approached here. One of the ideas here is to go through your emails and deal with emails right away. If you open up an email and you can handle it in a couple of minutes, handle it. If you cant, assign it to someone else. Forward it to them or put it on your to do list. This is the whole key, is your to do list. What I've gotten really good at in the last month of this process is I go through my emails and if I can't deal with it now I get it out of the email inbox and on my to do list and that's it, period.

There's another pretty cool app that I use in Gmail called Boomerang. Boomerang allows you to make an email disappear essentially by saying get rid of this and bring it back in two days, which is okay. I mean it's helpful in some instances. It's also kind of delaying the inevitable. I still like the to do list better but it does help to process the inbox.

And the great thing about processing your inbox is it's not so much the idea of having zero emails in your inbox a couple times a day, which is fabulous, but it's the mental clarity. Because for some reason the number of emails in our inbox is totally related to the amount of stress that we feel. And listen, I know you agree with me on this one. This happens to everyone. If you look at your email and you see a hundred, two hundred emails you're like, "Oh my gosh, I've got so much stuff I've got to do." But after my email sessions, when I have no emails left I feel phenomenal. Do I have any less work to do? No. I just have it in the right place.

So processing your inbox on a regular basis, which I do twice a day, is really, really, really critical. And I'm going to answer a question which I know I'm going to get right now ahead of time, is what if you don't have enough time to process your inbox in the amount of time that you allotted in your schedule? Happens to me a lot. So in that case what I do is I apply the 80/20 rule. I scan the emails. I look at the ones, the 20% of the emails that are driving 80% of my results and I answer those. I respond to those. I put those on my to do list and I leave the rest of them there and I try to catch up in the next session. If at some point I realize that I'm not going to catch up I'll do an extra session, maybe in the evening or early one morning just to get it processed.

And for those of you out there that are saying, another question, which I had, I actually had this question when I spoke in Alaska last year. One of the engineers there asked me, "I have about 10 000 emails in my inbox, what do I do?" And what I told him was to, and what I've heard people refer to this as, is to claim email bankruptcy. Just move all those emails to another folder, get rid of as many as you can. Just dump them somewhere. Because odds are out of those ten thousand emails I'm sure that 9 000 of them you're not going to ever look at again, sorry 9 000, probably 9 900 of them you're never going to look at again.

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So save them, just put them in a folder on your network or something, where they're not lost but they're just out of your inbox and then never let it get to that again by following the steps that I'm laying out here today. I'm telling you that the amount of stress that goes along with a full email inbox is crazy. How many engineers that I've talked to, I say, "How are things going?" They say, "Oh man, I'm so stressed out, I've got a million emails I've got to answer. I've got so much stuff going on." Email's a killer and that's why I'm doing this session for you.

Alright, let's get to the fifth step and this is kind of the bring it home step, which is these steps that I've laid out for you today, in order for them to stick and become a habit you have to do this for at least twenty-one days in a row. There's a lot of different studies out there and in the updated version of my book, *Engineering Your Own Success* that's coming out, I've cited many of these studies on how long it takes for a habit to become a habit. People say sixty something days, fifty something days. Listen, start with twenty-one days. My experience tells me that if you do this for three weeks in a row, if you do something for three weeks in a row it sticks pretty good. But it's not that easy to do it. So you have to put it at the forefront of your mind. You have to think about it every morning when you start your day. You have to think about it every night when you go to bed. This is a huge goal and a commitment from you right now and you need to stick to it.

One of my favorite authors out there is Leo Babauta of Zen Habits, the Zen Habits Blog. And it's a wonderful blog about, really about self-examination and about also productivity. He's got a wonderful book called *The Power Of Less*, that I talk about all the time. And one of the things that he talks about so much is establishing these habits, that he actually went through a process and what he did for one year straight is he did one habit each month. He implemented one habit each month into his life, where he focused on that habit for thirty days and did it everyday for thirty days in a row, cemented it and then went on to the next one. And I actually did that myself too for some time with him and that's what helped me to give up TV and I still haven't come back to it since then. And it's been a huge change for me.

So please, I've given you some valuable steps, at least what I think are valuable steps here. Don't short yourself by trying it for a week and giving up or trying it for a day and giving up. Please see it through. Go through for twenty-one days straight and then tell me how it feels because most of you right now are living the way other people want you to live. You're answering them when they want you to answer them. You're breaking up your lunch break because they want you to. You're not paying attention to your kid at the dinner table because someone at work sent you an email that popped up on your phone.

Sometimes in life you need to understand what's the most important thing. You need to do whatever you have to do to hold those things as the most important. And it's unfortunate in the society we live in today that it's more and more difficult to do that. So please, I hope that this five-step process will

help you. What I'm going to do for you right now is just summarize them real quickly and run through them again with the main points.

- First thing is establish a daily schedule and make sure that that schedule has specific times when you'll respond to email. Call them email sessions. I would also recommend having a couple of phone call sessions on there too, where you respond to phone calls and you can just lump it in with your email if it works best for you.
- Secondly, establish the habit of checking your email at those times. Writing the schedule down is only step one. Adhering to it is a big step too. And the biggest help for me I mentioned was the Gmail app, Pause.
- Step three - limit the labels and folders that you have in your Gmail and Outlook. Keep them simple, personal - business, maybe finances and receipts and a couple of other ones. You can always search by name or project to find the right emails.
- The fourth step - process your inbox daily or multiple times a day, depending on how you want to do it, meaning get everything out of that inbox. Get it on the to do list, forward it to other people, delete them. If it's a newsletter you read every couple of weeks or once a week filter it to a newsletter folder maybe and you can go into that folder. I do that. I read newsletters, maybe half an hour a day I spend on blog posts and newsletters.
- And the fifth and final step is to cement it as a habit by doing this whole process everyday for twenty-one days in a row.

And if you have questions or if you have feedback send it to me at afasano@powerfulpurpose.com. I'd love to hear it and do a show in a few months from now about how this email session may have helped engineers with their email, to be more productive and honestly, to improve the quality of their design work because you're not getting pulled away and breaking your train of thought every ten minutes or five minutes or whatever the case may be.

So with that I'm going to leave you with those five steps and I'm going to jump into our career changing tip for today's session.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip:

Now it's time for our career changing tip and this is the portion of the show where I try to offer one strategy that you can implement tomorrow and see dramatic results in your career and your life. And

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today's strategy that I'm going to give you or challenge that I'm going to give you, I should say, is a big one. And for those of you that are driving in your car right now please make sure that your seatbelt's buckled. For those of you that are in your office at work you might want to lower the volume of it here because this is going to be something that many of you are like, "No way!" But I'm going to challenge you.

What I want you to do is when you leave the office Friday I want you to shut down your computer, shut down your email and I don't want you to look at your work email until you come in on Monday morning. Now for those of you out there, like I said before, maybe you work on a construction site or a plant or something and there's people working on the weekend and there's a potential for an injury or something, obviously you've got to use your judgment. I don't want you to do that if there's a case you can miss something like this. But those of you that just do a lot of design work and you can try this, I want you to try it because if you can do this successfully the feeling that you get over the weekend will be very liberating.

When I started using the Pause application it was life changing. It was amazing the stress that was lifted off of me because I knew that emails weren't coming into my inbox so I wasn't checking them. But to be able to get away for a weekend without looking at that, it'll just give you a taste of what it's like to take back control of kind of your life and doing the things you want to do on your own terms. And that's really the point of this. So I hope that you can go through this five step process and if you do I want to hear from you. Email me at afasano@powerfulpurpose.com. Let me know. Give me a case study. I'll have a follow up show in a few months. I'll even have you on if you want to talk about successes or challenges you've had because again, I'm not a design engineer and I know many of you are so a lot of you are going to say it's easier for me but I still believe that you can do this. And if someone out there wants to try to prove it I'll have you on the show in a heartbeat.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

Alright so with that thank you for listening. I hope you enjoyed it. Those of you interested in coming to sunny San Diego in late September for a transformational event - you want to come hang out, meet a lot of successful engineers, go on some great tours and have some great networking dinner parties - please consider coming to my event for engineers, the **Institute For Engineering Career Development** fall meet-up. And that's iecdfallmeetup.com. There's still tickets left. Questions about it, shoot me an email and I will help to get you there regardless of whether you can afford it or not because we can do a financing plan. I will help you get there. The goal is to fill the seats with engineers that want to succeed and have some fun at the same time.



So with that I'll catch everyone on the next session of ***The Engineering Career Coach Podcast***. Until then, I wish you an extraordinary career and life.

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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