



The ENGINEERING CAREER COACH PODCAST SESSION #46

TECC 46 The Engineering Career Coach Podcast – Five Steps to Managing Conflict in Your Engineering Career and Personal Life

Show notes at: engineeringcareercoach.com/spark

Anthony's Upfront Intro: In this episode I will speak with author and speaker Dr. Zach Schaefer on how to manage conflict in your career and your life. 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 show. Today, this is the show for engineers that want to create extraordinary careers and lives. I have a great show for you today. I'll be speaking with Dr. Zach Schaefer from "Spark The Discussion." When we get into the topic of conflict, which is always something that people struggle with... I mean to be honest, I struggle with it. Everyone struggles with it. Nobody really wants to go through conflict. So today, we're going to talk about tips for managing conflict and I'll introduce Dr. Schaefer in a few minutes here.

But before I do, two quick announcements. Number one, I will be offering one complimentary webinar per month in the year 2015. It'll be located on my website at engineeringcareercoach.com/webinars. Just go to my website and click on Webinars. I'm going to rotate the webinars right now between my *Engineer Your Own Success* webinar, which focuses on the development of your soft skills, goal setting, communication, networking, leadership. And in the following month, I'll do my Resume and Interview webinar for engineers. I've helped many engineers land jobs with great salaries with the strategies in that webinar. So check out engineeringcareercoach.com/webinars. We got a few weeks before the first one. You can register. They're totally free and they'll be running all year long.

Second announcement, which I'm really excited about, is [The Engineering Career Success Summit](#). A few months ago, I was able to fund this event through Kickstarter. It's an event that I want to establish that is going to serve engineers in their personal and professional development every year. It'll be a conference, a yearly conference. This year, it'll be April 30th, May 1st, May 2nd in Washington D.C. and we just opened up registration today after just recently announcing that we have Jonathan Fanning, the author of *Who Are You Becoming*, as the keynote speaker and I'm so

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excited about this. Jonathan, he's a great friend. He's all over the world speaking for Fortune 100 companies but he will be spending that weekend with us in D.C. in doing two sessions. One on the idea of 'Who Are You Becoming' which is a leadership-based talk, and the second one is on emotional intelligence.

As for the schedule for the event, the Thursday, just prior to the event, they'll be kind of a pre-party Thursday night. But we'll also have an optional mastermind workshop that afternoon for up to 16 engineers. We'll really learn about your own strengths and weaknesses and how you can use that as you move forward that weekend but also in your career. So that's Thursday.

And then Friday, the first official day of the summit will focus on career skill building. There'll be two tracks, career advancement and leadership. We'll cover communication, emotional intelligence, leadership, how to bring value to your employers and clients. There'll be panels with different executives there. And then Saturday, we're going to focus more on work-life balance and lifestyle design, which I'm really excited about. So Friday will focus on your professional skills building them, and then we'll talk about balancing on the next day. And then that afternoon, we have a special tour of some of the structures in D.C and it kind of an engineering look at some of these structures. I'm super excited. The only downside is, there's only 75 seats this year because we're keeping it small. I don't want to say, "To test," because we're definitely going to do it every year but we want to see how it goes and we've already sold half of them through Kickstarter.

So again, it's engineeringevent.com. Prices are affordable. It's early-bird pricing right now, so check it out and hopefully, you'll come join us down there and I would love to meet you.

Coaching Segment:

With that, let me introduce our guest for today and jump right into the main segment of the show, get this interview rolling here. Dr. Zach Schaefer is the Founder and President of "Spark The Discussion," which is found at sparkthediscussion.com. Zach is a university professor, and author of researcher and a consultant.

In addition to starting his own consulting business, he is also an Assistant Professor of Applied Communication Studies, which is extremely interesting to me, at Southern Illinois University. He helps Saint Louis companies and business professionals "talk with intent," enhance workplace performance, and create innovative workplace cultures. He is also the author of the book, "American Creativity: The Mind At Work," which is a very interesting book that looks at the perspectives of individuals in different professions. Kind of showing how this patterns between them.

The show notes for today's show will be found at engineeringcareercoach.com/spark. If you want to

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see the recap of the show and check at any of the links that I referenced as I talk with Zach. And with that, I'm going to give you a quote that will carry us right into the main segment of the show. The quote is from Mahatma Gandhi and it is as follows: **“An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.”** Again, “An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.”

Coaching Segment:

Anthony: So now, I want to welcome to the show Zach Schaefer. Zach, how are you doing today?

Zach: I'm doing very well, Anthony. Thanks for having me.

Anthony: Oh, I'm really happy that you took the time to join us today. I'm excited to talk about the topic of conflict with you, which is something that I know most of us are kind of challenged with. But before we get into conflict, I have a couple of kind of questions upfront. And the first question for you is, obviously, you focus in communication, that's what you do, as I talked about in the introduction. Tell us a little bit about how you got into the whole world of communication and what really made you think about this idea of communicating intently, talking intently. Tell us about that.

Zach: Absolutely. I'll back it up quite a bit. When I went into college as an undergrad originally, I was like a typical undergrad and had no clue what I wanted to do. At the time, I was quite good at Math and Science and brought in quite a few credits. So I did what any good college student would do and say, “Oh, I guess I'll be a doctor.” And within the first semester, I hadn't even taken any of the pre-med classes yet. I just turned luck got an instructor who became my mentor, a good friend and colleague named Dr. Robert Krizek, and he knows by Bob now. And I was just enamored with this individual. I took his intro to communication studies. I believe it was called Class. And he was a consultant in addition to being a wonderful professor and I just saw the impact that he was able to make both in student's lives and in organizational settings through the stories that he would tell based on his consulting experiences.

So at the time as an impressionable 18-year old, I thought, “The Heck with the med degree, which I really didn't care about, I just didn't know what I wanted to do, and I started pursuing more courses and advanced communication studies. And the question we often run into as a discipline is, “Oh, that's neat. What is it?” And unfortunately, we have no great answer.

So engineering, people can wrap their mind around that pretty quickly. But communication is such a broad term. You really have to specialize. So that's what I began to do. And over the course of the next ten years of my education in undergrad grad school and then my doctoral program, I really focused on how organizations use and misused communication to achieve their goals.

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Anthony: That's really, really interesting. Last question before we jump into the topic of conflict, Zach, is I mentioned your book before, "American Creativity: The Mind At Work," where you kind of look at the perspectives of people in different professions, tell the listeners a little bit about how you came up with the idea for that book. I mean I thought it was really interesting and I read parts of the book. Maybe you could share a little bit of backstory there.

Zach: Yeah, absolutely. One of my bugaboos, so to speak, is the myth that only artistic people are creative. And I am not artistic by any means; however, I do find myself to be creative in a variety of other measures. And so I started just informally talking to people that I knew about what they thought about creativity and found out that people are wildly creative, both in their personal lives, but especially in the professional lives in a variety of ways. So then, I just formalized this sort of informal field conversations into a book and I want to appeal to a wide audience, so which is why I tried to choose people from 25 different industries or careers if you will.

So in the book, you know, I know interview white-collar and blue-collared people. I talked to people who work on a train yard or in a union. I talked to a professional poker player. I talked to someone that runs a very large organization with revenue in the hundreds of millions of dollars. So there's a lot of perspectives represented in the book. And the basic premise is that, wow, I guess I didn't think I was being creative, but in actuality, I am. So I really challenge people to think about what creative means. And unfortunately, a lot of people say thinking out of the box and that's a very uncreative way to talk about creativity.

But being creative is an individual aspect of coming up with something fresh, something new, something useful. In the business community, they just call it innovation.

And the last thing I'll say about the book is through these conversations, most of which out of the 25 no less than two hours, some of them went into for five-hour range because they were such fun.

Anthony: Wow!

Zach: People really started to see other opportunities for how they could be creative, both in the workplace and in their personal lives. So people take anything away from that book. It's breaking that conventional wisdom and myth that only artistic people are creative. For me, being human is being creative and it's just exercising that creative muscle more often than we normally do.

Anthony: That's awesome. And we'll definitely link to Zach's book in the show notes, which you could find at engineeringcareercoach.com/spark, so you could check it out. I'm definitely going to grab a whole of it and read the whole book. I'm looking forward to it.

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So let's get into conflict management, which is something that I know a lot of engineers, a lot of professionals deal with or that maybe you avoid it because you don't want to deal with it. But we're going to go through five tips today to kind of I guess take it head on and deal with it. Why don't you jump right into it?

Zach: Well, yeah. Well, I mean I'll ask you a question. Since you're a successful guy and deal with a lot of engineers who are very technical people, logical thinkers, when you hear that term, Anthony, what do you think of with conflict?

Anthony: The immediate thought that comes to mind is negative, whatever some kind of negative connotation whether it's conflict with someone else on your team, conflict with another professional maybe you're working on a project with, and that's kind of what comes to mind for me, definitely more of a negative connotation.

Zach: Absolutely, and you get the gold star for the day because that is a common question that I post to both my students and my clients. And literally 99% of the time it's those negative connotation definitions that people began to think about, the obstacles, the arguments, the hidden tension, the yelling, and that is or can be part of conflict but it doesn't have to be.

So everything I'm going to discuss today is really about adopting a different mindset, a different attitude change, and I'm trying to build an organizational environment around this mindset that views conflict as more productive as long as it's structured well. And so I also want to touch on the fact that I had mentioned, for me, part of being human is part of being creative.

And in addition, because we're social animals, and part of being human is knowing how to disagree and when to disagree, unless you're that lone wolf that goes up and lives in the mountains, you're around the other people and you are going to disagree with them. So what I found in terms of my clients is that the most successful people, meaning those that... not necessarily climb the corporate ladder the highest, but those that have the biggest impact on those around them, they know how to disagree with the class. They know how to disagree with others without coming off disagreeable, if that makes sense.

Anthony: Sure.

Zach: And the first step to that is really knowing yourself. Alright. So step one in these five steps, know yourself. Know what your triggers are. I always like to use the example that of my own ethnicity and heritage is I'm 50/50 German-Irish, meaning I can burn hot and quick like a match but I get over it quickly, an animal so stubborn. So one, you need to be aware of those things when I'm interacting and communicating with other people because my style might not be the best in terms of

trying to achieve my conversational goal.

Anthony: Mm. Okay, that's interesting and certainly sounds like a logical first step. But again, we're talking about five steps here that you could take to kind of deal with or manage conflict in this first step that Zach has identified, which is the great one is to know yourself, and I think that's the key. And I guess we'll see why too as we weigh deeper into the conflict here.

Zach: Absolutely. And so, once you know, and it sounds common sense and common place, "Oh, of course I know myself and I don't mean it and sort of that tangential way." I mean really sit down and think about what are my triggers? What makes me uncomfortable in the workplace? Who's specifically am I not able to communicate with very effectively in the workplace and why? Don't just go to blame the other person or the other party, but think about how you're contributing to that conversational obstacle.

And really, for me, that second step is trying to shift from blame to contribution. And I'd love to take claim for this wonderful little concept but it actually comes out of the research program, from a variety of scholars from Harvard wrote to a wonderful book called "Difficult Conversations: How To Talk About What Matters Most." And this specific tip of shifting from blame to conversation, it really turns a potential conflict or negative conflict into a dialogue. It allows you to say, "Hey, I've contributed to this issue in this way. What do you think?" And usually, there is reciprocity that takes place and people will begin to walk down that path with you and acknowledge how they contributed as well.

Anthony: That's great. And I like the sound of that book, Difficult Conversations. We'll check it out. We'll link to that. And also, another book I want to add in that I've read myself when I was in coaching school is Fears Conversations by Susan Scott, which is a really awesome book, kind of similar of what you just described, kind of helps you to avoid avoiding the conversations that you need to have essentially that you mean you try to avoid conflict. So I just want to throw that in there.

Zach: Absolutely. There are so many great books written on this topic. But with conflict and communication as any skill because conflict management is really a skill is you have to practice it to get better. Would you get a car with the race car driver who says, "I've read every book on race car driving. Get on in?" Of course not.

So learning is the first step, the knowledge or the conceptual idea. But applying those strategies from the book is the crucial difference between people who can successfully navigate conflict situations and those who can't and remain... usually within their primary conflict management strategy, which is often a bad one.

The third tip I'll say – again, and this takes some intro-inspection and some patience – is know your

audience. Right. We're talking to engineers. We're talking to intelligent people and professionals. So you know when you're in an organizational setting, things like identity, status, reputation, hierarchy, those come along with the package whether we want them to or not.

So you need to know who you're speaking to and you need to think about how you're phrasing your messages based on where that person is in the organizational hierarchy and based on your position in the organizational hierarchy.

Anthony: So you're kind of assessing who the person or people are that you're dealing with, what their statuses are and their backgrounds, credentials potentially and then also, understanding yours on how they relate I guess together or how they stack up?

Zach: Absolutely. So is your personal style, if you've taken some time that it should reflect on who you are and how you communicate, is it complementary or adversarial to someone else in that hierarchy? There are just certain personalities that rub each other wrong and that's never going to change. But the key is, is if you know that that personality rubs you wrong, you can begin to set a plan or a strategy for how to best communicate or disagree with that person.

Let me give you an example. Often times, when you're in a group or team meeting in the workplace and two people start arguing during the meeting, I always hear this phrase, "Take it offline." Have you heard that?

Anthony: Yes.

Zach: Okay, and it's a useful phrase. It basically means this is between you and that person. We don't have the time nor energy to hear these things and we're not going to be able to contribute to resolution. Fine. We're people, not fail, but where they fall flat is not resuming that conversation in a private setting on their own and letting it fester to where it leads to more negative assumptions, expectations, and intentions.

So when you hear that phrase 'take it offline,' what I suggest is doing some intro-inspection that says, "Who is this person? Why am I disagreeing? Isn't it that truly in the issues and how they're being presented, or is that because I don't like that person and their personality and how they're coming across?" And then once you go to have that online conversation, that really leads into the next point, which is, "What's your conversational goal?" And correct me if I'm wrong, I would believe that engineers are very goal-oriented, is that right?

Anthony: Oh, absolutely.

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Zach: And so in terms of conversations or communication, especially when it's wrapped in conflict, meaning our emotions are heightened and our feelings are involved, you really need to step back and slow things down to think about what's my goal and how do I best achieve it?

Anthony: Hey, Zach, real quick before you go forward here. I want to just back up for one minute and highlight kind of something that you said there in that third step, which I know is really important, is really thinking about who that person is and how you relate to that person because what I find with people's at, sometimes they don't like someone for whatever the reason maybe. Maybe they're heading them on the corporate ladder or they got passed over for a promotion because of this person. And then what happens is you kind of see conflict in every decision or every conversation you have with them but it has nothing to do with the actual issue at hand. It has to do with the fact that you resent them for other issues. And I think that that's an important point that I want to bring up because I know that happens to engineers often and other professionals. And I think that's the importance of that step right there or the first few steps that we covered is because if that's the case, then you're going to have a conflict with that person kind of forever and it's going to be kind of a miserable situation. So I think it's important to understand kind of where of that conflict is coming by understanding the relationship between you and the person, which is kind of what Zach has led us through so far. Do you agree, Zach?

Zach: Oh, 100%, yeah. I mean you're spot on because what that, again, hypothetical person is doing is focusing on the wrong things. They're addressing symptoms of a conflict rather than the cause, right? The cause would be, "I just don't flat out like this person and they probably don't like me," and there's issues tied with that.

But instead of really truly investigating that, which is really difficult for someone to do, they point all the little symptoms and pick a part what the person is saying and try to make the look bad, and that will never ever help them have a productive or collaborative relationship with that person.

Anthony: Now, excellent. And what we'll do at the end of the show in the Take Action Today segment of the show, I'll have Zach give us something really actionable that you can do to start to practice some of these things. So as you listen through, don't worry. We'll give you some kind of exercise to do at the end.

Zach: Absolutely. Well, I want to highlight... I'll kind of jump in here. The next step would be identifying your primary conflict management style. And traditionally based in the research, you know going back to 50 years, there are really only about five different ways that people manage conflict regardless of their industry. And I'll quickly highlight the five and then I want to talk about one or two of them if that's alright, Anthony.

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Anthony: Just to be clear, Zach, this is the fifth step, right?

Zach: Yeah, I'm sort of jumping ahead here, but for good measure. And I'll come back then to the fourth.

Anthony: Got it.

Zach: So the five different ways people deal with conflict whether it's in the workplace or a personal relationship is to compromise, competition, collaboration, avoidance, or accommodation. Now, obviously, you think, "Oh, collaboration, in theory, that's the best way to try to deal with conflict." And of course, it is. But when I'm working with clients, what I always say is, "Okay. What's collaborative conflict look like?" And they usually give me the deer in the highlight's face because it's one of those situations where it's wonderful to talk about but nobody really knows what it is and he's able to describe specific behaviors of how to achieve it.

And so what I'll quickly mention is that collaborative approaches to conflict are difficult. They're not easy. You're down in the trenches going through all of these assumptions, expectations, and intentions that each party or multiple parties have. It is not this easy sort of cure all step that teams or organizations get too quickly and it takes a lot of time.

The other strategy that I want to make sure people are not doing, and I would guess that engineers probably don't do this very often just because the ones I've met in my professional experience typically speak their mind and do so very clearly, is the accommodation style. What I like to say is the people who accommodate, they're people pleasers, and I am a recovering people pleaser. And do you know the problem with being a people pleaser?

Anthony: What's that?

Zach: You cannot do it all the time because you cannot please everyone.

Anthony: Right.

Zach: And what typically happens is doing it once in a while is fine. It has a short term conflict management strategy. It can be very useful. But when that is your primary style or strategy that you use every single time, a few things occur. One - people take advantage of you and you feel taken advantage of because you give in over and over and over. But more importantly is when you do stick up for yourself and you're assertive and you want to stand by your own ideas and information, people will then not understand that because you're usually passive and you might get labels of being, you know, I don't want to use foul language on your show, but some things that you probably wouldn't

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want to be called. So by adopting the accommodating conflict management style, it might make you feel good in the short term. But in the long term, it's going to lead to negative consequences for your professional development.

Anthony: So that's accommodation and collaboration you covered.

Zach: Absolutely.

Anthony: I think covering collaboration is an important one because that would, if you look at the list of five: compromise, competition, collaboration, avoidance, and accommodation, I would jump to collaboration as the solution immediately.

Zach: Absolutely, yeah. And that's what the research suggests. But what's interesting and what I found, and again, this goes sort of against some of the traditional research, is that a true collaborative conversation actually might involve some competition. Clearly, it's going to involve some amount of compromise. It might involve some amount of avoiding certain topics because usually, these things, if it's an important decision for you know a large project goal, it's not just one meeting. It's an extended period of time. So collaboration takes a lot of different forms. But the key is you need to be clear about the goals and you need to be honest with your team members.

Anthony: Great. Zach, let's do this. We got the five steps that we walk through. Can I give you an example that a lot of engineers deal with and we can kind of walk through the steps?

Zach: Absolutely.

Anthony: So I'm going to use the example of an engineer working on a project and they have a client, and the client is basically telling the engineer that, "You need to have this project done in a week." And realistically, from an engineering standpoint, it's not going to be possible to finish that project for multiple weeks. And this engineer is obviously dealing with this conflict and let's kind of walk through the steps on this. So, is this an okay example?

Zach: Yeah, absolutely. I mean scope budget and timing are three key concepts in that field. So this would be a perfect dilemma that engineers would need to deal with.

Anthony: So walk us through the steps. So the first one being kind of knowing yourself, understanding yourself.

Zach: Well, absolutely. One would be, "how do you deal with the pressure," and pressure being deadlines. Are you the type of person that performs very well under a strenuous deadline or are you

the type of person that sort of flips out and loses control as the deadline begins to approach? You need to keep that in mind because deadline approaches that client becomes more demanding and emotions get heightened. So if you know you're not good as that deadline approaches, you need to make sure you're having these difficult conversations regarding the scope and timing as early on in the process as possible.

Anthony: So talk about step two. This is still a one-on-one to understand a little bit more shift from blame to contribution.

Zach: Sure. And at this point, based on the conflict you're discussing, both parties haven't suggested there's a conflict. The client has just asked for something to occur, and the engineers had there probably is a conflict what we call a perceived conflict. But until they would say, "No, I can't do that," the client probably isn't going to perceive a conflict. Does that make sense?

Anthony: That makes sense.

Zach: So unless if the answer is no, then the engineer needs to say you know, "I can't do that," and have good reasons as to why they can't. So I would say the first step is, and if it's a blatant, no, you need to have that conversation then and there and not via email, not via text message. Have that face-to-face if possible. And if not, then definitely a phone call.

Anthony: That's when the real conflict happens.

Zach: Absolutely, and it kind of hitting on that perceived conflict. I'd say seven times out of ten, we perceive a conflict in our head that doesn't actually exist and then we make this big maze and come up with all of these contingencies that can occur. And when we open our mouth, we create a self-fulfilling prophecy and create a conflict that didn't exist.

Anthony: Yeah, and that's kind of why I brought this one up. Because I remember this happening to me often when I was doing engineering and I think, like you're saying, more than half the time, the client would ask for something and I'd spend the few days or a week in my head saying, "There's no way we're doing this. There's no way we're doing this." But I never actually call them at and told them that. Some of the times that I did and they would be like, "Well, you know, that's not a big deal, then we could push it back a week." Other times, they wouldn't say that and then there'd be a bit of a conflict. But I think that that's an important... that the idea of this preconceived conflict is important.

Zach: Right, and that's the academic way to talk about it. What I say in the workplace, you know they don't care about my academic jargon is. Stop maze-making. Get out of your head and have a conversation. You're not going to know what they're assuming or what they're intending unless you

ask them and tell them what you're thinking. So a simple phrase that engineers can use because a lot of people are terrified of the F word, feelings, is simply saying, "What's going on in your head regarding this?" Here's what I'm thinking. And I mean the party will reciprocate and then you can have that conversation.

Anthony: So that's the strategy you would use if you contacted the client and tell them you couldn't do it and then they were like, "No, you have to do it," and you got conflict, then you could take that approach, right?

Zach: Absolutely 100%. And you know I would then walk them down the path of insuring that I give you my best. You know I give you my top values, so to speak. And as a consultant, which I'm guessing occurs in engineering and project management, it's typically about under promising and over delivering because you never want to over promise and then under deliver.

Anthony: Sure.

Zach: And communicating the... making that kind of stuff transparent with the client clearly making sure they're the priority one you're discussing them but making things transparent like, "Hey, here's what I have going on. I want to deliver. If you give me this extra week, here are the one or two things that you'll see as a benefit to that."

Anthony: So I think I've got a real clear picture on it. Now, let me try to summarize this for the listeners here. So we use this example, I'm an engineer. I'm working on a project and the client says, "Anthony, I need your plans in a week." And I'm thinking to myself, "two - two and a half to three weeks." So I contact the client immediately. I tell him or her that, "and that person says to me there's no way. It's got to be done in a week."

So what I would do at that point is I would say, "You know what, let me talk to my staff. I'll call you back. I don't think it's doable at all, but I'm going to talk to them for you and call you back." I would hang up the phone. I would then think about the idea of shifting blame to contribution and understanding my audience and then I would come up with a conversational goal to have when I contacted them back again and lastly, think about how I'm going to kind of manage this conflict where I want to use compromise or the accommodation, or whatever the case is going to be, then I would contact that client back and basically try to shift the blame to contribution like you talked about, Zach. Now, what are your feelings on this? Why are you so adamant about having it done by this date and then depending on what they say, I already have thought about them and understand them a bit more and understand my goal than I can kind of walk through whatever management style I'd like and hopefully kind of resolve that conflict. Does that sound good?

Zach: Yeah, that sounds great. Can I add one or two quick things?

Anthony: Definitely.

Zach: None of these occurs in a vacuum, right. So everything... in my whole consulting philosophy revolves around contextual awareness. So, "Hey, he's got to ask questions of the client even if they make a direct statement, I need this done in a week." And you shouldn't accept that at face value if you want to do the best job for them. You should then start asking questions to understand the reasons and rationale behind that because maybe you'll learn something that can help you in achieving their goals in the project.

So, for instance, you could ask, "Is that non-negotiable, or can we negotiate on this? Here are the two reasons why I'd like more time." Or, just say, "Maybe you could explain a little bit more and help me understand why it's necessary to have it done in that time."

The second thing is history. Is this a one-done client that you'll never work with again or is this someone you have a long standing partnership with? Because, again, that will determine the conflict management style that you should select and whether they'll be useful or not.

Anthony: Or, is this a client you never want to work with again?

Zach: And you... again, you have to be honest with yourself, are they sucking your time, energy, and money from you and vice versa?

Anthony: Yeah, it's a good point. And you know what, Zach, the more you talk about this and the more I think about it is this really lends itself well to engineers because what we do essentially is we solve problems, we lay everything on the table, we look at the variables and we try to solve the problem. And essentially, this is what you're doing with conflict and you're laying everything on the table and you're understanding yourself, the person, the different options that you have and what the consequences are going to be and then you're going to take an approach.

Zach: Absolutely. And the unfortunate thing that I poke a little fun at very logical thinkers like engineers are returning is they love formulas. Unfortunately, there is no formula for humans and communication and conflict. There are a lot of factors and there are strategies such as the ones we've outlined today. But in the end, people are people and we bring a lot of baggage to the table. And unless we start asking the right questions and are willing to really truly say, "How did I contribute to this disagreement," you're just going to be stuck sorting through people's baggage.

Anthony: No, I agree. And I think that's why the framework that you've provided here with the five

steps is so helpful because people are people. But if you take the time to understand them, understand your goals, to understand the different potential solutions, then you can kind of break it down as much as possible and hopefully, come up with a positive you know solution.

So let me summarize those steps one last time, then we'll jump into the Take Action Today segment of the show to wrap it up, and then last, Zach to give us something actionable that we can try to implement on our own.

So first step is to know yourself, what are your triggers. I think that was the key there. What are your triggers? The second step, try to shift from blame to contribution. Zach, it'd be a great example of asking the person you know, "What are your feelings on this? Why are you thinking this?" Step three, understand your audience, understand what they're thinking maybe, what their perspective is, where they're coming from. Step four - understand what your conversational goal is. What do you ultimately want to get out of this conversation with this person, this interaction? And then lastly, identify your management style. We talked about compromise, competition, collaboration, avoidance, and accommodation.

So with that, stick with us and we're going to jump into the last segment of the show and wrap this up.

Take Action Today Segment:

Anthony: So now, it's time for the Take Action Today segment of the show. And the point of this segment of the show is simple. You've listened to the show for 20-30 minutes. I want you to be able to finish the show and then go and actually use the information.

So, Zach, why don't you try to wrap this up for us and give the listeners something that they can use to go out into their engineering career today or tomorrow and start to try some of these conflict management solutions?

Zach: Absolutely. So there are two steps here, and the first one involves picking someone from your professional life that you tend to have disagreement with. Okay. The second step is developing what I call your conflict RADAR. And RADAR is an acronym and it stands for Reflect, Analyze, Describe, Apply, Respond. So you need to walk through those steps of that conflict RADAR to truly understand the underlying patterns and meanings of disagreement with that person. And if you do that, you will absolutely have more effective communication with them in the future.



Anthony: Excellent. And so that's an easy acronym. We'll list it in the show notes at engineeringcareercoach.com/spark. So after the show, you can go there, look for the acronym and try to implement.

So, Zach, I want to thank you for spending some time on the show today. I really appreciate it. I really enjoyed this episode because conflict management is something that can really build up a lot of negative energy, cause a lot of stress, and I believe that the information that you gave us today will help myself for sure and some of the listeners to fuse some of the conflict. And I know for sure there are some other things that we talked about then I'll definitely probably ask you to come back on the show in the future and talk to our guest again.

Zach: Absolutely. And I'd love to be back and thanks again for having me, Anthony.

Anthony's Closing Remarks:

Anthony: Great. And just remember, you could check out Zach at sparkthediscussion.com. He's got a great blog there. In fact, I was reading some of the articles today, the very practical, something you can really implement, which I love about his blog. So check that out.

And then I hope that you continue to engineer your own success and I'll catch you on the next episode of the podcast!

Until the next episode, I hope that you continue to engineer your own success!

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