IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE: How To Be More Than Just A Line Item; Contract Engineers: No Illusions; Invest In People; Hey, turn on those images, they might be amusing. Or not. Probably not. But it's worth a try.

PACKETPUSHERS
Human Infrastructure Magazine
A Newsletter About a Life in Networking

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(aka The Project Plan)

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The "Be Our Guest (Editor)" issue.

Thought For The Week:
"The 'S' in IoT stands for 'Security'"

0. Welcome Guest Editor Keith Townsend

by Drew Conry-Murray

The Packet Pushers have turned over this issue to guest editor [Keith Townsend](#). This is the first time we've asked someone outside of Packet Pushers to take over the magazine.

Our goal is to bring in new voices and perspectives, and to make sure you don't get tired of hearing just from the usual suspects.

You may know Keith from his [The CTO Advisor site](#), or have seen him speak at tech events, or watched him grill vendors as a Tech Field Day delegate.

Keith brings both IT knowledge and business insight to his writing and commentary, and his general theme for this issue is "Thinking of your career as a line item."

To help expand on this theme, Keith reached out to a couple of contributors. [Julian Wood](#), who blogs at [WoodITWork](#), looks at career development from a contractor's perspective.

[Mark May](#), who writes at [Virtual Storage Zone](#), discusses why managers should think about helping employees develop skills that aren't directly related to their current job.

Keith has the lead-off article, so dive on in.

1. How To Be More Than Just A Line Item

by Keith Townsend

Every company says its people are its most valuable asset. If you believe this, I question your preparation for the reality of today's economy.

When it's time to cut costs, most companies don't have any trouble [shedding](#) their "most valuable assets." At dinner with Deep Storage's Howard Marks, he noted that if an employer can make $0.20 over the $1.00 they pay an employee, they will hire an employee. The inverse is also true: if an employer loses $0.05 on an existing employee, they'll find a way to weed out that inefficiency.

The days of working most of our lives for the same employer are over. The majority of workers will have many jobs during their careers, and the gig economy is upon us.

So how do you ensure job security in a time where employees are just a line item on a spreadsheet vs. a resource in which to invest?

Don't just be a budget item.

This is a particularly hard question for people in IT, where the business often has a hard time connecting your value to the organization compared to departments like marketing, sales, manufacturing, and so on.

I went the route of starting my own business. However, I didn't wake up one day and say, "Hey, I think I'll quit my job and start a company today." I had to study and understand basic business concepts.

To do this, I started with my existing employer and reached out to people in departments outside of IT to learn different business lines and understand IT's impact on their jobs.

I had one-on-one conversations with people in departments who were close to our end customers to try to better understand the connection

between what IT does and how it helps the business serve those customers.

Key Questions

What's your plan for job security? Do you want to launch a new business? Or take Julian Wood's route and become a contractor (see below)? Or do you find a way to make yourself more valuable in your current job?

Your decision starts with data. Here's a list of basic questions that will help you gather that data

- How does your company make money?
- How is that different than your company's competitors?
- What's the role of technology in your company's industry?
- What's the role of technology in your company?
- How does your job responsibility support your company's objective? (If you haven't figured this out, go back to the previous questions and keep asking)
- Is there similar value other companies may find in your service?

The goal of these questions is to get you to focus on an organization's bottom line, and then see how you can contribute to that bottom line. For instance, if you work at a non-profit, you need to learn what value your donors are looking for, and then how your efforts can help achieve that value and support the organization's mission.

These questions are just starting points. I believe natural conversations and new information will flow as a result.

Once you answer these basic questions, you've started your journey to taking more control of your fate instead of just being another line item.

2. Contract Engineers: No Illusions
by Julian Wood

IT contractors have no illusions about their relationship with the companies that hire them: they're a line item in a budget alongside hardware, software, and coffee.

Full-time employees are also line items, but that fact is often disguised by corporate language about "our greatest assets" or "teams" or even "family."

While the contractor's relationship is nakedly transactional, it can be hugely rewarding for an engineer. You get to work for many different companies, build up a great store of knowledge in a short period of time, and get an excellent appreciation for what does and doesn't work in a number of situations.

You often get to avoid most office politics and don't have to suffer through the annual performance review "exercise." You may choose to go deep in a particular facet of IT and can become the go-to expert who parachutes in when a company needs help.

Contractor rates are generally better than salaried rates, and you have the flexibility to take more time off based on what you can afford.

There are, of course, difficulties to consider: Moving between jobs and continually hunting for the next contract can be stressful and tiresome. You don't get much career progression or any job security, and self-development or training is all up to you. Sometimes you work with horrible people and may not be considered really part of the team.

And any time you're sick or don't work, you don't get paid. Thus, that higher daily rate can quickly wither away.

Given the potentially precarious nature of the contracting life, it's often in your best interest to strengthen your relationship with clients. You might still be a line item, but you can be a reliable and trusted one.

How? Well it's an old story but true: Get to know the business a little better, and find out where you can add value beyond your contract and silo.

Use your multi-company experience to suggest new ways of doing things. For example, how about a "War on Stuff" where you suggest asking all users to highlight the IT things that annoy them the most and target fixing these as a priority.

Present yourself more as an integral part of the company and not just a temp. Be as interested and helpful as possible; you may find that contract rolling over as they find more and more things for you to do.

With some luck you can become a long-term contractor, which in my opinion is the best of both worlds.

Join us [for a Webcast](#) on Thursday, October 26th at 2PM ET as LiveAction's CTO John Smith and Ethan Banks from the Packet Pushers share best practices to reduce the complexity of SD-WAN technology adoption, provide service assurance governance with proactive insights, and deliver the promised performance enhancement for a better application experience.

Ethan and John will share SD-WAN market feedback, use cases, and walk through a platform demonstration highlighting three key enabling technologies:

1. Real-time network visualization and topology maps for complete situational awareness.
2. Continuous machine learning from customer data, to provide real-time 'human in the loop' insights for better service management.
3. Dashboard, reports, and systems integration for service assurance governance.

We look forward to sharing our customers' success with you.

[Register now!](#)

Get ready for SD-Wan: [3 Challenges to Consider as You Approach SD-WAN Monitoring](#)

3. Invest In People

by Mark May

The team you manage and lead is more than a line item in a budget spreadsheet. It's made up of men and women who each want to feel respected as employees. The best way to do that is to become invested in their personal professional development.

When I say personal professional development, I'm not talking about them become better members of your staff. I'm talking about them improving in ways which benefit them at least as much as it does the company, if not more. If you have network administrators who wanted to learn about containers you should encourage and help them. Sure, they may not be working with containers as part of their daily function, but they'll be a better administrators all around.

Your job is to help foster a mentality that your team members own their careers. You might have input on raises and promotions, but they need to understand that the direction and success of their careers belongs

to them.

The best way to encourage this mentality is to make sure they understand you are there to help them grow--and not just in areas that will increase the company's bottom line. Your goal is to help them learn in ways that will contribute to the lifetime of their professional careers, and not just in the job they have today.

Some people may need help with soft skills like time management or effective communications. Others may want to learn a technical skill to prepare for a career pivot. Either way, this type of professional development will, in the end, also benefit the company. Investing in your people will make the entire organization stronger and better able to serve the business.

You'll need to encourage them to have open and honest dialog along the way about how their development is going. Keeping them honest about their progress and the value of what they are learning is key.

Sometimes these conversations can be hard, but the most rewarding conversations are often the most uncomfortable to have.

Talk with the people you are leading about their professional and business goals and how they are working on them. Create a shared career vision and offer advice and training when appropriate. I'm not talking about performance reviews here, but you can speak about their performance.

The goal is helping them. In turn, this should help the company. People are happy and productive when they feel like they are being invested in.

Investing in your teams can be a challenge when the money is tight, but you don't have to spend a lot to do it. Frontline managers have plenty of tools and experiences that can help the people they lead. Internal cross training is a great way to help develop technical skills.

Regular meetings can be used to help develop soft skills such as leadership.

Treat your employees with respect because they are more than numbers on a budget. Help grow them in the areas where they want to develop, and you'll have happy and productive employees.

If you choose to ignore their personal professional development, you'll end up with employees who feel left behind or employees who leave you behind.

Thanks, Internet

All kinds of amusing things wash up in our social feeds. Here's one that caught my eye.

Roll a critical hit at every breakfast.
Source: John Rampton @johnrampton

Join the Packet Pushers' new membership program and get benefits including our weekly Link Propagation newsletter and more. [Click here for details and to sign up](#).

Internets Of Interest

A collection of pre-loved links that might interest you. "Pre-loved" because I liked them enough to put into this newsletter. It's not *true* love.

By Greg Ferro and Drew Conry-Murray

Azure Stack Finally Takes Microsoft Public Cloud Private

Paul Teich at The Next Platform [takes a detailed look](#) at both the business strategy behind Azure Stack (Microsoft's newly available private cloud software), and some of the technical details about how it

works. He also examines the efforts that have gone in to the underlying hardware platforms from third-party partners.

If you're curious about Azure Stack, this is a good article to start with.

[LINK](#)

Join the Datanauts on their mission to bust silos and explore the latest developments in cloud, convergence, data centers, and more. Sign up free here.

Network Break is a weekly podcast that delivers news & analysis on the networking industry in a fun, fast-paced style. Subscribe here!

Product News

Find out about interesting new products, or get essential information about things you might already be using.

Arista Announces A Virtual Router To Run In Public Clouds

Arista Networks has announced the [vEOS Router](#), a virtualized version of its EOS network operating system that can run in public clouds.

The vEOS Router is the latest version of EOS to be disaggregated from Arista hardware: cEOS, a containerized version of EOS, was [announced earlier this year](#) that can run on ToR white box switches.

[LINK](#)

Briefings In Brief: A New Packet Pushers Podcast

Want more tech news? [Subscribe](#) to our newest podcast channel, [Briefings In Brief](#). We take five minutes or less to summarize and analyze tech news, product announcements, or other interesting items that come across our desks.

[LINK](#)

Recent Podcasts

The last five podcasts published on Packet Pushers

PacketPushers.net - The Last Five

[PQ 129: Accelerating Change In Enterprise IT – Future:Net (Sponsored)](#)

[Datanauts 103: Azure Infrastructure And PowerShell At Microsoft Ignite](#)

[Network Break 154: Arista & Cisco Put New Products In The Cloud](#)

[Show 358: The NSX Future With VMware (Sponsored)](#)

[PQ 128: ExtraHop 7.0 & Addy Machine Learning (Sponsored)](#)

Full Stack Journey tells personal stories about the ongoing quest to become a full stack engineer. [Subscribe today!](#)

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Quick Survey: A Better Name For White Box?

Tech blogger [Eyvonne Sharpe posted a Twitter question](#) asking for suggetions to re-name white box switches, which let you mix and match hardware and the network OS. She thinks "white box" sounds like a DIY project, making execs too uncomfortable to invest in them. Is there a better name for these devices?
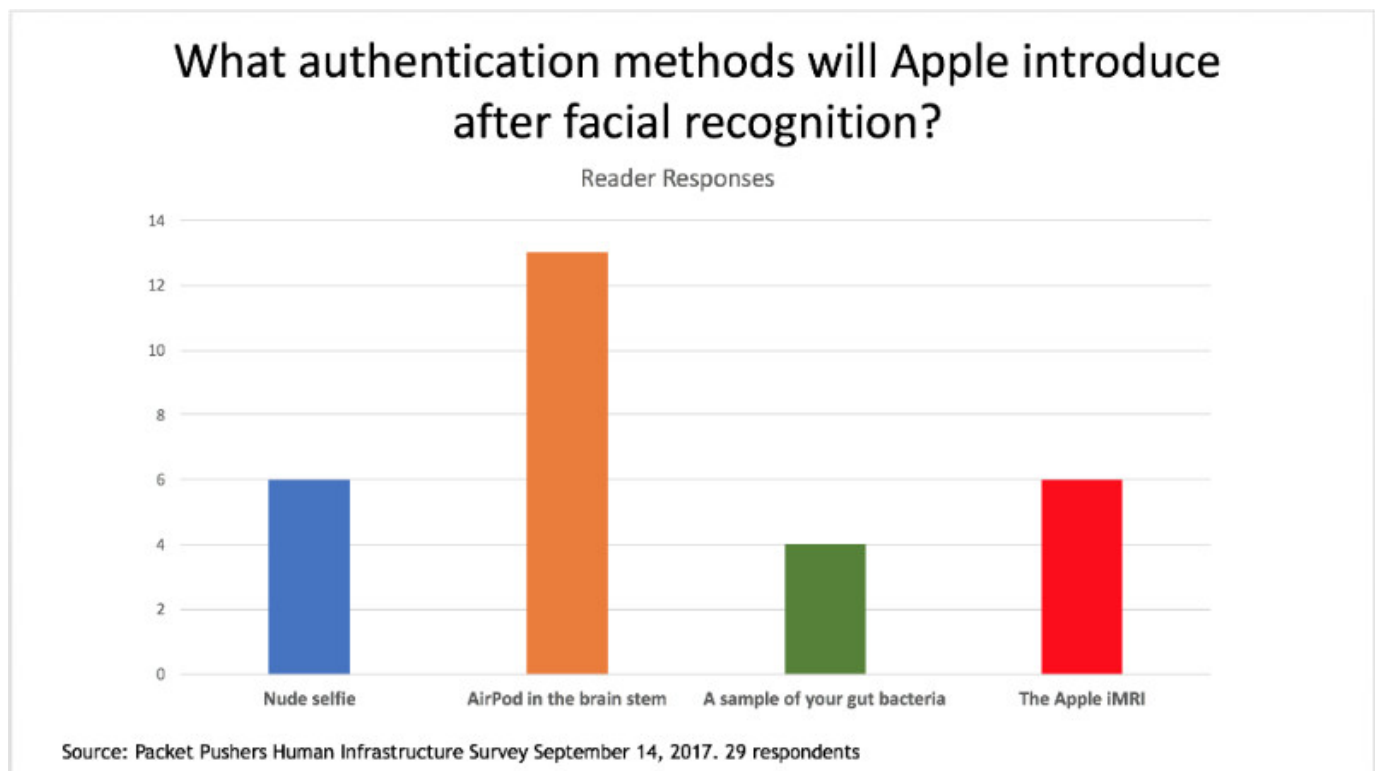
[A. Choose Your Own Adventure](#)
[B. Vanilla Flavor](#)
[C. Hardware In The Nude](#)
[D. Be Not Afraid](#)
[E. Other](#)

Last Issue's Survey Results

What authentication methods will Apple introduce after facial recognition?
Reader Responses

Source: Packet Pushers Human Infrastructure Survey September 14, 2017. 29 respondents

Did We Miss Something?

Got an link or an article to share? Email it to
humaninfrastructure@packetpushers.net