

Everyone's CV is perfect now. That's a problem. For candidates as well as employers.

Sept, 2026

Not long ago I was managing a process to appoint a commercial sales director. The final 3 candidates were heading into back-to-back interviews, all with the same brief: First 100 Days in Post - a strategic overview addressing short, medium, and long-term growth. Or something to that effect. As is typical, candidates will share their presentations with me and have some preparatory discussion ahead of interview. Bear in mind, these candidates are operating at a very senior, strategic level. Each armed with unique but entirely transferrable experience. Imagine my horror when 3 almost identical versions of the same presentation landed in my inbox! ChatGPT's most informed response to the interview brief. x3.

Which led to 3 slightly uncomfortable conversations. Of course, I knew that in the room, addressing the interview panel, each candidate would bring their own unique experience, capability, ideas and expertise to the fore, in their own inimitable way. But what does the homogenised starting block, strip away from the individuals? How much harder must a candidate work, on the spot, in the moment, to showcase their value and differentiate themselves? And how does an interviewer make the meaningful distinctions?

It's the same for CV's, hastily cobbled together to meet an advert submission deadline. Ten years ago a CV told me a good deal about the person who wrote it, including whether they could write. Today it mostly tells me which tool they used. It certainly highlights the value of utilising a consultant who will leverage their known network to present a battle-tested shortlist, but how does a hiring manager select a shortlist from cold cv's - and how on earth does a candidate cut-through the noise for selection in a direct process?

The polish is now universal.

The use of AI in job applications has gone from novelty to default in about two years. In a survey of 739 UK candidates by [Omni RMS](#), 51% said they had used AI tools to improve or tailor their CV. Morgan McKinley's [2026 Global AI Report](#) puts the global figure at 59%.

Employers are feeling it. Research from [Robert Half](#) found 48% of UK employers say AI-written CVs are causing them significant difficulty, and 67% of hiring managers say checking for machine-written material has made hiring slower. Morgan McKinley found that 40% of UK employers now struggle to verify candidates' skills and experience.

The technology that was supposed to speed hiring up has slowed it down. Candidates use it to look better, employers spend longer working out who and what is real, and everyone ends up back in a room trying to establish what a two-page document used to tell them.

If everyone looks exceptional, nobody does.

The usual response is to treat this as a cheating problem and go looking for detection software. That misses what has changed. Most candidates using AI are telling the truth, only more fluently than they could manage alone. The difficulty is that fluency used to be evidence. A sharp, well-judged CV once suggested a sharp, well-judged person. Does it matter that the end effect has been created via AI? Does it in fact, even level the playing field somewhat? Perhaps it depends on the role and the delivery.

It certainly matters at a senior level. A leadership appointment rests on judgement, and judgement is exactly what a generated, ubiquitous document conceals. The language of leadership is easy to produce: strategy, transformation, stakeholders, growth. The substance is harder to fake and impossible to read off a page that a machine has smoothed.

It cuts the other way too. More than half of UK employers, 55% according to Morgan McKinley, have not adopted AI in their own hiring. Many senior candidates are rewriting their careers to please an algorithm that isn't there, and losing their own voice in front of the human who is.

So how do employers assess, and candidates differentiate?

If the document has stopped doing its job, the weight falls on the things that can't be generated.

For employers

1. **Reference early and properly.** A reference taken after the offer is a formality. Taken before the final interview, **with** the candidate's knowledge, can be the best evidence you will get.
2. **Ask how, then ask again.** Anyone can claim a result. Fewer can explain the decision behind it, what it cost and what they would do differently.
3. **Listen to the people who worked for them.** A leader's former team will tell you more in ten minutes than a CV will in ten pages.

4. **Stop rewarding polish.** If your shortlist is chosen on presentation, you are selecting for the best prompt.

For senior candidates

1. **Sound like yourself.** Use the tools if they help, then edit until a former colleague would recognise you in it.

2. **Include what only you could know.** The number, the setback, the decision that was unpopular at the time. Specifics are the one thing a machine can't supply on your behalf.

3. **Build your reputation before you need it.** In a market where documents are discounted, the candidates who get the call are the ones somebody already vouches for.

Back to what worked

There is an irony in all this. The most advanced technology to reach recruitment in a generation has made the oldest methods the most valuable ones. Knowing people, leveraging a mature and trusted network, and validating facts and instinct with the word of someone whose judgement you rate, were perhaps being dismissed as being 'the old way of doing things'. They are now the only parts of the process that can't be automated into meaninglessness.

I'm regularly asked for my opinion on the impact of AI on the careers of exec search and recruitment professionals. I genuinely believe technology has its place but when you are in the specialist niche of exclusively dealing in 'people', it's patently clear how necessary the 'human in the process' is. You simply would not allow AI to choose your life partner, I don't believe we would trust an algorithm to determine chemistry, there's still some nuance to being human!

The perfect CV may be here to stay. The question for anyone hiring at senior level is what they are relying on instead. In my experience, senior hires should always be qualified by a personal and robust search process. Human chemistry, intuition and relationships cannot be replicated by software. Well... not yet!

Leitmotif Partners works with employers and senior candidates on precisely that question, and a conversation is the best place to begin. Email steph@leitmotifpartners.co.uk

