

The

ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

HELPING ENGINEERS SUCCEED
IN WORK AND LIFE

The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #66

Maneuvering Your Engineering Career Through Planned and Unplanned Transitions

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/transition

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!

Chris: Hello **Engineering Career Coach** listeners! I hope this week's episode finds you to an awesome in your engineering career. Finds me to an awesome in mine and I'm excited about this particular episode because of the topic that's near and dear to me, something that I'm going through right now that is called a career transition. So, I'm going through one right now. I have retired from the military this past month. I'm moving into the private sector. So, the interview really is something that was helpful for me.

There is a couple of really good points that our guest, James Lehman, is going to give into. There is some great strategies, great advice that comes from a 20-plus year career, 20-plus changes in his career. He is going to get into those details. He is going to talk about the things that he's learned. Often times, through the school of hard knocks in career transitions, it's just some great information he's going to pass on. And one thing that's for certain in today's engineering industry - it's highly unlikely that you're going to remain with the same firm or organization in your entire career. No matter what your current situation is, whether you're actually in the middle of a transition, you're thinking about a transition, or the transition word is not even coming to your mind; there is going to be some good information in today's episode. But before I get into the main segment, I want to take a moment to recognize our sponsor for today's episode.

If you're thinking about taking the FE, PE or SC exam this year, I recommend that you check out PPI. They are the leader in engineering exam preparation. For a special 15% discount, use promo code **coach** at ppi2pass.com/coach. Again, that's ppi2pass.com/coach and use the promo code **coach** and check out for a 15% discount on your order.

Alright. Now, I want to give you a quote related to today's topic to bring us into the show and this one comes from Jack Canfield. He's a successful author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series and he tells us that: "Switching from one career to another can be scary, but it also can be a thrilling experience."

Look at it as an opportunity to really go after what you want to accomplish in life and make a difference in the world. The key is to take small, conscious steps and prepare yourself for a successful transition.” And this is just a great segue, a great key up for us in the discussion I’m going to have with James Lehman, talking about these conscious steps that we can take to prepare ourselves for a successful engineering career transition.

Coaching Segment:

Chris: Alright! I’m really excited to introduce you to today’s guest in the **Engineering Career Coach Podcast**. I had a chance to meet with him shortly in St. Louis before departing there for Germany and I’m glad he agreed to come on the show. I have with me the one, the only, James Lehman.

James is the author of the new book *Maneuvering Your Career – 20 Strategies to Prepare You for Voluntary (or Involuntary) Career Transition*. James has either experienced or witnessed just about anything that can happen in the workplace relating to people and their careers. He himself has had 20 job transitions, and as a Senior HR Professional, he has spent more than 20 years working in Human Resources. James also is a Certified Professional Coach, and works with both groups and individuals helping people access their power so they can own their job, and achieve their dreams.

The show notes for today’s show will be at engineeringcareercoach.com/transition. And as always, the show notes will contain a summary of the key points discussed in today’s episode, as well as links to any of the resources, websites, or books that are mentioned during the show. And again, those notes are located at engineeringcareercoach.com/transition. So James, thanks for being on the show! Because I believed that the material on career transitions that you outlined in your book are going to be extremely helpful for any engineer who is at the transitioning now, thinking about transition, or wanting to prefer if they have to go through an unforeseen transition. So, thanks a lot for coming on the show.

James: Thanks. My pleasure! I’m glad to be with you. And I’m glad you made it over your way back safe.

Chris: Yeah, thanks very much. That was a physical transition so, very good on that and we don’t touch too much on that in the book but we go more along in the career transition side. And we met back in May. We talked a little bit about some of the transitions that I myself am going through in my career. But, for those listeners who haven’t had a chance to tap into your book yet, why don’t you tell us a little bit more about the book?

James: Sure, yeah. I wrote the book last year after I lost a job at 20. I realized there was one common denominator in all of my work transitions and that was actually me. I searched for what I was going to do next and then kind of at my lowest, it hit me. Why not use all of my experience, most the

good and the bad, maneuvering through the work force over the past 30 years to help someone else? So, I enrolled in the coaching program with a coaching school called iPEC and I started writing the book.

Chris: That's awesome. And I've heard quite a bit about iPEC before. I know that Anthony Fasano was a graduate from that program as well. So, what did you learn when you went through that process and what have you learned through the process that led you to put this book together? You've got a lot of wisdom that you share in that book with everyone. Can you show a little bit more about what you learned yourself as you went through all those processes?

James: Sure, yeah. First of all, it was very therapeutic for me. I relived a lot of the horror stories, not only my experiences but also the crazy bosses and the dysfunctional work environments that we all work in every day. I guess I had a lot to say because of the stories that just got leaked out on to the pages. But, through the coaching training and also my faith, I know that everything is for a purpose. And so, my passion now is to help others get unstuck from their careers, identify those gremlins, eliminating the lease that's holding them back and help them move forward.

The biggest premise of the book is to take control now, whether you're still working or currently in between jobs and to take the steps necessary to put yourself in the back of the boat. The book kind of has a river theme because I am like in my career to a river. Here in Missouri, we have those wonderful crystal clear roof head ice coal rivers in the mountains of the Great Oakeley and the thing is, they all have rocks that are just beneath the surface or rapids that take you around the next bend and you never know what is going to hang you up or even tip you over.

The river also has a power that is hard to control. What I found is that by placing the paddle in the water in certain ways, you can harness that power to make the boat go wherever you want it to go. Just like in our career, we don't know what's coming up tomorrow or next week or next year, but we can take steps right now to be sure we are prepared for whatever is around the next bend.

Chris: That's right on. What do you think are some of the things that engineers that might be able to do to get themselves prepared for those unforeseen situations that are going to come up? I mean, it's obviously hard maybe for some people to picture what that might be just because it is unforeseen, but what are some of the tips that you would give to somebody who is not even thinking about a transition?

James: Yeah, sure. I have 20 different strategies in the book but, if we are talking about what we can do right now, I'd pick these two. One is kind of knowing what's hot, knowing what's hot out there in the market place. And the second one is what I call visualizing the future.

Chris: Keep telling us a little bit more about knowing what's hot. I think I've got my own ideas but let's hear what you get with this one.

James: Yeah, certainly. In my book in chapter 6, I talked about the importance of keeping your skills up to date. For engineers, I'd think that with the speed the world is moving, it is quite difficult to keep up with what's going on. Something new is being emitted every day right? So, the best way to know what's hot is to admit it yourself. But as you are working on that, here is some tips for you.

Everybody should be active on LinkedIn. They make it so easy to stay up to date in your industry. Most of us think of LinkedIn as a place to connect with people and to build a network, and that is so true. And I think you guys talked a bit through some of your other podcasts but those are great resources for staying up to date. LinkedIn allows you to join interest groups or groups that are in your industry or for areas that might have other folks who are doing the same thing as you're doing and you could join up to 50 of those groups and you can use these groups to stay current.

Look for and join the groups that include pop leaders in your industry. You can include your Alma model, your networking groups. You can also include national groups that relates to what you're doing. The more members these groups have, the better. Because that instantly grows your network and the people you are connected to. Like we members including you can post articles, research, post questions and then these leading thoughts are sent to you so you don't have to go looking for these stuff and it's all right there. You just got to pick and choose what you want to read.

Another great way to keep up with what's hot is to use that little known Stock app that probably came on your smartphone or device. You can add the Stock symbol to companies in your industry, the even company you work for today, companies where there are industry leaders or companies that you would like to work for someday. And check back there frequently. Supposedly, reports from stock analysts and press releases or annual reports; all that information that you can use to try to keep up with what's going on. Those are great ways because then you can start participating in conversations and other leaders in your organization about what's going on. Shows that you are engaged and interested in what's happening.

Chris: James, those are both great inputs especially the one on LinkedIn because you highlighted, we talked a little bit about that in some of the other podcasts out there. You mentioned about being active and being able to place articles and do things like that in those groups. What are your thoughts on an individual kind of lurking or being active? Do you think if they are active within those groups, that's going to help them on how to get themselves better connections if they need to tap into those transition?

James: Absolutely, yeah. You know, the great thing about LinkedIn is that you can use it for, like I said building your network with people, but also gaining insight into what's going on that's hot. But, as those articles or those research kind of points are being posted; I wouldn't call it lurking. I would just call it commenting. So, you can read those things. You can share them with others. You can share those with people in your network. You can even make a couple of comments. You don't have to

write your own articles or wrote your own research. You can just read what someone else is doing and if you agree with it or add a comment or post a question. Good thing about that then is that uses your name and adds attention to who you are out to your network. So, as you post those things once a week or whatever, even if it's just a quick share or a quick comment, it gets your name out there in front of those engineers.

Chris: That's a great point, especially the piece where some people get intimidated by thinking that they have to create their own materials. So, I like your comment that you certainly don't need to do that. You could look for other relevant materials in that group and share that. So, I think that's a great point. You mentioned a second strategy – visualizing the future. What can you tell us about that?

James: This strategy kind of follows the book called *Preparing for Change* and I'll tell you, the average number of jobs or work transitions that we have today is six. If you have not yet experienced a job transition, I promise you most probably will. The best advice I have is to be prepared. And in the chapter on visualizing your future, I'll just grab a process for building a business plan for you, kind of you incorporated but I have adapted the small business administration business plan template. This will be the same template a small entrepreneur might get with a banker or now on TV, that popular TV show. They sell what they have to their highest investor, right?

Chris: Yeah.

James: The research says that today the work force is made up about 30% freelance or sub-contract workers. By 2020, this is short few years from now, the work force is going to be about 50% contractors. So, I can tell you from working in HR for 20 years, it used to be that companies wanted to keep their contractors and employees as separate as possible from the administrator point of view because of the government regulation and employment tax considerations. But, those still exists today but the more modern HR system in full design for having corporate contractors into the work force so the managers can review their entire organizations when during resource plannings.

So, I used to figure out either tricks to being able to get these contactors into the system but now as they charged us with some limitations, that functionality is right out of the box. Again, that's another area that's hot. So, what we need to do today to be able to make that business cage, why that company needs to hire us for the skills and experience that we offer, whether it's a regular employee position or where 6 to 12 contractor down the road. And the business plan is a great template to use as a way to get prepared. I do have a copy available on my website that's available to download if anyone is interested in that. You have my website part of the materials for this podcast, correct?

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. We will definitely put the link in there. I think something that's relevant that I just took out of this portion that you just mentioned was the fact of the increasing reliance on outsourcing by virtue of any companies and I can see this very much so in the engineering industry where the firm may not have enough business to be able to to sustain having full-time individuals or

staff so they reach out and bring those people in.

And I think for any of you listeners that are out there that are interested in visualizing your future as a freelancer, as an engineer for higher if you will, the material that James has that he's going to provide you is definitely good resource to get a look at as you start trying to formulate with what might look like for your future. So, I appreciate you showing that. Any other tips that you might share on this visualizing the future, this portion of freelancing or entrepreneur? That's something that Anthony and I get a lot of questions on for engineers who are interested in generating their own transition. So, transitioning from a cubicle to moving out on their own.

James: Yeah. And you know, I think the key there is to make sure that you're always going to be working on what's hot. So, we talk about knowing what's hot is good, but then how do you get yourself out there so that people know about you? And again, that's your network. The best way to get projects or the best way to have somebody hire you is because of someone that you know. And so, the more you can get your name out there, the more people that you interact with, whether it's through volunteering or getting involved in your professional associations. They always need volunteer leadership for those, whether it's leadership committees or the communities that do a lot of work for those associations.

But, doing those type of things will get your name out there. But then again, making sure whether you're doing a professional job, the people that you're working with will recommend you that you're showing up every day in a way that shows that you are a leader and that you're an expert at what you do. It makes a huge difference. Nobody wants to hire somebody that just says, "No, we can't do that." People want to hire people that will get things done. And so, being known for being a positive person that can actually work well with others; it all comes together around how you show up for the day.

So, even if you are in a position now that you're stuck and there's not been a whole lot of advancement opportunity there and you don't know what you're going to do next, it's those people on how you show up in that type of environment that can make a huge difference for you down the road. Myself, I have been doing the contract work for a long time and I get most of my work from the people I work with before. My previous bosses, people that used to work for me; I am now doing a contract for them. They have moved on some place else and now they have come back and hired me as somebody to help them. So, it all comes down to how you show up and what kind of professional you are.

Chris: Those are all great points, James. So, one of the questions I'd ask based on from this is, you just mentioned that you've been doing your own thing, this freelancing HR work here for a while. I have to, this is just an assumption of mine because you will be able to tell me here quickly when I ask you the question, but there had to be some little of fear or anxiety that you had in going through each one of these transitions that you had and then making this determination that you were going to go forward and do your own thing.

And as I read your book, you started out as a, not a HR. You started off as wanting to be a CPA. And as you shared your story in the book, tell us a little bit about the transition that you had from wanting to go to a CPA route, get into HR and then you making these decisions to go into really kind of a freelance transition, because there has to be some level of fear that you have faced in each one of these steps that you made, but you somehow worked through that.

James: Yeah. In my book I talked about my very first job out of college and getting terminated after one year. So, I was working for the largest big A back then. They called it the big A public accounting firms in the world and I've taken the CPA exams twice but no success. And the managing partner called me and said they expected me to pass the third time like two weeks before! Well, that didn't work and sure enough, I lost my job. So, at 22, I had been fired from one of the biggest firms that I failed exam three times and didn't know what I was going to do next.

And so, right then and there, at early age, I kind of totally changed my perspective on career and job and life. And I swore then that I was not going to put all my eggs in one basket and expect that the company is going to take care of me. I learned that probably too young of an age. But because of that, I always kind of take care of myself and looked out for myself what I was going through next. I think that kind of helped me out along the way. I have always been kind of in a position during the last 30 years as things would happen to the industry that I was in a good position for that.

So, during the time, the world was going to come to an end and all the computer systems in the world were going to stop. I was in a position of consulting where I was actually using my accounting background to help companies select and implement new systems and society managed to pay all the departments before all the work in the HR kind of came my way as well. And so, that's how I transitioned into HR. Because I've had that consulting background and then working for HR for all these years, now the world is changing from these old ERP systems to the cloud solution. Again, I'm in a good spot where I've got that experience that people need the help from what I could provide.

So, the fear has always been there but again the courage is what overcomes that. And so, the courage I learned early on that I can do what I need to do to accomplish that, whether I'm working for somebody else or working for myself. It's always been for myself for what I'm doing next. And so, it does take a level of courage but again, if you have the skills that's hot and you know the people, you can work with your previous employers or people you've worked with in the past. I've never really had to go out and find work too hard. It's really been just gone my way because of the relationships I've made.

Chris: That's brilliant. So, I hear you through that just again. That's something that Anthony and I catch on over and over again and get a lot of episodes in the show as we do here as well as our writing which is developing that network, developing a reputation of excellence in the work that you do and in just showing up and being there and participating and providing value to others. And I think

you start right there, kind of reflects that as well.

Would you share with some of the listeners, maybe a story from the book or your coaching practice that you find typical for somebody going through a career transition? We touched a little bit here on fear and bringing courage to the table but there is probably a number of other emotions and a lot of other concern as somebody is getting ready to go through one of the rapids that one of these career transitions. What are some of the other things that you found that people face when they are going through this situation?

James: Yeah. I've always said that I think the toughest part of any career transition is making the decision that it is time to move on. Hopefully, this decision is something you choose when time is right for you, right? The most difficult issue that I find is getting past the difficult blocks that keep us stuck, or in a position that will prevent us from achieving our goals. Realizing that we all have those limiting beliefs or gremlins that constantly tells us that we are not good enough or who do you think you are or you tried that before and failed, what makes you think it will be different this time; I will tell you that after I got fired and failed the exam three times, I was told that I will never get another job in public accounting at 22.

I took a job that was the worst thing ever. Eight days into it and I said, "This is not for me. Forget it. I'm out of here." I quit without a job. I called another one the big A firms at the time that I'd had actually got an offer form a year before out of college and I said no to. And I went and talked to him, kind of got the courage to talk to him thinking at least he could help me with finding a job with one of his clients. He offered me a job on the spot. I took the exam one more time, passed all four parts and if I would not have had the courage to go and do that when I was told that you can't and not knowing where my career would be today.

So, getting past those things of, you failed once before or you tried it before, you got to get past those gremlins and those limiting bleaks so that you can get past that. And especially if your transition is involuntary, you might be dealing the thoughts of failure and even shame. But, the hardest part about dealing with a situation like that is you got to go out and tell somebody else. You got to tell your story because everybody you talk to has gone through a transition and remember, one thing they want to do is help you and they can't help you unless you tell them.

Chris: Yeah. That's absolutely true. And that's great as in I've talked about before. I have mentioned here before in the episode that I'm in a midst of a career transition myself and certainly one of the things that I want to be able to do and I'm doing it apart from this discussion we are having right now today is being able to share my story and to connect other people with individuals like yourself who can help them get through those rapids because you're right. There is a lot of uncertainty. There is a lot of trepidation. And as long as you have got a network and you have the connections and you have some kind of education of where you want to be, it makes it some much simpler to have that support network there. So, that's an absolutely great story.

James: And you know, just one more thought on that. When we talk about being prepared, it's not about, "Oh I don't need that now because I've got a great job." It's about, we are taking the steps every day to build that. So, to me, I still do this. Every day I go out to LinkedIn. I log into LinkedIn every day. I look for people that I know. I look for people that I met the day before. I reach out. I just became a coach not too long ago and so, I just search for coaches, to find people that are doing what I'm doing and I sent them a note saying, "Hey! I am new to coaching. I'm building a network with coaching. Would you be in LinkedIn with me?" And probably now, the person said yes. And so, you got to do it every day because when you need that network, it's too late to try to build it. You need to build it every day.

Chris: That is so true. And if you ever get linked up with Anthony Fasano, I got to make sure that the two of you guys get linked up on LinkedIn.

James: We are. Yeap.

Chris: Awesome! Alright, I've got another one as well. I think the two of you would hit it off. But James, thanks a lot for the material that you shared here during this main segment. James is going to stick around, everyone, for the Take Action Today segment and I'm going to make sure that you also get the details and those are going to be in the show notes for how to get to his website and also, how you can get your hands on the copy of his book *Maneuvering Your Career – 20 Strategies to Prepare You for Voluntary (or Involuntary) Career Transition*. James, stick around with me. In a moment here, we will come back in the Take Action Today segment. And we will be right back.

Take Action Today Segment:

Chris: Before our Take Action Today segment of the show, I'd like to offer another word from today's episode sponsor.

Our listeners often ask me what exam prep materials or review courses they should use when preparing for the FE, PE or SC exam. Hands down, we recommend PPI. If you plan to take your exams soon, we have a special promo code for listeners of our podcast. Use promo code **coach** for 15% off your order at ppi2pass.com/coach. Again, that's ppi2pass.com/coach and use the promo code **coach** and check out for a 15% discount on your order.

PPI's mission is simple. They want to help engineers pass the FE, PE and SC exams and advance their careers. Quality is paramount at PPI. In fact, it is the driving force behind everything they do. With best-selling exam review materials developed by PPI founder, Michael Lindeburg and other experts in the industry, they have been the source and solution for passing the FE, PE and SC exams for more than 40 years. To see how PPI can help you pass your exam and for special offers and

The

ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

HELPING ENGINEERS SUCCEED
IN WORK AND LIFE

discounts exclusive to our podcast listeners, visit ppi2pass.com/coach. That's ppi2pass.com/coach.

Now it's time for our Take Action Today segment of the show. Today I'm going to give you one tactic I use to help guide me through my transition and then ask James to share one more strategy that you can employ for career success. So, one tactic that I'm using for the transition that I am navigating through right now is one I have used throughout my career and that is a timeline. With the timeline, I have mapped out each option that I'm taking into account, each of my family members. So obviously, it has changed throughout my career as my family has grown.

But, I take into account not only what it is that what I'm trying to achieve but what my family members are trying to achieve. So, that would be my wife or either one of our two children. For example, like schooling or major events like kids are in there, milestones in my wife's career, opportunities that she has coming up, also education, etc. So, all these different elements get merged into this timeline and there is a tool that I use from the day I have entered the air force over two decades ago. I am through my retirement from the air force into the next chapter of my professional career. So, you will find a version of that loaded into the show notes. You can tap into that. It will be in Excel Spreadsheet format and you can go in there and work around with it and see if it's useful for you. So, that's one tactic that I'm using. James, what additional strategies can you suggest that can help a person navigate their way through a career transition?

James: Well, this is very timely because I just learned last week; another friend of mine, I talked about one in my book but there is another one that just lost their job after 27 years with the same company. It was quite a shock for them and while we are talking about being prepared, again, he's been there long enough that he was sitting comfortable and thought that he would be there through retirement.

He had done a great job of building contacts and networks. The unfortunate thing that I didn't even think about earlier was that he had done all of this and yet, all of this built up on his smart device that was owned by the company. So, he had his entire network, all his contacts; his only email address that everyone knew was his company email address. His only phone number was his company's cell phone number. And when he was told that his job was eliminated, they collected that phone. And so, he not only left the organization, but he left all that great data behind.

Chris: Oh, wow.

James: So, I have now added that to my next book. Number one will be build your network but also, make sure you have copies of it. Make sure you are backing it up somewhere and make sure that you maybe have a separate email address, separate phone number that's not just for the company because you need to make sure you can take all that with you wherever you go at a moment's notice.

Chris: Wow! James, that is a powerful strategy. It's actually one that I have never thought of my own.

So, that's really timely and I appreciate you sharing that one with us. I really want to thank you for what you're doing: bringing your knowledge and experiences in your strategies just like this one you shared with us out to the world. I really enjoyed your book myself.

I truly enjoyed it and I want to make sure that all of you that are listening, again in the show notes, you can get yourself and get your hands on the copy of that book *Maneuvering Your Career – 20 Strategies to Prepare You for Voluntary (or Involuntary) Career Transition* as well as the worksheet for your personal business plan that James mentioned earlier in the show. James, again, thank you very much for coming on the show and helping all these engineering professionals out there get themselves ready for navigating through that transition.

James: Thank you so much! Good luck everyone.

Chris: That's it for this episode. Again, the show notes are going to be located at engineeringcareercoach.com/transition. And until next time, get out there and engineer your own success.

*Thank you for listening to **The Engineering Career Coach Podcast**. Be sure to visit engineeringcareercoach.com, where you can find all past episodes and also download a free 3-part video series created specifically for engineers to help you best utilize LinkedIn for networking, improve your communication and speaking skills, and also to help develop your leadership abilities. Now is the time to engineer your own success.*