



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION # 10 Acing the Engineering Job Interview

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/session10

Anthony's Upfront Intro: You are listening to the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast* with Anthony Fasano. In this session I am going to walk a graduate engineer through the job interview process, providing her with tips for acing every job interview. 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.

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Engineering Career Coach Podcast Session # 10. This is your engineering career coach Anthony Fasano and I want to welcome you all to our next session of the podcast. I want to start by letting you know that I have a free gift for you on my website at engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift. If you go there and enter in your name and email address, I will e-mail you the three top resources that I used to become a partner in an engineering firm at age twenty-seven, and all three of those resources are free so check it out. Again, it's engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift.

Alright, so happy new year everyone. I'm excited that 2014 is upon us. I took some time over the holidays to hone in on my 2014 goals. I've got a very clear-cut picture of my goals, in fact I'm staring at it right now - it's over my computer at my desk so that I stay focused. And before I get into today's topic of the interview process, I do really want to help as many engineers as possible this year achieve their goals. I talk to so many motivated engineers between my *Institute for Engineering Career Development* and LinkedIn and all these other avenues that engineers reach out to me, the podcast. And a lot of them are motivated and have these goals but they can't seem to stay focused on them.

So, one of the things that I'm going to do to kick off the new year to try to help as many engineers as possible, is I'm opening up our *Institute for Engineering Career Development* January webinar, which will be January fifteen and it'll be open to all engineers. It's actually going to be tonight, which I know is a stress for some of you to get on the call, but if you register you will get a recording. Alright so there's still plenty of time to get in there, get the recording or listen to the session live. But basically I'm going to have a friend of mine who's an engineer come on, who made a commitment last year, personally, to run a thousand miles over the course of a year and he did it by November. And he did it

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while maintaining a very positive, successful engineering career. So I thought that was very interesting that he was able to take on such a big personal goal and still have success professionally.

So he's going to tell us how he did that. And this webinar is open to you and there's still time to register and if you want to do so, you can check the show notes to get the link at engineeringcareercoach.com/session10 or if you'd like to go right to the page you type in your browser bit.ly/2014goalsengineers again, that's bit.ly/2014goalsengineers and you can registering and you can join us. Again, that is tonight, but even if you can't make it live tonight you can get the recording.

Alright, so with that let's get into our topic a little bit for today. Today we're going to talk about the interviewing process. I have an engineering graduate student Sherry, who's going to join me for the coaching segment of the podcast today. And one of her challenges is that she's just nervous in this whole process. So we'll talk a little bit about being nervous, but also I'm going to walk her through all the different steps of the interview and give her strategies on how to approach it. And also, we're going to you get into some of those tough questions that the companies give you, like how much money do you want to make and things of that nature. Just to give you an idea of some of the questions that you might face and help you to prepare as you embark upon this interview process and while Sherry's a graduate student, this process would apply for an engineer of any age. I've helped engineers of all ages to use this same process. So before we get into the coaching segment. Let's go into our motivational moment and get the show kicked off with some positive inspiration.

Anthony's Motivational Moment: For today's motivational moment I want to pick a quote that's going to talk a little bit about nervousness because one of the biggest challenges that engineers, and I think all professionals face during the job interview process is nervousness. They talk fast. They cross their words up a bit. They don't say all the things that they want to say because you're in that spotlight kind of and that's challenging, because you need to be able to deliver. In order to deliver you need to be confident in yourself and you need to try to shake that nervousness. So, I've actually selected a quote today from the late, great Elvis Presley. And the reason I selected this quote from him is because for those of you who don't know who Elvis is - which I'm sure, hopefully that's not the case for many of you - but he's one of the greatest musicians ever. He had twenty albums. He had thirty-six number one singles, thirty-six, number ones. He won three Grammy awards and believe it or not, he also starred in thirty-three movies. Alright, so just think about all of the crowds that he played in front of. And the quote that I've selected for today's motivational moment is as follows: ***"I'm so nervous. I've always been nervous ever since I was a kid"*** - Elvis Presley. So this is one of the greatest musicians of all time, who's played in front of thousands and thousands of people, he was in movies probably in front of millions of people, yet he's nervous, He's always been nervous. And the

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reason that I wanted to share that quote with you is because everyone gets nervous. Don't think that you're the only one.

Alright, I'm a professional speaker; I've spoken for thousands of engineers. I still get nervous. Alright, that nervous energy is going to come. You have to learn how to control it and a big part of that is being confident in yourself, in your abilities. And in the coaching segment today I'll give you some specific strategies for trying to overcome that nervousness in the interview.

But the main thing is part of your mental approach. Alright, it's be confident in yourself. Understand that the biggest of biggest stars are nervous. It happens. But you can control it and you can shine in the interview, in your interview. Those of you that are listening for the first time, I did the last podcast on your annual reviews and annual review preparation.

You can see that at engineeringcareercoach.com/session9, you can listen to it. And again, these are the kind of moments where you need to overcome nervousness. Alright, so remember that Elvis was nervous too, okay. And let's get right into our coaching segment now with Sherry and let's go through the job interview process.

Coaching Segment:

Alright, now it's time for the coaching segment of our show today. And my guest today is Sherry from Pennsylvania. Sherry is a mechanical engineer pursuing a Masters degree in mechanical engineering. She's going full-time for her master 's degree right now. She received her bachelor's degree in 2010. She's twenty-five years old and she wants to discuss the interviewing process. She has an interview coming up, trying to get a full-time engineering job. And today we're going to give her some strategies, hopefully for getting that job and acing that interview.

So what I'd like you to do Sherry, if you don't mind - just for the listeners - is to elaborate a little more on kind of what you want to talk about. I know you have a specific interview coming up so why don't you describe that for the listeners?

Sherry: Sure, so I have an interview coming up that's going to be an on-site interview. I did a campus interview first and I want to talk about more of interviewing at the company's facility. And I guess, for me, the trouble I have with interviews is just being able to clearly answer questions. I just want to talk more about how to go about doing that.

Anthony: Okay. Alright, so Sherry wants to talk a little bit about the specifics of the interview. She has an interview coming up at a company's office I guess, at their site. I'm assuming this is a, is this a large company Sherry? Small or large? What kind of size?

Sherry: Yes, it's a large company in the oil industry.

Anthony: Okay. Alright, a large company in the oil industry. Alright, so first thing's first is, this is not just for Sherry but for everyone out there who's listening, and I'm sure you're preparing for an interview, which is why you're listening to the show. You want to do your preparation of course. You want to research the company. You want to understand what the latest news is with some of the projects that they're working on, which is very important. I mean the good thing here is that Sherry has an interview, which sometimes is the harder part. However, now she, you have to be prepared when you actually go in for the interview. So have you started to do some research on the company? I'm assuming you probably have.

Sherry: Yes, I basically searched for the first interview.

Anthony: So you had an interview already?

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: Phone?

Sherry: It was a campus interview, so it was a quick thirty-minute interview.

Anthony: Alright, so you had a thirty-minute interview here and then they've invited you for the on-site interview, which is going to be a bit of a lengthier process. Alright so let's talk about this a little bit. So you do your research. You prepare. You understand what's going on with the company; what the latest news is, what kind of projects they're working on, and then you go into the interview. Now how much - I know this is a, I guess this is an entry level type position - but is there is very specific job that you are applying for, interviewing for, or is this just kind of, they're just hiring recent graduates?

Sherry: The position is entry-level.

Anthony: Alright, so it's an entry level position, so somewhat general?

Sherry: Yes, but I guess for the mechanical engineering position. They did specify what type of skills they're looking for and what the job entails so I have a pretty clear idea of what that position is.

Anthony: So the first thing that you want to do when you get in to the interview - and this is true for any interview - is, they're probably going to ask you to tell them a little bit about yourself. Most likely it'll be different people from the people you had in the first interview. And for those of you out there that are listening, that are having a first interview, you can take the same approach. And what's important is you want to have something prepared about yourself, a couple of minutes long. It talks a little bit about some of your key skills, some of your strengths, some of the projects that you've

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worked on - maybe it's a senior design project, maybe it's a masters project that you've worked in your Masters degree program. But you want to have a couple of things like that ready.

What you want to be careful of is, you don't want to just ramble on about yourself because the natural inclination is to tell them as many good things about ourselves as possible, which is understandable, but in reality we want to keep it short, keep it brief, keep it on point, emphasize your strengths. And then what you want to try to do is if you can, in beginning of the interview, is try to say something to them like, 'I understand that this is for an entry level mechanical engineer and I've read the job description. I was wondering though if you could give me a little bit more of an idea of some of the day-to-day responsibilities that this job might include?' And what they'll do typically is they'll do that. They'll go in to some descriptions for five minutes, ten minutes and they'll explain things to you. And while they're doing that what you should be doing is essentially sitting there, taking all of that in and thinking to yourself, 'How is that going to help me? How am I match for them? How can I come back and then present myself as a match? So when they're finished speaking and you have that

information then you can come back to them, and you can say something like, 'Well, this is a perfect match for me because of my internship, I did XYZ' or 'In my school project I did XYZ, which sounds very similar to some of the responsibilities that I'll have in this position.' Do you understand that Sherry?

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: So that's important, I mean a lot of people don't do that. And the reason that you must do that is because essentially this company is looking to fill a certain specific position with a specific need and if you understand that need, and you can make it clear to them in how you can fill that need then it becomes, it almost becomes difficult for them not to hire you. And the analogy that I use all the time, that I tell engineers on this topic is if you were to go to the grocery store and you walked in and you saw someone who worked there and you said to them, 'Do you have any milk?' and they look at you and say, 'No, we don't have any milk but we have tomatoes. Would you like a tomato?' You're going to say, 'Tomato, I don't want a tomato, I came here for milk.' But if they said to you, 'Oh, yes, we have milk. It's in aisle six.' What are you going to do? You're going to go to aisle six; you're going to buy the milk. So my point is that if we come into the interview and you start telling them everything that's great about yourself and your resume, etcetera, they may not even be interested in that. So you have to determine what they're really interested in so that you can explain to them how you can provide that to them. Alright, I hope that that's helpful.

Sherry: Yes, that makes sense. I do have a question though; how would you go about preparing for behavioral type questions and technical questions, I guess for an entry-level position?

Anthony: Sure so the behavioral type questions, one of the things you can do is you can Google a list of questions. There's plenty of articles out there that will give you some of the behavioral type questions. For example, I'll give you a couple now. One of them might be; What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses? The strengths one is fairly easy to answer, you just talk about the things that you're good at. The weaknesses one is the one where it's a bit of a trap. What I always tell engineers is when you're asked that question, try to answer like, I'll give you an example. Let's say I was not that good at public speaking or presenting and I wanted to improve on that. I might say something like,

'Well, one of my weaknesses to be honest with you, is presentations and public speaking. It's something that I've been working really hard on. I'm taking some classes and I'm doing some training to get better so it's a weakness now, but it's been improving and I think it's going to get better.' You see what I'm saying there?

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: So you're not just saying I'm not good at speaking, I'm a terrible presenter, you're saying no I'm not good at it but I've already been taking steps to get better and I am better now and will improve.

Sherry: Right.

Anthony: So that's one. And another question that always comes up or that can come up often is, 'What kind of salary are you looking for?'

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: And this is always a tricky question too. But in speaking with a lot of recruiters and hiring managers, what a lot of people have told me is the best way to answer this question is by offering a range of salaries. So for example, I don't know exactly what the going rate is for mechanical engineer in the oil field entry-level, but let's just say you did your research and you came up with a number of fifty thousand dollars a year, let's just say as an average. What I would do if I were you is I would say, 'You know, to be honest with you, I did a little bit of research. I don't have a real concrete number. I'm really interested in getting a job and getting going, but I would imagine that the range would be somewhere in the forty to sixty thousand dollar range.' Or you could say, 'Forty five to fifty five thousand dollar range, based on the research and some of my colleagues in the industry.' You say something like that.

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: And the reason for that is two-fold. One, if you were to say forty thousand they might say,

they might be thinking, 'Forty thousand. Oh man, we were going to offer fifty. That's great.' So you just cut yourself ten thousand dollars short or if you were to say sixty thousand, they might say, be thinking to themselves, 'Sixty thousand. That's ten thousand more than we wanted to spend. We're not going to hire her.' So giving that range kind of covers all the bases there and that's something that's important to do along with your research prior to the interview, is to research the average salaries for entry-level engineers in your field.

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: Is there any specific behavioral questions that you had seen that you were thinking about?

Sherry: I guess one of them was, 'Give me an example of a time when you displayed leadership or were a leader of your team.' That's was something that I was asked in my previous interview.

Anthony: And were you able to answer it?

Sherry: Yes. I was working. I was a manager for a few months and (inaudible) start the semester so I was able to talk about that. I guess I'm not sure what type of, what would be the best answer for that apart from saying exactly what you did in that job.

Anthony: No, it's a good question. It's a really good question. I think it comes back to what I spoke about before is, when you've asked them the question about the job and what's involved in it and what the roles and responsibilities are, then you can answer these questions in a way that makes you again, a match for that. So let's say they said to you, 'Well, you're going to have to do, write reports in this position and you're going to have to oversee a couple of other entry-level engineers.' And you can come back to them. Then when they ask you the question again later about leadership, you can say, 'Well, actually, I had a management position for a few months. I was writing a lot of reports and I had to oversee some of the other staff.'

Sherry: Right.

Anthony: Everything has to go back to their need, whatever that need is, that you have to try to determine as early on in the interview as possible then everything ties back into that.

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: Alright so as far as technical, because you mentioned some technical questions too. I mean the only thing you can really do for that is just draw on your educational background. If there are any technical issues, technical journals that you know are going to be heavily utilized in this

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position, you might want to just look at them or look at the chapters or become somewhat familiar with them, so if they say to you, 'We use the XYZ Journal. Are you familiar with that?' You can say, 'Well, I haven't exactly used it yet, but I do have it in my possession and I've looked through it and I've started to get familiar with it, and it looks like a lot of the stuff in there I've learned about in school.'

Sherry: Yes, okay.

Anthony: So whatever you can do. And if you know anyone in the industry, that's working right now and you can talk to them about the technical, anything technical that they can provide you, that will also help you be able to say something like, 'I have a lot of colleagues that are already in this industry this industry and we talk on some of the technical topics from time to time, so I am kind of up to speed on some of the stuff already.'

Sherry: Yes. Okay.

Anthony: The other thing that would be helpful too is if you belong to any of the professional societies, like for example the ASME society in your school. You could always say to them, from the technical aspect too, 'I am a member of the ASME and we have a lot of technical seminars and I get to talk to people on technical topics to stay up to speed on that.'

Sherry: Yes. I know with the oil industry sometimes there's like controversial topics. Is that something that I should kind of stray away from if they do want to talk about the future of the company, I guess in terms of just talking about company information in general.

Anthony: Yes, I would try to steer clear of controversial stuff. I mean, if there's something controversial going on in the industry I think you should be aware of it and know of it, like when they had the oil spill in the Gulf. If you were, if it was that time when you are interviewing then you should definitely read up about it, understand it. They might say to you, 'What do you think about everything that's going on in the Gulf.'

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: And you want to be able to say, 'Well, you know, I read everything about it. I read a lot of articles on and it's unfortunate,' and you could be able to talk about it a little bit, which I think is important. But I wouldn't necessarily bring it up or get into any of those topics, unless they really ask you for your opinion and if they did give you, in that they did ask for your opinion then you want to play it safe. What you could say again is like, 'I'm aware of the topic because I do read a lot about the industry news and I know that this, this and this are going on. I haven't read up enough about it yet to take too much of a stance on it but it's something that I'm really reading about on a daily basis.'

Sherry: Yes, okay.

Anthony: A couple other things while you're thinking of more questions. You want to make sure that when you go to the interview, you have your resume obviously. You also have a list of references. I recommend you put together one sheet with some references of names, individuals on it, phone numbers, email addresses. Maybe they're professors, maybe they're managers from internships that you've had in the past. And before you go to the interview I would reach out to each one of the people on the reference list and just let them know that you're submitting their name to the company at your interview coming. That'll be very helpful and I think that they'll appreciate having those references right there that day. Because if they do like you that day then they can just literally make a couple phone calls, maybe do a couple checks and hopefully offer you a position.

Sherry: Yes, alright. How would you recommend just getting over general nervousness?

Anthony: One of the things that you could do for general nervousness, there's a couple things you can do. Before the interview, like ten minutes before, maybe you're in your car or something beforehand, do some really deep breathing. That's usually very helpful for relieving your nervousness. I know as a professional speaker, when I went and did training for speaking, before you got on stage they would tell you if you had any kind of jitters or were nervous to do the deep breathing. They call it square breathing, where you breathe in really deeply and breathe out. And a lot of the time that can put your nerves at ease.

Sherry: Yes.

Anthony: So that's one thing you can do. The other thing you can do that might be helpful for you - again, right before the interview or even a couple hours before in the morning when you're preparing - is to just continually visualize yourself having a great interview. See yourself having a great interview, see yourself shaking their hands at the end of it. And sometimes that mental image kind of forces your brain into the idea of kind of actually believing that you had a great interview already and when you get in there it puts you like into that state. So those are a couple things that you can do that might be helpful for you.

The other thing you can do is just talk to colleagues too. Just say, 'I have an interview, can you give me any advice? How was your last interview?' And just talking about it with people, sometimes, too, can kind of reduce the nervousness.

Sherry: Yes. Okay.

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Anthony: Was there any other questions that you had Sherry, maybe that you could think of from your past interview or other experiences?

Sherry: I guess one of the main issues for me from past interviews is just, just getting nervous when I'm answering questions and so sometimes not being able to answer them as well as I'd like.

Anthony: It's alright, just take your time. Take your time with it when you're in the interview. I know that's difficult to do sometimes but try to slow it down, try to take your time and rehearse it beforehand. So what I mean by that is we talked about the idea of asking them the question about the day-to-day responsibilities. Say some of those things to yourself over and over so that you feel more comfortable when you get in there. Again, you're getting it into your mind already so when you get there it just kind of comes out because you've already rehearsed it. So anything you can do like that will be helpful. The other thing that you may want to consider and this is just - apart from just the interviewing process - and this is something that I mentioned to a lot of people that have come on the show is to check out an organization called ***Toastmasters International***. I don't know, have you ever heard of ***Toastmasters***?

Sherry: No.

Anthony: Okay, ***Toastmasters International*** is an organization that - they probably have one at your school, they have them on most campuses and most towns in the United States - it's an international organization and they have a couple of meetings per month and you can join as a member, it's very inexpensive. And basically you get up in front of the room and you do speeches. You do public speaking and they ask you to speak spontaneously sometimes. What it does for you really is, I mean it allows you to be a better presenter but it allows you to build your confidence and your communication skills. And for me before I started speaking, I got nervous in front of people and I would really rush things and I wouldn't be able to get my thoughts out, kind of like what you're describing. And going to ***Toastmasters*** and being and participating in that was very helpful for me to overcome that. So now when I speak to people I can just, I feel like it's a lot slower. I feel like the whole situation is just moving slower.

Sherry: Okay. Alright, I'll try to look into that.

Anthony: So check that out and for those of you listening, we'll put the link to the ***Toastmasters*** website in the show notes for the show.

Sherry: Okay. Well, that's all the questions I had.

Anthony: Alright, great Sherry. Well listen, good luck with the interview. I hope some of this information will be helpful and for those of you out there just to summarize real quick. A couple things

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that we went over here with Sherry was - do your research before the interview. Make sure you know about the company; latest news projects they're working on, a little bit about their history, obviously if they have a mission statement, those kind of things are important as well. Then when you get into the interview, make sure that you have a short, prepared introduction for yourself that's a couple of minutes, that emphasizes your key strengths, key projects you might've worked on - whether you're an experienced engineer and worked on some projects or you're a student and you've worked on a senior project or an internship - have that information in there. Then as soon as you can after the introduction, try to ask them a question, mainly around what are the real day-to-day responsibilities of this position. And when they tell you the answer to that question use the answer to come back throughout the rest of the interview and continue to present yourself as a match for the position. If you do those things they should be extremely helpful.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip: Alright, I hope you enjoyed our coaching segment today with Sherry and I hope it's helpful to you in your engineering career. Now before we get into today's career-changing tip, I'd like to very briefly mention our ***Institute for Engineering Career Development*** annual meet-up, which is going to take place in Austin, Texas in late April. This will be a transformational weekend for engineers and I invite you to join us. You can visit the website for the event at iecdmeetup.com. We have executives in all different disciplines in engineering that are going to come the first morning and sit on panels and you can ask them any question you want about their career, about advancement strategies, about business development, client interactions. Whatever questions you have for high-level executives, you can get them answered. We're going to have tours of the Austin City Hall, we're going to go to the best restaurants in Texas, in Austin and be able to network and have good food and to meet other motivated engineers. Then on Saturday we're going to have a keynote presentation by Brett Harward, author of ***The Five Laws That Determine all of Life's Outcomes***. A wonderful book. I've read it myself a couple of times. Brett has studied super successful people and he's going to give you the strategies of how they succeeded. And there's going to be some other tours and some other exciting opportunities. It's going to be a wonderful venue in Austin, Saturday, we'll be on the ninth floor of University of Texas at Austin football stadium, conference room suite. So please come to Austin, have some fun with us, meet some other motivated engineers and take control of your engineering career. And again, registration is opening any day now. There'll be an early bird fee. And again that's iecdmeetup.com

Alright, so with that let's get into the career-changing tip. And today we focused on the job interview and how to overcome nervousness that can apply throughout your engineering career and it can really hamper you if you don't take control of it. So here's a tip that you can use that can help you to overcome nervousness and just really improve the quality of your conversations overall. One of the things that we do when we're nervous is we cut people off. We're jumpy. We can't wait for them to stop talking. So what I want you to do in your conversations in the next few days is when someone is talking to you I want you to resist the urge to talk until you actually hear silence for one second. That

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may sound very simplistic and easy to do. It's really not. Trust me, took me a couple of weeks myself the first time I did it to try to accomplish it. So again when you get into a conversation - whether it's a meeting, a conversation with one or other person, even conversations at home with friends, family members - when someone's speaking to you wait until they completely stop, hear the silence for a second and then respond. This will force you to listen to everything they're saying and process it. And it will improve the quality of your conversations and hopefully slow things down for you so you're not nervous and you're not jumpy in your conversations. I hope that tip's helpful.

Anthony's Closing Remarks: I hope you enjoyed another session of the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. You can get all of the show notes and all of the links I mentioned today at engineeringcareercoach.com/session10

This is your engineering career coach Anthony Fasano signing off. I'll catch you on the next session.

Thank you for listening to the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast with Anthony Fasano - transforming engineering careers one engineer at a time.*

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