



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION # 8 Escaping the Cubicle Lifestyle as an Engineer

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/session8

Anthony's Upfront Intro: Welcome to the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast with Anthony Fasano Session # 8*. In this session I'm going to provide some coaching and guidance to an engineer who has a goal of escaping the cubicle lifestyle and building more freedom and flexibility into his career and his lifestyle. I'm going to give him some tips and strategies to get on this path and hopefully help you to do the same in the process. 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, this is Anthony Fasano and I want to welcome you to session eight of the *Engineering Career Coach Podcast*. I offer all listeners a gift by visiting my website at engineeringcareercoach.com/freegift, put your name and email address in and I will email you the top three resources that I utilized to become a partner at an engineering firm at the age of twenty-seven, and all three resources are free. So with that I want to start the show off by saying happy holidays to all our listeners out there. I hope that you take some time over the holiday season to enjoy life, enjoy your family, slow down a bit, which I know is always a challenge for all of us motivated engineering professionals. I'm certainly going to try to do it and I hope you will too.

I do have a pretty exciting podcast I believe for you here today. This is one that is kind of a little bit near and dear to my heart because this engineer's looking to escape the - quote unquote - cubicle world and get out there and do some different types of things and have some more freedom in his life, and that's what I wanted to do when I was an engineer, what led me down my path. So I'm very excited to get into that with him today. I do also have a pretty interesting career-changing tip for you that I think you will like. It's going to help you to think a little bit differently and I'll give you that at the end of the show after our coaching segment.

So before I get into the coaching segment, I do want to mention briefly, I do run a community for engineers called the *Institute for Engineering Career Development*, where we provide training on non-technical skills, leadership development for engineers. It is an online community at engineeringcareerdevelopment.com. What I want to mention about it is we put on meet-ups throughout the year. They're really transformational weekends for engineers, where we get top-of-the-

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line keynote speakers and authors. We also bring in executives in the engineering industry in that region to come in and answer questions and just converse with engineers to try to help them chart their path in their career.

We've put together a great event in Austin, Texas this April. The website's iecdmeetup.com and you can check it out. Save the date for the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth of April. We'll be opening up registration in January, which is just a few weeks away. We're excited, there's not a lot of seats so there will be limited seating so I will make an announcement on the show once we open up our registration to non-IECD members. So with that, let's get right to the show today. I want to start off by giving you a quote as our motivational moment.

Anthony's Motivational Moment: For today's quote, I've selected one from Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Workweek*, one of my favorite books and I'm going to talk about the book a little bit later in the career-changing tip. However, Tim has helped a lot of people to think differently in their careers and that's what this show is about today and you'll see when I get into the session in a minute here that this engineer is thinking outside the box and wants to take a little bit of an untraditional route. And the point of the show is not to say that you have to get out of that idea of a cubicle world or a traditional corporate route as an engineer- you can stay there if you want to, but the point of the show is to say you don't have to. You could do something different, untraditional as an engineer. If any of you have stories of an untraditional career route as an engineer that you want to share with us, please visit the website engineeringcareercoach.com and put those entries in through the contact us tab. I would love to hear them.

So here's today's quote from Tim Ferriss, "For all of the most important things, the timing always sucks. Waiting for a good time to quit your job? The stars will never align and the traffic lights of life will never all be green at the same time. The universe doesn't conspire against you, but it doesn't go out of its way to line up the pins either. Conditions are never perfect. 'Someday' is a disease that will take your dreams to the grave with you. Pro and con lists are just as bad. If it's important to you and you want to do it 'eventually,' just do it and correct course along the way." So I love that quote because it's so true. We come up with these ideas like, 'eventually I want to do this' or 'someday I want to do this,' but the point is when? What do you mean someday? Someday becomes never. You need to do it now. All of you that are setting your goals now for the new year, you need to be thinking about this now. Not saying that this is a goal for five years from now, this is something I need to start today. And I use this quote because the engineer that I'm going to be coaching momentarily, this is something that, he wants to make these moves in his career so he needs to do this now. And all of you out there that want to make moves need to start today. So I hope that quote was inspiring for you. Let's jump right in now, into the coaching part of our show today.

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Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright now it's time for the coaching segment of our show here today and today's guest is Dan from Washington DC. Dan is an electrical engineer. He has a BS in electrical engineering and is currently pursuing an MS in electrical engineering. He's twenty-six years old. And he wrote to us about trying to use his engineering background to really achieve his goals. And I'm going to read you his application, which was a very interesting one and it's something that I definitely jumped on and wanted to try to help Dan achieve.

He said on his application, 'My ultimate goal is to eventually leave the so-called rat race to become self-supporting and financially independent. I recently began making significant efforts towards formalizing my freelance writing and editing skills into a part-time business. I am also currently taking a review course to prepare for October's FE exam. I'll be starting graduate school this fall to not only develop professionally and personally but also to meet my ultimate goal of gaining more professional and financial freedom. I am seeking your expertise and how to best achieve this goal. How can I use my engineering background to meet my goals? How long before I can consider myself competent enough to leave the traditional?' So Dan, how you doing tonight?

Dan: Pretty good. Thanks for having me in.

Anthony: I just read through your application but why don't you, for the listeners out there, just kind of run through it in your own words and tell me a little bit more about this whole idea of freedom and reaching your goals as an engineer.

Dan: Well, I just started in my current job about three years ago, three years in November. And already I can see that, I guess maybe being around people that have been there for multiple years, that right now I just can't see myself being, not just at that particular job but as I mentioned, the traditional workforce for so many years.

It has to be another; it has to be life outside the cubicle, like you said. So what I've been trying to strive towards is kind of being more financially sensible if you will, with my money to make sure that everything is set up correctly as well as pursuing different avenues, such as getting my masters, pursuing my FE so I can eventually get a PE license -- things that are kind of, in my opinion, make me more independent, though still tied to engineering. So I'm looking for ways that I can tie together my profession along with my love of writing and editing, which I feel is more of a freer type of job or type of work if you will.

Anthony: Okay, that's great. I totally understand where you're at. I mean that's one of the reasons that I started my coaching, training, speaking business because I felt like there was other things I can do to help people, but I also felt like I didn't want to be fixated in one place. And yet I'm still very

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involved in the engineering industry, which is kind of the same path that you're looking to go down. And again, I guess that's definitely one of the reasons that I wanted to really work with Dan here tonight because I'm someone that believes that there's a lot of opportunity out there and between the Internet and using these social networks and building different kinds of skill sets, credentials, expertise that you can really do anything you want. You could have a work career that's totally mobile, independent of location. I mean there's tons of things you can do and it's good to see people like Dan, who are trying to make that happen and realize that. Because there's people out there that working in a company for twenty, thirty, forty years in a cubicle is rewarding to them, is great and they love it. But then there's other people out there that aren't going to want to do that. And recognizing that and starting to take steps towards it is a big thing. So we definitely commend Dan for applying and coming on here tonight to talk about this. One of the things that I can tell right off the bat that Dan is doing properly in order to set himself up for this kind of a career and lifestyle is, he's building his resume, his reputation, his expertise. Right, he's got a degree in electrical engineering. He's been working for good company for the last three years. He's getting his masters in electrical engineering. He's pursuing his professional engineering license, and he's even doing some his own freelance writing and editing, which is something he wants to do long-term.

So for those of you out there if you're looking to achieve a certain goal and set yourself up for a certain career or lifestyle, the one thing that you have to do is you have to put yourself in a position to do that. And by getting these credentials and building your expertise and building up that resume you're doing that. That's one of the things that you're definitely doing. I mean for me, my success as an engineer, becoming a partner, getting different credentials - that was a big part of me being able to do what I do now because engineers believe that I can help them. So we're very parallel here, in the same line. But Dan, tell me about the idea of freedom, what does that mean to you? What makes you feel so strong about trying to achieve that in your career and your life, about having that flexibility?

Dan: As I mentioned, just the routine of going to work. It kind of takes away from, a little bit, of actually enjoying the work because that is such a big part of doing it. So to me, freedom to me is being able to work my own hours, because I believe I'm responsible and able to hold myself accountable and get the work done. And having that freedom just to work on my own terms and to make decisions about where my career is going and not being limited by certain salary ranges and things of that nature. And also, just the freedom of doing something that I actually enjoy doing, on a daily basis and that I can help others with, using my talents and skills. To me that's freedom, having the freedom of choice. So that would be my definition.

Anthony: Okay, great. That's awesome. Freedom of choice - that's something that those of you out there listening, I hope you've taken this to heart. Definitely if you feel this way in your career and you're not maybe happy, you're not fully engaged and you want to have the freedom to choose what

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you want to do. I always tell members of the *Institute for Engineering Career Development* - the career development community that I run for engineers - I tell them all the time that I define success personally as the ability to do whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it with whomever I want to do it with and it's kind of a little bit of a crazy definition, but the bottom line is it's kind of right in line with Dan's definition of choice. And it's really, to be able to have the choice to do what you want to do, whether its freelance writing, editing in the engineering industry, helping people, doing it from the United States, doing it internationally, doing it wherever you feel like going this year.

A lot of the talk that we're having right now reminds me a lot of Tim Ferriss and his book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, which for me was a very inspirational book. I know it might not be for everyone that book, it's probably more for people like Dan and myself, who love the idea of just being different, getting out there and doing different things. But if that's a book that you can pick up if you have any kind of an intimation of wanting to go into freedom or more choice in your career.

But let's focus here on Dan and let's try to help them in this situation. His question was, how can I use my engineering background to meet my goals and how long before I consider myself competent enough to leave the traditional workforce? And good questions.

So, first of all, the whole idea about using your engineering background to meet your goals. I think you're kind of doing that already but I think one of the things you can do is, everyone that has an engineering degree in my opinion has been taught a certain way to think. We have very good analytical skills. We're able to really see things and plan things and I think that, it sounds to me like you're using those skills because number one, from my experience, engineers can handle a lot of things because of these skills, because of the ability to stay organized and stay focused. And Dan right now you're working for a good company, you're getting your masters degree, you are studying for the FE exam, you have a little bit of a side business with writing and editing. So I think you're using your fundamental engineering skill sets right now to build your resume, which is the critical thing. So I think that you couldn't be using it in a better way.

And really, what you want to do is, which leads us into the next question of how long before I can consider myself competent enough? I think the way to answer this question is to think about the people that you're going to serve, first right. And secondly think about yourself long-term, as far as the opportunities that you're going to have. So you can run through a couple scenarios. So, for example, let's just say that you take your FE exam and you get a couple of writing clients, editing clients and you decide, 'You know what, I'm going to take this gig, I'm going to run with it.' You go out there. You have success for a year and then all of a sudden this business dries up. Right. Now think about, or even let's say it lasts two or three years to make it even more challenging. Let's say the business goes good for three years and all of a sudden it dries up, right?

Dan: Right.

Anthony: So now you haven't done engineering in three years. You have your FE under your belt, but you don't have your PE license, alright. Now, what kind of position is that going to put you in?

Dan: That's true.

Anthony: Maybe you may still be able to go back to the industry fairly easily, but you may not. So, my point there is, I would at least spend the next couple years, you're on the right track and I would get that Masters degree. I would get your FE. If you can, and you can stay in some kind of a stable job until you get your PE license. I think at that point I would feel like this is where I'm comfortable because now I have the PE license that no-one can ever take away from me. I've got a masters degree in electrical engineering. I've been building this side business for three or four years now to the point where I have some good clients. I have a reputation in the industry for this. Now I'm in a position where I can leave and if anything were to happen to me, I have tons of different things to fall back on.

Dan: Okay, I see. I see.

Anthony: See what I'm saying?

Dan: I do. And that is something I was thinking. At least staying in it and taking advantage, for instance, of the assistance that the job offers as far as covering the expenses for getting those type of certifications. But not only that, also getting the experience as you mentioned, that I would need as an engineering trainee, to eventually get my PE. And I think that will help me out as far as writing and editing those papers by just kind of increasing my whole, I guess, professional outlook and as well as my networks. So, I definitely agree with that.

Anthony: Yes, absolutely. And the other thing to think about too, which a lot of people don't think about is, a lot of people in your position could take the approach of, 'My plan is to not be doing necessarily highly technical engineering for my whole career, so I don't necessarily need my PE license.' right. But for me there's a couple downfalls there. One, the idea that we already talked about that if you do have to resort back to engineering for any problem, having your PE license dramatically increase your chances to getting a job again, alright - that's number one.

But the second thing that people don't think about is, if I'm a company and I'm going to hire you for writing, technical writing, editing, whatever the case may be. If you have a PE, that just gives, to me it's like a lot more credibility. You know what I mean?

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Dan: Exactly.

Anthony: It's like, 'I found this guy. He's great. He's got a nice little niche business. He's a PE. He's got experience in the engineering field, but now he 's doing editing, report formatting, different things, so we've been using him.' You know what I mean? I mean like for me, I do engineering career coaching but I have a PE and I keep it after my name. And the reason for that is, because engineers know that I'm, I went through the process. I got licensed. I know what the engineering career is about and I can help them.

Dan: And I agree with that wholeheartedly. I think it helps, especially that's what makes this business unique is that I am focusing on engineers so it's best that someone who has accomplished, pretty much a good number of things in his career including the PE. I think that'll stand out and help me get the best clients.

Anthony: Yes, absolutely. And I think that also, what is going to be something that everyone out there should keep in mind - because a lot of people, I mean most of our listeners are trying to achieve that dream career, achieve their goals, whatever the case may be - and I think that one of the things we can always be tempted to do is to kind of jump too early. I had this situation in my career when I want to start my coaching, training, speaking business. I went through intensive coaching training and I knew I could help engineers and I just wanted to do it. I just wanted to leave my comfortable job and just go out and do it. I had a family. I had other responsibilities, and I had to wait. I had to be patient. I waited. I was patient. I did my research. I built my expertise and finally I was able to land that client that was big enough for me to be able to go on my way and start the company and in a stable way and give me all of the experience and the contacts and everything that I needed.

So the message here is for all of you out there because I know there's lot of engineers that get frustrated in their careers if they have a goal like Dan or another goal and they're not able to achieve it in their current position. But what I will tell you is, you are probably learning things in your current position every day that are going to help you to ultimately achieve that goal. And that's one thing to keep in mind to try to get you through that time. You may see it as a downtime in your career or career where you're stagnant. I mean for me, one of the reasons I even became a coach was because I had a supervisor who wasn't giving me a lot of responsibilities and I was bored so I wanted to find something else to do and I found a coaching school. I had been interested in it and I heard about it and I went and gave it a shot and the rest is kind of history.

So, I think there's a really powerful message in the coaching session here today is that if you have a goal and you want to achieve it, you have to first of, build your reputation, build your resume, build your expertise in that area. Get some credentials that are going to show people that you have the expertise, you have the background. Don't go after it too early. Take the time to build those

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credentials. Get everything under your belt, prepare, make the right connections so you can really hit the ground running when it's time to take that opportunity. It doesn't have to be your own business, it could just be another job or a slightly different part of the industry, whatever it may be. And the last thing on this point is never to let anyone tell you that you can't do or that you're making a stupid decision. Someone could say, 'Hey Dan, listen you're crazy. I mean you're a young guy. You're an electrical engineer. You're in a great company. What are you crazy, doing some freelancing, writing, editing?' And you know what people said that to me, but the bottom line is, if you're clear on what success means to you. And obviously Dan is clear that success for him means choice, freedom, the ability to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. If he's clear on that and he's put together a plan to go after it, then he's going to go for it and that's the bottom line. It doesn't matter, I mean he may seek advice, like he's doing tonight in coaching, it's only going to help him further. But the last thing you want to do is listen to the people that are going to tell you that you can't do it. That's kind of one of the reasons I also started the **Institute for Engineering Career Development** because all those engineers out there that have such ambitious goals, people will tell them, 'You're crazy. You can't do this.' In the institute we tell them, 'Yes you can,' and we try to help them to do that. And that's something that is, just something that I'm really, really passionate about because I believe that there's too many resources in the world today for you not to be able to do whatever you want to do, everyday. So Dan, tell me what you're thinking right now? What are your thoughts right now?

Dan: I just have a lot to think about. It's more clear now on where I'm going. So even on those long commutes I can think this is just another day that's leading me towards doing what eventually I hope to be doing for the rest of my life, which is having that freedom of choice. And I definitely appreciate this advice and this call.

Anthony: Good.

Dan: And the institute.

Anthony: Yes, that's right, Dan's a member of the institute and please check out the Institute at engineeringcareerdevelopment.com if you're one of those engineers that's really shooting for the stars and you really want to do things that you never thought you could do or other people tell you that you can't do. Because believe me, we can definitely help you achieve it. So, with that I want to just say thanks to Dan for coming on the call.

Dan: Thank you.

Anthony: You'll be able to get the show notes for this call everybody, at engineeringcareercoach.com as I mentioned previously in the show and Dan, I really look forward to working with you and helping this become a reality through the institute and I'm glad that you joined us tonight.

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Dan: Thank you Anthony.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip: I hope everyone enjoyed our coaching segment for today. Now it's time for your career-changing tip. And this is something I like to do at the end of each show, because I think it's a big deal that you take a half an hour out of your week, or out of your every other week to listen to my podcasts. So I want to make it extremely valuable for you and give you a tip that if you implement it, will change your career and your life if you implement the strategies I give you here.

So today's career-changing tip is to read the book, ***The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-to-5, Live anywhere, and Join the new rich***, by Timothy Ferris. Alright, now I know that many of you don't necessarily want to travel around the world in lieu of working as an engineer, but this book will dramatically change the way you think and approach your career and your life on a daily basis. There are so many books that you read and that you reread and that stay with you for your lifetime, that I think that this could be one of them for you. It is for me. It's tabbed up. It's on my desk. I refer to it regularly. And by reading this book, there's going to be some sections that are detailed in talking about how to do an online business that's not going to be interesting to you necessarily. But it's the parts like the beginning of the book where he talks about how he decided that he wanted to beat to a different drum than everybody else, how his parents inspired him to do things totally different and how he went from a job that was eighty hours a week corporate job to an eighty hour a week business that he started for himself to a business that he ran that took him four hours a week and he travelled around the world. And he explains to you how he did it. But really it's why he did it that really hits home for me and I think you're going to enjoy it.

Anthony's Closing Remarks: So with that again, thanks for joining me here on the podcast today. Be sure to check out the resources available at engineeringcareercoach.com.

The show notes for this show will be available at engineeringcareercoach.com/session8 with a link to ***The 4-Hour Workweek*** and all of the other resources that I mentioned in this show.

With that, I want to thank all of you for listening. I wish you happy holidays and I will see you in a few weeks for the next session of the ***Engineering Career Coach Podcast***.

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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