The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST
SESSION #17
3 Major Benefits of Professional Associations and How to Realize Them, with SHPE National President Barry Cordero

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/barry

Anthony's Upfront Intro: You are listening to ***The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*** with Anthony Fasano session #17. In this session I speak with Barry Cordero, National President of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, who discusses three major benefits of professional associations and how you can realize them.

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, your engineering Career Coach of engineeringcareercoach.com. Please check out my website. It is absolutely loaded with free career resources and advice for engineers. I've got a great show for you today with some information about professional associations that was really eye opening to me when I did the interview with today's guest. We're going to get right into it.

I just want to thank everyone for their feedback. To be honest, it's been a little bit overwhelming. The show has really taken off in the last few months and I've received some great feedback and also some critical feedback. As I mentioned on the last show, some of the feedback indicated that I should cut out some of the talk at the beginning of the show and get right into the good stuff. So I have eliminated the motivational moment and from now on we'll be getting into the main segment quicker.

I will just ask that you keep the feedback coming please by either emailing me at afasano@powerfulpurpose.com or by reviewing the show on iTunes and visiting engineeringcareercoach.com/itunes. That would help out a lot. With that, let's jump into the show, which will focus on recognizing and realizing the major benefits professional associations can offer. And again, I picked up a lot of tips myself on this, especially about leadership that was really fascinating to me.

So let me formally introduce my guest and then it'll be go time. Barry Cordero is the National President of The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, also known as SHPE. SHPE is a

premier national organization aimed at increasing the number of Hispanics contributing to the nation's innovation and technology future. As the National President of SHPE, Cordero focuses on the execution of the SHPE programs and events to enable growth. Cordero also works as a fulltime Principle Project Engineer with Medtronic Inc. where in addition to other accomplishments he pioneered a systemic, hands on training program for all employees to engage in problem solving.

Alright everyone, enjoy the show and please stick around for the career changing tip at the end. Barry has a real good one for you today.

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: Alright, now it's time for the main segment of our show today and today I have with me President of The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, also known as SHPE, Barry Cordero. Barry, thanks for spending some time with us today.

Barry: Thank you. Thank you and a pleasure to be here.

Anthony: So today we're going to focus on talking about professional associations. I'm sure that about ninety percent of our listeners out there are either members or have contemplated joining a professional association. I wanted to have Barry on because I know that Barry certainly knows, as do I, is that there are a lot of benefits to associations but a lot of people just join and they don't get that involved and they don't reap these benefits. So I'm going to kick it off by kind of just letting Barry talk a little bit in general about associations.

Barry: I've been kind of thinking a lot about this. I've been involved with SHPE for about eleven years and I've been talking to a lot of people about why do the organizations and societies and employee research groups, why do they give you opportunities that you wouldn't otherwise have. I think part of the reason is they enable you to get comfortable in uncomfortable situations.

Similar to kind of like a fraternity or a sorority, it helps you in college get comfortable in this new environment, where maybe you're a younger guy or a lady on campus and you don't really have a group of people. What the fraternities and societies do is they kind of give you that organized peer pressure, where you might go and do things that you otherwise might not be interested in because there's a group of people that are helping you, encouraging you or with you along the way.

And then fraternities and sororities, the things you do may not be as honorable or you may not want to remember them but when you look at professional societies like SHPE or NSBE or IEEE or ASCE or any of the technical societies out there or other professional societies, what they can do for you is if you have a goal that's audacious or just something that you or no-one in your family has ever pursued,

you have other people in these organizations that are in the same boat as you. They're in the same situation and if you leverage them well you can find strength in numbers and you can achieve goals that I think maybe you were not otherwise able to achieve.

Anthony: Great. Yeah I agree with you Barry, having a lot of experience with it myself, I think it does allow you to push your limits and broaden your horizons. And like you said, I mean you said it the best, is to get comfortable in situations where you're uncomfortable and that's really the only way to grow. That's just cut and dry the only way to grow.

So Barry is going to hit three major points here today and then we'll go into a couple of sub-points on each one. The first point that we're going to get into is **associations allow you to develop a community or a network to help you reach your goals**. Barry, why don't you talk about that one?

Barry: In organizations like SHPE a lot of times what it does is it kind of opens your mind to what are the goals that you could possibly have. In our community specifically I think many of us are first generation citizens, we're first in our families to go to college and many of us are first in our families to be in a white-collar career. So, believe it or not, a lot of what we expect and what we understand and what we thrive for in business and in technology is based off of our understanding from our family experience.

And so what SHPE and other organizations help you do is you kind of get exposed to what other people's journeys have been, what other people's career goals have been and what experiences that have helped them reach their goals. So what I believe is that organizations like SHPE kind of give you, they open up your mind. They make you more aware to what possibilities there are for your career, for your personal and professional development when you're a working professional.

When you're in college engineering and science specifically are very hard majors to pursue and they don't have very high success rates. In minority communities only around fifty percent of students who start an engineering degree will finish it in five years. But what some of the more recent studies are showing are that students in professional societies, because they have that community, that network of people struggling through that process with them, they're twenty to thirty percent more likely to complete those technical degrees. And that's really powerful when you have people backing you throughout and you know you're not alone. It can really help you achieve your college goals.

And then finally I think really having a network of people that are tied together because of a principle or because of a mission, it allows you to access people that may not normally be in your sphere of influence. So an organization like SHPE, we're forty years old. And we have executives, senior executives. We have entrepreneurs. We have all these people that are members and when you come to our conference or when you just have, when you connect with them at the local professional chapter, it can open up your eyes to what people have done and it can also connect you to other

opportunities. A lot of times these people have openings or they might even have career advice to help you kind of shape your career.

Anthony: Great. So that's the first point and again, that's developing that community or that network. I think one word that really stands out for me in that point Barry is support. Like you said, whether you're in college and you're trying to get an engineering degree or whether you're trying to build an engineering career at any level, it's difficult. It's stressful. There's challenges and to have a support group and of course a network that can help open you up to opportunities I think is invaluable. You said it's powerful from the stats that you gave. So that's our first point.

Our second point is to **develop professional skills**. The associations like you to develop your professional skills through leadership that you sometimes can't really do at school or at work. Why don't you get into that one Barry?

Barry: That's something that's really unique about a lot of these organizations is many of them are grass roots developed and they still have that feel. So in SHPE or NSBE or SWE - Society of Woman Engineers, you can still take an idea and turn it into a program that has impact on the community. And so if you look at that process, taking a concept and turning it into a product, there are a lot of parallels with the engineering field and with product development.

If you can capitalize on those skills and build your experience, you can really beef up your experience by going through and understanding what the market needs, understanding what users need, shaping your product based on that feedback and doing prototypes and rapid learning cycles of what this experience, what this event, what this program might look like and then executing it and measuring your results.

So what I like to tell people is find a way to put this on your resume in the experience section and if you look at my resume you cannot tell the difference between my paid engineering experience and my leadership experience in SHPE because to me I only have one category - it's experience. Typically in interviews, when I have an interview what separates me from my peers is that experience I've had in SHPE because I've been able to lead events, to organize events, to negotiate contracts, to manage large budgets, to manage individuals who are only volunteers.

That kind of takes me to another major thing that you get out of these professional societies is the experience of leading through influence. That's becoming more and more important in technology field where there aren't as many direct management, direct report type relationships. More and more people are having to build experience through leading by influence, where the people that are responsible for executing a new program, they don't necessarily report to you. And that is exactly what we do in our societies, in our organizations. Not only do they not report to you, they don't get

paid. So you have to learn how to develop a value proposition that gets them bought in and gets them executing on a regular cadence so that you can meet your overall goals.

Anthony: Barry, I just want to say that that's a really powerful thought right there that I didn't really think about and I'm sure a lot of people don't think about is the ability to build your leadership skills through influence and what Barry just said, I mean these are people that are volunteers. When you work at a company or an engineering company you have staff if you're a manager and they're employees. I mean it's their job, they get paid to do this so to some degree 'they have to do it.' But when you're working in a professional association, pretty much everybody, I mean there's some paid employees but pretty much all those people there are volunteers. So you really have to have a visions and you really have to lead through influence, like Barry has explained here. I can imagine Barry that bringing that back to the workplace would just be so helpful.

Barry: Yeah, it's really helped me a lot and most of my career positions have been kind of that influence piece. I do have direct reports but what I do at Medtronic is lean sigma deployment for an entire site. So there's several departments that I'm supposed to influence. Even though they don't report to me, they have objectives that I'm responsible for. It's really helped me to learn how to capitalize on those skills.

Also, another skill that I've really developed through SHPE is strategic planning and execution. This is something that has direct correlation to the business world. In nonprofit organizations and in professional societies we have to take our mission and then determine what portions of that we're going to execute on. We develop that strategic plan and a goal deployment and we execute on it.

And I could have just been talking about your company because they do the exact same thing. Because of the experience I've gotten doing that in SHPE I've been able to apply that a lot at my job and I've gotten the opportunity to work with the senior staff and consult them on developing strategic plans and executing through goal deployment. It's a great skill. It's very useful and you'd be surprised how many people just don't have that, that skill.

And then finally, the last part that I think that you really get out of these societies, especially if you're in a leadership role, is you really build your communication skills. In engineering or technical fields, we're not necessarily known for our communication skills. I mean we have to work very hard to understand the technical aspects of our careers and a lot of times we don't all have that experience of developing our interpersonal skills. But what all these societies are about, they're kind of built on that network. The foundation of that is communication.

So especially when you're in a leadership position, you have to be able to use that to influence people and you have to develop your public speaking skills. And that's really important if you want to climb in a leadership position in technical organizations. I mean people that are very good technically but they

don't have those interpersonal and those communication skills, there's kind of a ceiling for you because you have to be able to interact at the highest levels of the organization. So through our societies I really feel like you can develop those.

Anthony: Yeah, I agree with that a hundred percent. Barry, the one thing I think that's really important about public speaking and communication skills and that a lot of engineers also need to realize is that getting up in front of a room, it's one thing that you're able to speak and present your ideas clearly and communicate clearly, which is very important, but it also builds your confidence tremendously. I can just attest to this from speaking at a lot of conferences. For younger engineers, I know myself from doing a lot of coaching work with them, is one of the biggest challenges is lack of confidence. And so I think getting in these associations, getting up in front of the room, even if you're just making announcements at the beginning of your meeting, every time you do that you build confidence and that's going to help you in your career. It's going to help you in life really overall. I think it's something that people think, "well I don't really need to know how to speak in public. I don't have to do that for my job," but it's not just about doing it for your job, it's about doing it for you and building that confidence.

I just want to interject two resources that are available to engineers out there for public speaking. One, on my website I have a totally free, very comprehensive guide on how to improve your public speaking skills at engineeringcareercoach.com/engineersspeak and then secondly, there's a great organization out there called ***Toastmasters International***. I've been a member for a while. It's a very inexpensive club. They have them all over the world they have chapters. You go there to improve your public speaking but along with that improvement, like I said, comes better communication skills and increased confidence. I think that that is all so important, especially for a lot of engineers that have English as a second language. I know for SHPE that's important because I spoke at a couple of SHPE conferences. That can be tough for engineers too, that can hurt your confidence level as well. Again, ***Toastmasters***, getting out there and speaking in front of people can help you with that.

Barry: Yeah I agree. I was actually, I was a member of Toastmasters for about a year and a half and I learned a lot through that and just the practice. Just getting that practice and getting that rhythm down and learning how to improvise is really, really valuable.

Anthony: Yeah. So let's go on to the last point that we have here for today, the third point, which is **developing your technical skills through training that you might not be able to find at school or at work**.

Barry: Yeah, so a lot of times - and especially if you get into a larger company - you'll get niched into a certain role. So I know medical devices pretty well. If you're a biomedical engineer, you want to go into design but all those positions are taken and you'll get pigeonholed into quality a lot of times and

so that's great. It's a foot in the door. You'll gain a lot of experience. But if you want to really get into the design part of the medical device industry you have to build your skills. They don't make those opportunities available to you regularly. They don't offer them to you. So what you'll have to do is get creative and a lot of times through professional societies, they'll offer you either direct workshops and training for free or they can get you discounts to workshops and seminars, where you can build those skills. For organizations like SHPE, because we're not discipline focused, we're kind of broad, we try to offer workshops and seminars that reach everybody. So we offer lean sigma, which is lean and six sigma, we offer project management and things that it doesn't matter what field you're in you can gain some experience from it. But organizations like ASCE and IEEE, you can get specific training and certifications for the field that you're working in and sometimes they're way better than anything you could get at a local university through an extension course and many times they're a lot cheaper. And then also through a lot of those discipline based organizations you get access to the latest research, you get access to the latest journal articles and that's really the value proposition they offer. You're working on a new project and there's something that you've never seen before, you can research these archives and find information to support the work you're about to do and a lot of times avoid unnecessary experimentation because somebody has already done it for you on a specific material, on a specific situation for a device, for a product. And that can be very valuable. By just getting your hands on that information it can be valuable to you and it can save your company a lot of money.

Anthony: Great, great. Alright, so let me summarize our three points that we hit on here today.

1. The professional associations allow you to develop a community or a network that can help you to achieve your goals. It gives you that support group, especially through challenging times.
2. Professional associations can help you to develop your professional skills through leadership that you might not be able to find at school or work. These leadership opportunities like leading through influence, learning how to lead volunteers, like Barry touched on.
3. The ability or the opportunity to develop your technical skills through training that might not be available to you at school or work, whether it's webinars, workshops, seminars, papers, research, all of those benefits.

So I think that that's a real, hopefully real good blueprint for those of you out there that are thinking of joining or even are members of associations and you're just not utilizing all of the potential benefits that are available to you.

So Barry, before we get towards the end of the show here let me ask you another question. You're the President of SHPE, which I'm sure is a big job, you've got a lot of responsibilities. You had your annual conference that you went to as President already, correct?

Barry: Yes, that's right yeah.

Anthony: How is that, I mean are you like a superstar at that conference?

Barry: Yeah, it's really different. I mean there's this dichotomy you live in, where if you're a leader in a society like that - and we're a very tight group of people in SHPE.

Anthony: Sure.

Barry: There is like this sub-universe of stardom. At SHPE I get to think strategically, I get to work with Senior Vice Presidents of these Fortune 100 companies.

Anthony: Right.

Barry: And they help us develop our strategic plans and we work on finance together and it's very high level, very strategic, very exciting. And then I go back to my company and I'm working kind of at the execute project management level and so it's kind of a night and day difference. It can be frustrating because you want to work at this level fulltime but the only time you get to work on it is when you're not getting paid.

Anthony: Right.

Barry: So it's interesting bit we have a lot of students and the students in our organization, they look up to our leaders. So I get a lot of very nice comments and requests and I try to speak with as many students as I can.

Anthony: Great.

Barry: Yeah, it's an amazing experience. I wish everyone could have this.

Anthony: Yeah, I'm sure it is and I can say, just a little plug for SHPE, I mean I've spoken at two of your conferences and hopefully will be speaking at more, but your conferences - the energy there is like off the wall. You go to these SHPE conferences from my experience and you just walk in it and I don't know Barry, but you just feel it you know.

Barry: Yeah. Yeah, it's unique. That's why people keep coming back and honestly I think one of the reasons is because we really help a lot of these students realize their dreams. When you look at an organization where ninety percent of the students are first in their family in college, never in their family has anyone ever been in a white-collar career and their getting access to all this through out organization, it makes it a very powerful bond. So we have a strong brand within our community and

hopefully if we continue to execute and have an even bigger national presence we can have a very well known brand in the United States. So that's kind of our dream here as we continue to work.

Anthony: Excellent. Alright, so that kind of sums up our main segment of our show here. I'm going to keep Barry on with us for just a few more minutes to do our career changing tip and we'll come back for that in a minute.

Anthony's Career Changing Tip:

Anthony: Alright, so we're back here now with Barry Cordero, SHPE President, for our career changing tip. This is the part of the show where I like to give our listeners one tip Barry, that if they implement it they'll see results in their career. I want to try to keep on our theme today of the associations and ask you if there are listeners out there that are preparing to join an association or they've been a member of a professional association and they don't feel like they're getting the most out of it, what is something that you would recommend to them to do to try to get more out of it and realize some of the benefits that you and I discussed here today?

Barry: I think what I'm about to say people will probably roll their eyes at but I'm going to tell you that it's true, despite the rolling of your eyes, you need to take on a leadership position within your organization. That doesn't have to be big. You can just volunteer to lead an outreach event. But you don't just do it just to do the volunteering, you do it in the mindset that if this was your job how would I put this on my resume? So the skills you want to get out of it are organizing a program, managing volunteers, executing with a budget, negotiating contracts, like these types of skills you want to experience in that leadership roll. So if you treat your volunteer position, your committee lead position as a job and then work it into your resume, not only do you get to execute on the mission of the organization and benefit the community and feel really good, but you also get to put it on your resume as a leadership skill. And then the bonus is talk it over with your manager and make it part of your individual development plan and then you get kind of a triple in that way.

Anthony: Excellent, and I agree. You've got to take a leadership role for all the reasons that Barry talked about on this whole session, you have to take a leadership role I think to maximize that experience, get your network booming and get your skills up, get your confidence up. You will see, I believe dramatic changes if you do that.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

Anthony: So once again I want to thank you Barry. I know you're really busy between your paid and nonpaid jobs and to take a few minutes out to come on with us today was excellent. Those of you out

there listening, you can access the show notes for the show today at engineeringcareercoach.com/barry. You'll be able to go there, get a summary of the show and get the links of anything that we talked about. We'll link to SHPE's website. We'll link to any of the references like Toastmasters that we talked about so you can pick up those links and access them. And I look forward to catching up with all of you. I've been getting a lot of good feedback in. Keep sending the emails in, going to the website, contacting me and letting me know how I can improve the show. And with that I look forward to catching up with you on the next session. Thanks again Barry, really appreciate it.

Barry: Thanks Anthony. It was a pleasure being on this show and I hope to talk to you again very soon.

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