Engineer Who Kept NASA Online During Columbia Now Has a Warning for AI-First Dev Teams

Former NASA Software Engineering Director joins Forte Group CTO podcast to share what his team discovered, and changed, after going all-in on AI-generated code.

Srinivasan's team achieved roughly 30% efficiency gains in engineering effort.

BOCA RATON, FL, UNITED STATES, April 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On the morning of February 1, 2003, Eashwer Srinivasan's team faced a test nobody had planned for. The platform he had built for NASA went live just hours before the Space Shuttle Columbia broke apart on reentry. With no cloud infrastructure and no playbook, the site absorbed hundreds of millions of page views from a grieving public in real time, and held.

Two decades later, Srinivasan, now CTO at Sonny's Car Wash, the global car wash equipment and solutions provider founded in 1949, is drawing on that same operational mindset to navigate one of the defining challenges in enterprise technology today: how to adopt AI in software development without quietly trading short-term productivity for long-term fragility.

His conclusions, shared in the latest episode of Forte Group's CTO2CTO podcast, are both specific and data-backed.

What the sprints revealed
Within two development sprints of adopting AI code generation tools, engineering leads at Sonny's flagged a pattern:

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"The code that is typically generated by many of these coding systems is pretty complicated,"

> When bugs appeared in fully AI-generated code, developers struggled to diagnose them. The logic had never passed through a human mind on the way in."
>
> *Eashwer Srinivasan, CTO at Sonny's Car Wash*

Srinivasan told host Lucas Hendrich, CTO at Forte Group. "After you spend several hours looking at it, you realize it's just filler."

The team redesigned their process, restoring a mandatory human review step before any AI-generated code reached production. The principle Srinivasan put in place was straightforward: AI writes nothing a developer hasn't understood first.

Where AI delivered, with numbers

The same rigor that revealed the risks also identified where AI genuinely pays off. By using AI to automatically generate functional, regression, and edge-case tests as code is written (rather than handing off to QA after the fact) Srinivasan's team achieved roughly 30% efficiency gains in engineering effort. The condition: every auto-generated test case still passes through human review before shipping.

"The whole concept of 'I'm done with my user story, can you write the test cases?' is becoming a thing of the past," he said. "But those auto-generated test cases still go through a human eye."

A framework built on high-stakes experience

Srinivasan's career spans NASA, GE, Rockwell Automation, and Wind River, environments where software failure is measured not in lost revenue, but in safety and public trust. That background informs three principles he brings to technology leadership:

- AI is a copilot, not an autopilot. Productivity gains are real when humans remain in the loop; maintainability risks are equally real when they don't.
- Legacy systems earn their longevity. In operational environments, reliability outweighs novelty: modernization means layering new capability on top of what works, not replacing it.
- Domain knowledge is non-negotiable. At Sonny's, engineers attend Car Wash College, a fully operational training facility, before writing a single line of platform software. Understanding the physical system is a prerequisite to building good software for it.

About the episode

Season 2, Episode 5 of CTO2CTO, Modesty in Tech: Lessons Learned from Building Platforms at NASA, is available now on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, Amazon Music, and iHeartRadio.

About the CTO2CTO Podcast

CTO2CTO is produced by Forte Group and hosted by Lucas Hendrich, CTO at Forte Group. Each episode features a candid, peer-level conversation between technology executives on the real challenges of leading technology at scale. Season 2, Episode 5 - Modesty in Tech: Lessons Learned from Building Platforms at NASA, is available now on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube,

Amazon Music, and iHeartRadio.

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About Forte Group
Forte Group is a technology services firm specializing in AI solutions, data and analytics, software development, and Salesforce services. Headquartered in Boca Raton, Florida, Forte Group partners with companies across healthcare, finance, logistics, manufacturing, and other sectors to build and scale technology that delivers measurable business outcomes.

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