

CAREER STRATEGY REPORT

Elena Marsh

TODAY Staff Software Engineer, Platform Infrastructure, Northpine Payments

TARGET Head of Platform Engineering within 18 months

THE HEADLINE FINDING

A rewrite that took most of the serious incidents off the payment path earned the same 4%¹ as the year before it.

YOUR HUMAN PREMIUM SCORE

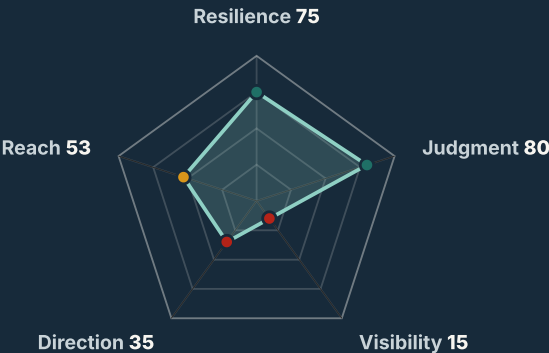
55 /100

Unpriced edge ● Room to grow

Needs attention 0-49 Room to grow 50-74 Strong 75-100

The business value is there. Too little of it is seen or paid for.

THE SHAPE BEHIND IT



WHAT THE DISCOUNT COULD COST

\$2,969 to \$9,896 a month

in the three discount levels on page 8, measured from today's pay. Scenarios, not your number.

BIGGEST LEVER

Value visibility 15/100

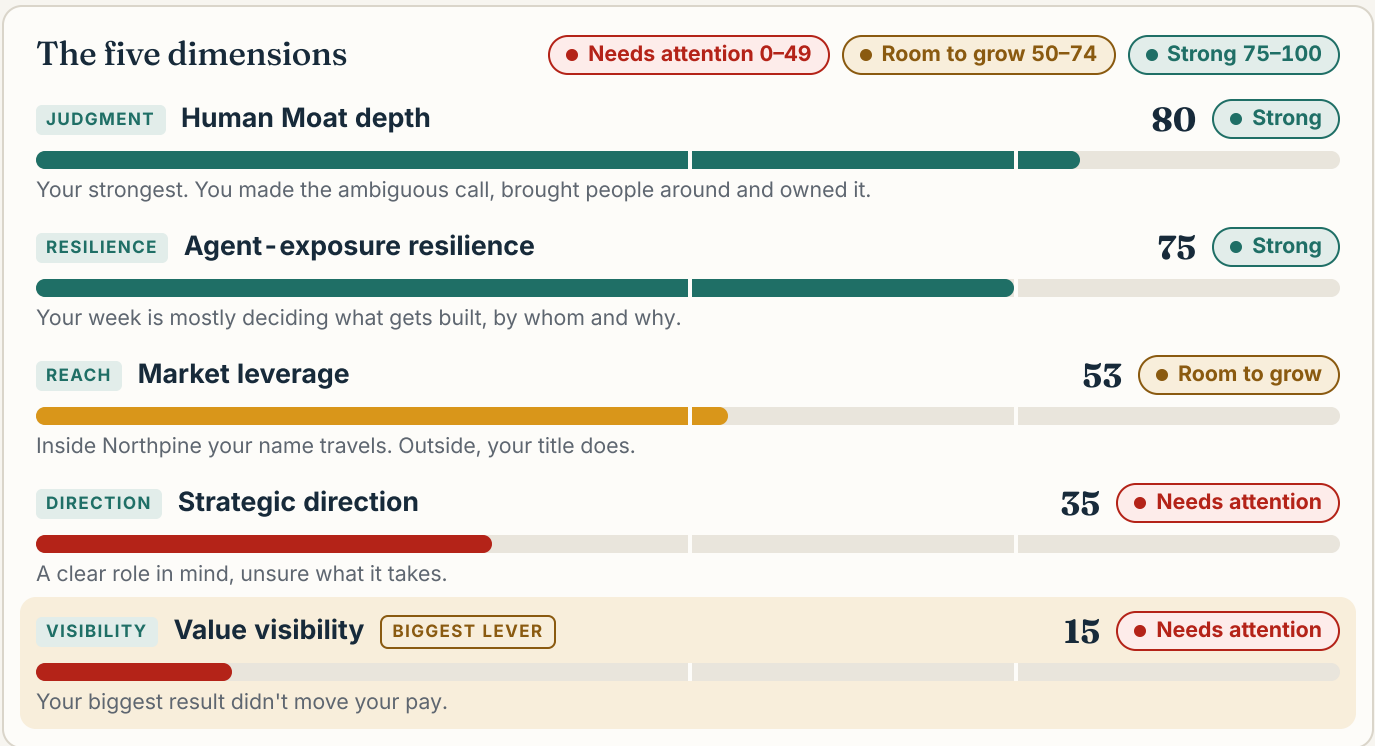
● Needs attention

TARGET

Head of Platform Engineering

Your results at a glance

Five dimensions make up your score. One of them is your biggest lever.



YOUR BIGGEST LEVER

Value visibility 15

Your answers show real judgment work and a pay history that hasn't registered it. The fix starts with translation, not more output.

"The standard annual cycle." The cycle prices tenure and rating, not results. If your biggest result didn't move your pay, it hasn't been priced.

"Some, but in technical terms." Business value described in technical terms rarely reaches the people who set pay. It has to arrive as revenue, cost, risk or time.

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AI Career Strategist · Career strategy report

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01

The read

What is actually happening around your role, and who is telling which story.

Northpine sells payments, and a payments company has its best year when volume grows and the cost of moving each transaction falls. Agents push that second number down by taking execution: the Go services, the migration boilerplate, the first draft of an RFC, the runbook steps at 2am. Much of your resume sits on those tasks. The part that doesn't, the judgment above them, is the part your resume describes least. The structural shift is easy to state and rarely applied to one person: at a scale-up, revenue can now grow while the platform team holding it up stays the same size, so every remaining role is expected to carry more decisions and less typing.

Whose story is it?

NORTHPINE

A staff engineer who keeps the authorization path quiet. The cheapest way to keep it quiet is to keep you on it.

TOOL VENDORS

Every engineer gets faster. That is their revenue, and it says nothing about who gets promoted.

THE INDUSTRY LINE

Staff-level engineers are safe. Mostly true, and it leaves out: safe at which level, and at what price.

You ticked learning AI tools, an MBA and building a promotion case², and you counted a finished cloud certification among your recent work³. Each is reasonable on its own. The AI tools and the certification run toward the layer being absorbed. The MBA spends the exact window you've given yourself. The promotion case, as you described it, asks the organization to notice cross-org impact you have already delivered and it hasn't priced.

THE QUIET TRUTH

**Nothing in the system is optimized for your individual relevance.
Nobody is against you. It simply isn't in anyone's job description.**

You already have the raw material for a better case: the judgment you showed when you halted the service-mesh migration⁴, and the agreement you got from teams that don't report to you⁵. The strategy is to make those two things visible and priced. The rest of this report builds it from your facts.

02 Your Human Premium, decoded

Your score is 55, in the Unpriced edge band. Two dimensions are strong and one is nearly empty, and the empty one is the one your pay is built on.

JUDGMENT Human Moat depth

 **80**

● Strong

Your strongest. When a high-stakes call was ambiguous, you made it, brought around the people who disagreed and owned the result⁶, and your resume backs it with the service-mesh halt⁴.

RESILIENCE Agent-exposure resilience

 **75**

● Strong

You describe your week as mostly deciding what gets built, by whom and why, and you said that with your heaviest tasks gone you'd still be deciding which problems are worth solving. That holds as long as those decisions belong to your role. Some of those decisions are yours by habit, not by role. If you left, they would go to whoever is on call.

REACH Market leverage

 **53**

● Room to grow

People across functions come to you regularly. If you moved, though, recruiters would mostly bring roles like the one you have⁷. Inside Northpine your name travels. Outside, your title does.

DIRECTION Strategic direction

 **35**

● Needs attention

A clear role in mind, unsure what it takes, and the preparation is learning AI tools. Section 6 gives you a better plan.

VISIBILITY Value visibility **BIGGEST LEVER**

 **15**

● Needs attention

This is the biggest drag on your RQ. Your manager's manager can describe some of your business value, in technical terms⁸, and your last pay change came from the standard annual cycle⁹. A rewrite that took most of the serious incidents off the payment path earned the same 4%¹ as the year before it.

Your Human Moat

What your resume already proves, and what your target still needs to see.

SHOWN BY YOUR EVIDENCE

✓ Discernment Called the halt on the Q3 2024 service-mesh migration

Discernment shows in the line most people would bury: you called the halt on the Q3 2024 service-mesh migration once load tests showed it doubled tail latency, and moved two engineers onto the rewrite⁴. You stopped a migration to protect the path you were rebuilding, and nothing in your review or pay history shows that anyone priced what it saved.

✓ Influence Fraud, ledger and merchant API teams on one contract

Influence is the pillar you didn't claim. You left "aligned people who don't report to you" unticked, yet you got the fraud, ledger and merchant API teams onto one idempotency and retry contract and retired three bespoke implementations along the way⁵. If you don't count that as influence, nobody you report to will.

YOUR TARGET DEMANDS IT, NOT YET SHOWN · SECTION 6 BUILDS THESE

? Legacy Mentoring two senior engineers

Legacy, as a Head of Platform hiring decision reads it: you mentor two senior engineers¹⁰, but what that decision looks for is someone you developed now holding a bigger role.

? Vision

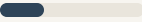
Every result solved after it became visible

Vision, naming a problem before leadership sees it. Everything on your resume is a problem you solved well after it became visible. A director is paid to see the next one first.

03 Task exposure map

Where agents reach first, and what stays yours.

Exposure to agents: Low Medium High

TASK (FROM YOUR RESUME)	SHARE OF WEEK (ESTIMATED)	NOW	1-2 YEARS	3 YEARS	WHAT AGENTS TAKE	WHAT STAYS YOURS
Building and shipping payments services (Go, Kafka, Postgres) YOUR CEILING IF YOU STAY	 about a third	Medium	High	High	Implementation, tests, migration boilerplate	Architecture calls on the money path under ambiguity
On-call and incident review, primary for 6 services YOUR CEILING IF YOU STAY	 about a fifth	Low	Medium	High	Triage, runbook execution, first-draft postmortems	The call during a live Sev-1 and what changes afterward
Platform RFC review SPLITS BOTH WAYS	 about a fifth	Medium	Medium	High	Consistency checks, drafting, standards enforcement	Deciding which RFCs should exist at all
Load testing and go/no-go calls SPLITS BOTH WAYS	 about a tenth	Medium	High	High	Running and analyzing the tests	The halt, and the reallocation that follows
Cross-team contracts (fraud, ledger, merchant API) BASE TO BUILD FROM	 about a tenth	Low	Low	Low	Drafting the spec	Getting teams with other priorities to commit
Mentoring two senior engineers BASE TO BUILD FROM	 small	Low	Low	Low	Little	Growing people into bigger roles

Shares are estimated from your resume and intake, not measured.

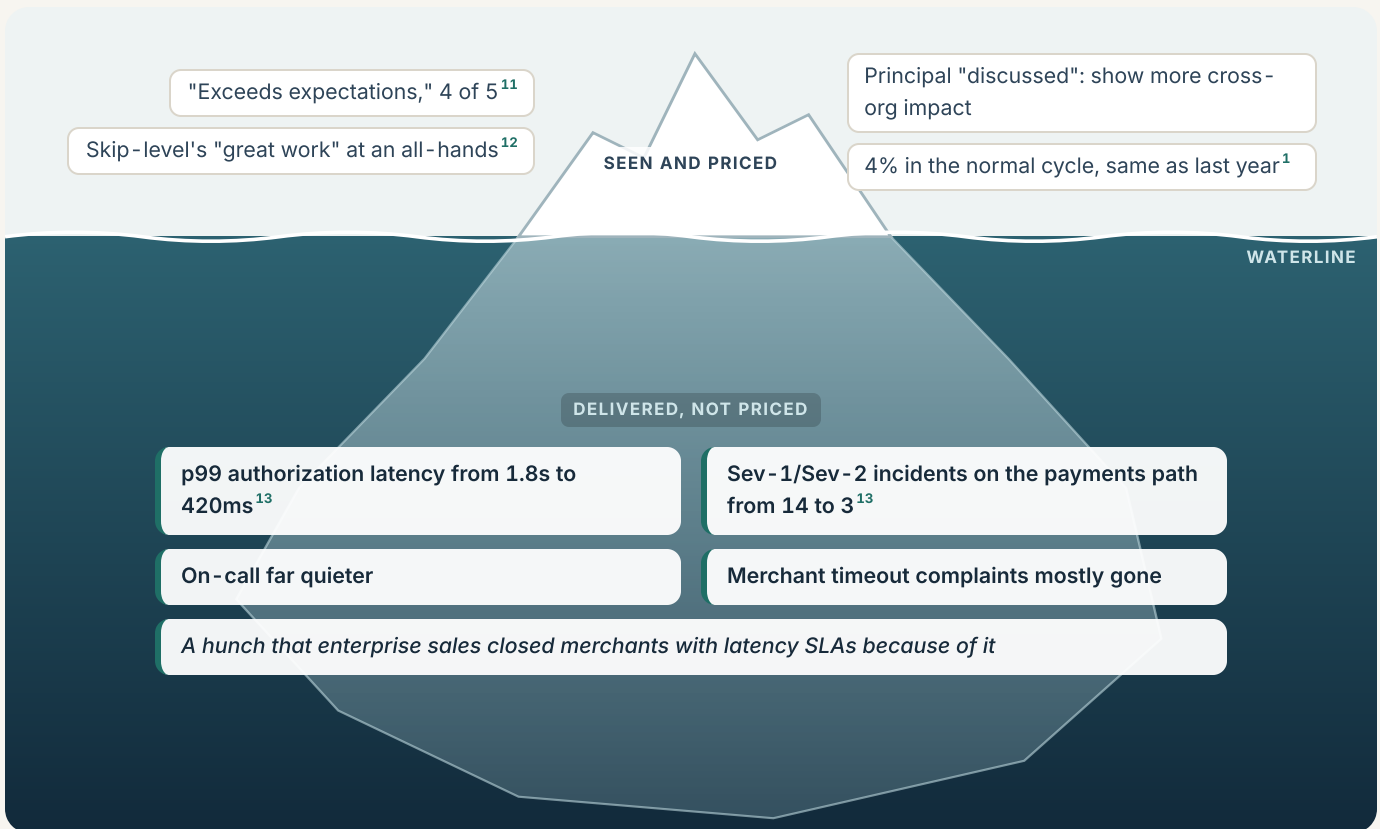
The top two rows are your ceiling if you stay where you are. They are where your reputation was made, the rewrite and the 2am calls, and they are where agents reach first. Being excellent at them keeps you valuable in a role whose scope is shrinking around you. The task most worth noticing is the go/no-go call: the analysis is heading toward agents, and the decision it feeds is heading toward you, but only if someone sees that you are the one making it. The same split runs through RFC review. You wrote the org's RFC template, and agents will soon apply it to every draft without tiring. What stays yours is

deciding which RFCs should exist in the first place. That is a roadmap call, and a roadmap call is what a Head of Platform is hired to make.

The bottom two rows, cross-team contracts and developing people, are the base to build from: they are the work a Head of Platform role consists of, and today they take a small slice of your week. Load testing and RFC review split both ways, with the analysis and drafting going to agents and the go/no-go call and the choice of which RFCs should exist staying yours. Section 6 is largely about making that slice bigger and making it seen.

04 Business Value Iceberg

What Northpine sees and pays for, and what sits below the waterline.



The same facts, rewritten in the language the people who set pay use:

RISK

The path that moves Northpine's money went from 14 serious incidents in two quarters to 3. Each one carries merchant trust, possible SLA credits and engineering hours spent at 2am instead of on the roadmap.

REVENUE

If enterprise merchants with latency terms signed after cutover, the rewrite stopped being platform hygiene and became a sales enabler. You don't yet know which deals. Finding out is the most valuable thing you could learn this month.

COST

Three retry implementations retired means three things nobody has to maintain, debug or onboard new engineers into.

DECISIONS UNBLOCKED

With one contract, fraud, ledger and merchant API ship without renegotiating retry behavior every time.

RISK AVOIDED

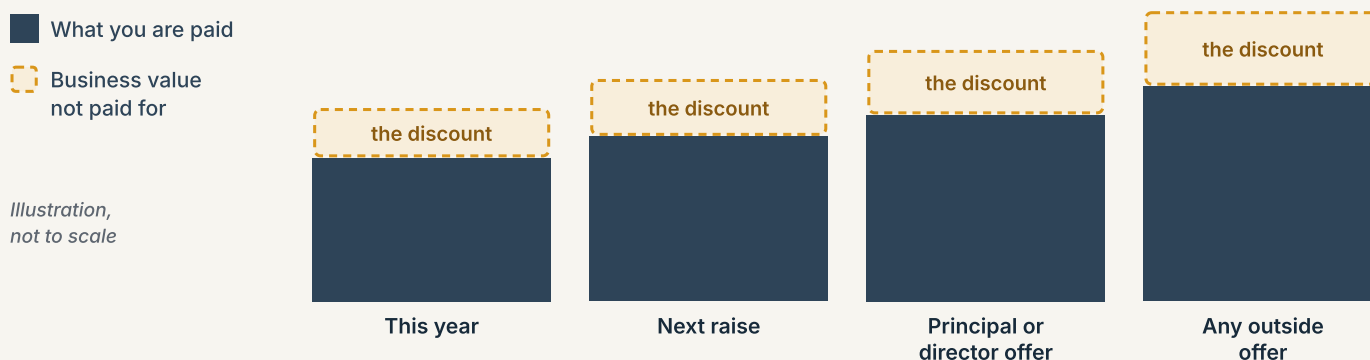
The migration you halted would have doubled tail latency on the same path you were fixing.

The discount, and a different frame

What the discount costs you, and a better way to think about it.

You are offering yourself at a discount.

Northpine received a risk-reducing change to its core platform, possibly a revenue one too, and paid for it at the rate of an ordinary year. The discount compounds: your next raise, a Principal or director offer, any outside offer, all start from the current number, so a discount left in place this year is inherited by every year after it.



Each later number is built on the current one, so a discount left in place this year grows with every number built on it.

None of this requires bad faith from anyone at Northpine. The rational move for an employer is to keep a strong performer exactly where they are, especially the one who gets the call when payments break. Promoting you opens a hole on the path that matters most.

SO THE FRAME HAS TO CHANGE.

Run your career as Elena Inc.

AN EMPLOYEE LISTS DUTIES

- Owns runbooks
- Reviews RFCs
- Mentors two engineers

A BUSINESS SELLS OUTCOMES

- Took most of the serious incidents off the payment path
- May have made latency commitments sellable (Move 1 finds out)
- Ended a class of cross-team rework

Elena Inc. already has one strong product. It has been sold at the old rate because nobody sent the invoice.

05 What the discount costs

What the discount costs every month, measured from today's pay.

Your inputs: discount guess 15%; inflation 3% a year; raises matching inflation; Principal Engineer at \$290,000 in year 2; Head of Platform Engineering at \$350,000. The web version of this report lets you change them.

The monthly cost of the discount, today

The discount is the difference between the business value your work produces today and what you're paid for it.

If the discount is 15%, your own guess¹⁴, every month it stays this way costs about

\$2,969

\$35,625 a year · \$178,125 over five years

If the discount is 30%, every month it stays this way costs about

\$5,938

\$71,250 a year · \$356,250 over five years

If the discount is 50%, every month it stays this way costs about

\$9,896

\$118,750 a year · \$593,750 over five years

In Dr. Roberts's client work, the discount has often run 30% to 50%, sometimes higher. Most people guess lower, and even the lower number rarely gets claimed: people settle for an inflation adjustment or a 5–10% raise. Strategic work aims at the larger number, in less time.



Scenarios, not your number.

Today's pay here is \$237,500, the midpoint of the 200–275K band you selected¹⁷ (you put your own total at \$220–260K¹).

Staying put leaves you at the mercy of your employer. If raises exactly match inflation, your pay stands still. Below inflation, it shrinks. One point above it is barely noticeable. The next step has no date: it gets pushed out a year at a time, and with AI it may slip further, or the role you're in may change underneath you. And any week, a role can disappear.

The leverage question

Agents are taking on more of the cognitive labor: the code, the first drafts, the runbook steps. That shifts the question from how hard you work to what leverage you have. Why would Northpine keep you, and pay you, as a strategic business asset? You answered it in your intake: "I know why the payments path is built the way it is, and I'm the one who makes the call when it breaks. Honestly, I'm not sure that's enough."¹⁸ It's an honest answer, and today it rests on things Northpine already gets without paying extra for them.

Looking away from that question is the real risk. Better to face that question now, while there's still time to build the answer.

YOUR RQ

6 / 10

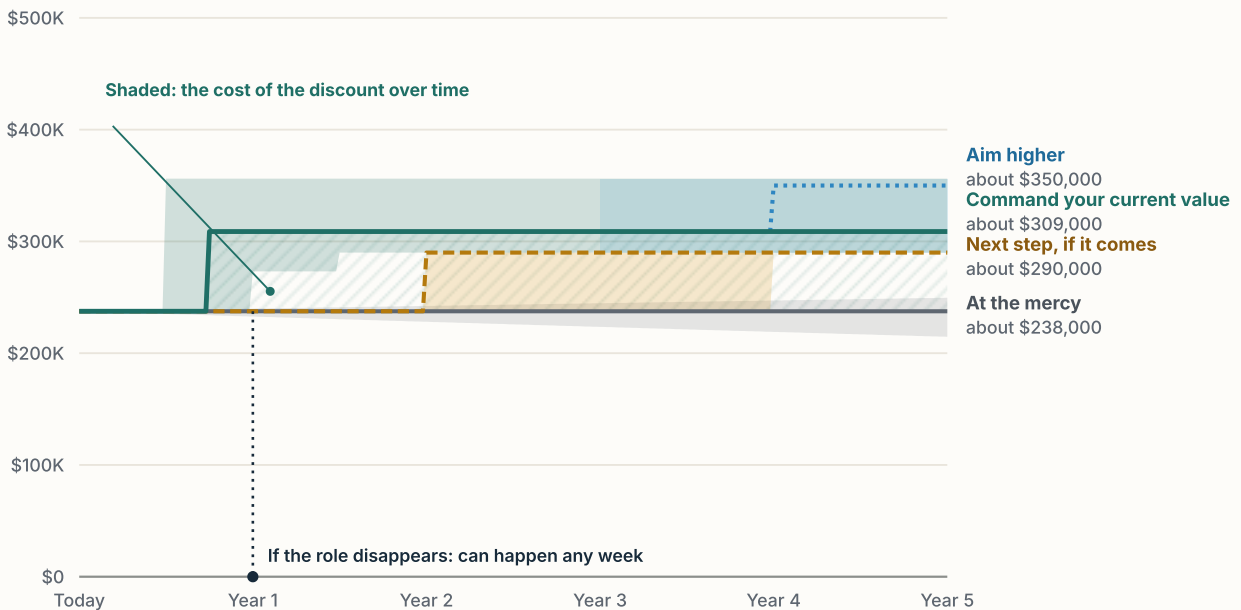


Repricing Quotient (RQ): how ready your record is to be repriced, 1 to 10. Judgment and low exposure raise it; low visibility drags it.

Your RQ is 6 out of 10. Your judgment and your low exposure hold it up. Visibility pulls it down most: your answers on how much of your work reaches the people who set pay, and how your last raise was decided, are the largest single drag, ahead of market leverage.

Five years from today, in today's dollars

Annual pay, today's dollars



■ **At the mercy** Staying put.

■ **Command your current value** Today's pay plus the discount within the first year (the band runs from your 15% guess to 50%), then your next-step estimate about a year sooner, if higher.

..... **If the role disappears** Pay drops to zero. It can happen any week.

■ **Next step, if it comes** Principal Engineer at your estimate of \$290,000¹⁵, drawn in year 2 when you expect it. The band runs to year 4 because dates slip.

■ **Aim higher** Head of Platform Engineering at your own estimate of \$350,000¹⁶. Later, and less certain.

■ **Shaded** The cost of the discount over time.

"At the mercy": the line assumes raises exactly match inflation (3% a year); the shaded range runs from 2 points below that to 1 point above. An illustration of paths, not a forecast. Bands show how wide each path could run. The next-step and aim-higher paths use your own estimates, with nothing added. Scenarios, not your number.

Fix the current first, then go higher

The discount is the low-hanging fruit: the closest money on the table. Closing it takes no course, no certificate and no new degree. It takes the record you already have, framed so the people who set pay can see it, and giving yourself permission to command what it's worth.

Once today's pay reflects today's business value, the same approach applies to the next level, and you start that climb from the right number. Some people work on both at once. How fast depends on how high you aim, the effort you put in and the length of the program.

What this report and a program cost, measured in the discount

Each cell divides the price by what the discount costs per day or per week at that level.

PRICE	IF THE DISCOUNT IS 15% (YOUR GUESS)	IF THE DISCOUNT IS 30%	IF THE DISCOUNT IS 50%
This report \$197	about 2 days	about 1 day	about 0.5 days
3-month program \$3,997	about 6 weeks	about 3 weeks	about 2 weeks
4-month program \$4,997	about 7.5 weeks	about 3.5 weeks	about 2 weeks
6-month program \$6,997	about 10 weeks	about 5 weeks	about 3 weeks

Across his client work, individual compensation has moved by \$20K to over \$200K a year. Results differ by person and situation.

What would this discount pay for?

Pick one goal, type the amount, and see five years of the discount at each level as a share of it.

Hypothetical example: a \$400,000 mortgage balance (not your number)

- If the discount is 15%, five years of it, \$178,125, is **about 45%** of your mortgage balance.
- If the discount is 30%, five years of it, \$356,250, is **about 89%** of your mortgage balance.
- If the discount is 50%, five years of it, \$593,750, is **more than all** of that mortgage balance.

Your goal: _____ Amount: \$_____ 15%: \$178,125 = _____% of it
30%: \$356,250 = _____% of it 50%: \$593,750 = _____% of it

06 Pulling the future forward

Start from the role you want and work back to today.



THE FUTURE STATE, FIXED · 18 MONTHS

Head of Platform Engineering for a payments organization, director level, owning the infrastructure roadmap and a team of 25–40, within 18 months, without relocating.¹⁹

You called Principal the safe version you tell your manager. This backcast works from the one you haven't said out loud.

WHAT MUST BE TRUE, WORKING BACK TO TODAY

1

Your business value is described upstairs, in revenue, cost and risk.

The people who set director-level scope can say, without you there to explain it, what the rewrite did for risk, and for revenue if Move 1 confirms it.

Today: they can say "great work."¹²

2

You have led people with accountability, title or not.

A cross-team initiative where engineers outside your team deliver against a plan you own, and at least one person you developed visibly stepping into more. Your two mentees are the obvious candidates.

Today: you mentor two senior engineers, and you have never formally managed anyone²⁰.

3

You own an outcome.

A roadmap line tied to one of the parts of the business that bring in money (enterprise merchant growth, reliability commitments, cost per transaction) is scope.

Today: primary for 6 services, which is a duty.

4

You have named a problem before leadership saw it.

One forward-looking call, in writing, that proves right. This fills in the Vision pillar from Section 2 and is the clearest single signal that someone thinks like a director.

Today: everything on your resume is a problem you solved after it became visible.

5

A sponsor says your name when you're not there.

Someone at VP level or above who would put you forward for a Head of Platform role. Sponsorship costs the sponsor something.

Today: a skip-level who said "great work" at an all-hands¹², which is appreciation.

6

The outside door is open inside your constraint.

No relocation is fixed, and this plan treats it as fixed. The external option is remote or local leadership roles, reached through the people who decide. Which companies and which decision-makers belong on that short list is judgment work done live with Dr. Roberts.

Today: recruiters bring roles like your current one.

TODAY

Staff Software Engineer, Northpine Payments. Value visibility 15.

Two routes, and what this rules out

How to build toward the target, and what to stop spending effort on.

One fact shapes everything below. The specialist route does not become the leadership route by continuing. More excellence on the first does not convert into the second. For the next stretch you build both in parallel.

YOUR FLOOR

Principal

JUDGED ON

Depth and org - wide technical direction

YOUR CASE TODAY

Largely made already: the rewrite and the RFC template.

YOUR TARGET

Head of Platform

JUDGED ON

People, a roadmap and the business results that roadmap serves

YOUR CASE TODAY

Barely exists on paper yet. Raw material: the idempotency contract, your two mentees, and a better answer to the EM role you turned down two years ago.

----- BUILD BOTH IN PARALLEL -----

What this rules out

OFF THE LIST

The MBA

Nothing on the requirements list is supplied by a degree, and a program would absorb the 18 months in which all six requirements have to be built. Section 8 tests the belief behind it.

OFF THE LIST

Learning AI tools as a career strategy

Keep using them; you'll be faster at your job. As a plan, it is a move anyone can make, so it doesn't set you apart. The cloud certification you listed (your AWS Solutions Architect – Professional) counted for nothing in your score, on purpose: it strengthens the layer agents are absorbing.

OFF THE LIST

Waiting for the Principal slot

A case built on "show more cross-org impact," competing for a slot that opens about once a year behind a colleague, hands your timeline to someone else's calendar. Build the case anyway, as your floor.

WHAT REMAINS

Three things you were planning to spend effort on are off the list. What's left is a requirements list, a format you've worked in for 11 years¹⁷.

07 90-Day Repricing Plan

Three moves, in order. Each one feeds the next.

YOUR 90 DAYS ON ONE PAGE: THE FIRST STEP, THEN THE SIGNAL THAT TELLS YOU EACH MOVE IS WORKING

MOVE	THIS WEEK	DAY 30	DAY 60	DAY 90
MOVE 1 Invoice the rewrite.	Ask whoever tracks SLA credits for the payments path's credit history across the before-and-after quarters, and ask the enterprise solutions lead which recent deals carried latency terms.	You hold at least one dollar figure you didn't have today.	Someone above your manager has repeated it.	It appears in a planning or review document you didn't write.

WHAT IT IS A one-page account of the rewrite in business terms: the incident drop priced (SLA credits, merchant escalations, engineering hours per Sev-1 on the payment path) and any enterprise deals with latency terms that closed after cutover.

WHY IT MATTERS Requirement 1, and the floor under the Principal case. Director candidates are people whose results already speak finance's language.

MOVE 2 Call the next problem.	List every leadership goal for this year that runs through the authorization path or merchant onboarding, and mark where the event pipeline's limits would block it.	One candidate problem with evidence.	The memo has reached a cross-functional audience.	Leadership references it or assigns work against it.
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WHAT IT IS Find out what your VP and CTO must deliver this year, map where the platform will constrain it, and write a short memo naming the problem before it surfaces. **WHY IT MATTERS** Requirements 3 and 4. This is how Vision gets onto your record.

MOVE 3 Build leadership evidence without the title.	Pick the next three services the idempotency contract should reach, and ask the mentee you'd trust with a workstream whether they want it. Propose the initiative once Move 1 gives you the business result.	Proposal drafted, mentee confirmed.	Your mentee presents progress to a group above your team.	Someone outside your reporting line asks your view on a roadmap decision.
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WHAT IT IS Lead a cross-team initiative with people accountable to your plan (extending the idempotency contract to the next set of services is the natural candidate) and give one mentee visible ownership of a workstream. Get known by the people who shape director scope: sales, finance and the teams that depend on your platform. **WHY IT MATTERS** Requirements 2, 5 and 6, and the missing Legacy pillar.

→ Move 3 is proposed on the business result Move 1 produces, so run them in order.

LEFT OUT ON PURPOSE

The case built for the person who decides on a Head of Platform role

They decide the outcome and turn on judgment calls made live, so they are done live with Dr. Roberts.

The compensation conversation itself

The order of these moves against Northpine's internal politics

08 Where a strategist would push

Two blind spots, and your barriers tested.

The 2am identity

You said you like being the person they call when payments break, more than you should²¹. The system likes it too. Every incident you resolve personally is evidence for keeping you on call and evidence against making you the person who runs the team that's on call.

The file you haven't updated

You turned down an EM role two years ago²¹. Somewhere in Northpine's talent conversations, you may still be filed as someone who doesn't want to manage. Nobody revises that entry for you.

Your barriers, tested

You named five. The Principal slot is handled in Section 6. Of the other four, no relocation is fixed and the plan respects it, one is true and buildable, and two haven't been tested.

“Principal slots open about once a year, someone ahead of me”

✓ **Handled in Section 6**

Build the case as your floor, not your plan.

“No relocation”

🔒 **Real and fixed**

The plan respects it.

“Never formally managed anyone”

↑ **True, and buildable**

Requirement 2 is how you build past it.

“No MBA”

? **A belief**

Nothing in the role you described asks for one.

“Most director roles I see are in NYC or SF”

? **Untested**

It describes what reaches you, and that tells you about your visibility, little about where the roles are.

One question you haven't asked: does Northpine's payments organization have, or need, a Head of Platform? Find out before assuming the role lives somewhere else.

Your next step: work with Dr. Roberts

Section 6 gave you the requirements and Section 7 the first three moves. The three things left out on purpose, the case for the person who decides, the compensation conversation and the order of moves inside Northpine, turn on the people involved. That is the work of the 3, 4 and 6-month programs. With a specific target and an 18-month timeline, that's the natural next step if you want to build them with Dr. Roberts.

Programs run 3, 4 or 6 months · career architecting with Dr. Roberts

✓ Your \$197 for this report is credited in full toward any program if you enroll within 30 days.

WHAT TO BRING

Come with the version of the goal you haven't said out loud (you have already written it once, in this intake) and the timeline you actually want, not the safe one. He'll tell you straight whether it's realistic and what it would take.

Work with Dr. Roberts →

aicareerstrategist.com/work-with-dr-roberts

Prefer to run the 90-day plan yourself first? **Ask the strategist**, a subscription for questions as you execute, is opening soon.

Join the waitlist at aicareerstrategist.com

About Dr. Roberts

[PLACEHOLDER]
Photo, 120 px

Kirthi Roberts, PEng (licensed in Engineering Physics), Master's in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, PhD (UBC)

He has worked with 500+ professionals over 12+ years, senior engineers, tech leaders and executives among them. Clients have landed roles at Amazon and Meta.

Kirthi Roberts

AI Career Strategist · aicareerstrategist.com · Career strategy report for Elena Marsh, October 10, 2026

Receipts

Built from: your resume, 12 intake answers, 12 assessment answers. Nothing else.

Each small number in this report points to the line of your resume or the answer it rests on.

1 P3, YOUR INTAKE Comp went up 4% in the normal cycle, same as last year. Total comp lands around \$220–260K depending on bonus.	8 Q5, FREE SCORE B. Some, but in technical terms	16 P11, YOUR INTAKE (YOUR ESTIMATE) Aim-higher role: Head of Platform Engineering, around \$350K.
2 P6, YOUR INTAKE Learning AI tools · An MBA or another degree · Building a promotion case	9 Q6, FREE SCORE A. The standard annual cycle	17 P1, YOUR INTAKE Staff Software Engineer · Scale-up · US · 11 years · 200–275K
3 RESUME AND Q4 AWS Certified Solutions Architect – Professional (2025); Q4: Finished an AI or cloud certification	10 RESUME Mentor two senior engineers.	18 P12, YOUR INTAKE I know why the payments path is built the way it is, and I'm the one who makes the call when it breaks. Honestly, I'm not sure that's enough.
4 RESUME Called the halt on the Q3 2024 service-mesh migration after load tests showed it doubled tail latency; redirected two engineers to the rewrite.	11 P3, YOUR INTAKE Review said exceeds expectations, 4 of 5. Promo to Principal was "discussed" and I was told to show more cross-org impact.	19 P4, YOUR INTAKE Head of platform engineering for the payments org. Director level, owning the infra roadmap and the team, 25–40 people.
5 RESUME Got the fraud, ledger and merchant API teams to adopt a shared idempotency and retry contract; retired 3 bespoke retry implementations.	12 P3, YOUR INTAKE My skip-level called it out as "great work" at the all-hands.	20 P5, YOUR INTAKE For the director path, I've never formally managed anyone and I don't have an MBA. And I can't move.
6 Q3, FREE SCORE D. I made the call, brought around the people who disagreed, and owned the result	13 RESUME p99 authorization latency down from 1.8s to 420ms. Sev-1/Sev-2 incidents on the payments path down from 14 in the two quarters before cutover to 3 in the two quarters after.	21 P8, YOUR INTAKE I'm the person they call when payments break at 2am. I like that more than I should. I turned down an EM role two years ago because I didn't want to stop coding.
7 Q9, FREE SCORE B. Recruiters reach out, mostly for roles like my current one	14 P9, YOUR INTAKE (YOUR ESTIMATE) What do you think the discount is? "Maybe 15%."	
	15 P10, YOUR INTAKE (YOUR ESTIMATE) Logical next role: Principal Engineer, around \$290K, in about two years.	

Strategy brief: for a mentor or sponsor

TARGET · WITHIN 18 MONTHS

Head of Platform Engineering

Director level · infrastructure roadmap · team of 25–40 · no relocation

What must be true for Elena

1. Elena's business value is described upstairs, in revenue, cost and risk.
2. Elena has led people with accountability, title or not.
3. Elena owns an outcome.
4. Elena has named a problem before leadership saw it.
5. A sponsor says Elena's name when she's not there.
6. The outside door is open for Elena inside her constraint.

Elena's first three moves, and the Day-90 signal for each

1 Invoice the rewrite.

DAY 90 Her one-page account of the rewrite appears in a planning or review document she didn't write.

2 Reverse-engineer the parts of the business that bring in money and call the next problem.

DAY 90 Leadership references her memo or assigns work against it.

3 Build leadership evidence without the title.

DAY 90 Someone outside her reporting line asks her view on a roadmap decision.

October 10, 2026