



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION # 11

Deciding on the Technical or Managerial Career Path as an Engineer

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/session11

Anthony's Upfront Intro: You are listening to the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast* with Anthony Fasano Session # 11. In this session, I'm going to help a younger engineer gear up for that 'oh so important' decision of whether to take the technical track in his career or the managerial path or a little bit of both. 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.

Welcome to the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. This is your engineering career coach, Anthony Fasano and I welcome you to session eleven of the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. Today we have a great topic for you. But before we get into that I want to start by offering you a free gift. If you visit my website at engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift, you can enter in your name and email address and I will email you a list and description of the three top resources that I utilized to become a partner in an engineering firm at age twenty-seven. And every single one of those items on the list is free. So check it out at engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift.

Today's topic is one that I'm really excited about because I get a million questions from engineers all around this topic. It's the idea of, 'I don't know if I want to go into the managerial side of things in my engineering career or if I want to stay on the technical track.' I get that question almost every day from people. And it's inevitably a decision that you're going to have to make. You're going to get to this fork in the road in your engineering career and say, 'Which way do I go?' There may be possibilities for doing both together and you'll hear a little bit about that in the coaching segment today. But I will have a young systems engineer on with me in a few minutes for coaching segment of the show and I will help him to make his decision or to think about which direction he wants his career path to go. And there's really one specific question that I ask him that really tells. And you'll see with that is, and hopefully you can use some of the questions and some of the thought processes in this show to help you with this decision that every engineer will make pretty much, because it's one that drives your whole career and your career is essentially a huge part of your life.

So before jumping to our motivational moment and really get the show revved up here, briefly I want to mention an event that I'm putting on in Austin, Texas in April. It's actually through my *Institute for*

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

WITH
**ANTHONY
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Engineering Career Development, where we help engineers to develop their professional skills and get on the path to partnership in their engineering company. And that's what this event in Austin, Texas on April twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth is going to be all about it. We're going to have some high-level executives on panels. You can talk to these executives. You can ask them how they got to where they were, any tips that they might have. We also have a keynote speaker, Brett Harward, who is an author of an excellent book, **The Five Laws That Determine All Of Life's Outcomes**. He's going to talk about how super successful people get successful, achieve their goals. And we have a lot of fun events planned like a tour of the city capital, another tour around the city. We'll be at the University of Texas at Austin football Stadium suite for Saturday's festivities. So please check it out at iecdmeetup.com. The early bird fees are out. It's less than two hundred dollars to attend this event and includes meals, dinners at top-of-the-line restaurants. So if you want to be a partner in an engineering company or just want to super charge your career, please consider joining us. There's limited seating to check it out at iecdmeetup.com. With that, let's jump into our motivational moment and get the show going.

Anthony's Motivational Moment: For today's motivational moment I tried to select a quote that talked a little bit about career paths. I think a lot of engineers get this idea in their head that they can only do one thing in their career, and they can't switch or they can do multiple things and I don't believe in that. They think that if I go down the technical track too long I can never be a manager or if I go into management and then I don't like it or I'm not good at it I can't come back to technical. So I've selected this quote that I found about how your career path can be open and winding and I'll read it for you; **"Your career is like a garden. It can hold an assortment of light energy that yields a bounty for you. You do not need to grow just one thing in your garden. You do not need to do just one thing in your career."** And that's by Jennifer Richie Payette. And again, I really like that because I think that it's true. I think that if you like to do different things in your engineering career then you should incorporate different things into your engineering career. I think that that's very, very important to stay engaged and have an enjoyable career. Listen, if you pick one thing and you really focus on it, you'll probably be really good at it. But that lack of diversity might make it less enjoyable. So don't think you have to stay inside the lines all the time. Do some different things, try some different things and you'll see with some of the stuff I talk with Kevin in the coaching session here, that you'll see that, I'm trying to get him to do something different or think about what he likes, so with that, let's jump into our coaching segment for today and let's get into this topic of the technical track or the managerial track in your engineering career.

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

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Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright everyone, now it's time for our coaching segment of the show and today we're going to be speaking with our guest Kevin, who is a systems engineer in the aerospace industry from Indiana. He graduated this past May 2013 and is now going to be entering graduate school for an MS in systems engineering, while working full time. He's twenty-three years old and one of the challenges that he's facing is setting goals and he'd also like to talk a little bit about developing his technical skills on the job. How you doing Kevin?

Kevin: I'm doing great.

Anthony: It's good to have you on the show here and we're looking forward to talking to you for a few minutes here. Tell us a little bit about your challenge with setting goals; explain it a bit more to myself and the listeners.

Kevin: Okay, so with setting goals I'm new out of college and all my goals typically were geared towards school, classes and graduating. Now that I'm in corporate America, I'm trying to figure out, well where do I want my career to go? Do I want to be at the management level? Do I want to become a technical expert? Do I kind of want to go into the business side of things? I'm not sure as in, how to set up those goals for any route that I may want to take.

Anthony: Okay. Alright, that's something that's certainly understandable that when you're right out of school, it could be a little bit difficult for you to try to set goals and figure out which direction you want to go. Tell me a little bit about what interests you as far as management? Like do you think that you'd be happy doing management or are you really happy with doing calculations? I know you haven't had a lot of experience but not even with work, but just in general and school. Did you do any stuff where you did leadership roles on teams, on projects, etcetera?

Kevin: Yes. I had participated in several different organizations where I held leadership roles in. That's what got me kind of thinking about management. I also like the calculations and being able to understand the technical side of projects so that's why I was kind of looking towards a, maybe a technical management track. But at the same time I'm not sure of how to map that out or what are the best ways to get there.

Anthony: Alright well you have some time. And one of the things that I would recommend, since you're entry-level is, over the next few years what I would do is, I would focus on developing my technical skills, which I know is one of the other things that you wanted to talk about.

Kevin: Right.

The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

WITH
ANTHONY
FASANO 

Anthony: But also developing some of your non-technical skills like your networking skills, maybe building up your network a little bit, building up your communication skills, get out there, doing some presentations. And work on all of that, kind of your whole reputation, your whole development of the technical, non-technical combination. Because I think part of deciding exactly where to go is going to be, come a little bit with experience because you're going to talk to people in the industry.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: You're going to understand some of the different roles that people are doing and then maybe that'll help you with that. But I think right now whether you go into management or not, you're going to really want to have a sound technical knowledge in your field.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Okay, so I think that that's one thing that you should consider doing. The other thing that I would do right away as well is try to get involved in any type of engineering societies that you can join, where you can meet some other engineers in the community that have more experience than you. So that you can talk to them about, talk to them about how they got to where they are and how they decided to do it.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Alright so I think a combination of those things will be helpful for you. I mean one of the things to do that we talked about here are another one of our episodes was mentoring, finding a good mentor. For those of you out there listening, that was episode five. So if you go to engineeringcareercoach.com/session5 you can hear all about how to go about finding a mentor, and how helpful it can be in your career. I think that's one of the things too that Kevin should consider doing here early on in his career. Because a mentor in your industry is going to be really helpful for you to try to figure out what direction that you want to go. So hopefully some of those tips will be helpful. But let's talk a little bit about, more about developing your technical skills. Give me any idea right now, Kevin of some of the things that you work on, and I would assume that right now for most of your day you're doing calculations and design work?

Kevin: Yes, for the most part from my end is more testing. So it's testing and verification. So making sure that the tests ran correctly, ran the way you wanted it to, the results that you got were expected and that there's nothing out of the ordinary or something didn't happen that shouldn't have happened. So for me, the more technical side of it would be writing test scripts. So that's using different computer programs to write code, which we call scripts. So I guess it's more or so developing that side of the technical business of programming and writing code.

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

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**ANTHONY
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Anthony: Alright. Let me ask you this question, let's just fast forward for a minute and let's say its ten years from now, and I'm talking to you, ' Kevin, how's everything going in your career?' And you tell me, ' Man Anthony, everything is going awesome. I'm like I'm just having a blast. I'm doing all this stuff.' And if you were to say that to me what do you think - and it doesn't have to be too specific, your answer - what do you think at least some of the things that you would be doing for you to have to be able to say that, based on what you like and so far we've done your in your career and your life?

Kevin: I would have to say that people see me as somebody that they can go to for questions when it comes to technical aspects, when it comes to management aspects as far as, how do I do this, how do I do that? I'm seen as I guess not so-called an expert but I'm seen as like a point of contact for different issues that may come up. At the same time, I'm understanding most of everything that I'm doing, if not I know what resources to use to get understanding. People that I work with that may be higher up than me, look to me for ideas and at the same time they respect my ideas and they want to implement my ideas.

Anthony: Alright, that's great. So it sounds to me like a large part of that is, I would say you want to become a leader.

Kevin: Correct.

Anthony: Alright so I heard that you want to become a leader. I also heard that you want to help people.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: And those couple of things would lead me to believe that you're going to end up leaning towards the management track. But that doesn't mean that you're still not going to have a lot of involvement in the technical side of things.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: Alright. So you could become a very hands-on leader, a very hands-on manager in your field. Alright, which I think is great. I think that's a great manager to be because then the people who are working for you understand that you understand them because they know that you're a manager that has technical experience. You're not just a manager that was promoted just because you were good at management, but don't understand what they're going through at the technical design level.

Kevin: Right.

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

WITH
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Anthony: Alright. So that's good. I mean that answer tells me a lot because when you think about the idea of technical versus manager, I mean it's a pretty black and white line. So if you go technical, you're really not going to do a lot of management.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: And you're probably not going to do a lot of the things that you just mentioned to me. Alright. So you're still young in your career, but that answer that you gave me tells me a lot about you and about what you want to do, you definitely want to inspire, you want to help people, you want to be the person that they're looking to for guidance. So I think that that will put you in the management area. And I think one of the things that I would consider doing if I were you, I think getting the Masters degree in system engineering for you is going to be great because you want to be that technical, hands-on type of manager, type of leader.

Kevin: Correct.

Anthony: But I also think after you do that, you might even consider another Masters degree, in doing something along the lines of like a Masters of engineering management or an MBA.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Especially the Masters in engineering management, which might be good for you because it's really like an MBA for people that want to be managers in engineering. So, you might not even need to take the whole degree, but maybe you just take a couple of courses, since you'll already have the MS.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: But I think it's something definitely for you to look into a little bit as you progress because it sounds to me like you really want to be a leader in the industry, but you want to remain that hands-on leader. I think that knowing that for you will be helpful as you try to make some of these decisions.

Kevin: Right. Okay.

Anthony: What are your thoughts on that, Kevin?

Kevin: That's actually, it's good to hear you say that because I've thought about, when I was looking at systems, I already knew that I wanted to do systems but at the same time I was also thinking about the MBA, the engineering management. I've been kind of looking for somebody to kind of weigh in on

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

WITH
**ANTHONY
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the differences between the two and kind of where either degree can kind of take you in your career. So that was kind of good to hear you say that.

Anthony: You know, I think the fact that you really like the technical side of things, and you want to be that go-to guy from the technical aspect. I think getting the Masters in your field is only going to help you. It's only going to strengthen that expertise, that knowledge.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: And then it's just a matter of ensuring that you have the skills you need to become the manager next. So whether you join a group. For example, those you out there listening, I run a community called the *Institute for Engineering Career Development*, where we kind of help engineers grow some of these skills. Whether you get involved in a community like that or you take some masters level courses, whatever the case may be - at some point you're going to want to get that training and that skill development to get you to the leadership management track. And some engineers if they tell me to go into leadership, I might recommend the MBA or the MEM right away, but for you it just feels to me like you want that technical aspect, it's important to you, and it's important for where you want to be in the future. So you have to maybe just do some kind of combination of them.

Kevin: Right, okay.

Anthony: Do you have any other questions, Kevin? I know you're kind of just starting out so I thought you might have other questions or any other things that you wanted to bounce off of me here.

Kevin: Yes, going back to the mentor. I've been kind of struggling with finding a mentor within my company. One of my coworkers I felt would be a good mentor because he kind of just took interest in me right out, as soon as I started. He recently left the company due to family issues. So he's the one that I asked to be my mentor, but he ended up having to leave the company. So now I'm kind of back at square, not knowing who I can really talk to or look to as a mentor.

Anthony: What is your, does systems engineering falls under, does that fall kind of in the mechanical engineering realm or what degree, undergraduate is that?

Kevin: I did my undergraduate degree in aerospace and mechanical.

Anthony: Okay.

The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

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**ANTHONY
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Kevin: But systems is kind of a, you can kind of look at systems as a interdisciplinary kind of type degree because it encompasses pretty much any kind of technical field. It's basically integrating all of them to create one product.

Anthony: Okay. If you were to join like an engineering engineering society, would it be like the American Society of mechanical engineers or what?

Kevin: I probably would join aerospace as the same time look at INCOSE.

Anthony: Okay. Because what I would do if I were you, to find a mentor is, I would go through those organizations.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Because it's actually, sometimes it's actually better to have, I mean you can have obviously some people that you look up to and your office.

Kevin: Right.

Anthony: But it's also sometimes better to have an outside mentor.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Because you may want to talk to them about some of your experiences in the office that you might not be comfortable sharing with the people in your office.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: So it's kind of a more open, open and honest kind of type relationship, where you can feel totally comfortable being open. I think that's important. That'll help you get the most out of your mentoring relationship. So check that out and see if you can go through one of those organizations. One of them might already have a mentoring program or one of them may just be able to put you in touch with the right people.

Kevin: Okay.

Anthony: Alright?

Kevin: Alright.

The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH

WITH
ANTHONY
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Anthony: Alright Kevin. Well I hope the time here that we spent together was helpful for you and I hope those of you out there listening, I hope this was helpful for you too. Regardless of what experience level you're at, whenever you get stuck on goals you can always try to look down the road in your career and think about some of the things that, big picture that you would have wanted to accomplish, like Kevin told us he wanted to be a go-to leader, he really wanted to be a leader is what it boils down and from that we were able to help him with some of these other decisions that he's going to have to make, alright. So with that, Kevin I want to thank you for coming on today and I really wish you the best as you as you move on in your career here.

Kevin: Thank you. Thanks for having me and the information was very helpful.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip: For today's career-changing tip I want to stay on this topic of technical or managerial track. One thing that you can do to help you make this decision - and this is, I would consider this a career-changing tip right, it is a career changing decision - I would take some time to make a list of two or five people that you know that are either leaders in the engineering industry, managers, department managers, shareholders and then a list of one or two engineers that stayed on the technical track for their career. And I would talk to them and I would ask them about how they made that decision, what they do in their career on a daily basis and looking back if they think they made the right decision and why. I think if you're able to ask someone these questions it would be really helpful and kind of eye opening in some instances. You may think that being a manager, a leader in the engineering industry or on a specific project is something. Yet you get a totally different response. And along those lines, I'm planning on interviewing the project manager of the Hoover Dam bypass project. He's going to come on the show, and he's going to actually take questions. We're actually going to take questions beforehand, you can go to engineeringcareercoach.com/hoverdam and put your questions in for Mike and I will ask him all of your questions, time permitting. And you'll be able to listen to all of them on the podcast, but this goes right along with this tip because this is someone that, here's someone right away that you can ask that went into management of big projects. And if that's something that you're interested in, then ask the questions and I'll get you the answers.

So the running theme of this whole career-changing tip today is if you want to do something in your career or you're making a decision between two things, talk to people that have done both. Understand what goes into each -- the time, the effort, what you're going to be doing, what you like doing. That should help you dramatically in figuring out which direction you want to go. And



The **ENGINEERING CAREER COACH**

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remember, it's never too late to change your career path. It doesn't matter what anybody tells you. If you think you can't do it contact me and I'll help you do it, it is possible.

Anthony's Closing Remarks: Once again, thank you for listening. Thank you for taking the time. I hope that you found the show helpful for you. You can visit my website at engineeringcareercoach.com. In the right sidebar, you can put your name and email address in and you will get the full version of my **Engineer Your Own Success** seminar. It's about an hour packed with different strategies for developing your professional skills, goal setting, communication, effective networking. All these things that will help you to become a partner become a leader if that's the direction you want to go. Get all those skills and start to learn how to improve right through that webinar. With that, thank you again. I'll catch you on the next show.

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

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