

The

ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

HELPING ENGINEERS SUCCEED  
IN WORK AND LIFE

## The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #53

### The Importance of Becoming a Visible Expert as an Engineer

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

**Anthony's Upfront Intro:** In today's episode, my guest, *Sylvia Montgomery*, will give you strategies that you can take to be recognized as an expert in your field. Let's do it!

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

**Anthony:** Welcome to the show. This is the show for engineers who want to succeed in both work and life. Please visit [engineeringcareercoach.com](http://engineeringcareercoach.com) and take advantage of all the free career and personal development resources that we have for engineers from our blog to our podcasts, to our guides and other career development resources.

We'll have a great episode for you today. In today's episode, I'm going to interview Sylvia Montgomery of Hinge, which is a marketing and branding firm for professional service companies. Before we jump into the interview, I just want to take a minute to remind you about the event that we'll be putting on in Washington, D.C. from April 30th to May 2nd called *the Engineering Career Success Summit*. I'm very excited about this event. The focus of the event is helping engineers transform from technical professionals into leaders. We're going to focus for two days on helping you improve your communication skills, your ability to network, your leadership. And on Thursday, the day before the event, we actually have a mastermind session for three and a half hours. If you're interested in that, it's going to be smaller group of about 12 engineers and myself and a few other coaches and experienced professionals that can help you work through some of the challenges you might be going through in your engineering career.

Tickets are on sale. Early bird tickets will be ending at the end of March, so please go to [engineeringevent.com](http://engineeringevent.com) and check it out, and I hope I can see you there. We also have virtual tickets available in case you can't make it but you want to get all the content from the actual sessions.

So now what I'm going to do is formally introduce my guest, Sylvia, and then I'll give you a quote to take us into the main segment of the show. Sylvia Montgomery, CPSM, has over 25 years of experience combining her Visual Communications training with Marketing, Planning and Execution. Her experience includes over a decade of working in and with the AEC industry. As a senior partner at Hinge, Sylvia is in charge of Hinge's AEC practice developing new business and creating

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marketing and branding strategies for clients.

And to take us into the interview, I always try to pick a quote that's kind of relevant to the topic in some way. And today's quote is from Denis Waitley and it goes as follows: ***"Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience."***

### Coaching Segment:

**Anthony:** Sylvia, welcome to the show. Thank you so much for taking the time to spend few minutes for this here today.

**Sylvia:** Thank you. Well, you know, so much of what marketers do is reinvent themselves. And I bet that quote is very inspirational because I bet for engineers and other technical professionals and you may have been more predisposed to, "This is my career path and this is what I'm going to do." And maybe you didn't realize at the time that at some point in your career, you would become a leader. And that requires reinventing yourself from a technical professional to a leader or even a marketer at different times. So that's a very appropriate quote for today.

**Anthony:** I asked Sylvia to come on the show because I often get questions from listeners out there saying, "I really want to become an expert in my field." So what we're going to do today is I'm going to ask Sylvia to explain to us what an expert is. I actually saw an article she did in the trade magazine about the idea of being a visible expert. So we're going to get into what that is, how it can help an engineering firm, and how you can actually take steps to become an expert. All the show notes for today's show will be at [www.engineeringcareercoach.com/expert](http://www.engineeringcareercoach.com/expert). And the show notes will contain a summary of the key points discussed in today's episode as well as the links to any resources, websites, or books mentioned during the show. Again, the URL will be [engineeringcareercoach.com/expert](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/expert).

Alright, Sylvia, so why don't we start off by maybe you could just explain what is a visible expert?

**Sylvia:** The term 'visible expert' is actually a term that Hinge point. But when you get right down to it, really we're talking about a professional that has high marketplace visibility and a reputation for expertise. So let's dissect that statement for a second, which is, first and foremost, you need to be an expert. What we're talking about here is not making somebody into something they're not. But rather it's going to be elevating the profile of somebody that has an expertise. So as technical professionals, as engineers, each of you have, you know, some sort of a craft and how you have developed that craft and we'll find that craft. That's part of how you have become an expert. Granted

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everybody depending on where they are in their career. That degree of expertise is either on the young side or on the season side or somewhere in that spectrum.

But I want to make sure that everybody understands that there is something that, you know, you're passionate about something that you refined this is your niche, and that's what we're going to elevate. So knowing what the expertise is, and when we talk about expertise, we're talking about niche - the more niche you can be in your expertise, the more helpful that is going to be, not only from focusing your efforts perspective, but also from attracting clients in the future.

But we have the expert and the visible expert piece comes into play because we want to build up their visibility.

**Anthony:** So basically, what you're saying is that we're not going to wave a magic wand and make you an expert. You have to be sound in some technical field. The more niche it is, there may be more opportunities for you. However, there are some things you can do to elevate that expertise.

**Sylvia:** Exactly. So we will work with that individual and the firm that's the go-to-person, you know, clients love that person that they've worked in this niche area. They know all the ins and outs. Unfortunately, most of those go-to-people are invisible. Meaning, they're only known within the firm. Maybe they're known a little bit to clients. So the trick is, how do you make them visible in a meaningful way so that they can help elevate the profile, the brand of the firm as a whole?

**Anthony:** So what you're saying is basically these are people that are in a firm that are kind of like in go-to-person in that firm that they have the knowledge. They have the expertise. If you work in that firm, you know to go to them. But the idea now is how can they be known outside of their firm?

**Sylvia:** Exactly. And the way research for those of you that are not familiar with Hinge, Anthony mentioned that we're branding and marketing firm, but our primary differentiator because, again, you got to be differentiated nowadays, clearly differentiated, is that we conduct ongoing primary research on professional services. So we're always, and I mean always, continually researching what's happening in the high growth professional services/firms today, what's working, what's not working, how our buyers selecting professional services, providers. So all of those things we're researching. And it was through and by a research that we completed end of last year on is their distinct called visible experts and what's the benefit that we identified that there is really five levels. So, level one is the resident expert, the one that I was mentioning. Everybody goes to them within the firm. Number two, the second level, is the local hero. So maybe they're also speaking at some of the local trade, seminars and things like that. And then you start to get into the level three, which is the rising star. They're a little bit more sought after. Level three is really where you start to have an impact on the firm as a whole. And then you move on to things like the industry rock star on level four and the global superstar, which is at level five. But what I want everybody to also take away from this is that you don't need to be at level five, Visible Expert, to have a significant impact on your firm.

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**Anthony:** Okay. So, let me recap that now for the listener here. So what Sylvia is saying, is her firm does a lot of research on this topic and they identified five different levels and just to put in perspective a bit. So level one is that engineer that sits in his or her office that is an expert of anyone in the company needs that person. They go to them for a certain calculation, for a certain question about an agency or guidelines or something along those lines. Level two is where maybe that person starts to go out and speak for some of the local professional associations. They get asked to speak on certain topics. Level three is a rising star to the point of, now, you have clients that maybe contacting your company and saying, "Listen, we understand that Anthony is with you and he has this level of expertise. We want to have him work on this project. We want to bring our project to your company." Then level four, you start to get out there in the industry. Now, maybe there's an event in California and they're calling you in New York because they want you to speak on the storm or regulations or whatever the case may be. And then ultimately, it's globally and you're known around the world for a certain topic.

So I think the key here to understand as an engineer is that once you get into that level three, at least from my perspective, that's when your firm is going to start to see results and that's when you personally can really start to see your career takes steps because of your level of expertise, because you're bringing in business for your company, because people are calling up your company and saying, "We want Anthony or whoever the case may be working on this project," and we're bringing it for you. Is that accurate, Sylvia?

**Sylvia:** That's definitely the spot on.

**Anthony:** Alright, excellent. So we have this understanding. Now, we understand what a visible expert is. Sylvia has done a good job here of breaking down with the five levels. Now, I'm sure what the listener is most interested in Sylvia is, how do you go about... okay, you're an expert. You're at maybe that level one. You've got the expertise. You've got the knowledge. How do you move up the charts? How do you develop your expertise? What are some steps that the listener can take?

**Sylvia:** That's a great segway because becoming a visible expert is going to be a balance of the technical, so your expertise, so those hard skills, let's call them hard skills, and the soft skills. The soft skills are going to be presentation skills, writing skills, those are just overall presence. Those are the kinds of skills that where technical professionals tend to be a little bit harder. I mean let's face it. There is a reason why from your personal chemistry, you were attracted to engineering. For the most part, those are not the folks that are as comfortable, and I'm generalizing here so I don't mean to insult anybody, but, you know, they're not as comfortable going out and working the room or presentations or things like that. So you got to have both sets of skills because to be visible, you're going to need to write. You're going to need to speak. You're going to need to feel comfortable presenting to large groups.

**Anthony:** I understand what you're saying. And I don't take offense with that as an engineer. I mean that's the reason I started the Engineering Career Coach website because it's obvious in a lot of my travels that engineers struggle with soft skills, communication, the networking and the speaking. And those are the skills that you need to get out there and present yourself as an expert.

So one of the keys here now is to take... you have this technical expertise, now you got to get out there and you got to show yourself as an expert and the best way to do it what Sylvia just explained is to speak. I mean if you can get up in front of a room and talk about that topic, I mean you might start in-house with a brown bag launched in your office for five people that you know which is more comfortable. But then you might volunteer to speak for your local association because they're always looking for speakers. And if you can't get out there at one association that goes well, then maybe you can go to another one or they can have you back again. And I think that's when you start to get some momentum and you can start to build up that level of expertise. Would you agree, Sylvia?

**Sylvia:** Absolutely. And I would also highlight that visible experts make complicated subjects easy to understand that to character trait that we found in the research of visible experts because it's not about throwing out all the technical terms. It's about how can you help your clients, your target audiences. Clearly, individuals that are not expert in the field, because that's why they hired you in the first place, understand the issues that you are dealing with. So it's not about impressing people with the technical, but it's about taking those complicated subjects and making them easy to understand.

**Anthony:** I think that's a very important point because many times as engineers, you're going to have to speak in front of people that are not technically savvy. And if you want to be considered the expert, considered the go-to-person, you're going to have to be able to explain to this group of non-technical people what your project is and what the benefits are to them or whether it's a community, whether it's a board of directors, shareholders, whatever the case may be. And again, I see that as being a critical component to being an expert.

So, Sylvia, I also noticed in couple of the articles that I read that you've written, you talk about in the engineering field specifically some things that you can do to develop your expertise, can we get into that a bit?

**Sylvia:** Sure, absolutely.

**Anthony:** So I know a couple of things that you talk about and some of the stuff that I've read is writing a book and getting published. Why don't you talk about that? I think that's perfect obviously for this industry.

**Sylvia:** Sure, sure. So, you know, the beauty nowadays is that a book doesn't have to be 300 pages. You can start small. And actually, a book we read from our research that, again, in looking

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at, what are the common traits of visible experts? How is it that some of them rise faster than others? What did they do? We found that publishing a book is a core characteristic of that group. But you don't need to start there. You can start, for example, by contributing here [ph] [0:15:31.9] from his blog. Marketers are always struggling to get there, project managers there and the engineers to share with them the success stories.

So you can start to find them, there's communication skills, by starting with contributions to a blog. If you're really committing to becoming a visible expert, again, a book is going to be a tool that is going to be definitely part of their journey, but you don't have to start there. And you could start with, you know, maybe the book becomes a compilation of all of these other writings that you've done overtime. I think it would be very hard for someone that's trying to commit to becoming a visible expert to start with the book. But it definitely should be something that you have as part of your journey.

**Anthony:** Sylvia, how about online like whether it's LinkedIn or whether a personal website or something? How can that be helpful or how important is that?

**Sylvia:** Online is so critical nowadays because you have things like this. Let's say that writing doesn't come easily to you while doing online interviews, whether their video or just audio, that's one opportunity: writing longer articles, writing blog posts, submitting articles to other publications, commenting, I mean you can start if you're like, you know, I'm not really sure what my voice is and you want to spend some time trying to discover what your voice is, what your position is on certain topics, then commenting on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is the number one platform for professional services. So LinkedIn is not a place to put your resume. It's not an online resume. LinkedIn really is your personal brand. Think of yourself as a personal brand, what goes into your LinkedIn, professional photo, a professional description, how you bring value to the clients you're working with and then you can use the publishing tool within LinkedIn to start creating some of that content that speaks to your passions and your voice.

So, nowadays, there are enough tools that you can leverage online. And the reason we talk so much about online is that has taken down any geographic barrier. So you're able to expand your reach much greater than in the old days when I was just traditional marketing.

**Anthony:** Alright. So what am I going to do here is I'm going to summarize what Sylvia talked to us about today and then I'm going to ask Sylvia to stick around and we'll get into the Take Action Today segment of the show here where I'm actually going to give her a scenario of maybe an engineer that wants to achieve something at expert level and we'll just try to walk through some steps. Essentially, we're just going to summarize these steps and put them into action.

So what we talked about, first of all, talked about a visible expert. It is someone in their field that's recognized. There were five different levels: the resident expert, the local expert, rising star, industry rock star, and then global. In order to achieve the status and climb kind of this ladder of the different

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levels of expertise, obviously, you have to start by being an expert and having that technical background in a specific niche. However, you're going to need to develop your soft skills, specifically your speaking skills, you can get out there and speak and be seen as an expert on this topic.

Also, visible experts make difficult topics easy to understand. That was another key point that Sylvia brought up. And lastly, she talked about LinkedIn, which I talk about all the time and I love the idea of that being your personal brand. And I think something that's really important is the summary underneath your photo and your main LinkedIn box. There's a summary. You can put a couple of paragraphs the way I tell people to write that summary, is that if someone looks at your LinkedIn profile, and that's the only thing they read, which often happens, you want to leave an impression on them and you want them to understand kind of what your mission is and what you're all about.

So with that, let's jump into the Take Action Today segment of the show.

**Anthony:** Now, it's time for our Take Action Today segment of the show. And I still have Sylvia Montgomery from Hinge here with me talking about how to become an expert, and I'm going to give Sylvia kind of a little example here, a scenario and have her give us what she would do in the situation to develop her expertise.

So, Sylvia, let's say, I'm an engineer and I'm progressing in my career and I noticed that maybe there's a new up and coming field like there's always sustainability or different kinds of fields in engineering that might be developing and this engineer says, "I really want to become an expert in this field whether I want to start my own company eventually or I want to start a department in my firm and I want to really take this new kind of niche and become known in that field."

Sylvia, what would you say are a couple of steps that this person has to go through and I'm assuming that this person has been doing work in these fields. They've learned a lot about it and they kind of want to leverage those skills now?

**Sylvia:** Right place to start so, you know, we'll use that character that you described, I would say that if they've been working in the field but they want to start to use that as their expertise, it's really hard to glide and say, "Oh, I'm an expert." People don't want to hear that. They want to associate you with the expertise on their own. So set a different way. I would tell this person and if they were clients, I would say, you know, "You haven't been producing a lot in writing, so why don't we have you start with doing a couple of pieces on LinkedIn, the publishing platform, about the best practices that are currently taking place in this field, in this new field and maybe its best practices and trends to look out for? So, you can be reporting on what others are doing, what you're seeing, but also, injecting your own voice in your own opinion. We're looking to bridge what's already out there with, "Hey, I have an opinion and here's what my opinion is based on." So it's giving credibility.

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An alternative would be that you could be interviewing other individuals that are more seasoned in that field that the person is interested in. So, again, breaking the gap between here's what's being done, here's what we see this in the future. So you're doing a little bit of blending. But the point is that overtime, not only are you sharing what others are doing, which is very important today to not make it all about you, but also introducing what's your voice, what's your position with it. And then overtime, that writing can be used to maybe, you know, as you mentioned, that some of the local brown bags or some of the local networking. You need to start small and kind of get your footing as to your presentation skills, your content, your voice, what's the message, and how does this tied back to your firm.

And one of the things that we want to make sure people don't forget is that becoming a visible expert should have a benefit on the firm overall. So that's a piece there, but that would be a place to start.

**Anthony:** That's great. And what I would say to just kind of the follow-up on that is you may run into an obstacle that your firm does not have a blog or they don't have an avenue for you to write or express that expertise. So what you consider doing is a couple of things: one, you could ask him if they can start a blog, which I think would be a great thing for you if you're able to start a blog for your company and then start develop that expertise. The second thing that you could do if that doesn't work out is to start your own blog and just kind of mention your company that, you know, "I really want to write about this topic and really develop an expertise on it that's going to help us long-term, do you mind if I'm just writing on my own," and whatever and just get their approval and then restarts the blog on your own. The other thing that I would also consider doing is Sylvia talked a lot about LinkedIn and how important it is to have that presence. And one of the things that I found LinkedIn to be very helpful for is the groups module. I mean there are groups on LinkedIn. You can type in any niche and you'll find the group in that niche. So if you're in sustainability or whatever the case may be, find the couple of groups in LinkedIn and get engaged in the discussions. And if you have a blog whether it's your company's blog or whatever the case may be, put that blog in your LinkedIn profile and then when you get engaged in these discussions, and if people start to like what you're saying, they might go to you, eventually get to the blog, and I think that all ties everything together.

So, again, the point to this segment of the show is to take all the information that we've talked about and make it actionable for you because really the point of listening to the podcast, there's really no point in my opinion unless you're going to take it and use all the information that we're trying to give you here.

So with that, I want to thank Sylvia again for coming on the show. Thank you, Sylvia, so much!

**Sylvia:** Thank you, Anthony, and it's a pleasure.

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**Anthony:** And, again, the show notes for today's show will be located at [engineeringcareercoach.com/expert](http://engineeringcareercoach.com/expert). And before we go, I do just want to mention something really quickly. I am taking on a partner with the Engineering Career Coach website and everything underneath it including the *Institute for Engineering Career Development*. His name is Christian Knutson. He came and interviewed me on episode 50 and he'll be getting more involved with the podcast and moving forward. And we have big plans to kind of revamp our institute for Engineering Career Development, which is a community. It's a private community for engineers where we help engineers succeed in work and life through doing three different things. We offer a lot of webinars, you know, at least one a month on these different skills that Sylvia and I talked about today: communication, networking, leadership. We also have a form, a private form because you're not going to want to go on LinkedIn necessarily and ask specific questions about your development or challenges you're having. So we have a kind of a safe close net form for that and we also have some live events. From time to time we go around the country and we do some mastermind groups and we're putting on the *Engineering Career Success Summit*. And we are revamping it in a few months from now. However, you can still join right now. We have a thriving coming in right now and you can still get in before we do the revamp. And the pricing structure is going to increase because we're also going to add some features like you're going to be able to get PDH credits and other things for some of our courses.

So check out [engineeringcareerdevelopment.com](http://engineeringcareerdevelopment.com). It's a wonderful community that can help you to build the skills you need for the expertise and for anything you want to do in your engineering career. And I would really look forward to getting engaged with you and helping you through the community.

Once again, thanks so much for listening, and I hope that you continue to engineer your own success!

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