

**The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST
SESSION #63**

Communication Skills for Engineers – The Seven Deadly Sins and How to Overcome Them

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/champion

Episode Intro: This is *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*, the only podcast dedicated to helping engineers succeed in work and life. This show is hosted by engineering enthusiasts, Anthony Fasano and Chris Knutson. Both are professional engineers who found success early in their careers and now work together to help other engineers do the same. Now, it's show time!

Anthony: Hello! This is Anthony Fasano and this is the show for engineers who want to succeed in both work and life. Today we are going to focus on what I think is one of the most critical skills that you'll need to build to become a successful engineer and that is communication. In today's episode, I am going to be interviewing Skip Weisman who I will introduce momentarily here who is an expert in work place communication.

So, I'm really excited about this episode because this is a topic that got a lot of email messages and LinkedIn messages from engineers about communication and how they are having trouble with them, how it's really affecting their career negatively and really their life overall. So, before we jump in here to the main segment of our show and I introduce Skip, I'd like to take a moment to recognize our sponsor for today's episode.

If you want to be guaranteed to pass the FE, PE or SC exams, I recommend that you check out PPI's review courses. PPI is so confident that you will pass your exam after completing their course that if you don't, you can repeat the course for free. I'll have more information about PPI's review courses a little later on in the show.

Alright, now I want to give you a quote related to today's topic to bring us right into the show. And the quote goes as follows: "The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives" And that's by Anthony Robbins. And again, "The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives" Alright, let's jump right into the main segment.

Coaching Segment:

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Anthony: So, for today's main segment I do have with me here Skip Weisman. I'm going to introduce Skip here, tell you a little bit about his background and then we will jump right in with him and get in to some of the communication failures of engineers.

Skip Weisman is an internationally recognized expert in work place communication. He works with small business owners and their teams to create "championship company cultures," by getting all individuals in the work environment to communicate more effectively together. The result is more positive, more productive and even more profitable company work project in our case.

Recently, Skip has been invited to speak to engineering organizations and associations to help engineers and project managers to communicate more effectively within their own organizations, as well as to serve clients at much higher levels to improve project profitability. For the first 20 years of his professional career, Skip served the CEO for 5 different professional baseball franchises in the US. He left the game of his childhood dream falling the 2001 baseball season into personal lifestyle choices. Skip has appeared on Fox Business News and is often quoted in articles for Forbes.com and US News & World Report on workplace communication issues. His latest white paper report is entitled "The Missing Ingredient To Improving Employing Performance" and is available as a free download at his website at www.yourchampionshipcompany.com.

The show notes for the episode today will be located at engineeringcareercoach.com/champion. And the show notes will contain a summary of the key points discussed in today's episode as well as any links to the resources, websites or books that we mentioned during the show. And again, that's engineeringcareercoach.com/champion. So with that, let me welcome you Skip. Skip, how you doing today?

Skip: Great. Thanks so much for having me.

Anthony: Thanks for coming on. We really appreciate having you. Communication is such a critical component in engineering as you probably know because typically we work on project themes with a lot of different consultants on a very large stress pressure filled project. So, it's a pleasure to have you on to talk a little bit about engineering. So let's jump right in here. I know you want to talk a little bit about the risk of damaging relationships with people when it comes to communication. Why don't you start off and tell us a little bit about that?

Skip: Sure. As you know, working on a project team can get things done in anything especially in my background fresh from sports, communication is critical and just the way we say something or the way we don't say something is either going to improve the relationship or damage the relationship. And actually, through the work I've done the last 15 years with organizations, I have noticed there is actually three potentials outcomes from our communication. And how we communicate is either building trust between two people or it's slowly eroding the trust between two people or the scary thing is it's even instantly destroying the trust between two people or a team.

And if you think about that, the odds are not in your favor. There is two out of three who are not wanting to be going and so, it's vital that we consciously communicate regularly every time we're in front of somebody, in front of a team presenting or communicating that we're consciously communicating to build trust and really have an outcome in mind or you want to build a relationship at all costs, really, in the right way.

Anthony: I know it's a really good approach to take and to think about it. I mean, as an engineer, I know myself, we're don't always think in this way about developing this trust or whether, you were talking about a project architect that you're working with or a contract you're working with or your own supervisor or a client who might be a developer, a municipally; every action you take, every communication that you have with them is, like Skip said, is either building trust, eroding trust or destroying the trust. And I think that that's a great way to frame the communication. I think we all know that communication's important but when you talk about it like that, Skip, it really seems like, it puts a lot of value on it.

Skip: Yeah, it does when you realize that two out of those three options are going in the wrong direction. Again, the odds are not in your favor and you have to be really conscious about it and the only thing for engineers to really understand is the importance of trust. They haven't read the book *The Speed of Trust* by Steven M.R. Covey. I highly recommend it.

What Steven has said in his research that as trust goes down, speed goes down and costs go up. And conversely, as trust goes up, speed goes up and costs go down. So, that's directly relating to this success of the projects engineers are working on and speaks of the value and the importance of trust is not just some fuzzy, fluff soft thing. It's vitally important to a project's success.

Anthony: We'll link to that book in the show notes for sure. So, let's keep moving here. Skip, I know that you have seven big mistakes that engineers make when they communicate and that causes virtually all their communication problems. So, let's dive into those seven mistakes.

Skip: Sure. They are all framed in the way that there is something missing or there is a lack of something going on in their communication they're not thinking about. They are not bringing to the table. And the first is the lack of specificity. And that is where we expect mostly it's not malicious but it's just really unconscious communication. It's way easy communication habits where we are not specific enough. And now in the engineering field obviously, there is a lot of specificity around. What needs to be done to create a successful project or a successful initiative or whatever regarding the technical aspects of what needs to be implemented or applied to get your project done.

The thing we're talking about, the lack of specificity is just how our communicating with other people, managing expectations or setting next steps or just following through. And we've all probably had those situations where we've been somewhere at the right time but in the wrong occasion or the right

location and the wrong time. Things like that. So, if you have ever walked away from a conversation knowing you didn't had all the information but for whatever reason you did not push back or ask for more information; then you walked away and you got to figure it out after the fact or call somebody else or you just leave a conversation confused and you don't get all the information you need or you don't give all the information you need.

Lack of specificity is really a, it's an epidemic and not just in the engineering field but a lot of different industries and even in our personal life because we make assumptions and you know, we learned when we were in our age about what happened when we assume things and yet, we still fall into that pattern of just allowing non-specific communications to get in our way.

Anthony: Yeah. And I'm just thinking about it too. Some of the examples I know from when I was doing my engineering design work, I mean if you're dealing with a client and they have a site that's 5 acres and you tell them, "Well you know, looks like there is some wet lines on the site." Some wet lines could be half their site or could be half an acre out of the five acres. So, I think it's even more important in some of these project situations where if you're not specific, it could make or break a project and then that goes back to trust factor that could destroy the trust of people. So, that's sounds like a big one especially in the engineering realm. Alright Skip, what's the next one?

Skip: Next one is what we call the lack of desirable behaviors. And lack of desirable behaviors basically means you're telling people what we want them not to do or just stop doing. "So, stop coming late to meetings and make sure you don't forget that report on Friday." We are framing our conversation in things that we don't want I suppose than what we do want. And what this does is it causes again confusion or a subset of the lack of specificity.

That's very specific way to frame the look of the conversations so thanks from what you don't want, you tell them what you do want. You can tell them what you want them to stop doing or what you don't want and you need to file that up with the specific behavior you want because it creates trial and error. They hear the "You don't want this, you don't want that" and so they try something else and that's wrong too. And they try something else and that's not right either. And it just creates a lot of negativity between people because the person feels like they are always getting their hands off and not doing anything right. And for not giving clear and specific directions as to what we do want, again, this is something that undermines the relationship. It creates confusion at workplace between team members and stuff.

So, we need to focus on the desirable behaviors that we want. This includes actual activities, things we need to get returned to us, whatever, but also, in just how we show out in what our behaviors are. So, there is a lot of new ones to this and it's really difficult initially to be thinking in these terms because think about what we grew up hearing as a little child. You know, parents were always telling us to stop doing things and not do this, not do that, and stop doing this.

Anthony: Right.

Skip: And so, it becomes part of our habit of communication and that's how we grow up and that just develops in us. So, to think differently, it take a lot of conscious thought. So, what do I want instead? When I do my seminars on this, I get people started thinking about, okay, this is the behaviors you've been saying you don't want. You keep getting more of it. What's the antithesis? What's the opposite? What do you want instead? And they have to start recalibrating the language to articulate that and it's a new habit to build and sometimes it could be challenging at the very beginning to begin, again, thinking more consciously in this way.

Anthony: Sure. And I thought of it when you said too. I could probably do better job with that with my kids.

Skip: Yeah. And adults are too children at often times. They want direction. They want clear direction. And sometimes, we just don't invest enough time in thought and to giving people what they need.

Anthony: Yeah, absolutely! I mean, I've been coaching a lot of engineering managers and I know that this is something that they struggle with because it's always about telling people how not to do it instead of telling them how to do it. So, that's a good one. Alright Skip, what's number three?

Skip: Three is lack of immediacy, which means basically we are putting off the conversation. And when I do my seminars and everybody raises their hands, 80% of the room raises their hands and they have a conversation that they need to have that they've been putting off. And I say, "What's the problem? Why are you putting these off?"

It's always a difficult conversation. You know, it's the bad news. I'm sure projects for whatever it is, there is engineers that face this in a regular basis because there is some scope creep on the project or there is some cost overruns or something or there is some change or something they have to articulate. And often times, we hold off on delivering that bad news, wishing and hoping something's going to change or make it easier and rarely it ever gets easier. And it usually just gets worse the more time that passes.

And so, it's basically communication procrastination. Putting things off. In the moment, in that meeting may not be the best time to have that discussion and what we have to do is we have to look for the first next most appropriate time. And most of us know when that is. It should be between 24 to 48 hours and shouldn't fester and yet, we continue to put off those conversations because they are challenging, they are difficult. It's bad news type of thing.

Anthony: Yeah. And that's a good one as well. I remember having that situation when I had to tell a client that it was going to cost more than we anticipated and so it's difficult but you try to play out some of the positive points and some of the good things you've done on the project but regardless,

it's still a difficult conversation. Alright Skip, what's number four?

Skip: Number four is the lack of respectful rebuttals. And this always creates nice conversations in my seminars because basically it's about using 'but' when you're rebutting somebody or trying to have a spirit debater or a conversation with somebody around certain items. So, and we all have heard this language before. "You know Anthony, you did a really great job BUT here are some of the things you've got to think about." My favorite, it comes up in workshops sometimes. "You know, I'm going to give you a raise but..."

Anthony: Right.

Skip: You know you're not getting the raise. And so, anytime we use the word 'but' to transition from a positive thing that we want to build somebody up with to something that were going to give them, some constructive feedback; it's very disingenuous. It shuts down the other person's thought process and they realize that the other shoe is going to drop at a moment and they stop listening often times or it blazes the emotional intensity of the conversation Makes it much more difficult because the person really feels the other person is being disingenuous and they really don't mean what they just said as far as the positive thing. They just want to get their point across on the constructive part of it.

And it's funny. I get so much feedback from my clients saying, "You know, I just wished they were more open to constructive feedback." And well, often times, as you know, it's how it's delivered. And if we are delivering it in that type of languages and you know the positive thing and then saying, "But, well..." The person is not going to hear, is not going to feel that your constructive feedback is genuine because the first part of the conversation really didn't feel good for you.

So, we need a better way to transition those things and give people the feedback they need while we are also supporting the situation where we do want to build somebody up and make them feel they are doing good and here are some ways we can just do it even better next time or whatever. You got to know what language. You got to be very conscious of how you're articulating that next phrase when you transition away from using 'but' and the easiest way to do it is just to use 'and'.

And again, this is one of those long ingrained communication habits that is difficult to break mainly because, again one, you're not going to say the same phrase the same way but you would have used 'and' as the transition, as if you were going to use the historical book. And so, again it takes a whole conscious thought to rephrase what we're saying next. And there is also two other words that you may try and substitute and that's how I've learned 'although' and "however". They are really thoughts in disguise. So, we have to stay away from those as well.

Anthony: I guess one other point on this I'd assume is that if you want to get better at this is to be, obviously using different words like 'and', but also when you are giving them kind of the good part of it, you want to be kind of genuine and you're not just saying something good so that you can and then

say “But here is something bad...,” right?

Skip: Right. They have to be genuine and this is where specificity comes in too. So, you’d say, “You know Anthony, you did a really great job because of a, b and c.” You know, when you point out the specific things you did well on the project and then you’d say something, “And here is some other ways you can make it even better next time.”

Anthony: Got it!

Skip: It sounds kind of strange but in reality, just by using ‘and’ instead of ‘but’, it allows the positive comments to linger and stick and it’s not nearly as detrimental as the word ‘but’, ‘however’ or ‘although; in that situation but specificity out on the front end of what you did well or what you liked or what you experienced goes a long way of making sure it’s more genuine statement definitely.

Anthony: Excellent! Alright, let’s get into five Skip.

Skip: Number five is the lack of appropriate tone and body language. And this is where people will arise at you or pointing fingers or folding the arms, the softest level probably, subconscious level maybe. And then you have the other side of it where there is actually raised voices, yelling and berating people in public. And I’m sure in your world, especially when you’re dealing with people in the construction field, in engineering and architectural projects, sometimes the communications is not at the level. It should be as far as the appropriate tone and body language and knowing that industry, it can get pretty nasty.

And so, this is one of the areas that can really instantly destroy the relationship where you’re berating people in public or yelling or raising your voices. And surprisingly, it happens more than you’d think and a lot of people in my seminars or projects have been exposed to this and it’s not a positive experience. And here is the thing: even if you’re not the direct victim of being yelled at or berated at in public, or even behind closed doors, it creates sort of a PTSD at workplace even if you’re just around it. When it happens, it impacts the whole environment.

Anthony: Yeah, it’s contagious.

Skip: And this really comes from a lack of emotional intelligence and not being able to manage our emotions in this situation. So, I strongly encourage people to get some training and coaching around their emotional intelligence aspect and be able to really manage their emotions so they can communicate more effectively with the best appropriate tone and body language there.

Anthony: That’s a big one. And if you’re the person that often raises your voice or yells, one of the things I’d say to you is you have to think about how that behavior is going to affect the outcome of your situation because most likely, as soon as you yell at someone, they are going to turn off and

they are not going to want to help you. They are not going to want to work for you. They are not going to want to get the job done immediately. And then of course, long term there could be other effects. So, I think, like Skip said, you probably need to get some coaching on emotional intelligence because it's not that easy to break that habit. And the bottom line is, it's not going to help you. Let's put it that way.

Skip: Yeah. And again, this is a long-term habit and it is a lot to do with our beliefs and all sorts of stuff and not being conscious in the moment of the impact. It's a very selfish way to communicate. It definitely takes some practice to be able to really take that step back and we have learned it when we were 5 years old when we get upset to count to ten before we respond. You really should be focusing on responding to somebody as opposed to reacting in the moment. And if we need to pull away and find a more appropriate time to have that conversations when the emotions are a little more subdued, then we should certainly take that road.

Anthony: Alright Skip, what's number six?

Skip: Six is a lack of focused attention. And this is where people are multitasking while you're talking to them or you're talking to somebody, you're trying to play on your smartphone, send a text, type an email or you're in a meeting with somebody and Paul comes through and you're right in the middle of a statement and somebody puts their hand up, "Oh, I got to take this." And again, it's devaluing the other person. There's a huge miss in the power of being able to multitask.

So many of us in the work place today are, I'm sure like in the job description or it's in the job advertisement, you must be able to multitask. Well, there is really about multitasking when you are conversing with another human being. That I think in this place human beings can really multitask. You know, it's like playing a musical instrument. When you have multiple limbs doing various things playing the guitar or drums or something like that, that's multitasking. Maybe for driving a manual speed Mobil or you got the shift in the clutch and all that stuff, that's multitasking.

Communicating with another human being is impossible to multitask. A lot of the other person feeling devalued and then and you missing some important message. So, we need to put the smartphone down. Give people focused attention when we are talking to them and just be in the moment because that's really where trust is built and things are valued. There is so many pressures on all of us today to get things done and sort them out. Technology's been a great thing and it's also been a detriment here because it brings us this false belief that we can multitask. And so, we need to put that down.

The only thing from perspective, especially from an engineering perspective that I've found some of the seminar that I've done with the industries is if engineers don't feel like they're being heard or people are not giving them their full attention, I say there is two reasons for that. One is you're not commanding people's attention and that's by the way you communicate. It can be your tone, your voice, inflections. It's the subject. It's how distinct you are in communicating in a way that gets people

to want to pay attention when there is all the back story and a lot of lingo, verbiage from an engineer perspective. It shows a lot of lingo you could use and that some people are not in the industry don't know but it's common to you. So, you need to really use the right language to get people, to command people's attention.

And then, the second thing is you're not demanding people's attention. And by that I don't mean you grab them by their throat and say, "Listen to me. This is important." At the beginning of the conversation you've got to ask for it. "You know Anthony, is this still a good time for us to talk?" You know, it opens up that permission where they say, "No, this is fine. This is a good time. I have a few minutes," or they'll say, "No, it really isn't." And then you could ask if you could schedule a more appropriate time because I needed your attention for the next 15 minutes on this topic. And then, you schedule a more appropriate time where you can both have that 10 or 15 minutes of focused attention time.

And so, I find that it's a revelation to people when I tell them these two things: you have to command people's attention by your communication style and topics that you speak it out and make it succinct and rub it in to the audience, even if it's the individual one-on-one audience. And then, demanding people's attention just simply by asking for it and saying, "I need your attention for the next few minutes. This is really important for us to talk about." And then you can negotiate the most appropriate time to do that. And so, that's probably a big tip that engineers could really learn till they command and demand people's attention more effectively.

Anthony: That's great. Alright, what's number seven Skip?

Skip: Number seven is the lack of directness and candor and this is about the elephants that Rue and I were talking about. I know not everybody knows what's happening. It's beating around the bush when we're talking to somebody, wishing and hoping they are going to get it and just pull it through osmosis or out of the sky on what we mean.

And that is also the thing where we are on project teams and there is, say 8 to 10 people on the project team and 1 or 2 people are dropping the ball, not falling through, not responding. And instead of the team leader, the engineer going to that individual whom everybody knows is the problem, we just call a team meeting and start talking about team work. How we really need to support each other, one for all, all for one. Let's make sure we are falling through with everybody and supporting each other. Everybody nods their heads in the meeting and then they walk out there.

And 8 out of 10 people know that they are not the problem and they are resentful of the team leader and also the people who are the perpetrators and it just devalues trust because the team leader's not dealing with the issue directly with the perpetrators. They're trying to just do it softly and in general context, wish and hope that people would get it.

So, the lack of directness and candor is number seven as is number one, the lack of specificity because they are all related. And I think that those are the two most important communication issues going on in organizations today. If we could solve the specificity issue and the lack of directness and candor issue, I think it'd solve 80% of your communication issues.

Anthony: So, you have given us the seven biggest mistakes which are lack of specificity, lack of desirable behaviors, lack of immediacy, lack of respectful rebuttals, lack of appropriate tone and body language, lack of focused attention, and lack of directness and candor. And for those of you that want to just have those in front of you, you can visit engineeringcareercoach.com/champion and we will list them out there. So Skip, just talk in general a little bit. I know these are all different issues but why do these mistakes occur and continue to perpetuate?

Skip: Yeah. That's a great question. Actually, there is three primary reasons. One is just ignorance. We don't know about them. These communication things are just developed over time and nobody's framed it in quite this way before. The feedback I get from this seminar on the seven communication sins is usually the highest attended conference whenever I'm delivering it. And people come up to me afterwards and say, "Nobody's ever framed it in this way to us and I can really pick and choose in all these and work through them and build habits over time."

And so, the first thing is the lack of awareness and the lack of framing so that we define them in the way that we are going to do something about them. If you get into any organization today and ask what things need to be improved, communication is always going to be at the very top one or two. And they never seems to get any better and where we have to agree that communication needs to improve, it will mean to me again nothing ever changes because ideally we don't define it in a way that makes sense.

And so, I find that just putting a frame around it and being aware of the seven inner contexts that we can chip away at is assuredly valuable. So, number one is, main reason is we just don't define it. You see, ignorance, lack of awareness of what the real causes are, of what the real situation is. So, these seven provide a framework you can start chipping away at.

Now, the second thing is while using communication habits, you may be aware that you need to communicate more specifically and we just don't because we choose not to. We just fall back into old communication habits and we don't work on it. And if you want to move forward in your career, Anthony, you know you really have to keep getting better each and every day and be better than the person next to you.

And it's amazing if you look at these seven. How easy it is, really, to separate yourself from the competition if you work in an advanced engineering career by improving your communication skills. And so, you just have to really make that commitment that I am going to build new habits of communication and I'm going to be much more conscious communicator and I'm not going to fall

victim to this. I'm going to work on communication because it is a major skill.

And then the third is low self-esteem. And low self-esteem is epidemic in our society, in our culture. And so, that low self-esteem is going to prevent us from being more specific. At some point, a lot of people tell me that, "Sometimes, I don't want to be specific because I want to get myself some wiggle room." I may not be able to get it to somebody by Friday so I am not going to tell them. I am not going to be specific. And that's all where I'm good but that's also holding yourself to a very low standard.

And I think especially in engineering field, I don't think it's that difficult to set yourself apart from people if you start making commitments and hold yourself to a higher standard. And so, that's a self-esteem issue. Not being directly candid with people is a self-esteem issue because we want to be liked. We don't want to hurt people's feelings and we don't have necessary of the skills to frame things in the right way, to be directly candid with people.

And so, a great way to overcome is to build better communication. How about some skills that will raise your self-esteem and believe that you do have value to get what you're asking for? And so, I do a lot of communication coaching around that I call the five communication beliefs that we probably don't have time to go into. I can send you a resource for that if you want to put that out to your listeners as well about the five power communication beliefs that will help you build self-esteem. So, these are the three primary reasons why these communication habits are perpetuating.

Anthony: We just went through all these, your explaining why they occur, why they perpetuate. Why shouldn't engineer take time to fix these problems?

Skip: It's a great question, again, I think it comes back to only if they want to get ahead in their career. Again, it's not challenging not to set yourself apart. And so, I think the reason is where do you want to go, what you want to achieve in the world and the thing is going to move you ahead. It's going to set you apart. It's going to impress people when you're in front of them either individually or collectively. It's how you communicate.

So, it's such a foundational skill that we take for granted. We've been communicating since we were born. As soon as we are out of the birth canal, we start crying and that's a form of communication. And these verbal communication that impacts and then their action. And so, we just take it for granted. We've been communicating since we came out of the birth canal and people have been communicating ever since and no one really teaches us how to do it.

Anthony: Yeah. And I ask that question obviously. I know that's an obvious question. I mean, you want to fix these problems, you communicate better. But I think the point of asking that question is really to reinforce the listeners that anybody would want to fix these problems but it's not that easy of a thing to do and Skip kind of stressed it in his last point about habits. You have to build better habits and that takes dedication. That takes focus. That takes practice everyday and like Skip said, you

have got to be more conscious about your communication efforts when you go into a conversation.

And this is something that we've talked about, I think in recent podcast is when you have a conversation, you're going to have a meeting, have a plan for that meeting. Go in there with an objective of what you want to get out of that meeting, even maybe some of the things you want to express to people so that you can be more conscious about it and you can avoid some of the mistakes or problems that Skip talked about here. Have some specific point shouted down that you want to get across. And that's what it takes really to improve your communication habits. Skip, what strategies can you kind of give out here as we get ready to close down here as far as you know, overcoming these challenges?

Skip: There's a couple that I mentioned on command and demand thing for getting focused attention. Being more in the moment with people. I don't think there is a powerful one. The one from specificity and this is, I'm going to challenge everybody listening right now because I think this is a big one that can really separate you from the pack. If you call any of your colleagues voicemails and leave a message, typically you're going to hear a message that says, "This is Skip Weisman. Thank you for calling. Your call is very important to me. Please leave a message and I'll call you back as soon as possible." As soon as I can or at my first available moment whatever, right?

That is non-specific and it sounds just like everybody else. The person calling you has no real belief as to when you're going to get back to them. You know, as soon as possible means absolutely nothing. That is one phrase we're going to have to lose and get rid of especially in these type of messages. So, if you call my voicemail literally, if you call it today, it would say, "Thank you for calling. I promise to reply to your voicemail by text, phone or email within three hours." And 99% of the time I've fulfilled that commitment. And I do it for two reasons.

One, I want to give people certainty that they are going to hear from me. And secondly, I want to hold myself to a higher standard so I know when I get that voicemail I've got three hours to get back to this person. And 99% of the time, you're not going to get that person on the phone anyway if you call them back. You're going to get their voicemail. So, it will take you literally 30 seconds to return back to the person's phone call and just acknowledge receipt and say, "I've got your message Anthony. I'm working on it. I get your point. I'll get back to you by the end of the week with an update just to know where I'm at."

Anthony: And I can attest because I left Skip a voicemail and he called me back within a few hours. I think that's a great way to definitely make yourself stand out. So, what we're going to do here is we're not done yet. We're going to get into our Take Action Today segment in a minute and I'm going to ask Skip to give us another strategy, that something any conversation you can apply right away today. Before we do that though, just one question for you Skip. Can you tell us a little bit about, we didn't get to talk about this but, how it was to serve as a CEO for these baseball franchises. What kind of an experience was that?

Skip: It fulfilled my childhood dream.

Anthony: Yeah. I'm sure it had challenges and I'm sure it was fun. But I mean, it seems it would be a pretty interesting job.

Skip: Yeah. I mean, from the time I was seven years old I wanted to be involved in professional sports and baseball in particular and I couldn't play the game in the early age and I knew I wasn't going to be the first base person in New York Mets as I wanted to be. So, I had to figure out a way to stay close to the game. I got Masters in Sports Management and did an internship in South of North Carolina and I was fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time a couple of times. I became a CEO at 26 years old at my first baseball team and I was able to progress from there. You know like I'm saying Anthony, I went to a ball park every day. That was my job. I go to a ball park every day. It was a great job for so long. I met some of my childhood heroes along the way and got a party with my childhood heroes along the way. So...

Anthony: That's awesome.

Skip: Yeah. It was a lot of fun.

Anthony: Alright. So, what we're going to do now is we're going to jump into our Take Action Today segment and we're going to close it out with Skip giving us one real actionable piece of advice that you can use maybe in your conversations, in your communication efforts that you can start to employ immediately.

Take Action Today Segment:

Anthony: Alright. So, here we are on our Take Action Today segment of the show. I really enjoyed this episode. Skip dived into a lot of different challenges for engineers with communication. So, I'm going to turn it over to him in a minute here to give us just two more actionable tips. But before we do, I'd like to just offer a word from today's episode sponsor.

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Alright Skip. Let's finish this out. Give us two actionable tips that engineers can use to try to improve their communication efforts.

Skip: Looking at all seven of these things can be pretty overwhelming and whenever we are overwhelmed, it shuts us down and we don't take action. And so, I want to just chip this away and make it as simple as possible. Look at the seven and pick one of the seven. I'd recommend starting with specificity. Whether it be changing your voicemail messages or whatever it is we talked about, something more specific from a timeline of you know, you don't have to use my three-hour response but 24 hours I think is reasonable to commit back to somebody and you can certainly do that.

But, pick specificity or pick one of the others. Just pick one and focus on it for the next 30 days. And say, "I'm going to be better at this for the next 30 days," and then tell somebody about it. I'm going to work on improving this aspect for the next 30 days and I'd like you to hold me accountable to it and give me feedback on it at the end of the 30-day period, whenever I'll come back to you. It's a really powerful way to build new habits, making you a more conscious communicator. That's the number one.

The second thing is I also want people to understand is that these communication occur at three levels. One is our self-communication. So, we're committing these communication sins to ourselves. We all personally communicate with 24 hours a day, 7 days a week every week of our life. It's also happening one-on-one with other individuals and it's happening only present in public. Either around the meeting room table in a meeting or presenting from in front of the room.

So, these habits occur at three different levels which means it's impacting 21 contexts of your vibe. Now it's even a border context. And so, if you need help, I highly recommend going to Toastmasters. It's a great, small, safe incubator to improve your communication skills and so, those are my two habit, my two tips. One, pick one of these seven, work on it for 30 days and get an accountability partner to give you feedback on it. And if you really want to raise your level of communication, build new habits consistently. There is Toastmasters groups in every community that meet regularly and it's a great fun way to meet people and improve your communication skills in a very safe environment.

Anthony: Toastmasters is wonderful. I think I mentioned it pretty much on every other episode here

because it's so helpful. It is really helpful. And just so everyone knows, the reason that we do this Take Action Today segment at the end of the show is because most of the time, whether it's myself, my co-host, Christian or any of our guests, this stuff that we are talking about in these episodes are not the kind of things that you're going to stop listening to the podcasts and go change in a couple of minutes or couple of hours.

They take a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of work on your part but the point of the Take Action Today segment is just to give you a few small steps that you can take to improve yourself because if you said to yourself, "Geez, I just got these seven problems I got to deal with now," then that's like staring up at a big mountain that you have to climb. Whereas if you say, like Skip said, if you just focus on one thing at a time or one of the seven at a time like specificity, all of a sudden that makes it more doable and that's kind of what we want to do with the show is give you actionable pieces of advice so that you can really improve. So with that, I want to thank Skip for coming on the show. Skip, where is the best place that the listeners can find you? Is that your website or...?

Skip: Yeah. The website is yourchampionshipcompany.com and I use championship company as general term, you're CEO of your own company, so, it's always going to fit for individuals as well. yourchampionshipcompany.com. And another thing I'd like to offer, it's a lot more learning on this is you can get the right paper on the seven communications and free webinar reporting on the seven deadly communication sins. It's on webpage which is howtoimproveleadershipcommunication.com.

Anthony: howtoimproveleadershipcommunication.com. Okay, great. We'll link to that in the show notes and again, the show notes for this episode on our website will be at engineeringcareercoach.com/champion. You can go there. You can get a summary of everything we talked about, all the links, books, paper information, all that information there. And also, if you want to leave any comments at the bottom of the show notes, I'll be monitoring them and I'll kick them over to Skip if some kind of question for him so that we can both answer you right there. Until next time, please continue to engineer your own success.

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