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Always Have A Career Plan B

By Ethan Banks

Companies don't care about you. I learned this hard truth just a few months into my exhilarating job at a CLEC.

This regional CLEC had been growing quickly. Everyone in tech had heard of them and their aggressive sales team. They were going to be the next big thing. Even so, when a friend at the CLEC told me about the empty desk next to his, I wasn't overly excited.

I had one of the most secure jobs there was--union-backed employment in state government. I felt safe there because getting rid of a state employee meant lots of paperwork, meeting with union reps, and a series of well-documented policy violations before being shown the door. I'd only ever seen one person get fired.

And yet...I was curious. My friend was one of the best engineers I'd ever worked with. Plus, the state government job didn't pay well. My wife and I were outgrowing our apartment, but we struggled to save for a down payment on a house.

I decided it wouldn't hurt to interview at the CLEC. Before I knew it, I had a very good offer in hand. I struggled with the decision for a little while, but math defeated risk aversion and I took the job.

Riding The Whirlwind

The next few months were a whirlwind. The CLEC hired even more people. We built out new POPs all over the region. We leased more office space. Other CLECs were going out of business and we gobbled up their ex-customers.

I lived in BIND, sendmail, and Apache configs, provisioning order after order from a never-shrinking stack of paper. We kept winning deals, growing our footprint, and hiring. Cabletron recognized us a regional mover and shaker because we were installing so much of their gear to build out our backbone.

The job was stressful, but I was happy. I was learning how an Internet service provider really worked. I became competent enough with DNS that I became the receiver of hostmaster@ emails, which felt a little prestigious. I helped lots of folks solve lots of problems.

I felt like I was making a difference. I felt as if I mattered, at least a little bit, in a company destined to matter a lot--a company that was going to drive down costs and provide an alternative to incumbent carriers known for poor service and high prices.

Each week, our VP would share ever-growing hire numbers, pending orders, and POPs. Everything was going so, so well.

And then it wasn't.

Hitting The Ground

The CLEC was funded primarily by one venture capital fund. And that primary funding source didn't like the numbers it saw. The first round of cash had spurred the tremendous hiring and network footprint expansion, but even with the piles of orders on our desks, we hadn't focused enough on customer acquisition.

We hemorrhaged cash. Our burn rate was catastrophic. We went back to our primary investor to get a second round of funding, and they said no.

And that was that. In the space a week, the CLEC went from big aspirations to closing the doors. A day or so after we heard the news that we were out of money, we were marched through conference rooms, given a two week severance, and let go. A skeleton crew stayed behind to shut down the network, but that was all that remained of a rising power in the northeast US telecom industry.

Despite being a competent engineer doing a good job at a growing company, I went home that Friday afternoon unemployed.

Companies don't care about you. The CLEC could have managed its money effectively. It could have grown more slowly. It could have carefully built out a customer base POP by POP instead of building a huge network, hoping customers would come.

Instead, the exec team got greedy. You could sense their hubris as they stated a goal of matching Verizon's footprint (it was just a regional player at the time) as soon as possible.

The exec team played a game of high risk, high reward. If they won, I might still be there today working on a national or international provider network. Who knows? But their decisions weren't made with employees in mind.

In the job market, you need to look out for yourself. No one else will--not your employer, not your bank, not the economy at large. Only you.

Looking out for yourself means having a plan B. I had a plan B that, paired with a bit of luck, meant I was working the Monday after I was laid off.

What's your plan B?

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Packet Pushers News Bits

We generate a lot of content besides the long-form podcasts: short podcasts, blogs, news briefs, even video. These are a few recent items.

Virtual Design Clinic Videos Now Available

Ignition members can now access every video from Virtual Design Clinic 2, including three technical presentations and all the Ask Me Anything questions and answers.

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- Creating Virtual Networks With Terraform
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Go to ignition.packetpushers.net/videos and dive in.

Arista Announces 400GbE Switches For Hyperscale Clouds And HPC

Arista Networks has announced its first-ever 400GbE switches, one of which is expected to ship by the end of this year, and the second in early 2019.

The switches are built on Broadcom's Tomahawk 3 ASIC, and include new features such as a 50 percent increase in buffer size, elephant flow detection, and two different optics options.

[LINK](#)

Video: DDOS on Your SD-WAN – You Don't Need It, Probably

DDOS and SD-WAN – What is the actual risk of DDOS attack on an SD-WAN IP? Would anyone target you? Are you just wasting money because you are unable to competently evaluate risk ? Is your service provider trying to justify there higher priced DIA service that, by the way, has no DDOS guarantees anyway?

[LINK](#)

Internets Of Interest

Links, stories, and research from around the Web.

You too can build your own chip – for ONLY \$30 million - Digits To Dollars

The newsletter Digits To Dollars breaks down the investment required for big companies (think Amazon and Facebook) to design their own chips. While the estimates are rough, the blog makes a compelling case for organizations that will demand chips in very high volume to bring the design back in house, rather than rely on a shrinking number of chipmakers who can demand higher prices as the number of competitors dwindles.

[LINK](#)

Coming Soon: HiveManager Shortcuts Powered By Amazon Alexa Integration - Aerohive Networks

Aerohive Networks will roll out a new voice interface with its HiveManager WLAN management platform. Using Amazon Alexa, Aerohive says WLAN administrators can ask more than 100 questions about client performance, connectivity, and network status. Administrators can also ask questions about specific users and devices.

To that end, Aerohive positions this feature as something you'd use when you're away from the office and need to check on something quickly. Rather than log in to a console, you can just ask.

I think we're going to see more integration with virtual assistants and IT systems. For instance, PathSolutions is [releasing a natural language query feature](#) in its network management offering. You can type a question using everyday language, or set up an Amazon Echo and just ask. These simple queries should be reasonably easy to find on a good management dashboard, so the voice interaction feels a little gimmicky. Then again, if Star Trek has taught us anything, it's that [keyboards are for suckers](#).

[LINK](#)

The End Bit

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