

Career Development & Money

How to be happy at work for the next 40 years
-from a mostly Dutch/European IT perspective-

NOTES!

bert@hubertnet.nl / <https://berthub.eu/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf-LljB2EYk>

<https://tinyurl.com/next40>

(A follow-up to <http://tinyurl.com/nlnog2015>)



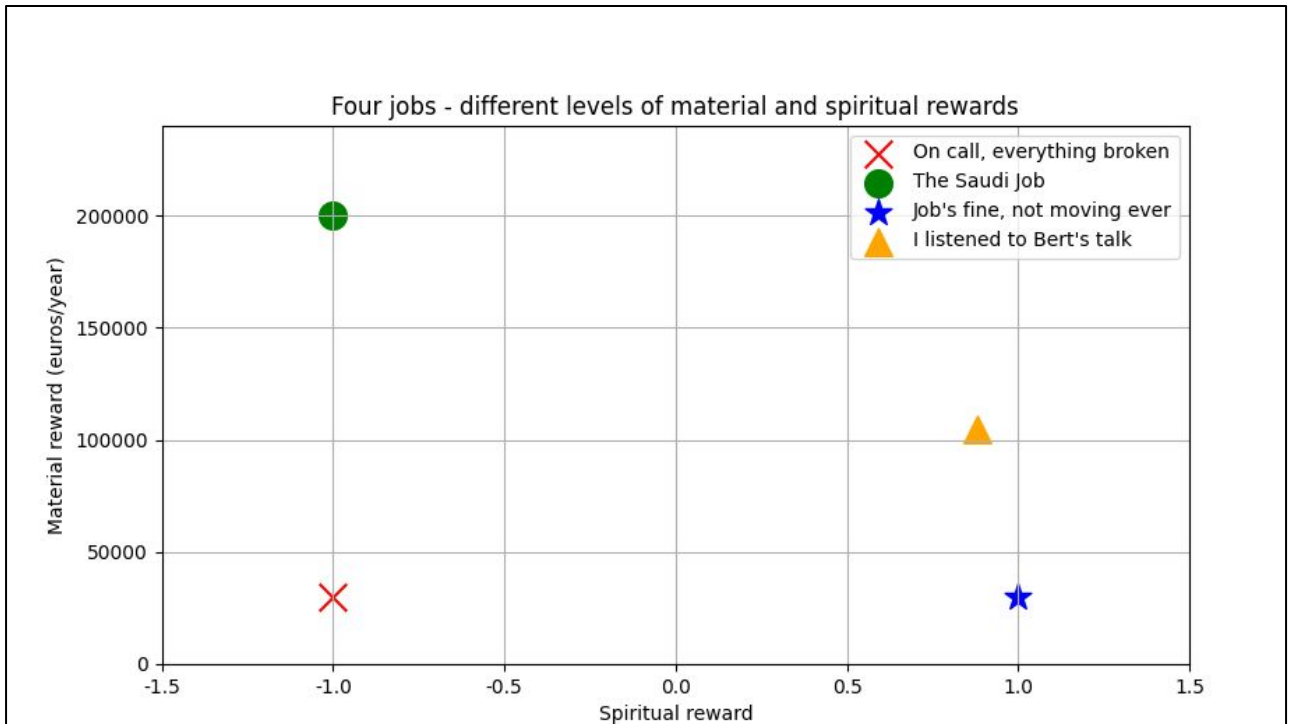
This presentation has a lot of notes!

The challenge

- Have a good life
- Enjoy work
- Keep this up for next 40 years!
 - Even as technology and the world keep changing

This does not happen without a plan.

If you don't make a plan, you need to be extremely lucky. Better make a plan.



Don't pay too much attention to the amounts - quite a number of NLNOG members are at the red cross - shitty job situation, shitty pay. You can improve this in two ways! Another large group of people is super satisfied at an underpaying job they are never going to leave - this too is banking up problems. The orange triangle is where you might end up if you pay attention to this presentation :-)

What is good work?

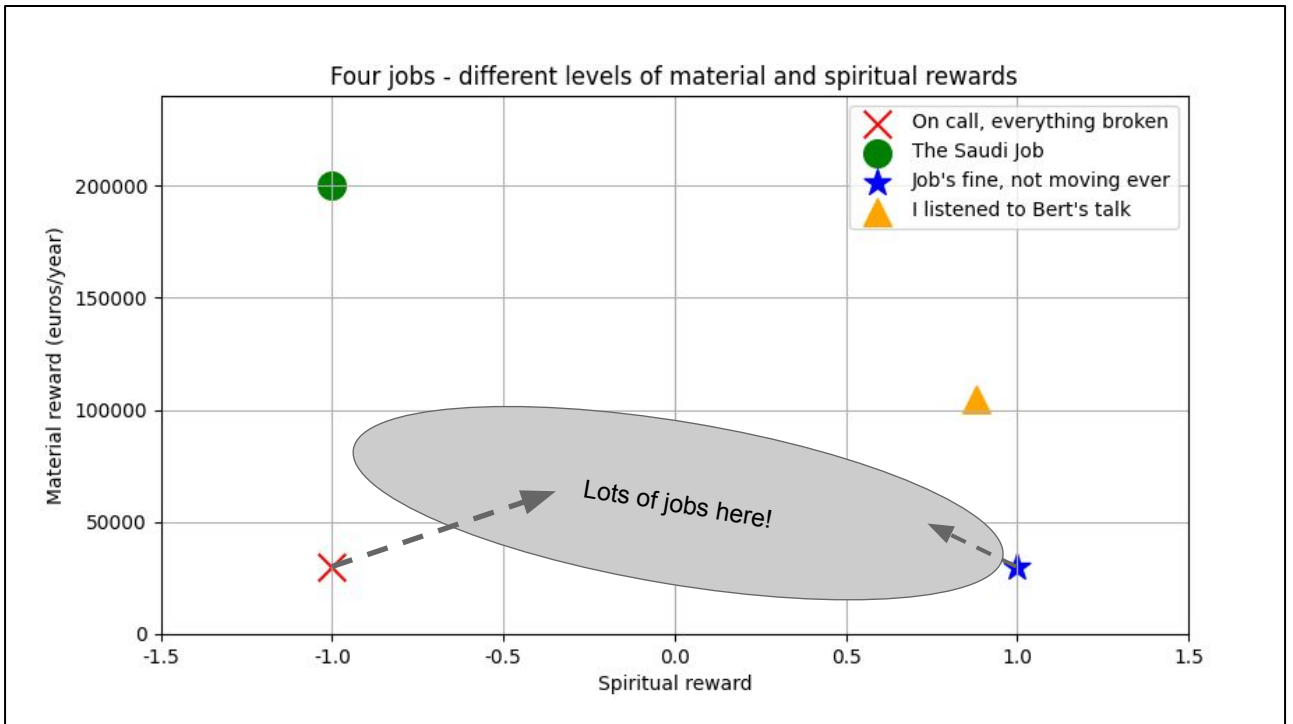
- Supportive colleagues, **safe environment**
- Sense of purpose (“it **matters** what I do”)
 - **Achieve** something from time to time
- **Enjoying** the thing you **actually** do (“automate routers”)
- Feeling that you are part of something nice (“**community**”), being **trusted**
- **Learn something new** once in a while
- Tolerable amount of **bullshit** (meetings, procedures)
- Practical things: **commute**, flexible working hours

I write this out in long form because some people have not ever experienced “good work”, or by now it is a long time ago. Trust me, it exists!

What is good material reward?

- “Money can’t buy happiness”
 - Mostly said by people with sufficient money
- **Money can’t EVER compensate for a bad job**
- Insufficient money however still really hurts:
 - Can’t live where you want to live
 - Can’t support a family
 - **You feel disrespected**
 - No savings, so you also can’t “take a leap” to something better
- **There are (bad) times when you simply must rake in the cash**

Money is no substitute for happiness. Getting a BMW instead of a Skoda will not make you happy. However, getting a Skoda when previously your life was difficult because you had no car, that will make you happier. Similarly, if you can’t live in reasonable housing, getting a raise that allows you to buy/rent a reasonable place will contribute a lot to your wellbeing.



The arrows are where I hope to move you during this presentation.

So where are you on the chart?

- Easiest to figure out: money
 - What do you make?
 - What do your direct coworkers make?
 - Cooperate and find out! (**DO IT**)
 - Add in value of company car
 - **You will be AMAZED at the range**
 - Slightly harder: what do similar people make elsewhere? Your only way to find out may be to apply for a job there and negotiate (yes)
- **It could be you are making good money and not know it (and vice versa)**

Ask your NLNOG friends! Note that this information is SO useful that some employers try to forbid you from talking about what you make. Lol!

So where are you on the chart?

- Are you happy, citizen?
 - Be honest to yourself (not easy)
 - There is bullshit **everywhere**
 - If the job were 100% fun, you'd be paying them!
 - Are you safe? Do your colleagues support you?
 - What percentage of time do you spend doing what you feel is "your job"?
 - And how much is spent trying to get permission/make it possible to do your job?
 - How often do you achieve anything?
 - Does your job, cosmically speaking, matter?
 - **Can you take time off easily? Flexible hours?**

I write out a lot of example here so you can check them for your own situation. It is not easy to tell how ok your job is. It is like getting in a swimming pool - then you find out how cold the water is. Once in, it is a lot harder to tell.

So where are you on the chart?

- Do you ever talk about “damagement”?
 - Or feel your company is led by idiots
- Does your longing for the weekend start on Tuesday?
- If you need to get reimbursed for something, how long does it take? Do you feel they trust you?
- If you found a new or better way to do things, would it be a lot of work to convince people to do it?
- What percentage of time is the company being reorganized, acquired, split, merged etc?
- Do you feel your company would love to replace you by **someone cheaper or who asks fewer questions?**

Even more examples. Do pay attention to the last bullet point - it is a sign of real trouble.

Do not underestimate bad work

- Bad work is **very very** bad for your mental health
- Bad work **physically** makes you ill
- Over time, your resilience against toxic environments **goes down** and the impact becomes worse (mentally, physically)
- **Over time.. You will forget what good work is like and no longer believe it exists**

I can't overstate all this.

But are you TOO comfortable?

- Worry number 1 for technical people: will this new job be **PURE HELL**, like my [war story] previous job
 - Can be very traumatic
- We like to stay where the job is 'tolerable', since the rest is scary and potentially **terrible**
- Same for technology: I like my [outdated framework] and it still does [X] better than your **k123s** stack
- By specializing ever further in technology we like, we can lose the ability to ever find work somewhere else, especially since we spent a decade telling everyone how this new technology sucks

If this applies to you, you probably know it. And yes your cool technology is probably actually really cool. I too have a hard time looking at huge fragile distributed frameworks. Yet they are very relevant, also to your future employment. And who knows, k43s might indeed be better than what you do!

My two worries

- Job that pays well, nice car, but is slowly killing you and eventually is a career dead-end
- (Too) comfortable job that underpays & will eventually limit your life, and after x years you no longer know how to get out

Both things are problems in the longer term.

Career development

- Short term actions: what can I do to improve life and work within 6 months?
- Medium term: could I find a new job that improves things?
- Longer term: how do I stay **relevant and employable?**

You can start today!

Short term: about your employer

- Does my employer even **care** about my department? Or do they want to **outsource/sell us/ignore** us?
- Am I in a **marginal** business? Or am I **enabling** million euro revenues?
 - Marginal means - if they pay me more, the company will never make a profit again (“supermarket job”)
- The answers should be: yes & no & no & yes
 - **Otherwise: get out in a hurry**

If you think your employer would rather sell/outsource/stop your department, you'll have a very hard time arranging for better pay/better conditions. They just won't care.

Short term things: Salaries

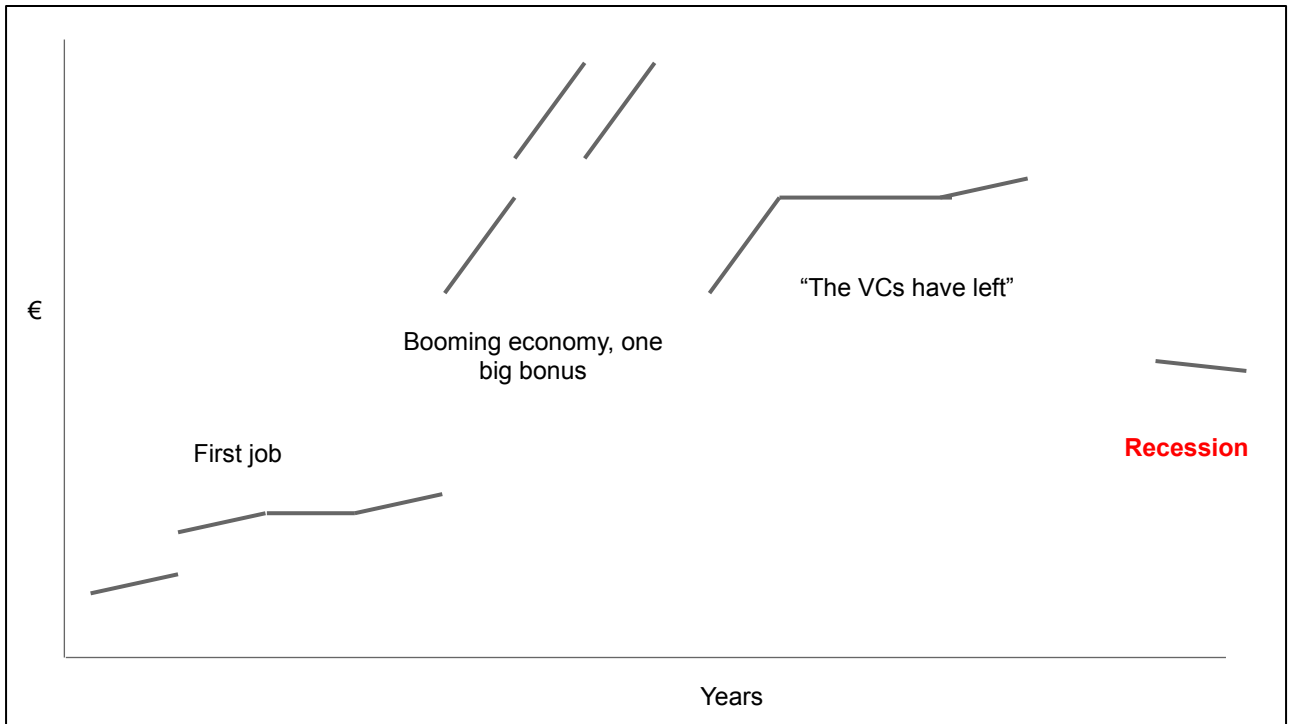
- In a place that cares about its technical staff & where you **enable** big business, salaries are typically extremely flexible
 - Because they don't really matter for the bottom line within a very broad range
- Almost every department will see **> factor 2** difference in rewards between similar people
- **You must find this out together**
 - Get out the loonstrookjes

So if your work is vital for keeping a billion euro webshop up and running, for the bottom line it does not matter if you make 1000 euros a week or 2000. This makes for a wide range of salaries, even for people in the same room. You must find this out. Also, people tend not to be very honest about what they make, or at least be confused. Tax, pretax etc things, including the car or not, make a huge difference. Be precise.

Short term things: Salaries

- ****I AM NOW SUPER ANGRY****
 - Highest earner is almost never the best person (quite often the other way around!)
- Use that anger!
 - **Start working on a real, credible plan to work somewhere else. Apply for another job, get an offer.**
 - Even if you don't take it, you can now tell your employer: match this or I quit
 - Don't just ask for more money "because Henk also gets it" or because "you really need it".

I'M THE GUNS OF THE NAVARONE!



If you'd plot what you make over 15 years it might well look like this - tiny increases while you work somewhere, then an employer where things are booming, bonuses all round etc. That company then goes bust for some reason :-) and your salary returns to normal levels. Then the economy sours, investments dry up and things stagnate. You might be out of a job for a while and return to wages that effectively decrease for a bit.

Fun salary facts

- Your employer will pay you as much as is needed to keep you around (if they want that)
- There is a huge random component **when getting hired!**
 - In a recession? Or an economic boom? Was your field a hype back then? Paying over the top is sometimes also good for management!
- Employers will invent all kinds of rules and systems to not pay you more and **it is mostly bullshit**

Do read your company's annual statements on profits etc. It is possible they are truly out of money. But even then, if you are worth it, there are always possibilities.

Fun salary facts 2

- 90% of flexibility in salary is when you get hired. Can go +50%. Try that later and you have to fight over 3%!
- Bullshit rules include “salary scales”, CAOs (collective bargaining agreements), “fairness”, missing diploma, “aanloopsalaris”, “OPEX rules”
 - Or my favorite: we start you in this lower salary so you have room to grow!
- **Know: if an employer needs you to stay, they can pay whatever they want**
- An employer will **NEVER** tell you you are underpaid

Do remember: the people you talk to might regard these “bullshit rules” as very real. But ask what the CEO / director makes, somehow that is always ‘different’. If an employer needs you and your demands are not outrageous, they will always find a way. You may have to help them a bit by thinking up ‘performance goals’ you are going to meet for this new money. It is some kind of game this way to think up of something that makes it work.

Fun salary facts 3

- To increase your salary, only a few avenues:
 - Change jobs (hard work, but good results)
 - Get a better job offer, **credibly** threaten to leave
 - Sometimes: discover you are underpaid even by their own rules! (or don't get paid what was agreed)
 - This works if you were hired straight out of school sometimes, or are still on some kind of "intern" wage
 - Rarely: I really need this because we have a child on the way, or the commute is killing me but I can't afford to live closer by

Regarding the last bullet, most employers know that if you can't afford to keep this job that you will leave. This is one of the few ways you can get a substantial raise without having a credible new job offer.

Other short term options

- To improve quality of life in short term, there are not a lot of options:
 - If your commute is killing you, try to keep COVID-19 work from home deal
 - Try working fewer hours, and negotiate 10% higher hourly wage (“because I’ll be more productive”)
 - Propose trading in your fancy company car for 1 day work/week less (especially if you don’t really **need** a fancy car)
 - Try switching departments (“at least you’ll get new pain”)

Try to be creative here - what is the worst part about your job? Can you change or minimise that?

Medium term: finding a new job

- To improve spiritual quality of work, you'll have to move to a new job or at least a new department (doubtful)
 - Unless you are in senior management, you won't significantly improve your employer (sorry)
- Same thing for monetary reward: easiest to fix over at a new employer
- Good news is: even **just trying** to get a new job is extremely good for you

The process of writing a CV, scanning the market, writing up what is good about your job, what skills you'd like to develop, that is all extremely useful even if you do not end up landing a new job

Medium term: finding a new job

- Many of you have always rolled from one job to another one (or through recruiters)
- Finding a **good** new job is more work however, especially in the upcoming recession
- You need to determine what you **want** and **what you have to offer today**, plus where **you need to improve**.

Just spending time on the third bullet alone is worth it.

Medium term: finding a new job

- Just do it. Even just **trying** it is good for your perspective.
- What do you want? What do you have on offer?
- Preparation:
 - Hiring is a pretty stupid affair, but you have to roll with it a bit
 - What is hip and happening in your scene? Kubernetes? Streaming telemetry? Cloud native? AI? Automation? Rust? Make sure you (go) do stuff like that!
 - **Basics: good CV, with dedicated versions for potential employer. No excuses.**
 - **Make one today! Very inspiring work.**
 - **I can help! bert@hubertnet.nl**

I'm serious - I help improve CV's all the time. This is by the way not magic - a CV doesn't have to be "exactly like this" to be good. There are however many things not to do. HR departments go mental over inconsistencies in dates for example, or if your linkedin profile is too different from your CV etc.

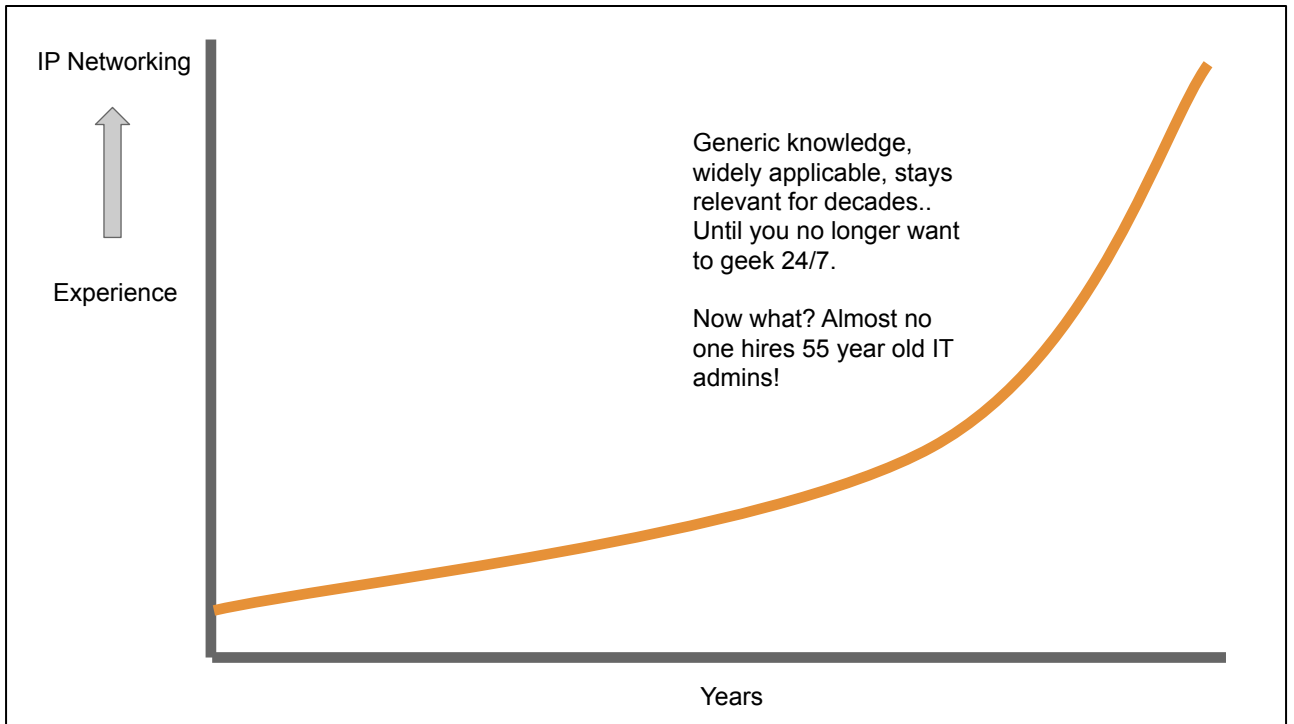
Medium term: recruiters, contractors

- (External) recruiters are a gateway to new work, but unless you do **really special work**, it is not the best route
 - Why does a company need an outside dedicated recruiter? They are not in it for your welfare!
 - Their goal is to shift people
- “Detaching” - again, ask the same question, do they really need temporary help? Or does no one want a regular job there? Why not?

If all your work has come from external recruiters and contracting agencies, you might be surprised to learn there is a whole world out there that doesn't work like that.

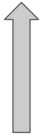
Longer term: employability

(very briefly)



This graph is nice, but wonder how it connects you to your next job.

BGP

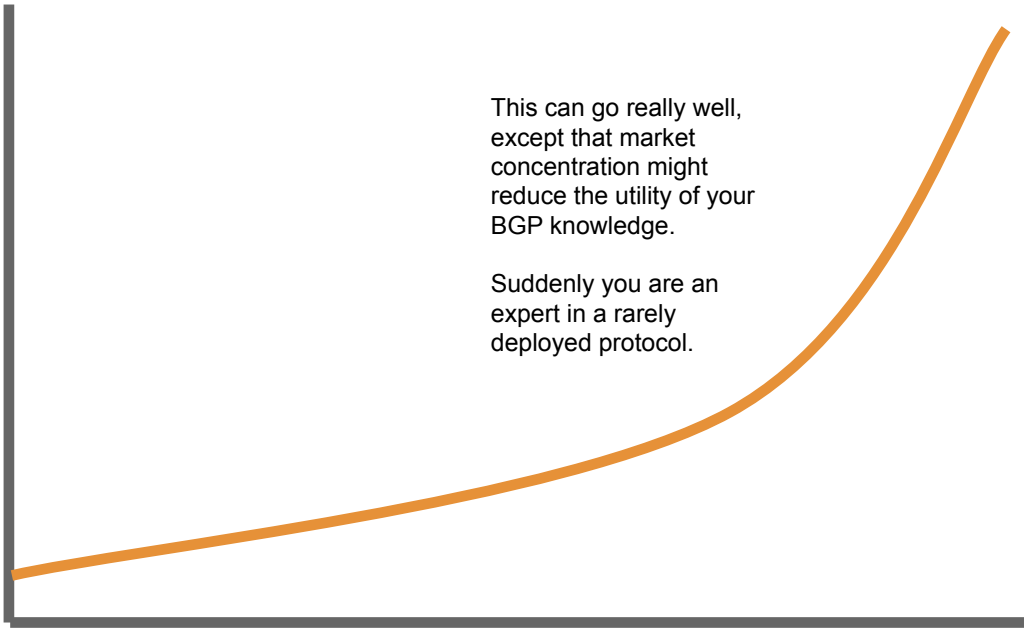


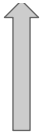
Experience

This can go really well,
except that market
concentration might
reduce the utility of your
BGP knowledge.

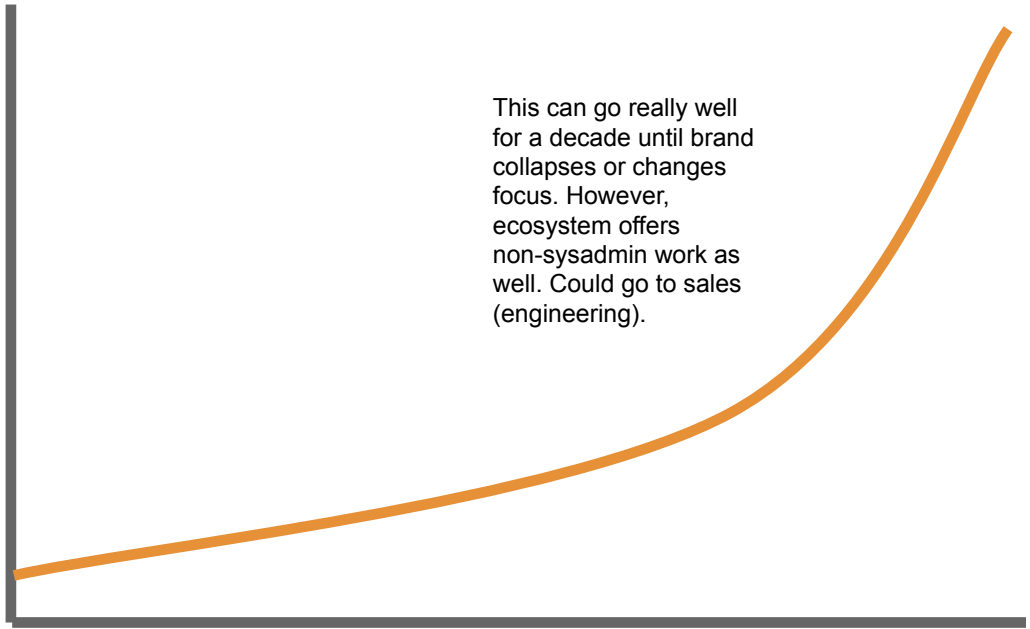
Suddenly you are an
expert in a rarely
deployed protocol.

Years



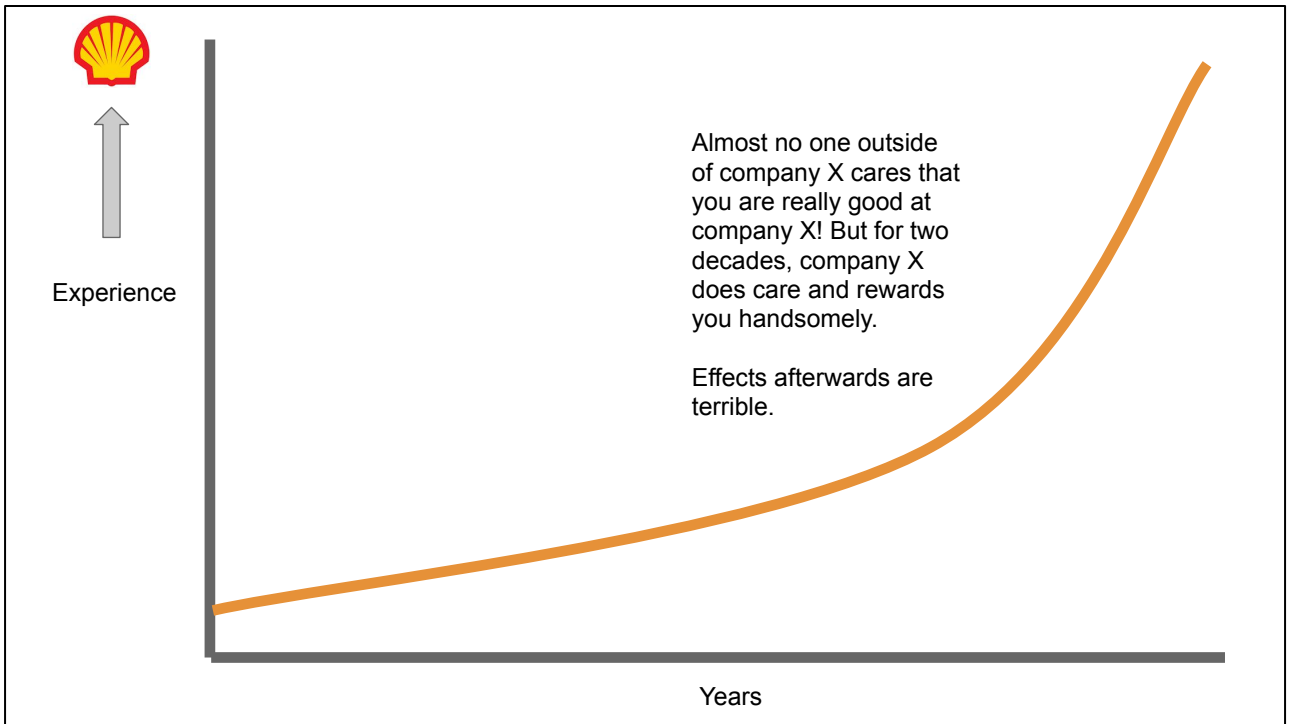


Experience



This can go really well for a decade until brand collapses or changes focus. However, ecosystem offers non-sysadmin work as well. Could go to sales (engineering).

Years



For Shell, read any really large company. Large companies are complex enough that you need to be an expert in that company to get anything done at speed. It is a valuable skill .. within that company. The only outside places that value that skill are vendors trying to sell stuff to the big company, so you could go work there.

Employability

- About as much fun as discussing **death**
- The Netherlands is **the most ageist job market I know**. “No one” hires technical hands-on people >50 years old
 - Unless they have **very** strong references
 - You might as well be dead otherwise
- You can **NOT** afford to fossilize
 - Eventually, your current employer **WILL** die, or fire you, or become too toxic (often all three)

This stuff is terrible. Unless we all think real hard, almost everyone in IT will not reach retirement age (if that even exists by then) holding a reasonable job. This stuff is so terrible everyone hates to think about it. But you have to.

Employability

- Don't get stuck in legacy software/technology unless you are SURE you can ride it out to retirement (<10 years from now)
 - Go team ~~COBOL~~ Perl!
- Sure you'd never be in some form of management? Perhaps change jobs and give it a try? Lasts for decades!
- That super well paying job for a US company? Might help you pay off your mortgage & save you 20 years
- Ponder leaving the field of IT. I'm serious
 - You might otherwise be competing against automation, the cloud & outsourcing

Seriously - also think about alternatives if you have more than 10 years to go.

Summarising

- It is vital to have an actual “good job” most of the time
 - But also make sure you get paid right, being too poor is very bad for you (and your family) in many ways
- Short term (TODAY!) you can optimize salary, reduce work related pain
- Medium term: write a really good CV, scout the job market (good anyhow), get a new job
 - Don't be too comfortable, consider new things
- Longer term: stay employable in IT or **somewhere**

Good luck!

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