

The

ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

HELPING ENGINEERS SUCCEED
IN WORK AND LIFE

The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #55

Seven Strategies for Networking and Building Relationships as an Engineer

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/howtonetwork

Anthony: In this episode, I am going to give you seven strategies that you can use to instantly become a better networker. 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 Episode 55. This is the show for engineers who want to succeed in both work and life. Please visit our website engineeringcareercoach.com. There is tons of free and affordable engineering career development resources from blog articles to podcasts to long engineering career guides with videos and all the content on the site there is geared to help you succeed as an engineer in both work and life.

I am really excited for today's episode. I am going to dive into the topic of networking, a topic that I get many questions of from engineers all over the world. This is the fifth episode in the seven-part series that I am doing to celebrate the re-launching of my book, *Engineering Your Own Success* with IEEE-Wiley press which happened this past December. And I thank everyone out there for the support in the book as the book is doing very well and that's in large part to the podcast listeners here.

Also, I am excited to say that in the Take Action Today segment at the end of the show, my co-host Chris Knutson does a brief interview with Zack Schaefer, also known as Dr.Z. Dr.Z came on the podcast back on Episode 46, discussing how to manage conflict in your career and your life. And we got great feedback on that show. So on the segment here at the end of this, episode Zach is going to give Chris a little bit of preview of the talk that he is going to do at the **Engineering Career Success Summit** in a few weeks. Now there is a couple of nuggets in there that I will think you will enjoy.

And speaking of the **Engineering Career Success Summit**, before we dive in to the main segment of this show here, I do just want to take a minute to mention the event. It's at www.engineeringevent.com. This is an event that I am putting on in Washington DC, April 30th through May 2nd. The event is going to be totally focused on helping engineers go from technical professionals to leaders. We are going to focus on communication, networking, leadership. There is

going to be successful engineers there on panels. There is going to be top personal development speakers and authors there. There is going to be parties and social outings. It's going to be an all-round awesome event. Again it's at engineeringevent.com. You can still get tickets and there is also a virtual ticket. So if you are a listener and you know that you are not going to be able to get to DC, you can get the virtual ticket and we are actually going to summarise all the sessions and we will send it to you within a month after the event.

Alright, now it's time for the main segment of the show. And as always, I want to start off with a quote that kind of really embodies my belief in what networking is and that is going to take us right into the main segment. So the quote is as follows: "The successful networkers I know, the ones receiving tons of referrals and feeling truly happy about themselves, put the other person's needs ahead of their own." That is by Bob Burg. Again, "the successful networkers I know, the ones receiving tons of referrals and feeling truly happy about themselves, put the other person's needs ahead of their own."

Coaching segment:

Anthony: Now it's time for the main segment of our episode today. And I am really excited to give you the seven strategies around networking. And before I jump into this, I just want to give a shout out to Joe, one of our listeners in Ohio. Joe is a back running electrical engineering and he reached out to me and sent me an email by saying: "Anthony, I loved the show but the sound quality could be improved." And I went back and listened to some of our shows and he was dead-on and he helped me out quite a bit. We emailed back and forth and I made some adjustments. My audio editor, Vjiron helped out as well. We got some new equipment which we are using for this episode. So I hope it sounds better. And I just want to say that because if you think that there is any way to improve this show, just send an email to afasano@engineeringcareercoach.com. I would love to hear your thoughts and how we could improve. We want to continue to improve it.

So let's get into networking. The show notes for today's show will be found at engineeringcareercoach.com/howtonetwork. The show notes always contain the summary of the key points that I discuss in the episode as well as links to any resources, websites or books that I mentioned during the show. Again, it will be at engineeringcareercoach.com/howtonetwork. So before I get into the seven strategies that I want to give you to help improve your networking skills, I wanted to find what networking is, at least in my opinion, from my perspective. And I always view networking as two words to keep it simple. Building relationships.

Many engineers or professionals' think of networking as collecting business cards and just adding to your rolled ex or your number of LinkedIn connections. That's not what networking is. That's the first step in the networking process or the process of building your relationship is the initial meeting. That's not networking in its entirety by any stretch. And unfortunately, a lot of people think that it is. Why is

networking important?

Networking is important because not only will networking yield opportunities for you and your career and your life because it will. And you notice I say life because, even when you network in your community or through your church or through your children's school, you are going to make other friends. That's also going to bring you opportunities in your personal life, just like you network in your career. But in addition to bring you opportunities, networking creates enjoyment right? It creates fulfilling, engaging, enjoying relationships and that's a huge part of having a career that is both successful and enjoyable. I want you to understand that when you listen to this podcast because a lot of people think networking as, "What can it do for me?" or "What can you do for me?" That's not the way to approach it. Yes, you get opportunities out of it but ultimately, you want to create relationships that you are going to enjoy throughout your career.

The last point I will make before we dive into this segment strategies is you are never too young or too old to network. I think in the engineering world, you get the perception that if you are young and out of school, your job is to scrunch calculations. Don't do any networking. You know, let the more experienced engineers do that. Or if you become like a partner or a senior executive, they say, "Listen, forget about the networking and the schmoozing. You keep an eye on the finances and the bottom line of the company and let the mid-level managers go out there and bring in the business" etc. So I would say, regardless of your age or experience level, you always need to be networking. You always need to be building your network and create new opportunities. Alright, let's jump into the seven strategies.

Number one: you need to build strong lasting relationships. Like I said before, it's not just about the number of relationships or connections or business cards you have. It's about the quality and the strength of those relationships. So in order to build strong relationships, I always recommend on focusing on the personal side of things; people's interest, their hobbies. Think about all of those things. Don't just think about their work. Don't just go up to them and say, "Hey, what kind of engineering do you do? I do this kind of engineering."

In my book on page 91, in the new edition of the book, I'll read some of it right now. I list a few questions that you can use to ask at a networking event or to try to learn more about the person from more of the personal side of things. Questions like: did you grow up around here, do you have children (of course, depending on the age of the individual), what made you want to become an engineer. Those are the kind of questions that you are going to get people talking beyond just, "What kind of engineer are you?"

So keep that in mind when you get into conversations with people, especially people that you have never met before. Try to learn about them so that there is a stronger connection and that's going to build the kind of relationship that is going to yield opportunities and enjoyment.

Number two: be genuinely interested in people. And I took this right out of a page in the book, Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I love that book. I listen to it all the time on a regular basis. And if you have never read that book, you need to buy the book or the audio book immediately and start it. And every engineer that I have told that and has done it, here she has reported back to me with great results. I will link to that book in the show notes for this show.

But what I mean by that point is, when you're having a conversation with someone and they are talking to you, especially if you ask some of the questions that I just explained, be interested in their answers. Engage with them. Look at them. Make a connection with them. Don't be on your cell phone or don't be checking around the room when they are trying to talk to you. Stay engaged. Be interested in someone. Don't just ask a question or don't just have a meaning with someone to get something out of them and then that's it. Because that is not going to get you anywhere.

Number three: listen to others completely and acknowledge them. I talked a little bit about acknowledging when we did the last session in this EYOS series on communication. And I'll link to all the previous *Engineering Your Own Success* episodes in this little mini-series we are doing in the show notes. But I do a lot of coaching of engineering managers. I went to interview their staff. There is one problem that always comes up all the time that I see.

And that's, they always tell me that their managers don't listen to them completely. They always cut them off. Or they go on to another topic when they are in the middle of a sentence. I know it's hard to focus. And I know that many of you out there are motivated engineers. You have to listen to people completely though. I have worked on this a lot myself and it's very, very, very, very difficult to do. The one trick I always tell people is listen for the silence. If you are having a conversation with someone, do not talk over them. Wait until you hear silence like this. And then speak.

I promise you the first few times you try to do it, it will be impossible to do. But after time, you will learn how to become a better listener. The quality of your conversations and relationships will totally improve. Just from that one little tip. And when I say acknowledge them, I mean repeat things back to someone and that's a way to really, again, strengthen a connection. So if someone says to you, "Anthony, this projects means a lot to me." You could say, "Listen John, I know this projects means a lot to you and that is why we have all our people working on it." So listening for the silence and acknowledging can be really big connection boosters when you are talking with someone.

Number four: you have to give people value. Networking and building relationships is a two-way street. There is too many people like me these days that want to go in, get what they need and get out. And they don't think about giving value to the other person. So if you want to build strong relationships, give value to people. I'll give you an example.

When I was doing civil engineering, I used to work a lot with different architects. And one architect I became friendly with. And we have lunch once in a while. We got connected through a couple

community programs we were in together. And I stayed in touch with him. I was a resource and I try to provide value to him. So if I found information about a local project or project that I knew would interest him and his firm, whether it was a proposal for them or whether it was maybe school design, I know they do a lot of school designs, I will send him an email and just say, "Hey, here is an article I found and I thought it might be helpful for you." That's it. I wouldn't say, "Hey by the way, do you have any work for us?"

I was just being a resource for this architect and nine times out of ten, if that architect or his company needed a civil engineer at the time, they were going to call our company. And you have to understand that people typically do business with people; one, that they are good with what they do and two, that they are comfortable with. So by giving value to people, they are really going to want to work more with you. They would want to be around you more and that's an important one.

Number five: join and get involved in professional associations. This is a big one. And the key here is not to join professional associations because I am sure you are probably thinking, "Duh! I have heard that a million times." But the key is to get involved in professional associations. When I say involved, I mean volunteer for a leadership position. That's how you take the experience of a professional association from a two or a three, to an eight, nine or ten. That's how you really get the most out of the associations. That's how you build the most relationships.

Because you are so involved, you are so engaged and you are making connections with the other people that are also volunteering. So please take that seriously and if you want to learn more about that, check out Episode 17 of the **Engineering Career Coach Podcast** and again, I'll link to it in the show notes. I interviewed the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers national president at the time, Barry Cordero, and he talked about in detail how powerful volunteering and getting active in an association can be. So definitely check that out.

Number six: join and get involved in community or other industry associations. Same idea but outside of your discipline now. Maybe it's a local community group. Maybe it's your school alumni group. That's something that a lot of engineers don't happen to do enough. A lot of larger schools have big engineering alumni associations, little more than your just regular alumni associations. So getting involved in that can be a very rewarding experience. It can help you give back to your school, maybe mentor other people there. I mean, you can also maybe get work. I know a guy who is very involved in his alumni association on a big school with a big campus and he ended up getting a lot of engineering work all over the school campus.

So get outside of the box of just your own technical discipline and get into other areas. Again, that's going to help you build more relationships. That is going to help you have more enjoyable careers and yield more opportunities. And that is what we are talking about here.

And the last strategy I have for you, number seven is to speak in front of an audience as much as possible. The way that you build relationships is you need to get in front of people because then those are the people that are going to come up to you and say, "Wow! Anthony, that was great. I enjoyed your talk. You gave great information. I'd like to get to know you more. Can we connect? Can we have lunch?"

It's just another way for you to get out there and meet the right people that you can build these relationships with. And I don't care if you are in front of 20 people or 500. It's still a way for you to increase your network. We talked about that a little bit in the episode that we did with Sylvia Montgomery which was just recently in Episode 53, becoming a visible expert. We talked about a lot about getting out there and speaking. Speaking is going to help you in communication. And communication is going to help you in networking is going to help you in a lot of aspects in engineering career.

So before I turn over to Chris Knutson, you can hear his little snippet interview with Dr.Z, let me just summarize the seven strategies that can help you to become a powerful networker. Build strong relationships by focusing on the personal side of the relationship. Be genuinely interested in people. Listen to others completely and acknowledge them. Number four is give people value. It's a two-way street when you build a relationship. Number five, join and get involved in professional associations. Get involved being the key there. Number six along the same line, join and get involved in community or other industry associations like your alumni associations. And finally number seven, speak in front of an audience as much as possible. And again, the show notes for this show will be located at engineeringcareercoach.com/howtonetwork. With that, let me hand it over to Chris for the Take Action Today segment and his interview with Dr.Z.

Take Action Today Segment:

Chris: Hey everyone! Chris here. I had the chance this past Friday to attend a really awesome project management leadership seminar out at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville here in Illinois with none other than the one and only Dr.Z, Dr.Zach Schaefer. For those of you who don't know him yet, Dr.Z is the founder and president of Spark The Discussion. He is a university professor, an author, a researcher, a consultant and important to us, he is a guest speaker at the **Engineering Career Success Summit** that is going to be taking place in Washington DC, the 30th of April through the 2nd of May, which is just about a month away. Really excited. I asked Zach to come out and share a little bit about what he will provide us at the summit in April. I am grateful he accepted. And so Dr.Z, can you tell us a little bit about what the participants, next month in Dc, might expect in your session?

Dr Z: Absolutely! First of all, thank you very much for having me on, Chris, and I am really excited about meeting the group of engineers next month. I'll briefly mention three things that will be expanded upon at the workshop itself. And the first one is, whenever I am dealing with highly skilled

technical people such as engineers, I understand that communication is often not in the foreground of what they are doing on a daily basis. It's in the background. And one of the things I'd like to do is try to help them slow things down on the workplace whenever they need to have, particularly important, difficult or strategic conversations, to make the process of communication more transparent. So one of the things we will be talking a bit about is transparency and how to make our communication more transparent and more effective.

Second thing we will discuss is what I like to call the one-minute why. And that's all I want to say about that one and sort of leave that as a teaser for the audience to bring that in to our workshop. Finally, I'll be talking a bit what I call: expect, enquire and act. And this is all about setting proper expectations or wowing the people that you are in communication with. Enquire and ask questions about what you have going on. And then enact and enforce the things and decisions that you make with the person. Because if you don't have that follow-up, you won't have any accountability.

Chris: Outstanding! That's great. And I'm actually really much looking forward to the one with the why. So I won't ask any questions even after we hang up so that I have got my own personal excitement and expectations for next month. So thanks a lot Dr.Z. I appreciate you coming on and taking off a few minutes out of your day.

And so everybody out there, that gives us a little bit of the taste of the material that you are going to be experience in Washington here in about a month from now. Thanks again to Dr.Z for his time today. And for myself, the great learning session that I had last Friday. I am looking forward to meeting up with him again in about a month at the **Engineering Career Success Summit**.

Check out the links in the show notes or you could register for that. And also if you want to take a moment yourself about Dr Z's work, you can go to his website. That's at www.sparkthediscussion.com. We will have that linked up in the show notes as well. And that's it for now from Illinois. I'll see all of you all in DC in about a month.

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