



Pay & Benefits

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Key takeaways

Our compensation system should help us to **assemble and retain the strongest possible team, maximize the potential of each Spooner, enhance the Spooner experience, and make efficient use of time and capital.**



With these goals in mind, we've built our approach to compensation around certain principles, as follows:

- **We compensate a Spooner according to their impactfulness in their role, and the reference market rate for it.** This approach is actionable and cost-efficient, and it helps us to attract and retain people.
- **We aim to compensate at the high end of our reference market.** This allows us to be selective in our recruiting, and it boosts retention.
- **We don't create an expectation of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes.** Instead, we hire individuals who are intrinsically motivated to do their best for the company, and we provide the trust and support they need to make an awesome impact.
- **We enable a Spooner to share in the company's success.** This helps them think even more like an owner and prioritize what's good for the company as a whole in the long term. Equity is one of the tools at our disposal to implement this principle.
- **We give generous separation packages.** Our principle of uncompromising excellence requires that we occasionally counsel a Spooner to leave. We try to handle these cases with the utmost sensitivity and support.
- **We like benefits when they're a highly efficient use of resources.** We avoid profligate spending. However, we should always offer a benefit if doing so is the most efficient option available, no matter how expensive it is.
- **By default, we enable a Spooner to achieve a high degree of personalization with their benefits.** We make an exception where it's inefficient or harmful to our company culture.
- **We foster transparency while protecting Spooner privacy.** We provide high-level guidelines concerning what we look for when assessing a Spooner's impactfulness, and lots of honest, constructive feedback. This information helps the Spooner maximize their impactfulness and their compensation. We don't reveal the compensation of any individual Spooner.
- **We guard against bias and inequality.** Two Spooners in the same role and of equal impactfulness receive equal compensation.

Compensation at Bending Spoons is composed as follows:

- **Pay.** Pay features a salary and, occasionally, a sign-on bonus. The salary depends on role, impactfulness, and reference market rate. Sign-on bonus assignments vest monthly over four years, with a one-year lock-up period.
- **Benefits.** We provide an array of benefits, including accident insurance, activities and events, backing for learning investments (through time and capital), access to equity in the company at favorable terms, a flexible schedule, flexible time off, food and beverages while at the office, health insurance (or suitable reimbursement), life and total disability insurance (or suitable reimbursement), mental health support, a mentor, parental support, relocation support, remote work, retreats, and a welfare budget.



The implementation of our compensation system touches upon the following:

- **Frameworks.** *Skills* are the main ways in which a Spooner can deliver impact at Bending Spoons. By focusing on growing their skills, a Spooner can enhance their impactfulness. Consequently, their compensation can increase. A *path* is a list of steps, each representing a certain level of impactfulness (broken down by skill) that a Spooner can achieve in their role. With each new step, better compensation is unlocked.
- **Impactfulness assessments and pay reviews.** We perform a company-wide impactfulness assessment toward the end of every year. Following that, we set the pay of each associated Spooner, as part of the pay review process. Two Spooners in the same role and of equal impactfulness receive equal compensation.
- **New hires.** We set the pay of new hires based on the role and their expected impactfulness, as assessed throughout the recruiting process. We offer the new hire equal compensation to that enjoyed by a Spooner in the same role and of comparable impactfulness.
- **Calibration.** We carry out the calibration of our compensation by role and level of impactfulness on an ongoing basis. The goal is to compensate at the high end of the reference market. We also audit our impactfulness assessments and compensation levels to check for bias.
- **Acquiring equity.** A Spooner can decide to receive their pay in cash, share options of Bending Spoons, or a combination of both. When choosing options, a 30% discount on the market price applies.

Introduction

We define a Spooner's *compensation* as all forms of their pay and benefits.

Compensation is a complex and important topic. It warrants serious consideration on the part of both company and individual.

Great compensation alone can't make a company worth working for in the long term. Most exceptional performers tend to be more fired up by factors like contributing to an ambitious mission, solving challenging problems, being part of a wonderful team, experiencing freedom and responsibility, and being inspired to grow to their full potential.

However, let's also not diminish just how relevant a factor compensation is for most people. It impacts the individual's financial security, which influences their emotional state and informs some major life decisions. Professionally, compensation affects productivity and satisfaction. When choosing a company to work for, compensation is often a key element in the decision-making process.



From the company's side, it's undoubtedly preferable to have high-caliber, fulfilled, and productive team members. Given how big a part compensation can play in this, and the fact that it also constitutes a large expense, any company aiming for sustained success needs to treat the compensation of its team members as a priority.

Below, we describe our compensation system at Bending Spoons. We start by laying out its goals, then we list the underlying principles. Lastly, we explain how it's implemented in practice.

In this document, we use the word *impactfulness* frequently. This is an internal term, created specifically to apply to the Bending Spoons environment. It's broadly comparable to *expertise*.

Goals

Our compensation system should help us to achieve the following goals:

- **Assembling and retaining the strongest possible team.** The nature of our work isn't labor-intensive, and a few fantastic people can make a far greater difference than a lot of ordinary ones. We want—and need—to staff every position with the strongest contributor we can. Offering great compensation is one of the many ways in which we make Bending Spoons an appealing option for outstanding individuals.
- **Maximizing the impactfulness of every Spooner.** There's a strong link between how we compensate a Spooner and the impact they deliver. This link manifests itself in many ways. For example, while extraordinary compensation is unlikely to provide a long-lasting boost in motivation, inadequate compensation is certainly capable of demotivating the individual—mainly by making them feel underappreciated. Moreover, how we compensate sends a message about what we value—and don't value—and it can determine where a Spooner focuses their efforts. Lastly, through benefits, we can eliminate certain inefficiencies and foster collaboration.
- **Enhancing the Spooner experience.** Creating lots of amazing jobs is a critical component of our mission. Compensation may not be at the very top of everyone's list of factors that make a job special, but it's still a significant driver of professional satisfaction for most people. That gives us one more incentive to get our approach to compensation right.
- **Making efficient use of time and capital.** We'd like to achieve the above goals by using our resources as efficiently as possible. This requires optimizing compensation-related expenses. It's



also important that we optimize the time invested in managing our compensation system. Time has a hefty opportunity cost—particularly at a company as ambitious as ours.

Principles

With these goals in mind, we've built our approach to compensation in accordance with a few principles. Below, we discuss each one.

We compensate based on role, impactfulness, and market rate

We compensate a Spooner according to their impactfulness in their role, and the reference market rate for it. This approach has a number of advantages, including the following:

- **It's actionable.** Although assessing an individual's impactfulness in their role and determining how the market values it is tricky, this is still something we can do in practice with an adequate degree of accuracy. We explain how we go about it in [Implementation](#) below.
- **It helps attract and retain people.** No matter how convincing the thinking behind our compensation system may be, many wouldn't want to work at Bending Spoons if we offered pay and benefits that are far worse than they could get elsewhere.
- **It's cost-efficient.** Offering compensation *beyond* market rates would probably mean we're allocating the company's resources wastefully.

Now that we've clarified the factors that determine a Spooner's compensation, let's be explicit about **some factors that are *not* part of the equation:**

- **Experience.** Compensating based on experience irrespective of whether it translates into impactfulness would be irrational. That said, between two equally motivated individuals, the one with greater experience *tends* to display superior impactfulness. When this is the case, we readily compensate them accordingly.
- **Tenure at Bending Spoons.** On average, the longer a Spooner has been with us, the greater their impactfulness. This is largely down to the accumulation of extremely relevant experience (including their exposure to our products, technologies, processes, and company culture). However, it's also possible for a recent hire to display superior impactfulness than that of a long-standing Spooner. Hence, tenure itself isn't a factor we take into account when setting compensation.



- **Talent.** We value talent highly, as it drives impactfulness in the long term. However, we don't set compensation based on talent. If we did, it would likely harm collaboration. Consider the following scenario: Monica and Hans hold the same role and are equally motivated. Monica is highly talented but still relatively inexperienced. Hans isn't nearly as talented, but he's far more experienced, such that his impactfulness is currently greater than Monica's. Then, it would likely create tension should Hans learn that Monica enjoys better compensation than he does despite currently contributing less. Also, compensating based on talent would probably be an inefficient allocation of our resources, and would further complicate our compensation system. Instead, we focus on giving a Spooner the opportunity to leverage their talent to enhance their impactfulness as quickly as possible. Compensation increases follow suit.
- **Political adeptness.** We aren't into company politics. We're especially unimpressed when someone tries to get ahead by bragging, backstabbing, or sucking up, rather than focusing on having an impact. When we encounter egregious behavior in this regard, we ask the offender to leave the company.

We compensate at the high end of the market

We aim to compensate at the high end of our reference market. This means that someone should receive better pay and benefits at Bending Spoons than they would in an equivalent role at the vast majority of other companies in the territory. This is important for the following reasons:

- It allows us to be selective, hiring candidates of great talent and motivation and, therefore, with strong long-term prospects of developing outstanding impactfulness
- It boosts retention, which is vital in a number of ways, such as by strengthening our culture and minimizing the costs associated with replacing people in roles that involve a steep learning curve

It's possible that the market rewards a certain role and level of impactfulness above the value someone of such impactfulness could create in an equivalent role at Bending Spoons. When this is the case, we won't be able to apply the principle. It simply doesn't make sense for us to compensate someone by more than the value they add to Bending Spoons in the long run. **We strive to keep generating better and better returns on impactfulness, allowing us to compensate competitively for as many roles and levels of impactfulness as possible in an increasingly wide territory.** How successful we are at this depends on our strategy and how effectively each Spooner contributes to its implementation.

Although we aim to compensate at the high end of the market, **we're not trying to outdo every company in this regard.** Offering the highest pay and best benefits in every case would cause our expenses to skyrocket without a corresponding improvement in impactfulness. Indeed, we believe that a large percentage of exceptional individuals, while wanting to feel properly valued, aren't trying to optimize their



compensation to its absolute maximum, particularly when the hypothetical upgrade would be incremental on an already highly satisfactory baseline. Rather, they're focused on finding professional fulfillment by doing outstanding work with outstanding people.

We don't create an expectation of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes

We define an *extrinsic reward* as something given to the individual by an external source as a direct consequence of an action or outcome. Examples include salary raises, bonuses, titles, grades, and awards. By contrast, we define an *intrinsic reward* as something the individual derives for themselves from their action or outcome. The sense of pride found in a job well done is an intrinsic reward, as is the personal fulfillment that comes from learning something new.¹

Research shows that creating an expectation of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes can be damaging overall.² For example, a company attempting to boost motivation by temporarily introducing a bonus that's contingent on its team members hitting certain performance goals will likely, in time, find the initiative does more harm than good.

While an individual may increase their effort to unlock the rewards, this effect is often ephemeral, and the individual regresses to their established effort levels before long. Further, the individual often updates their idea of "normal" to one that includes these rewards, growing to expect them with increasing entitlement. In our example, when the bonus is then eliminated or the individual simply doesn't earn it in the future, they're likely to feel they've lost something. This leads to discontentment and resentment.

Several other consequences stemming from an expectation of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes can negatively impact both individual and company. The main ones follow:

- **Decreased creativity.** If an extrinsic reward is on someone's mind, it can stifle their imagination. They're more likely to focus on what's tried and tested.
- **Decreased big-picture, long-term thinking.** The individual may put the bulk of their focus on checking the boxes to get the reward. This causes them to lose sight of what optimizes impact for the whole company in the long run. It's reminiscent of those who get through university by studying only the material needed to pass exams rather than by actually gaining a deep understanding of the subject.

¹ There are various, subtly different definitions of *extrinsic reward* and *intrinsic reward*. We've crafted our own definitions to be particularly useful in this discussion.

² A synthesis of the research on the topic can be found in Daniel Pink's *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.



- **Decreased collaboration.** For the individual, taking the time to selflessly help a teammate can reduce the probability of unlocking the reward themselves. Assigning rewards at the team level mitigates this—but can create frustration as the individual’s reward depends on their teammates, too. Plus, inter-team collaboration still suffers.
- **Decreased passion for the work.** Extrinsic rewards make the work feel transactional and, consequently, harder to love. This effect can be irreversible.
- **Increased politics.** Inevitably, some people attempt to unlock the reward by claiming unwarranted credit for marginal impact, or even undermining others to look better by comparison. Besides making it harder to assign the rewards correctly, this can contribute to a cut-throat culture of competition and suspicion.

On the whole, **systematically creating expectations of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes at Bending Spoons would probably decrease Spooner impact and happiness in the long run.**

Finally, we need to consider the cost of implementing such a system. The actions or outcomes triggering the rewards need to be defined, kept updated, and monitored for completion. Also, difficult conversations would arise over whether the criteria have been suitably met and whether the reward should be unlocked. Simply, **implementing the system would cost some Spooners significant time and mental bandwidth.** In this case, we don’t believe that the juice is worth the squeeze.

In light of the above, **we choose not to create an expectation of extrinsic rewards for specific or short-term actions or outcomes at Bending Spoons.** In practice, this means the following:

- **We don't provide a detailed, prescriptive checklist to unlock a raise.** If it were possible to define in advance *precisely* what every Spooner should be doing to deliver the most impact, then we’d at least experiment with distributing detailed, prescriptive checklists. Despite the downsides previously outlined, doing so might well be the most efficient way to reach our ambitious company objectives. But the landscape we operate in and the roles Spooners cover are far too complex and dynamic for that to be possible. Any detailed, prescriptive checklist would soon become outdated. Each Spooner instead has the responsibility of acting entrepreneurially and largely determining their own areas of action. That’s not to say that the Spooner is just left to figure out everything for themselves, though—we’re keen to give some direction when it comes to maximizing impact and unlocking a raise. So, while we don’t believe in detailed, prescriptive checklists, we do provide a set of high-level guidelines concerning what to work on to reach higher levels of impactfulness and, consequently, compensation (see [Frameworks](#) and [Impactfulness assessment and pay review](#) below).
- **We don't promise extrinsic rewards for achieving a specific business goal.** We love to set goals for ourselves, and being effective and efficient at fulfilling them certainly correlates with achieving



better compensation over time. Nevertheless, fulfilling a particular goal doesn't *directly* translate into a salary raise, bonus, or any such reward.

- **We don't promise extrinsic rewards based on short-term performance.** At Bending Spoons, you won't hear, "Impress me for the next few months and you'll get a raise."
- **We don't have an *Employee of the Month* award.** They share the downsides we've already laid out. Plus, they're lame.

Rather than relying on extrinsic rewards as motivation devices, **we aim to hire those who are intrinsically driven to do their best for the company and whose passion is well-aligned with their role.** Then we place faith in such a Spooner's ability to be an awesome contributor, applying as few hard constraints and supplying as much support as possible. We focus on creating an environment in which their drive and passion can flourish and lead them to exceptional feats. And **as a Spooner demonstrates in a sustained way that they've reached a new level of impactfulness, we adjust their compensation accordingly.**

Our decision not to attach extrinsic rewards to specific or short-term actions or outcomes doesn't translate into lower compensation. When calibrating our compensation levels, we think in terms of *overall* compensation. If the companies we benchmark against offer both fixed and variable pay components, then **our fixed pay must be higher to compensate for the absence of a variable component.** This is indeed the case at Bending Spoons.

We enable a Spooner to share in the company's success

We believe in giving a Spooner the opportunity to share in the company's success, for two reasons:

- When someone has skin in the game, they tend to think even more like an owner. In turn, they're more likely to prioritize what's good for the company as a whole in the long term over what may help their team in the short term.
- Regardless of any material rewards, some find that it feels fantastic to have a stake in the company's success—it makes their journey more thrilling and gratifying. Giving a Spooner the opportunity to enjoy this feeling is part of making Bending Spoons a great place to work.

Theoretically, there are various tools we could use to enable a Spooner to share in the company's success—for example, equity shares and profit shares. In the rest of this section, we call tools of this type *equity*.³

³ This stretches the standard definition of *equity*. Even if our usage of the term here is a bit imprecise, it allows us to keep the discussion at this stage general, independent of any particular implementation. In [Acquiring equity](#) we describe how we implement this principle.



We don't award equity directly. Instead, **a Spooner can acquire equity by paying for it in cash.** Our method is preferable for two reasons:

- By having to consciously choose to exchange cash for equity, a Spooner who elects to get the latter fully appreciates its value
- The Spooner is paid in the currency that's most valuable to them at that time

We offer equity to the Spooner at favorable terms (for example, at a discount versus the market price). This is justified by the advantages to the company that result from the Spooner thinking even more like an owner than they otherwise would.

We give generous separation packages

One of our strongest propositions to a new hire is the outstanding quality of our team. Top contributors enjoy working with equally bright, driven, passionate, skilled, and collaborative individuals. They're likely to stay with Bending Spoons for the long haul and maximize their potential if this condition is met. Thus, **we aim to surround every Spooner with the strongest contributors we can.**

We put extreme attention into evaluating applicants thoroughly, and only hire individuals who have a large chance of being a roaring success here. From time to time, though, we make a mistake. Also, it's possible for the performance of a once-strong contributor to drop to a consistently less-than-great level. Perhaps they've lost motivation or have failed to keep up with the evolving demands of their position. In these cases, our priority is always to work with the Spooner to find a way for them to reach and sustain excellence in their position (or another one currently available in the company). However, **it may become clear that, despite the best efforts of everybody involved, this won't happen within a reasonable time frame. When that's the case, the right thing to do is counsel the individual to leave.**

We'd like Bending Spoons to be known for handling every departure with the utmost sensitivity and support. Therefore, **we give generous separation packages**, including a considerable payment.

We like benefits when they're an efficient use of resources

We're wholeheartedly in favor of benefits, as long as they represent an efficient use of our resources in the pursuit of our goals for compensation, as laid out above. **We always encourage a Spooner to optimize costs by being frugal and challenging every expense.** Optimizing our benefits doesn't just mean ensuring that each one creates more value than it costs. It also means ensuring that—to the best of our knowledge—there aren't more efficient alternatives at our disposal.



Note that *optimum* isn't the same as *minimum*. **No matter how expensive a benefit is, we should offer it if doing so is the most efficient option available.**

The value of offering a particular benefit can take many forms, among which are extra individual productivity, better collaboration, and an improved brand as an employer. Consider our company retreats: We feel that they foster superior collaboration by letting us bond in ways that would be impossible in normal professional contexts. They also give Spooner happiness a generous boost. Sure, they're a major expense—but, so far, we've always considered them worth the investment.

It's hard to quantify the value of a benefit producing advantages that are qualitative in nature. This shouldn't prevent us from offering such a benefit, but equally, **we shouldn't blindly allocate company resources to it**. We must at least have a thoroughly researched and well-thought-out hypothesis of why the benefit constitutes an optimal use of resources.

Optimizing benefits requires that we personalize them to at least some degree. This is a tricky topic, so we dedicate the next principle to it.

We personalize benefits—with some limitations

The same benefit can offer different value for a different Spooner, depending on their role, needs, and preferences. Therefore, **personalization helps maximize the efficiency of our investment in benefits**.

However, **personalization has a couple of drawbacks**:

- **It can add complexity.** This comes in the shape of rules and controls, which tend to be impractical, expensive, and a bit of a pain for most.
- **It can hurt our company culture.** Whenever there's a case of individuals being treated differently, divisiveness is a risk.

These drawbacks don't apply to all benefits in the same way. That's why we can't generalize—varying degrees of personalization may be optimal from one benefit to the next.

Our default approach is to enable a Spooner to achieve a high degree of personalization. For example, every Spooner chooses how they spend their company-financed budget for welfare-related goods and services. In this case, enabling personalization doesn't add excessive complexity, nor does it harm our company culture.

We also tailor our benefits depending on factors such as the Spooner's role and group. For example, a Spooner has the freedom to work remotely when they choose to do so. However, there are some roles (particularly those related to office management) that require being present in the office. As such, we can't



extend the remote work benefit to a Spooner in such a role. Similarly, although we love being generous as a company, inviting office staff Spooners to our retreats would be an inefficient allocation of our resources.

Conscious of its drawbacks, **we restrict this tailoring to the cases where it unlocks major value.**

We don't give a Spooner the option of forgoing benefits in favor of cash. If we were to offer cash to a Spooner who decides not to join our retreats, we'd probably reduce participation. While this might be an optimal use of resources for each individual Spooner, it likely wouldn't be for the company as a whole. It would also lead to additional costs, as a Spooner who wouldn't have joined the retreat anyway would—understandably—claim the extra cash. Lastly, attaching a cash value to every benefit risks making the relationship between Bending Spoons and a Spooner transactional, hurting our company culture.

We employ only the bare minimum of controls with our benefits

Some of the benefits we offer lend themselves to being exploited in unintended, wasteful ways. When faced with a choice between not providing a benefit because it can be abused, providing it but adding tight controls, and providing it with the bare minimum of controls, we favor this third option. **Fostering our culture of trust is much more important to us than avoiding being taken advantage of on occasion.** It's motivating and empowering for the individual to feel trusted and to operate in an environment with precious few rules. Our approach minimizes overhead, leads to superior productivity and happiness, and creates value far in excess of the extra costs caused by the occasional offender.

When choosing how to leverage the benefits we offer, **we invite a Spooner to act in the best interests of the company.** If there's a disagreement about how the Spooner is using our benefits, then we'll discuss the matter together to align on what constitutes optimal usage. By being honest and caring for the company, the Spooner helps Bending Spoons optimize the allocation of its resources, and inspire one another to be better professionals and people.

We foster transparency while protecting Spooner privacy

Through this very document, **we share the goals, underlying principles, and implementation of our compensation system.** Through other documentation, we provide high-level guidelines for what we typically focus on when assessing a Spooner's impactfulness. And, as discussed in [Frameworks](#) below, for several roles we also describe the various steps to which we attach increasing levels of compensation.

When it comes to compensation, there are further ways in which transparency is relevant. We pride ourselves on being a team of top performers with sky-high standards—for ourselves and for one another.



The more clarity people have about their own strengths and weaknesses, the more likely they are to understand how to enhance their impactfulness and unlock better compensation. Therefore, **we're committed to creating an environment where a Spooner can get lots of honest, constructive feedback.**

Although transparency is our default setting on almost any topic, **we don't reveal the compensation of an individual Spooner.** There could be advantages to making compensation public internally, but we deem these smaller than the potential harm done by applying pressure on a Spooner to share such personal data. Also, we don't know how extreme transparency in this specific domain would affect relationships between Spooners. In our estimation, the downside exceeds the upside, and undoing this move may not eliminate the damage done to some people and relationships.

For anything compensation-related that our documentation doesn't cover, **we encourage the Spooner to ask their tier-2 function lead.**

We guard against bias and inequality

This principle applies to all aspects of what we do at Bending Spoons, and is highly relevant when discussing compensation. In particular, **we ensure that two Spooners in the same role and of equal impactfulness are compensated equally**, regardless of factors such as their race, religion, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age, family status, political affiliation, and disability status. We describe any initiative that we have in place to guarantee the absence of bias and inequality in compensation in [Calibration](#) below.

Implementation

Now that we've explained the goals and principles underlying our compensation system, let's describe its implementation.

Pay

In terms of pay, there are two components at Bending Spoons:

- **A salary**
- **Occasionally, a sign-on bonus**



Occasionally, we may assign a sign-on bonus to a candidate to make our offer even more attractive.

We leverage this option with an outstanding candidate in a role for which we lack competence internally, and where acquiring this competence would be extremely inefficient for us.

Sign-on bonus assignments vest monthly over four years (48 months), with a one-year lock-up period.

The one-year lock-up period means that, should a new hire leave Bending Spoons before their first anniversary with us, they lose all of the sign-on bonus they've been assigned. The one-year lock-up period is always measured from a Spooner's start date. The monthly vesting means that a hypothetical assignment of €4,800 is earned (or *vested*) in increments of €100 every month. Let's say that the Spooner is assigned a sign-on bonus of €4,800. Should they leave the company before the end of month 12, they'd forfeit the €4,800. If the Spooner stays, they earn €1,200 in one chunk at the end of month 12. In month 13 and then every subsequent month until month 48, it's a further €100.

We pay out vested sign-on bonuses at regular intervals (generally once a year, in January). Once a Spooner has vested a portion of a sign-on bonus assignment, they receive the corresponding cash in due course, even if they leave the company in the meantime (assuming the lock-up period has expired). However, if the Spooner leaves the company, they forfeit the *unvested* part of any assigned sign-on bonus.

The salary depends on role, impactfulness, and reference market rate. For example, a Bending Spoons software engineer of junior-level impactfulness should receive a salary of €63,965. A software engineer of senior-level impactfulness can receive a salary of €143,330 or more. Note that achieving senior-level impactfulness as a software engineer by our demanding standards requires outstanding talent, strong motivation, and several years of relevant experience in a high-quality context. Also note that these figures are necessarily indicative, and that there's no strict upper limit to compensation.

A fixed-term Spooner has the same salary as a permanent Spooner in the same role and of equal impactfulness.

Benefits

Some of the most important benefits we offer follow:

- **Accident insurance.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner receives high-end accident insurance, no matter where they're based.
- **Activities and events.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner has access to all activities and events organized and sponsored by the company, like team sports and the Christmas gathering.



Sometimes, we might decide to open an activity or event to office staff Spooners, too. We decide based on the specific activity or event, trying to be inclusive while allocating the company's resources efficiently.

- **Backing for learning investments.** We provide a Spooner with backing for their learning investments in the form of time and capital (common investments include books, courses, and taking time off other work activities to explore a technology or practice a skill). There's no approval process—we encourage the Spooner to make their learning investment decisions autonomously, and only ask them to act in the best interests of the company. This benefit extends to all Spooners.
- **Favorable access to equity.** A fixed-term or permanent Spooner can decide to receive part of their salary or sign-on bonus in share options of Bending Spoons at a 30% discount on market price. More on this in [Acquiring equity](#) below.
- **Flexible schedule.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner can work on a flexible schedule. We ask that they act in the best interests of Bending Spoons. More specifically, we ask the Spooner to allocate at least six of their working hours to be between 9 am and 6 pm Milan time on most days. This makes it easier for teammates to communicate with one another synchronously where needed. Certain roles pose more stringent requirements in terms of work schedule—for example, this may be the case for roles related to office management.
- **Flexible time off.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner can take as much time off (including full vacation days) as they need to be at their most productive, healthy, and happy. We only ask that they act in the best interests of Bending Spoons. Regulations impose a lower bound to the amount of time off that a Spooner takes. These rules change from country to country. In all cases, we encourage the Spooner to exceed the applicable minimum requirement.
- **Food and beverages.** We guarantee high-quality food and beverages at the office for every Spooner, for free.
- **Health insurance.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner receives high-end health insurance (or suitable reimbursement if based in an incompatible location). An office staff Spooner who is an employee of an external agency has access to their employer's health insurance instead.
- **Life and total disability insurance.** A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner receives high-end life and total disability insurance (or suitable reimbursement if based in an incompatible location).



- **Mental health support.** Bending Spoons pays for unlimited professional mental health consultations for a fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner, and for their close family members. This support is also available for office staff. The Spooner can pick a therapist from a list of recommended mental health professionals. A fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner also has the option of sourcing their own therapist and submitting reimbursement requests.
- **Mentor.** A mentor is an experienced Spooner to whom another Spooner—their mentee—can turn for advice. Typically, a mentor helps their mentee identify actionables for how to improve, answers their questions about the company, acts as a sounding board for their ideas, and offers emotional support. A fixed-term or permanent Spooner has a mentor.
- **Parental support.** We offer considerable support—including a dedicated buddy, flexible time off, parental planning financing, and childcare financing—to parents, parents-to-be, and would-be parents.
- **Relocation support.** When a Spooner relocates to the benefit of Bending Spoons, we typically cover transportation and moving expenses and offer up to a three-month stay in temporary accommodation when needed. A dedicated relocation buddy provides help throughout, and, where necessary, a dedicated residency permit buddy assists with securing residency permits.
- **Remote work.** We offer remote and hybrid work options. This benefit applies to a fixed-term, intern, or permanent Spooner. We finance work-from-home equipment for a fixed-term and permanent Spooner who works remotely. A Spooner in a role that requires their physical presence on site (for example, because they're involved in office management) may not be able to work remotely.
- **Retreats.** We organize and pay for at least one company retreat every year, with optional participation. The duration and format may vary (we keep experimenting and optimizing), but the experience is consistently unforgettable. So far, we've visited incredible places such as Cuba, Japan, and Tanzania. A fixed-term or permanent Spooner is invited to our retreats—although we strive to be generous as a company, inviting an intern or office staff Spooner wouldn't be an efficient use of our resources.
- **Welfare budget.** A fixed-term, office staff, or permanent Spooner who's based in Italy has a yearly budget they can spend on welfare-related goods and services (€1,200, €250, and €1,200, respectively). The budget's tax-free nature limits the goods and services that qualify—included are things like gym memberships, travel vouchers, and domestic support. The budget is adjusted on a pro-rata basis. So, for example, a fixed-term Spooner who joins on a six-month contract at the beginning of October will receive about €300 that year, and about €300 the following year. At the



moment, we can only offer this benefit to a Spooner hired and residing in Italy. We intend to explore the possibility of offering it in other countries in the future, but until doing so is viable we pay a non-Italy-based Spooner the relevant gross amount in cash.

Frameworks

When adjusting the compensation of an existing Spooner as well as setting the compensation of a new hire, **we leverage the following frameworks:**

- ***Skills***
- ***Paths***

Skills are the main ways in which a Spooner can deliver impact at Bending Spoons. A Spooner's impactfulness can be broken down by skill (for example, *playing for the team*, *setting excellent standards*, and *solving problems*). For each skill, we provide a definition. By focusing on growing their skills, a Spooner can enhance their impactfulness—and, consequently, increase their compensation. We encourage a Spooner to discuss with their colleagues, particularly their leads, which skills they're great at and which need improvement.

For some roles, we've formalized a path. **A path is a list of steps, each representing a certain level of impactfulness a Spooner can achieve in their role.** The higher the step, the greater the associated impactfulness. Impactfulness is broken down by skill, with some skills being *core* and others *non-core*. Although the degree of importance varies, most skills are relevant to at least some extent for all roles. Core skills are those most critical to the role—highlighting what these are helps a Spooner to prioritize their improvement efforts. Nonetheless, we expect the Spooner to strive to reach an acceptable level across the board. We currently have formal paths for roles covering about 60% of Spooners, and intend to increase coverage in the future.

A path isn't something to be completed like a video game. Not every Spooner will achieve the maximum level of impactfulness currently contained within their formal path, and that's OK. In designing these paths, we may include steps that it takes rare talent, strong motivation, and many years of high-quality experience to reach. In some cases, unlocking a certain step might also require that the right opportunity is available to the Spooner so they can demonstrate their impactfulness to a greater extent than they've been able to so far—something neither Bending Spoons nor the Spooner can fully control or guarantee. **A Spooner can add lots of value even without getting to the highest levels of impactfulness.** The fact that it's theoretically possible to take an additional step along the path doesn't mean the Spooner's current impactfulness is anything short of remarkable. Further, the challenge inherent in going from one step to the next isn't fixed—the Spooner will move along some steps more quickly and easily than others. So, they shouldn't get disheartened when they see several steps in front of them, nor should they be impatient



about or disillusioned with an apparent lack of progress. We encourage the Spooner to be ambitious and to have high standards for themselves, and we applaud an eagerness to grow as much and as quickly as possible. But it's paramount that doing so doesn't prevent them from recognizing just how important their impact already is and how much Bending Spoons appreciates it.

It's also possible for a Spooner to surpass the maximum level of impactfulness currently contained within their formal path. **We're always on the lookout for this sort of one-of-a-kind level of impact, and we make sure to compensate the person accordingly.**

Lastly, while it may be beneficial for a Spooner to use the formal path to inspire and inform their growth, they mustn't let it become restrictive. There are many ways to contribute to the progress of Bending Spoons, some of which aren't captured by our framework. However, this doesn't mean we ignore or fail to value such alternative ways of delivering significant impact. **Simply, we encourage a Spooner to focus on delivering the greatest impact they're capable of.** This is the most reliable and effective way to propel both individual and collective progress at Bending Spoons.

Impactfulness assessment and pay review

In this section, we explain how compensation is adjusted over time as a Spooner increases their impactfulness or changes their role. **The pay review process takes place for every fixed-term and permanent Spooner, and directly follows the company-wide impactfulness assessment that occurs toward the end of every year.**

Impactfulness assessment

Bending Spoons is divided into functions, such as Marketing, Product, Technology, and others. Every Spooner belongs to at least one function, which is determined by their role. For instance, our product managers belong to Product, while our software engineers belong to Technology. **It's the responsibility of each function to set the compensation of each associated Spooner.** When a Spooner belongs to more than one function (which may be the case if the Spooner covers more than one role), their primary function is responsible for such decisions.

In the impactfulness assessment, each function groups its Spooners by role and level of impactfulness. If a formal path is available for the role, this means assigning a Spooner to the step that best represents their current level of impactfulness. If a formal path isn't available, functions still implement the same principles, leverage the skills framework, and follow a similar process. Either way, the grouping by



impactfulness isn't particularly granular—these assessments are too noisy to discern minor differences in each Spooner's ability to contribute, and we'd rather be roughly right than precisely wrong.

To group its Spooners as described, **functions collect input from the relevant colleagues, especially the Spooner's direct function and team leads.** Discussions ensue, and borderline cases are debated to finetune the assessments and ensure consistency.

We don't determine that a Spooner's level of impactfulness has increased immediately upon observing a spike in their impactfulness. **When making such assessments, we look at their track record over an extended period.**

Pay review

After the company-wide impactfulness assessment, we move on to the pay review process, where we make the relevant pay adjustments. The salary depends on role and impactfulness. This means that **each step of a path entails a specific level of salary, with higher steps entailing greater levels of salary.** Two Spooners in the same role and of equal impactfulness get an equal salary. We discuss how we determine the mapping from role and impactfulness to level of compensation in [Calibration](#) below.

A Spooner is welcome to reach out to their direct function lead for any questions about or comments on their impactfulness assessment or pay review, including if they feel that they're not being compensated consistently with the system as described in this document.

New hires

Right before we extend our offer to a new hire, we set their pay. **We do so based on the role and their expected impactfulness, as assessed throughout the selection process.** We offer the new hire equal compensation to that enjoyed by a Spooner in the same role and of comparable impactfulness.

It's acceptable—and common—for a new Spooner to demonstrate impactfulness a bit below what's appropriate for their compensation level during their initial period at Bending Spoons. After all, they need to get up to speed with our products, technologies, processes, and company culture. Extending offers at conservative compensation levels would minimize such temporary inconsistencies. On balance, though, doing so isn't an option worth pursuing, as it would considerably hamper our ability to attract the strongest candidates.



Calibration

The calibration of our compensation system has two objectives:

- **Aligning to the market.** This means setting the right compensation for each role and level of impactfulness, given reference market rates and our ability to generate returns on impactfulness.
- **Minimizing bias.** This means ensuring that functions are as unbiased as possible in assessing the impactfulness of a Spooner.

Our reference market rates and our ability to generate returns on impactfulness change with time. Similarly, it's possible for fresh biases to creep in that must be identified and weeded out. Therefore, **calibration must be an ongoing process.**

We calibrate overall compensation to be at the high end of the reference market, considering salary and benefits.

Calibrating compensation levels accurately against a specific target (say, the 80th percentile of all companies across the territory) is extremely challenging. The key reasons are as follows:

- When it comes to roles, the definitions and classifications change from one company to the next.
- Different companies can have very different standards of impactfulness (or a similar concept, such as expertise), so that achieving the label of “senior” software engineer at Acme Corp. may require significantly less impressive skills than doing the same at Duff Industries.
- Most companies don't share compensation data, so we must rely on unofficial sources. Their data, while definitely helpful, is far from perfect.
- Companies don't follow the same approach when structuring their compensation. For example, the portion that's subject to vesting can vary substantially.
- It's hard to attach a monetary value to benefits, particularly as different people can value a particular benefit in wildly different ways.

Despite these limitations, **we have the tools to calibrate our levels of compensation with acceptable accuracy.** A few examples of such tools follow:

- **Candidate responses to our offers.** Whenever a candidate rejects our offer on pay or benefit-related grounds, it causes us to investigate whether their expectations are representative of the reference market and not an outlier.
- **Spooner churn on compensation-related grounds.** When a Spooner leaves the company, we conduct an exit interview to establish the causes of their decision, including pay and benefit-related ones. Again, if the issue lies with compensation, we evaluate whether an adjustment of our compensation levels is due.



- **Third-party data.** There are several sources of compensation data—some paid, some free. Despite having considerable limitations, these are still helpful overall, and we leverage them.

Whenever the calibration process leads us to change the compensation associated with a certain role and level of impactfulness, we then adjust the compensation of every relevant Spooner.

A Spooner who participates in performing an impactfulness assessment is also tasked with minimizing bias in the process. Moreover, **we periodically audit our assessments to determine whether any gender bias affects compensation at our company.** So far, we haven't found any measurable bias. We'll continue to repeat this audit and potentially introduce new ones in the future.

Acquiring equity

When it comes to their pay, a fixed-term or permanent Spooner can decide to receive cash, share options of Bending Spoons, or a combination of both. Then, by exercising their share options, the Spooner can acquire shares of the company's equity.

Conclusion

We hope that this document helps each Spooner understand what we aim to accomplish through our compensation system, the principles it's founded on, and how it works in practice. For more information, a Spooner can reach out to their tier-2 function lead.

We set out to create a legendary company—among the best in history. Our compensation system is one of many pieces of the beautiful puzzle we're intent on putting together. Therefore, we're committed to refining it to perfection. As always, any feedback is welcome.