



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #29

IECD 2014 Fall Meetup - What Our Panelists Taught Us On Communication and Networking

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/sandiego

Episode Intro: Welcome to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*, where it's all about helping real engineers to overcome real challenges and get real results. And now for your host, who is on a mission to inspire as many engineers as possible, professional engineer and certified career coach, Anthony Fasano.

Welcome to *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. This is your host Anthony Fasano and I want to welcome you today. Today I have kind of a bonus podcast session for you that I hadn't planned on recording but this past weekend I threw an event called *The Institute for Engineering Career Development Meet-up* out in Sand Diego and it was amazing and the information there was amazing.

And while we had a lot of learning sessions, in this podcast session I'm going to summarize the two sessions on communication and networking, where we had a bunch of panelists come in from engineering companies, very well respected professionals in the industry. And I want to go through the points that they gave on communication and networking because I think it's really, really something that can help you in your career and these points are really valuable.

So before I jump in and do that I do want to just make an announcement. First of all, many of you know that I write daily and weekly emails called the *Daily Boost* and the *Monday Morning Motivators* in addition to kind of my weekly newsletter I send out to engineers. As of October 13th I'm stopping the *Boosts* and the *Monday Morning Motivator*. I really enjoyed doing them for the past, however many years it's been now, three or four years and I know I've helped a lot of people but I need to get more focused if I want to continue to help engineers because there's other things I want to create, other products, other programs. I really want to build the Institute and obviously I have other things that I'm working on.

So I'm going to be moving away from them and I'm just going to be focusing on doing one weekly newsletter for engineers, which you can subscribe to at engineeringcareercoach.com. Just go right to that URL. You can put your name and email in there. And again, that's just something for me, I talk a lot about the 80/20 rule, about really focusing on what's going to generate the most results for you or what's going to help you to achieve your goals so for me this was a decision I had to make. So I just kind of wanted to give everyone a heads up on that.



The other thing I want to say too, because a lot of people out in San Diego asked me when is the next career development event that I'm going to be throwing and I may be doing a big one in Washington DC, coming up in the Spring. It's actually going to be April 30th through May 2nd. So really Friday and Saturday will be the big days of it. Thursday will be kind of an opening day. So save the date. Again, it's going to be in Washington DC. It's going to be a big event. We're going to call it [The Engineer Career Success Summit](#).

We're looking at having tracks and courses for engineering students, up and coming engineers, younger professionals and also experienced engineers. So there'll be more information coming out on that in the next month or so. I'm very excited about that. Alright, so let's get into this session and again, the point of this is because I want to take the value that we got in San Diego, at least a part of it, these first two sessions, and give it out to those of you that listen to the podcast that are part of *The Engineering Career Coach* community. And I'm going to run through that now.

All of the information that I'm going to talk about, every single line that I went through is in the show notes for this show, which you can find at engineeringcareercoach.com/sandiego. So with that, let me give you a quote that one of our panelists gave during the communication panel and then I'll jump right in to the main segment of today's show. The quote is from Ralph Waldo Emerson - "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, now it's time for the main segment of the show here today and I'm going to run through pretty much what each of the panelists told us. I'll give you the name of the panelist, where they're from and then the points that they gave, whether it be on networking, whether it be on communication, whatever was helpful that they brought to the table. I'm going to bring that out for you now in this show.

So our first panelist on the panel of *Keys to Effective Communication* was Paz Gomez from URS Corporation and Paz is the Vice President there. She's had a successful career both in the navy as an engineer and now with URS. She gave two main points. She covered written communication and oral communication. As far as the written communication goes, her advice was to keep it short and sweet. She used the acronym KISS. Get to the point as soon as possible in your written communication.

And obviously written communication focuses a lot around emails, which is kind of apropos because our last session of *The Engineering Career Coach* - session 28, which you can access at engineeringcareercoach.com/session28, I had Pat Sweet on and he talked all about writing emails



better specifically from an engineering standpoint. So that was Paz's main point on written communication, was get to the point.

On oral communication she gave a couple of different tips. One was to maintain eye contact. She said it's so important in conversation and I agree with her. Look someone in the eye when you're talking with them and maintain that. Paz recommended that you be an active listener. And what that means is sometimes you need to listen to what's being said behind the words. Sometimes people say something but they mean something else and if you can get good at becoming an active listener and picking up those things it'll be very valuable to your conversations and your relationships.

Paz also mentioned something that I'm dear to from my coaching training, which is acknowledging. When you repeat words back to someone so that they know that you're engaged and know that you're listening. So if a client said to you, "You know this is a real important project for us," you might say back to them, "Listen, we know that this is an important project for you and that's why we have our best people working on it."

Paz also gave a quiz to the audience, which was interesting. She said, "What number do you get if you divide thirty by half and add ten?" So for some people the immediate answer that comes to mind is thirty divided by two is fifteen, plus ten is twenty-five. But that's not the answer. You have to divide thirty by one half so that actually equals sixty, plus ten is seventy. And the point of the question was simply to reinforce the importance of actually listening carefully and taking in that information.

Our next panelist was Andy Prouty. He is the Head Engineer for Sony Online Entertainment in the San Diego area. And he had thoughts on both being successful in general and communication. So first of all, Andy's points on being successful. His first point was to identify who your customers are. I think this is wonderful because it's not always the person paying you. If you work in a large engineering company your customer could just be another department in your company that you have to deliver results to - that's 'your customer'.

And this was something that hit home for me because I worked for a larger civil engineering company and we had different departments. So often time we weren't necessarily doing something for an outside client, we were doing it for another department in our company and they were the people that we had to deliver for and again, that also affects your reputation. So I like that first point of identifying your customers.

If you have the time, step up and volunteer to engage and participate in more projects. Now I know a lot of us are overloaded so this could be scary but if you are younger, maybe you're starting out and you have a little time on our hands and you want to volunteer for more projects, then doing so with your manager I'm sure is going to put you on that track to rapid advancement.

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Be focused on delivery. Andy said you must deliver value to your customers. Remember you identified who your customers were, now you have to deliver that value to them. Focus on delivering.

Andy recommended learning the business side of your industry, whatever industry that is for you. He said that that will really separate you from other people and I agree with that. I know that in my engineering travels there wasn't many engineers that knew both the business side and the technical side of engineering. So that could be a big edge for you.

Last point on being successful - always be respectful of others. And while I think that goes without saying I don't think people always follow that. So always be respectful of others.

Then Andy gave us some points on effective communication. Understand what requirements and expectations your customers have for every project. And I think this is so important. If you're working on a project without having a conversation with your client or your supervisor about exactly what they need then that sets you up for a lot of problems, a lot of challenges. You could be doing work on a project for two weeks and you could be doing the wrong work because you weren't clear about what your client wanted. So be sure about that from the beginning.

Andy said you shouldn't have an excuse-laden mentality. You shouldn't just make excuses for everything in your career. I think that happens to people. They get to the point where they're constantly making excuses for not delivering or any other reasons. Don't fall into that trap.

Be succinct, going back to kind of what Paz said. Just be straight. Be direct. Get to the point.

Another great point here by Andy, his last point was to make it clear to people in meetings what you want to accomplish as early on as possible in the meeting. And also if people are either unclear or they come into a meeting late give a status update and then close your meetings by coming up with next steps for all parties. I thought that was an excellent point. The worst thing is you sit around a meeting for an hour and everyone leaves, they don't know what their goals are and what they're supposed to accomplish from the meeting. So as, whether you're running the meeting or just involved try to make sure that everyone has next steps when they leave that meeting.

Alright, next was John Tanner from RBF Consulting and John offered the following thoughts: He said to jump on opportunities. Often times we let opportunities go by in our careers. You need to jump on them when you see them.

John had a great quote. He said, "The best way to advance in your engineering career is to be liked, be good at what you do and be a good communicator." And honestly, I think that's a really good way to sum up how to be successful as an engineer. Again, I'll give it to you again, "The best way to

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advance in your engineering career is to be well liked, be good at what you do and be a good communicator."

Another piece of advice that John gave, which I really liked, was don't be too blunt, deliver messages honestly but softly in a positive way. Put yourself in your client's shoes. And he gave a good example - if you're working on a project, let's say, and you submit the project to an agency and the agency gets back to you with a lot of red marks on the set of plans. You could call your client back and say, "Man we just got these plans back and there's red marks all over them. This is going to take a while for us to turn around."

Or you could say something like, "We got the plans back from the reviewing agency. There are some challenges, some things we need to overcome on the plans but we don't anticipate any major problems and we should be able to wrap this up in a couple of weeks (or whatever the case may be)." It's just the way you deliver the message. And I think that that is a talent and that is a skill. That's something you should really focus on.

Alright, our last panelist on the communication panel was AJ Whitaker from Atlas Civil Design and he offered the following points:

He said to put yourself in a circumstance that allows you to communicate. I think this is important. If you want to communicate with people in a certain industry, kind of network with them you've got to get to where they are. You have to think about your circumstances and you control them.

Another point that AJ made was to find a person you trust to give you honest feedback. He gave an example of one of his younger engineers that he had hired and he used the analogy whenever he would review the person's work as to how many monkeys could create the same work and in how long. So for example he told a story about one of his engineers wrote a report and he thought the report was awful so he basically wrote on it, he marked it up and he wrote on the top 'one monkey could replicate this work in ten minutes'.

And he was kind of doing it to keep things light and I think they had a good relationship, him and this employee. But the employee kept improving so the next time he would review it he would say something like, 'now this piece of work would take three monkeys to replicate in about a day'. And again it was kind of jokingly but it was serious in that you need to work on things but you're improving.

Another awesome point that AJ made was when you're job hunting and interviewing you should always ask, "Who am I going to be working for and will they help me advance my career?" He said that he goes out of his way to tell people that he's going to hire that, "I am going to be behind you to help you advance your career and do whatever I can in my power to help you do that." And I thought that that was a really amazing question to ask. So again, if you're looking for a job or you're

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interviewing don't be afraid to ask the question, "Who am I going to be working for and will they help me advance my career?"

Now we're getting into the second panel, which was business development and networking. And again, I think of networking as building relationships and I've said that on this podcast many times. So a lot of the points in this panel were meant to help you with conversational strategies, just getting to know people, getting to build those relationships.

The first panelist was Bree Tsaniff of SWS Engineering and she offered the following thoughts: First point - the biggest source of business development is your action with your current clients. Because if you treat them good, you do high quality work then they are going to come back and that's really the best source of business development right, to get those same clients to keep rehiring you.

Another point that Bree gave was when conversing with people think about things that you have in common with them that you can discuss. For example, the schools you attended, music, sports, anything that you have in common is a great way to kind of break the ice and start a conversation with someone.

You must believe in yourself and be confident if you're going to be able to network effectively. Because if you can't, people are going to read into that and it's not going to come off as genuine. So you need to believe in yourself, stand tall, be confident when you're networking.

Listen intently to people. This one kept coming up throughout the day. You have to listen intently to people if you're going to be able to turn around and try to deliver value to them or build a relationship with them because you need to understand them, what their desires are, what their hobbies are, what their interests are.

Be mindful of your body language. Don't cross your arms when talking to someone. That shows that you're kind of closed down. So just think about the way you're standing. Are you looking at your phone instead of listening to the person intently? Be mindful of those things.

Bree says that you should connect with everyone you meet on LinkedIn and use a very professional photo on LinkedIn and I agree with both. LinkedIn is your database. It's your contact. It's your rolodex, however you want to look at it. Have a professional LinkedIn profile and we've talked about that in the Institute before. We've done some webinars on developing your LinkedIn profile. It's so important.

Before you have to speak ever, whether you're getting up in front of an audience or going to an event and you're a little bit nervous, Bree gave a sample exercise. She actually got up in front of the room and did it and it was kind of funny. She put one arm up. She shook her hand quite a bit and she put



the other arm up, shook her hand quite a bit. Then she lifted her right leg off the floor, shook it quite a bit and then did the same with her left foot. And you can repeat that over and over. She said she does that and basically what it does is it takes away a lot of those nervous feeling, butterflies and can calm you down to go into a networking event or a presentation. So if you struggle with that try giving her little exercise a shot.

Alright, next up was Michael Kincaid of AECOM and Michael is in charge of the business development for AECOM on the west coast and he gave us a bunch of interesting points. First of all, he said to develop relationships but never view them as transactions and I thought that was really interesting hearing someone put it like that. Don't just think about kind of making a sale when you're trying to get to know someone or, he said, you will lose. So think of them as relationships, not transactions.

Offer something to someone without expecting anything in return. I've always tried to follow this myself. When you're networking, get out there, give value to people, help people. Don't look for things in return.

Understand what your client does and then you can help him/her to do it better. I thought this was an amazing piece of advice from a business development expert. If you want to help someone, if you want to show them that you can help them understand what they do and then help them do it better.

Michael said you should always be respectful of people's time. Excellent point. You should have goals in mind for every meeting you attend, which was similar to what some of the stuff we had earlier. And then you should set expectations for any of your endeavors and check in on those expectations on a regular basis.

And our last panelist was Christy Pavano who is a Business Development Consultant. So she helps engineering firms to try to secure new projects, new clients. Christy said to do your homework prior to an event or meeting. Make sure you are really researching the people that are going to be there and you know your stuff.

Be genuine and be yourself when you get into these situations when you're networking, when you're talking with people. You don't necessarily have to have commonalities with someone to talk to them. There are a million things you can talk about - the weather, anything. It doesn't have to be like you went to the same school with them.

Christy recommends staying up to date on industry news and company news of those people that you are currently networking with by just going to their websites and just looking at their newsfeed or reading some of the updated engineering magazines.



She also said that LinkedIn is huge and I think LinkedIn came up throughout the day. So it's obviously very, very, very, very important.

So that was kind of a summary out of two of the six sessions that we had over the weekend and I hope you can take something out of it. I mean communication is going to be the key for you to be able to communicate successfully with team members in your engineering career and we know as engineers we're constantly working on teams.

And networking is what's going to allow you to build relationships that are going to yield those opportunities for you.

So with that, what I'm going to do now is jump into the take action today portion of the show and give you one real piece of actionable advice that I took out of this past weekend in San Diego.

Take Action Today Segment:

Anthony: Alright, the one piece of advice that kept coming up was listening and I started to think about it a little bit. And I started thinking about how important listening is because when you listen to someone you learn about them, you understand their needs, their desires, you get to know everything about them. And then you can deliver whatever it is that you need to deliver to them.

So if it's a prospective client you can show them how you can help them and fulfill some of their needs. If it's a prospective employer you can do the same thing and show them why they should hire you because you have 'this', which is what they need. Right. If it's in a relationship and maybe you're not that happy in a relationship, if you're listening better, understand what the other person needs in the relationship then you'll be able to provide that to them. And it all comes back to listening.

So one kind of actionable piece of advice that I can give you on listening that I learned in coaching school was that when you're talking to someone, besides just focusing on them intently is to listen to the silence before you start to talk because often times we cut people off because our mind is working and working and we want to get right in there and give answers and get going and keep the conversation going. What I would recommend to you is listen for the silence.

So have a conversation with someone and when they're talking keep listening, keep listening. Keep listening till they finish, you hear a silence for a second and then you can talk. This is extremely, extremely difficult to do. Trust me because I went through this process myself. But once you do it, it becomes easier for you and the quality of your conversations will dramatically improve. So give that a shot today.



Anthony's Closing Remarks:

I hope you enjoyed the summary. I really enjoyed, for those of you out there that came to the event, it was just so much fun to meet you. And I'm telling you I love going to conferences but what comes out of conferences is more for me sometimes than the actual learning sessions, which I thought were great, it's the dinners and the conversations where you're having a couple drinks with someone and you're talking and you're learning about their life, their goals. And that was really the cool part for me this weekend and that's why I loved it. I'm really looking forward to our next one in early May in Washington DC and I hope that those of you that came come again or those of you that didn't come can make the next one.

And in closing, one thing I want to mention. I keep getting questions about when my updated and expanded edition of the book, *Engineering Your Own Success* will be out and it will be out literally any day now. It's in the final stages and as soon as it's out I will let everyone know and if you're on my mailing list, which you can get on at engineeringcareercoach.com you will get an email from me with a discount. The publisher has allowed me to give out a discount directly to my mailing list, to my podcast listeners so you will hear that and I'm looking forward to getting this book out there, getting some of the new information out there.

So with that, thanks again for listening. Again, if you want the show notes for today's show simply go to engineeringcareercoach.com/sandiego. And until next time I hope that you continue to engineer your own success.

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