



SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 04, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

59

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

118

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a simple question: what does hiring actually feel like when you are the person on the other side of the application? Not the career-site version, not the carefully scripted recruiting presentation, and definitely not the process described in a leadership meeting where everyone applauds the new applicant-tracking system. The real version - from the first click to the last awkward “we’ll be in touch.”

I apply to real opportunities and follow the process wherever it leads. I pay attention to the details: whether a recruiter is prepared, how an interviewer handles a candidate’s time, what the technology makes people do, and whether the questions reveal anything useful. Sometimes I find a team doing things right. Sometimes I find an application that apparently wants my full employment history, childhood address and the name of my first goldfish.

I tell those stories with humor because laughter helps people recognize patterns they have been living through for years. But this is not simply a comedy series about corporate nonsense. The stories are also about trust, ageism, layoffs, ineffective leadership, and the ordinary people trying to find a place where their work matters. I hear from candidates who are exhausted, recruiters who want to improve things, and leaders who are curious enough to ask what happens when someone tests their process without special treatment.

This September 28 - October 4 edition contains my original published LinkedIn posts from the week. Before each post you will find two new editorial notes: what appears to have sparked it and why the message matters. The post itself remains my original writing, including the jokes, the frustrations, and the strange moments no corporate communications team would have approved. I hope you find something here that makes you laugh, think, or treat the next person in a hiring process a little better.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The week at a glance.

OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28		
01	The Interview Games: Coming to a Screen Near You	6
02	A Nine-Minute Rejection at Graham Healthcare	7
03	Coffee With a Toxic Ex-Boss	8
04	Director of Watching Former Employees	9
05	Another Chapter in the Hiring Laboratory	10
06	My Panel Interview Background Investigation	11
07	America's Got Talent: Interview Edition	12
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29		
08	Even the TV Is Judging Me	13
09	When the Company Appears in the Comments	14
10	The Job Description That Wants Everything	15
11	Chewy Responded Like a Human	16
12	Customer Retention Versus Client Retention	17
13	Costco and the Corporate Face	18
14	The Panel That Looked Like a Deposition	19
15	A Job Title Is Not a Biography	20
16	The Reader Message That Stopped Me	21
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30		
17	The Hiring Manager at His Own Surprise Meeting	22
18	The Comments Section Is a Bonus Round	23
19	Progressive Insurance and the One-Way Webcam	24
20	You Do Not Need to Interview the CEO to Have an Opinion	25

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The week, continued.

OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30		
21	My Unpaid Second Job: Interviewing	26
22	Five Below: A Prepared Email and a Late Interview	27
23	The Boss Who Could Only Talk Behind My Back	28
24	Is the Experiment Fair to Other Candidates?	29
25	When “I’m Fine” Is Not the Whole Story	30
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 01		
26	Christian Brothers Automotive: Waiting on the Call	31
27	How I Actually Get Interviews	32
28	Forty-Five Minutes at Nordstrom Became a Marathon	33
29	My Resume Dealership	34
30	When the Applicant Pool Becomes a Small Town	35
31	The Interview-to-Application Ratio	36
32	Ageism Arrives Wearing Business Casual	37
33	The Day the Badge Stops Working	38
34	General Motors and a Better Interview Conversation	39
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 02		
35	The Interviewer Knows Who I Am	40
36	Tell Me About a Time... Again	41
37	The Performance Review After I Left	42
38	Workday Wants Me to Apply for My Password	43
39	Age Jokes Are Still Ageism	44
40	Bob’s Discount Furniture: Sell Me the Couch	45

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The week, continued.

OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 03		
41	The Ethics Committee Meets the Interview Games	46
42	Starbucks: The Unofficial Corporate Convention	47
43	What Happens If I Accept the Offer?	48
44	Executives Invite Me to Test Their Hiring	49
45	Great Performance, Suddenly the Problem	50
46	The Coworker Who Became an Unpaid Detective	51
47	The Movie Theater Manager Sees a Threat	52
48	The One-Way Interview and the Windows Update	53
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 04		
49	HR, Why Does This Take Six Rounds?	54
50	Overqualified: The Fortune Cookie of Hiring	55
51	Pace Transportation: One Job, Five Jobs Worth of Duties	56
52	The Resume That Pretends to Be Younger	57
53	Would You Be Comfortable With a Younger Team?	58
54	The Job Posting That Keeps Coming Back	59
55	Listening In on a Panel Interview	60
56	7 Brew Adds Protein to the Job Search	61
57	Three Engineers. Three Different Hiring Processes.	62
58	Netflix: The Application Before the Interview	63
59	The People Who Applaud and Secretly Compete	64

The Interview Games: Coming to a Screen Near You

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The running hiring experiment began to look like the outline for a television series, complete with recurring characters and unpredictable episodes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how documenting candidate experiences became a bigger storytelling project - and invite readers to imagine where it could go.

At first, I thought I was just testing interview processes. Then I realized I had accidentally built the outline for a television show.

Some people golf, restore old cars, or collect watches. I decided to enter the modern hiring process on purpose, which is basically the professional version of touching a hot stove and saying, "Interesting. Let's see if it burns differently at another company."

For anyone new here, I call it The Interview Games. I apply to real companies, go through real recruiting processes, sit through recruiter screens, panel interviews, one way videos, assessments, personality tests, and the strange rituals companies call normal. I pay attention to what candidates experience: how companies communicate, whether interviewers are prepared, whether the job description matches the conversation, and whether salary is discussed normally or guarded like nuclear launch codes.

But the goal has always been bigger than writing posts about interviews. I want The Interview Games to become a TV show.

Modern hiring already has everything television needs. Suspense. Drama. Mystery. Plot twists. Recruiters who promise to call tomorrow and disappear into another dimension. Hiring managers who join late because of "technical issues." Panel interviews where five people ask the same question as though nobody shared notes. One way video interviews where you stare into a camera answering questions for a person who may or may not exist. Then there are companies that turn a mid level position into eight rounds, two assessments, a case study, three references, and what feels like a citizenship exam.

Every experiment feels like another episode. Sometimes the recruiter is prepared, transparent, funny, respectful, and communicates. The hiring manager knows the role, asks thoughtful questions, and the interview feels like two adults talking instead of a congressional hearing. Then another company schedules interview number seven and opens with, "So, tell me about yourself." At that point my inner raccoon is looking into the imaginary camera like Jim from The Office.

People ask whether I would ever accept one of these jobs. Maybe. If the right opportunity made sense, I would consider it. But collecting offers is not the point. I started this because I became fascinated by the gap between what companies say about hiring and what candidates experience. People tell me about ghosting, automated rejections, endless assessments, unpaid projects, repeated interviews, and weeks of silence. Then employers say they cannot find qualified candidates.

Apply. Interview. Observe. Document. Repeat. The dream is simple: The Interview Games on television. Real applications. Real interviews. Real candidate experiences. Probably a legal department with its own trailer and my inner raccoon demanding executive producer credit.

Until then, I'll keep testing the process and sharing what happens. Modern hiring created the game show. I just want to put cameras on it.

A Nine-Minute Rejection at Graham Healthcare

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described receiving a rapid rejection after applying for a vice president role at Graham Healthcare Group.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question what “careful review” means when the entire decision appears to happen before the applicant finishes coffee.

Somewhere in corporate America, a hiring team just broke a land speed record, and I am not sure whether to be impressed or concerned.

A reader sent me this gem from Graham Healthcare Group. He applied for a Vice President, Strategy Execution and Transformation Office position. First came the confirmation email thanking him for applying and explaining that the team would review his qualifications. Very professional. Very polished. The standard corporate handshake before the algorithm enters the room.

Then, 9 minutes later, the rejection arrived. Nine minutes. The message said that after careful consideration, Graham Healthcare Group had decided to move forward with other candidates. I have questions. How careful can consideration get in nine minutes? Did someone read the resume at 3x speed? Was there a pit crew involved? Did executives gather around a laptop while someone yelled, We have seven minutes left, make a decision!

Nine minutes is barely enough time to make coffee, forget where you put

it, find it, and open LinkedIn to see another post about recruiting and human connection. I am picturing the process now. Application received. Resume downloaded. Someone glances at page one. Another person whispers, Strong background. The ATS begins humming. Somewhere, a printer spits out a sheet that says NO. Meeting adjourned. Careful consideration complete.

Candidates are told to customize the resume, research the company, study the role, write a cover letter, optimize keywords, update LinkedIn, prepare examples, understand the culture, and demonstrate genuine interest. You can spend two hours preparing an application for a role that may spend less time under review than a frozen pizza spends in the oven.

To be fair, there may be reasonable explanations. Maybe the system identified a missing requirement. Maybe the role had a deep candidate pool. Maybe there was an internal candidate. Maybe an automatic screening rule triggered. That part is impossible to know from the outside.

But the phrase after careful consideration arriving nine minutes after the application is comedy writing itself. At this rate, recruiting emails are going to start arriving before you finish applying. Thank you for your interest. We have reviewed the resume you are still uploading. After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with someone who has not applied yet. Please continue checking our careers page for future opportunities.

The job market in 2026 keeps finding new ways to surprise me. I have seen long interview processes, one way video interviews, panel interviews, ghosting, automated rejections, and jobs that disappear before the applicant remembers the password they just created.

But nine minutes from application to careful consideration deserves its own category. Graham Healthcare Group, congratulations. You may have just introduced Formula One recruiting. The resume barely crossed the starting line before the checkered flag came out.

Coffee With a Toxic Ex-Boss

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An unexpected coffee-shop encounter brought a former difficult boss and old workplace memories back into view.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how far a person can come after a toxic workplace - and why peace is better than reopening that chapter.

Earlier today I went to grab some coffee, because apparently caffeine is cheaper than therapy and comes with fewer follow up questions.

I walked in expecting nothing more dramatic than one extra shot of espresso, and then I looked across the room and saw someone I had not expected to see: my toxic ex boss. The late night messages. The pressure. The meetings where speaking honestly felt like volunteering for your own exit interview. Years ago, I probably would have kept my head down, grabbed my coffee, and disappeared faster than a manager when HR asks who approved the decision.

But I am not that person anymore. He saw me, walked over, and said, "Alex, how have you been?" I smiled and said, "Great. Much better since I stopped needing permission to have an opinion." There was a pause. His internal legal department woke up. He asked what I was doing now, so I told him about my writing, interview experiments, and conversations about leadership, hiring, toxic workplaces, and what employees whisper about. Then he said, "You always had a lot to say." Years ago, that sentence would have

bothered me. This time I smiled and said, "I did. I just didn't always feel like I was allowed to say it."

That was the conversation I could never have had with him back then. I was not trying to win an argument or get an apology. I realized how different it feels when someone who once controlled your schedule, paycheck, confidence, and your peace of mind no longer controls anything about you. Then he asked, "Do you really think I was that bad of a boss?" My inner raccoon grabbed a tiny microphone, opened a PowerPoint titled Evidence, and prepared a four hour documentary. Instead, I said, "I think you taught me a lot about the kind of leader I never wanted to become." That one landed. Strangely, I did not feel angry. I felt calm.

Sometimes closure is not a dramatic apology, a resignation letter, or a movie scene where inspirational music plays while you walk away in slow motion. Sometimes closure is standing in a coffee shop talking to someone who once intimidated you and realizing their voice does not sound as loud anymore. People change. Sometimes bosses change. Sometimes they don't. But you

change too. You learn that protecting your peace is not weakness, speaking up is not disrespect, having boundaries does not make you difficult, and leaving an environment that keeps shrinking you can be one of the most important promotions you ever give yourself.

We talked for a few more minutes, shook hands, and went our separate ways. I walked out with my coffee thinking about the version of me who used to rehearse every sentence before speaking to him. That version would have been shocked that I could stand there, say what I thought, and walk away without carrying the conversation around for the rest of the day. Today's version just took another sip and thought, Well, that was cheaper than therapy.

And somehow, after all those years, the coffee tasted a little better too.

Director of Watching Former Employees

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The idea of former bosses continuing to follow ex-employees online prompted a satire about lingering workplace control.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to defend the right to leave a job and own your story without remaining on an ex-manager's imaginary payroll.

Some people leave a job and move on. Other people leave a job and apparently inherit a new position called Director of Watching What Former Employees Do Online. No salary. No benefits. Just Wi-Fi, unresolved feelings, and time to inspect every post and book like evidence for a trial nobody scheduled. That part of corporate life will never stop being funny to me.

I remember when I first realized this. I would write something general about toxic leadership, bad communication, ridiculous meetings, or managers who think “culture” means buying pizza after making everyone work twelve hours, and somehow one very specific person would become offended. No name. No company. No location. Yet here they come: “I KNOW THIS IS ABOUT ME.” Well, I did not say that, but thank you for volunteering.

That is the beautiful part about writing about workplace behavior. Sometimes you never have to identify anybody because they do the work for you. You can write, “Some managers struggle with accountability,” and suddenly a

former boss kicks open the digital door yelling, “HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT MY MANAGEMENT STYLE?” Gary, nobody said your name. This was a general observation. But since you arrived carrying Exhibit A, please continue. Guilt has better search capabilities than most recruiting software.

It gets even better when somebody writes a book, article, or post about corporate behavior and a former manager recognizes themselves in one small section. Suddenly they become a literary critic. They skip the lessons, ideas, research, and observations, then sprint toward the paragraph that made their eye twitch. Next comes a public response explaining why the story definitely is not about them while providing enough context for everyone else to figure out exactly who they are. Nothing says “that was absolutely not me” quite like writing five paragraphs explaining why it was not you.

I used to think I had to explain myself whenever somebody from my past became offended by something I wrote. Now I imagine my inner raccoon sitting behind a tiny desk wearing reading glasses,

reviewing the evidence and whispering, “Interesting. Alex never mentioned your name, but you arrived with a confession, screenshots, and your employee ID.”

People are allowed to leave companies and keep living. They are allowed to succeed afterward. They can tell stories, write books, laugh about ridiculous experiences, discuss leadership, and talk about lessons learned without permission from someone who no longer signs their paycheck. Leaving a company does not mean surrendering your memories, opinions, or sense of humor with your badge.

And if a general story makes someone furious because they recognize themselves in it, maybe the problem is not the story. Maybe it is the mirror.

Corporate life really is incredible. Sometimes you do not have to expose anybody at all. They clock in, identify themselves, and complete the paperwork for you. Somehow the exit interview keeps following you online.

Another Chapter in the Hiring Laboratory

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A fresh hiring experiment provided another comparison between the corporate interview promise and the actual candidate experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted new readers to understand how I test real processes and why the details between application and answer matter.

For anyone new here, I have somehow turned the modern hiring process into a social experiment. I apply to real companies, go through real interviews, test the process from the candidate side, and then share what actually happens.

Sometimes it is polished. Sometimes it feels like corporate theater with a Teams link. Either way, I document the questions, the awkward moments, the good parts, the bad parts, and the comedy gold hiding between “Tell me about yourself” and “We’ll be in touch.”

Yesterday’s experiment was eBay.

The interview was for a Director of Salvage role with eBay Motors. I joined early camera on, notes ready, while my inner raccoon was pacing backstage demanding snacks. One by one, people joined the call. Hiring manager. Operations. Talent Acquisition. Leadership. I looked at the screen and realized I was not interviewing anymore. I was being listed. So I said, “Before we start, can someone tell me what the current bid is? I’d hate to lose myself to another candidate with free shipping.” Thankfully, they laughed. Once people laugh during an

interview, my brain assumes we are friends and HR has lost control.

Then came the greatest hits. Tell us about yourself. Leadership style. How do you handle underperformance? How do you manage conflict? How do you measure success? All fair questions, but I am convinced every corporation shares one giant document called INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FINAL VERSION 27.

At one point someone started asking me a question with full confidence, eye contact, and hand gestures. I listened until another person finally said the phrase that has united corporate America since 2020: “You’re on mute.” Beautiful. The person laughed, unmuted, and repeated the question while the rest of us pretended we had not just watched a silent TED Talk.

The interview itself was professional. Good conversation, reasonable questions, nobody asked what animal I would be, and nobody requested a 46 slide presentation by sunrise. At the end, I asked about expectations, team challenges, success measures, and what the first few months would look like. Then came the ceremonial closing line:

“We’ll be in touch.” Technically, they were. At 2:22 AM the next morning. Nothing says personalized candidate experience quite like a rejection email arriving when even my raccoon is asleep. I pictured the recruiting system sitting in a dark office, pressing a button and whispering, “Release the rejection owl.”

And that is why I keep doing these experiments. Not because every company is terrible, and not because every interview is broken. Some are genuinely well run. But the space between the polished careers page and the real candidate experience is where the interesting stories live.

eBay gave me a professional panel, a mute button moment, a joke that landed, thoughtful questions and a rejection before sunrise. That is more plot development than most streaming shows manage in a season. Experiment complete. The raccoon already opened another tab.

My Panel Interview Background Investigation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

During a panel interview, I found myself noticing bookshelves, coffee mugs and other clues while answering the questions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make people laugh about the small human details hidden behind the formal faces on a video call.

A while back during one of my panel interview experiments, I learned something important about myself: I do not just join interviews. Apparently I conduct an environmental scan like a mildly unhinged corporate detective who wandered into Talent Acquisition.

Most people are focused on the questions. Leadership style. Conflict resolution. Biggest weakness. Why should we hire you? Meanwhile, I am answering professionally while also noticing the bookshelf behind the VP, the coffee mug on the desk, the motivational quote on the wall, and whether someone has positioned a leadership book toward the camera even though that thing has clearly never been opened.

That day, one of the HR managers was sitting in her office, and right behind her was a Backstreet Boys poster. My brain immediately left the interview. I was still smiling, nodding, and talking about operations, but internally I had entered the Millennium era. I kept looking at it thinking, there is no way we are going to finish this conversation without addressing the

five men silently supervising Human Resources from the wall.

So when there was a pause, I finally said, "I have to ask before we continue. Is that a Backstreet Boys poster behind you, or is this part of the culture assessment?" She started laughing, and the rest of the panel turned toward her screen like they had worked with this woman for years and never noticed a boy band living in the background. She told me she had been a fan forever. I said, "Good, because if the next interview question is 'Tell me why,' I am leaving."

That got everybody laughing, and for about thirty seconds the panel stopped feeling like a congressional hearing and became a normal conversation between humans. That is one reason I always pay attention to details during interviews. The little things matter. People spend so much time preparing the perfect STAR answer that they forget the person on the other side of the screen may have a dog walking through the room, a ridiculous coffee mug, a baseball hat, a framed concert ticket, or apparently the

Backstreet Boys monitoring compliance.

And yes, my attention to detail is probably excessive. I notice if the clock on the wall is wrong. I notice the stack of unopened mail. I notice the motivational sign that says "TEAMWORK" while three panelists are talking over each other. My inner raccoon notices everything and stores it in a tiny filing cabinet labeled "Possible Material Later."

By the end of that interview, I remembered the questions, the panel and the role. But what stayed with me most was the poster. Somewhere in corporate America, candidates are researching mission statements, memorizing company values, and practicing polished answers in the mirror. I am apparently checking whether HR wants it that way.

And honestly, those tiny details are usually where the best stories live. Years later, I may forget the job description, but I will always remember which boy band was quietly supervising HR that day.

America's Got Talent: Interview Edition

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A multi-person interview felt less like a discussion and more like a reality-show audition.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to spotlight how performance-heavy panels can overshadow the actual skills and judgment a candidate offers.

Job interviews in 2026 are starting to feel less like professional conversations and more like America's Got Talent, except nobody gave me a golden buzzer, Simon Cowell works in Talent Acquisition, and I have 45 seconds to explain revenue growth, leadership, emotional intelligence, and why six strangers should hire me.

The other day I joined an interview that felt like I should have stretched beforehand. There were people on the call, each with a different title and the same expression people use when judging a competition. One person introduced everyone, another explained the position, and then the questions started coming like I had made it to the live finals.

"Tell us about yourself." Easy. "Describe a difficult situation." Still good. "Why should we hire you?" Okay, judges. Then came, "You have about 30 seconds." Thirty seconds? I have spent longer deciding whether I want regular fries or curly fries. Suddenly I was no longer interviewing for a job. I was standing center stage waiting for the audience vote. I could practically hear dramatic music while my inner raccoon stood backstage wearing a

headset, screaming, "GIVE THEM THE LEADERSHIP STORY! NO, THE REVENUE STORY! SMILE! WHY ARE YOU BLINKING LIKE THAT?"

And interviewers love saying, "Just relax. This is a conversation." No, Brenda. Conversations do not involve four people taking notes while I explain the biggest mistake I made in 2019. A conversation is two people talking over coffee. This is an elimination round without television.

Modern interviews have everything a talent competition needs: auditions, callbacks, panels, surprise judges, personality tests, case studies, timed answers, and the mysterious executive who appears in the final round after watching your journey from a secret control room.

At this point I am waiting for a recruiter to lean forward and say, "Alex, we loved your energy, but we're not sure your stakeholder management story connected with America." Then a red X lights up above my head.

The funniest part is that after surviving all of this, you can still get an email three weeks later saying,

"We decided to pursue candidates whose experience more closely aligns with our needs." THREE WEEKS? I performed leadership jazz hands for seven judges. At least tell me who won. I understand companies want to make good hiring decisions. Interviews matter. Questions matter. Meeting the team matters. But somewhere along the way we turned hiring into an endurance sport where candidates need preparation, lighting, a microphone, wardrobe changes, and enough STAR stories to release a greatest hits album.

So now when somebody tells me they have a "quick interview," I do not believe them. I hydrate. I charge my laptop. I notify my inner raccoon. And I wait for the judges. Because apparently finding a job now is not about whether you can do the work. First, you have to make it through auditions.

And if somebody finally hits that golden buzzer, I am expecting confetti.

Even the TV Is Judging Me

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An attempt to relax with television turned into a comic reflection on the endless messages telling adults what to fix about themselves.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give readers a break from application stress while laughing at a culture that turns everything into an evaluation.

Sometimes adulthood is just sitting down after a long day, grabbing the remote, and discovering every television channel has been assigned to judge your life choices.

You ever just sit on the couch, planning to watch something mindless for thirty minutes, and somehow the TV turns into a performance review? That was me. I sat down, kicked my feet up, grabbed the remote and started flipping through channels trying to relax. Within minutes, I had been judged financially, physically, emotionally, professionally, and somehow by a man renovating a kitchen.

First channel: a home renovation show. I'm watching a couple buying a \$900,000 house while debating whether the kitchen island should be twelve feet or fourteen. Fantastic. I'm wondering why one cabinet door still needs lifting before it closes, while they debate whether the guest bathroom needs heated floors. Next channel: a cooking competition. Now Gordon Ramsay is yelling because someone's scallops are undercooked, and suddenly my sandwich looks like I've disappointed the culinary industry.

Apparently chips do not count as plating.

Next channel: travel. A smiling host is drinking something out of a coconut where the water is so blue it looks Photoshopped. Meanwhile, my biggest adventure that day was taking a different route home. Next channel: business. Some 27 year old explains how he retired at 24 after creating seven companies, buying twelve rental properties, waking up every morning at 4:17, taking an ice bath, meditating, journaling, and apparently never wasting nine minutes staring into the refrigerator wondering why he opened it. Wonderful. I've been awake for three hours some mornings before I remember why I walked into the kitchen.

Then I hit the fitness channel. A guy with 3% body fat is screaming, "NO EXCUSES!" Sir, I absolutely have excuses. My knees have submitted paperwork. After that came a dating show where twenty adults are competing for one person they met six minutes ago. Everyone is crying, discussing "their journey," and saying they came here for the right reasons. I came here because I couldn't find the remote earlier.

Even the commercials joined the attack. Buy a better car. Fix your credit. Improve your skin. Upgrade your mattress. Invest more. Exercise more. Travel more. Apparently my shampoo has also been holding me back professionally.

At some point I realized I wasn't relaxing anymore. I was sitting on my own couch being criticized by a rectangle hanging on the wall. So I turned the TV off. Silence. Beautiful silence. Pure silence. No millionaire telling me I'm behind. No chef disappointed in my dinner. No fitness instructor questioning my commitment. No couple renovating a guest bathroom larger than my first apartment. Just me, the couch, and my inner raccoon staring into the darkness thinking, "Finally. A program we're qualified for."

Silence felt like the only streaming service I could actually afford. And honestly, it was the best thing I watched all night.

When the Company Appears in the Comments

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

After an interview story was posted, someone associated with the organization responded to defend or explain the process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show why candid public feedback matters even when the people behind the process see things differently.

Sometimes the funniest part of my interview experiments is not the interview itself. It is what happens afterward, when somebody from the company wanders into the comments carrying a corporate flashlight and calmly explains that the maze and trap doors are all “functioning as intended.”

For those who are new here, I have been applying to companies, going through their interview processes, documenting what happens, and sharing the candidate experience. Not because I am collecting offer letters like Pokemon cards, but because modern hiring has become the greatest unscripted comedy show. Every company has its own version of the process, and every process requires enough steps to make you question whether you applied for a job or enrolled in a leadership themed escape room.

I recently shared my Amazon interview experience. Multiple interviews, repeated questions, panel energy, and enough structure to make mission control look casual. Then Jesse, a Regional Director at Amazon, commented that the process is “functioning as intended”

and said that if someone is bemused by a thorough, data driven interview process, Amazon may not be for them.

And honestly, that may be the most Amazon response possible. Not rude. Not angry. Professionally translated into: Yes, we built the obstacle course. Yes, the obstacle course is supposed to have this many walls. No, we are not removing the walls. Please continue to the next checkpoint and have your STAR story ready.

I respect the confidence. Imagine calling customer service because your refrigerator is on fire and the representative says, “Correct. The appliance is currently functioning within our thermal engagement strategy.” That is how corporate language works. Nothing is ever weird. It is intentional. Nothing is excessive. It is thorough. Nothing takes too long. It is data driven. And if you are confused by any of it, congratulations, the process has now collected additional data about you.

My favorite part is that candidates are constantly told to be authentic while entering an interview process

where they must prepare twelve examples of conflict, failure, leadership, disagreement, innovation, ownership, customer obsession, and the time they rescued a village using only Excel and a positive attitude. By round five, nobody is answering naturally anymore. We are all sitting there mentally flipping through our internal folder labeled “acceptable workplace trauma.”

Still, this is why I run these experiments. I want to see how companies treat candidates, not just what the careers page says underneath a photo of six people laughing around a laptop. And sometimes the best part is when someone from the company joins the conversation afterward and confirms that, yes, the giant machine is making that noise on purpose.

So, thank you, Jesse. Message received. The process is functioning as intended. My inner raccoon would just like to know whether there is a snack break before the next leadership principle.

The Job Description That Wants Everything

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview exposed a company struggling to define the candidate it wanted while expecting an impossible mix of qualifications.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to consider whether unrealistic wish lists keep good people from ever reaching the conversation.

You ever interview with a company that clearly has no idea what they want, but they are convinced they will recognize it the second it walks through the door carrying 12 certifications, twenty years of experience, and somehow willing to accept the salary of a lemonade stand? That was this experiment.

For those new here, I apply to companies, go through their hiring processes, and document what candidates actually experience. Sometimes it is confusing. And sometimes it feels like a corporate wildlife documentary where everyone is searching for a unicorn, a purple squirrel, or some mysterious creature that can lead a team, rebuild a department, increase revenue, fix morale, and still describe themselves as “humble and hungry.”

Before this interview even started, I was asked to sign an NDA. Not after the interview. Before it. For one year. My inner raccoon put on reading glasses and started reviewing the fine print like we had wandered into a government briefing.

I signed it and joined the interview. Then came the job description. Or, more accurately, several job descriptions living together inside one conversation. They wanted someone strategic, but hands on. Someone who could lead people, work independently, collaborate constantly, move fast, be patient, challenge leadership, align with leadership, and embrace ambiguity. Every answer unlocked another requirement. “Oh, that’s great. We also need someone who...” Of course you do. By minute thirty, I was no longer interviewing for one job. I was interviewing to become Regional Director, Operations Manager, Recruiter, Analyst, Therapist, Firefighter, IT Support, and part time wizard.

At one point I laughed and said, “Just checking, is this one job, or am I accidentally interviewing for the entire org chart?” They laughed. I laughed. The unicorn did not. So I asked, “What does success actually look like in this role?” There was a pause. Not a normal pause. The kind where you can hear five people opening the job description in

separate browser tabs and hoping somebody else answers first. One person said growth. Another said stability. Someone else said transformation. I am pretty sure the purple squirrel quietly left the Zoom meeting.

This is one of the strangest parts of modern hiring. Companies can spend months searching for the “perfect candidate” while still trying to figure out what that candidate is actually supposed to do. Then everyone wonders why the role has been open for six months. Maybe the purple squirrel is not hiding. Maybe it read the posting, saw seventeen responsibilities from four different jobs, noticed the one year NDA before the first conversation, and decided life in the forest had better benefits.

The interview ended well, everyone was nice, and I thanked them for their time. Then I closed my laptop and stared at the NDA like I had just been briefed on classified corporate wildlife. Apparently the unicorn is confidential. My inner raccoon, however, has retained counsel.

Chewy Responded Like a Human

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A positive Chewy interview story prompted a thoughtful message from a company leader who asked about the alias behind the test.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize people who listen to feedback and demonstrate that the experiment also highlights what companies do right.

Sometimes the best part of these interview experiments is not the interview itself. It is what happens after I share the story and someone from the company reaches out.

Recently, I posted about a positive experience I had interviewing with Chewy. The recruiter made the conversation feel human. After I shared that experience, Jess, a leader with Chewy, sent me a message thanking me for the feedback and asking about the alias I used. I explained that I keep those aliases private because the moment companies know how I enter the process, the experiment stops being natural. "If I start handing out the secret identities, recruiting departments everywhere are going to get an emergency alert saying, CODE RED. ALEX MAY BE APPROACHING. Suddenly there is a fruit tray in the lobby, executives personally greeting candidates, the hiring manager is early and somebody from HR is hiding behind a ficus with a clipboard.

I want to experience the process the same way any candidate would, not walk into a corporate Broadway production called Look How Much We Care About Applicants. Jess

understood that. Then she sent something that meant more than I expected. She said she respected the process, loved recognizing her team when things go right and told me my post made their week.

That is what people do not always see. I joke about hiring because modern hiring keeps giving me unlimited material. Ghosting. Seven rounds. One way interviews. Executives joining late and asking the same question someone asked 20 minutes earlier. My inner raccoon has become an unpaid recruiting consultant. But underneath the sarcasm, there is a serious reason I keep doing this. Candidate experience matters. People remember the recruiter who listened, the manager who respected their time and the company that made them feel like a human instead of Applicant 8472 trapped inside an ATS dungeon.

Companies should hear when they get it right too. Not every experiment needs to end with me dragging a broken process into the sunlight while my inner raccoon overturns a trash can. A recruiter created a good experience. A leader listened instead of getting defensive.

A team got recognized for doing something well. That matters. If one uncomfortable story makes a company rethink part of its hiring process, even better. But when a positive story reaches the people responsible and they celebrate their team, that might be one of my favorite outcomes.

Hiring does not have to feel cold, robotic, or exhausting. Sometimes all it takes is one recruiter, one manager, or one leader deciding that the person on the other side deserves respect. Jess reminded me that there are people inside companies who genuinely want to make the process better.

I will keep experimenting, documenting, joking and protecting the aliases. The raccoon has rules. But I will also keep giving credit when companies get it right, because if we are going to talk loudly about what is broken, we should also recognize what is working.

Customer Retention Versus Client Retention

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The absurd possibility of a screening tool rejecting experienced applicants over synonymous resume wording became the point of the story.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question automated screening that values matching phrases over demonstrated ability.

At some point, hiring became the only place where someone can spend twenty years leading teams, solving problems, surviving bad bosses, fixing broken departments, and learning how to communicate with every personality imaginable, then get defeated by a computer because the resume said “customer retention” instead of “client retention.”

That is the part of modern recruiting that still makes me laugh. We say we want personality, communication skills, leadership, and judgment, then hand the first decision to software looking for exact phrases, certifications, magical verbs, and apparently the blood of a unicorn.

I saw a comment today suggesting that a manager or HR leader should have to sign off before someone is rejected, especially when the ATS makes the first cut, and I immediately pictured the meeting. “Why did we reject Alex?” “The system determined he was not qualified.” “Why?” “He used the word managed.” “And?” “We were searching for oversight.” Perfect. Twenty years of experience erased because the robot wanted a

synonym. Somewhere, a candidate could probably run the department, coach the team, fix the customer experience.

The funniest part is companies constantly say, “We hire for attitude and train for skill.” It sounds fantastic on a careers page. But the application process often tells a different story. We hire for keywords. We screen for keywords. We reject you for missing one keyword. Then six months later the same job gets reposted and leadership announces that finding talent is difficult. Meanwhile, the person they needed may have applied on day one and been launched into the rejection abyss because they wrote “operations leadership” instead of “operational management.”

This is one reason I keep experimenting with hiring processes. The more applications I submit and interviews I go through, the more I notice companies talking about human qualities while building a process that sometimes prevents humans from showing them. Personality cannot be found in a keyword.

Communication cannot be measured by whether your resume contains “cross functional collaboration” seventeen times. Leadership cannot be determined because your PDF scored 82 instead of 86 on some invisible electronic treasure hunt. Technology should help recruiting teams. Use the ATS. Use AI. Use automation. Save time. Nobody is asking HR to print 4,000 resumes and build a fort in the conference room. But before “Dear Candidate, after careful consideration,” maybe the careful consideration should involve an actual person.

Until then, somewhere tonight, an ATS is rejecting a fantastic candidate because they wrote “helped” instead of “facilitated” or “managed” instead of “led.” Tomorrow morning someone in leadership will stare at a PowerPoint titled Talent Acquisition Challenges and ask the most mysterious question in corporate America: “Why can’t we find good people?” Somewhere in the digital rejection pile, plenty of good people will be wondering the exact same thing.

Costco and the Corporate Face

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Costco Wholesale hiring experiment offered an opportunity to contrast a genuine conversation with scripted corporate behavior.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to look beyond rehearsed answers and notice whether an interview is conducted by a person willing to connect.

I have officially reached the point in my Interview Games experiment where I can tell within the first five minutes whether I am talking to a human being or someone professionally laminated by corporate America.

Today's experiment was Costco Wholesale.

For those new here, I apply to companies, go through their interview process, and document what candidates actually experience. I pay attention to scheduling, communication, questions, personalities, awkward pauses, and the moments when everyone suddenly looks down to take notes because you apparently said something important.

This interview lasted over an hour. Not 20 minutes. Not the friendly 30 minute "tell me about yourself and we'll be in touch" version. Over an hour. By minute 45, I was wondering if I should ask where the break room was because apparently I lived there now. We talked leadership, operations, accountability, customer service, performance, and enough behavioral scenarios that my STAR method needed lunch.

The hiring manager was corporate. Very corporate. Professional. Serious. Focused. Straight face. Every answer got the same calm expression like I was presenting quarterly earnings to the board. I could have announced that a raccoon had entered the meeting wearing a Costco badge and I'm fairly certain the response would have been, "Thank you, Alex. Can you tell me about a time you managed that raccoon through conflict?"

Naturally, I decided to test the atmosphere with a Costco joke. I said, "I'm a little nervous about interviewing with Costco because every time I go in for one thing, I leave with a rotisserie chicken, 48 rolls of toilet paper, three pounds of cashews, and something I didn't know I needed. I'm just hoping I don't leave this interview owning a kayak." Nothing. Not a smile. Not a chuckle. Not even the polite corporate nose exhale people use when they want you to know they understood the joke but Legal has advised against joy.

The hiring manager stared at me for about two seconds and went right back to the next question. I nearly

laughed harder at that. That moment captured why I do these experiments. Every company has a personality, and sometimes you can feel it through a screen. Some interviews become conversations. Some feel like interrogations. And some make you wonder whether laughter requires manager approval, a requisition number, and three signatures from HR.

To be fair, the interview was organized, detailed, and professional. The manager came prepared, asked specific questions, and kept the conversation moving for more than an hour. I walked away with notes and another look at the candidate experience in 2026. No idea what happens next, and that is not really the point.

The experiment gave me what I came for: another real hiring process, another company culture to observe, and another reminder that reading the room matters. Especially when the room is Costco. Apparently, even the sense of humor comes in bulk. You just have to find the aisle.

The Panel That Looked Like a Deposition

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Zoom panel with HR, Legal, Finance and other serious-looking participants felt intimidating before a question had even been asked.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to parody corporate formality and show how easily a hiring conversation can become theater.

There is a kind of fear when you join a Zoom panel interview and everyone on the screen looks assembled by Corporate America to investigate the disappearance of joy.

A while back, I logged into one of those interviews and immediately knew this was not going to be casual. On the screen were HR, Legal, the VP of Finance, and a few serious people wearing the same expression: somewhere between an earnings call and federal deposition. Nobody smiled. Nobody moved. One person blinked after 20 seconds, which reassured me that Zoom had not frozen.

The interview started exactly how you would expect. Leadership questions. Conflict questions. Accountability questions. Budget questions. Tell us about a time you failed. By question six, I was no longer sure whether I was applying for a job or testifying before Congress about a missing spreadsheet. The VP of Finance stared so intensely I wondered if he was calculating depreciation on my personality. Legal looked like they already had a folder with my name on it.

About 30 minutes in, the energy had reached levels normally reserved for tax audits and compliance training. So naturally I cracked a joke. They were talking about company culture, so I said, “I can already tell accountability is important here. I’ve been on this call for half an hour and nobody has smiled without prior written approval from Legal.” Silence. Not a chuckle. Not a smile. Not even the corporate nose exhale people use when they secretly think something is funny. HR looked directly into the camera and said, “We try to maintain a professional environment here, and that comment was not very professional.”

My inner raccoon immediately put on a tie, opened a notebook, and wrote, “Culture assessment complete.”

I wanted to say, “Thank you. I was starting to worry someone here might accidentally enjoy themselves,” but Legal was sitting right there, and I prefer my life without exhibits labeled A through F. So I nodded, thanked HR for the feedback, and continued answering questions while internally laughing

that one harmless joke had activated the company’s emergency response plan. I imagined a red light flashing in HR: PERSONALITY DETECTED. PLEASE REMAIN CALM.

That moment told me more about the company than any polished answer about culture ever could. Companies love saying they want authenticity. Bring your whole self to work. Be yourself. We value personality. Fantastic. Apparently, the approved version of your whole self should arrive with humor disabled, spontaneity turned off, and all unscripted thoughts submitted to HR five business days in advance. I did not insult anyone. I did not swear. I did not launch into a Netflix comedy special. I made one joke in a room where the atmosphere could have preserved food.

The interview ended with the classic corporate closing: “We still have several candidates to speak with.” I smiled, thanked everyone, and wished them a great day. Nobody smiled back. At least their culture was consistent.

A Job Title Is Not a Biography

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The habit of judging a long career through one job title made me think about what recruiters miss when they skim.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to read accomplishments and responsibility instead of assuming titles mean the same thing at every employer.

Somewhere along the way, corporate America decided that the fastest way to understand a person's entire career was to stare at one job title for six seconds and make a life changing decision.

Apparently, "Operations Manager" means the exact same thing at every company. "Director" always means the same scope. "VP" always means the same authority. And "Coordinator" definitely tells you everything someone has ever done, because why bother reading the next three inches of the resume when the title already gave you a horoscope?

This is one of the funniest parts of the hiring process to me. Candidates are told to tailor their resumes, explain transferable skills, quantify achievements, show leadership, demonstrate impact, and somehow squeeze twenty years of experience into two pages. Then someone glances at the title and says, "Hmm. Not quite the background we're looking for."

Meanwhile, the person with the "wrong" title may have managed 50 people, controlled a multimillion dollar budget, opened locations, fixed failing operations, hired

teams, fired teams, trained leaders, negotiated vendors, handled customer disasters, and probably repaired the office printer because nobody else knew how. But the title said Manager instead of Director. Rejected. Thank you for your interest. We have decided to move forward with candidates whose experience more closely aligns with the role. Translation: We stopped reading before the bullet points.

Job titles are corporate nicknames. One company's General Manager runs a \$20 million operation. Another company's General Manager is trying to figure out why Brenda took the only working stapler home. One company's Vice President has 500 employees. Another company's Vice President has a laptop, a business card, and no idea who they are allowed to approve for lunch. This is why the actual work matters more than the label sitting above it.

Read what the person accomplished. Look at the size of the operation. Look at the complexity. Look at the team they led, the problems they solved, the money they managed, and the results they delivered. Ask questions. You may discover the

person whose title looked "too junior" has already been doing the job you are trying to fill. Candidates also need to remember this. Do not assume you are unqualified because your current title does not perfectly match the title in the posting. Companies invent titles like restaurants invent burger names. Sometimes "Senior Regional Strategic Operations Excellence Leader" is just a District Manager wearing a tuxedo.

The hiring process would improve dramatically if we stopped treating titles like sacred corporate scripture and started reading the actual experience underneath them.

Because somewhere right now, an incredibly qualified candidate is being rejected because their title did not match. And somewhere else, a "Chief Synergy Officer" is trying to remember the Wi-Fi password. Titles are labels. Experience tells the real story. Read it.

The Reader Message That Stopped Me

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader commented that the stories were one reason she remained on LinkedIn while her daughter searched for work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to acknowledge that the jokes sit beside serious struggles - and that being seen can make a difference.

Every once in a while, someone leaves a comment that cuts through all the sarcasm and hiring stories and reminds me why I keep documenting what the modern job search feels like.

Today, someone told me she is no longer working and that one reason she keeps LinkedIn is to read my posts. She also said her daughter is looking for work and has experienced almost everything I write about. That hit differently, because behind every funny interview story, rejection email and corporate punchline, there is a real person wondering what is going on.

I joke about hiring in 2026 because the material writes itself. Seven rounds of interviews. Applications that ask you to upload your resume and then politely demand that you type the whole thing into 47 boxes. One way video interviews where you stare into a camera and answer questions for people who may never watch it. Jobs reposted before applicants finish their coffee. Rejection emails arriving at 2:13 in the morning like the ATS woke up and decided you were the problem. Underneath it are people applying to hundreds of jobs, rewriting

resumes, adjusting keywords, practicing answers, taking assessments, networking, following up, and staring at an inbox like it owes them child support.

And somehow the official advice is still, "Just keep networking." Of course. Because clearly the missing ingredient after 400 applications was commenting "Congratulations!" under a stranger's promotion announcement. I started sharing this because I wanted people to see what hiring looks like when you live through it, not the polished corporate version with smiling stock photo employees around a conference table. The real version has managers joining late, interviewers forgetting they are on mute, panels asking the same question three ways, recruiters disappearing, jobs closing unexpectedly, and rejection emails arriving before you finish telling your family the interview went well.

Sometimes it is hilarious. Sometimes it is frustrating. Sometimes it is brutal. And sometimes someone tells you that your posts helped them laugh during a season that was not funny at all. That matters more to me than any number under a post.

So to the parents watching their kids struggle, the spouses watching someone they love lose confidence, the people searching for months, and the people wondering whether they are the problem: you are not imagining how strange this process has become. A rejection email generated at 3:47 in the morning is not an evaluation of your entire life. It is another chapter in a hiring system that can be confusing, inconsistent, impersonal, and occasionally run like a raccoon has administrator access to Workday.

I will keep testing it, documenting it, laughing at it, and calling out the parts that make no sense. If these stories help one person feel less alone while navigating this circus, I am going to keep going. At least until somebody from HR schedules a meeting to discuss my tone. Apparently, this is my hobby now.

The Hiring Manager at His Own Surprise Meeting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

During an experiment, the interviewer appeared unprepared and unfamiliar with material the candidate had already studied.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask for basic preparation and mutual respect rather than treating the candidate as the only person with homework.

Modern hiring has reached a fascinating stage where sometimes you walk into an interview prepared to explain your experience, leadership style, accomplishments, and why you might be a good fit, only to discover ten minutes into the conversation that the hiring manager appears to have been accidentally invited to his own meeting.

That happened during one of my recent interview experiments, and by the halfway point I was no longer sure which one of us was supposed to be asking the questions.

I joined the call ready for the usual routine. Tell me about yourself. Why are you interested in this company? Walk me through your background. Instead, I asked what success looked like in the position and got a long pause followed by, "Well... that's a good question." Then I asked what the biggest priorities would be during the first 90 days. He leaned back, looked somewhere beyond his monitor like the answer might be written on the ceiling, and said, "I guess getting familiar with everything." Excellent. Phase One:

learn things. Bold. Innovative. Very corporate.

Then I asked how the team was structured, and we entered another pause. "We're actually still figuring some of that out." At that point my inner raccoon had put on a tie, opened a notebook, and started evaluating the candidate. Why is the role open? What challenges is the team facing? How is performance measured? Each question landed like I had requested audited financial statements and nuclear codes. At one point I honestly expected him to slide the job description across the screen and ask me if I could explain it to both of us together.

Eventually the conversation reversed. He started asking me how I would organize the department, improve communication, hold people accountable, create better processes, and fix issues. I answered, but around question four I realized I was basically providing a free consulting session while technically still being the applicant. So I smiled and said, "Just to confirm, am I interviewing for the

job, or should I expect an offer letter for your position?" Silence. No laugh. Corporate air conditioning could be heard emotionally.

He eventually smiled and said, "No, no, we're just having a conversation." Of course. The famous corporate "conversation" where one person has a résumé, the other has the job description, and somehow neither person knows what the job is. Candidates are told to research the company, study the role, prepare examples, understand the culture, practice questions, memorize the posting, and arrive ready to explain how they will create value. Fair enough. But preparation should probably work both ways.

If you're interviewing someone, knowing why the position exists, what the person will do, how success will be measured, and where they fit inside the organization feels like a reasonable starting point. Otherwise, congratulations. You didn't conduct an interview. You scheduled a leadership consultation and invited the applicant to run it.

The Comments Section Is a Bonus Round

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Responses to earlier experiments turned a hiring-process story into a second conversation about criticism, humor and accountability.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain the point of the experiment and why discussion should not end when a company feels uncomfortable.

Every time I think The Interview Games has reached maximum corporate comedy, LinkedIn hands me another episode and reminds me the comments section is a bonus round.

For anyone new here, I test modern hiring processes by applying, interviewing, documenting what happens, and sharing what companies do well, what feels broken, and what somehow requires six interviews, three assessments, a panel on mute, and a recruiter who disappears into witness protection. I know not everyone loves the experiment, and that is fine. Disagreement usually gives me more material.

Today, a District Manager from Five Below stopped by and left this comment: “So, you waste a company’s time and resources that could be utilized to hire a REAL candidate for a potential fit? Not cool.” I have to admit, the capitalized REAL completed the experience. For a second I wondered whether Five Below has a aisle labeled REAL CANDIDATES, while the rest of us wait outside with our resumes. Apparently I have become

the counterfeit version of a job seeker.

So yes if the experiment ever reaches Five Below, I promise to give everyone time to prepare. Alert HR. Notify Legal. Charge the walkie talkies. Test the Wi-Fi. Hide the purple squirrel. Put fresh batteries in the corporate buzzword generator. Maybe hang a sign on the door that says, “REAL CANDIDATES ONLY. INTERVIEW EXPERIMENTS REPORT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE.” I would hate to arrive unexpectedly and cause someone to examine the candidate experience from the candidate’s point of view.

That is what makes me laugh. Companies test candidates constantly. We take assessments, complete case studies, answer one way video questions, sit through panels, repeat the same story to five different people, research the company, prepare questions, send thank you emails, and sometimes wait weeks for an automated rejection at 2:17 in the morning. Candidates are expected to donate hours of preparation because that is part of the process. But when someone turns around and studies that process, suddenly we need an

emergency meeting and a laminated policy.

And for the record, I am a real person. I have a resume, a calendar, a pulse, and enough interview stories to make some recruiting teams close their laptops when my name appears. The point is not to embarrass individual employees. When a company creates a great candidate experience, I say it. When a hiring manager is prepared, professional, funny, respectful, and makes the interview feel human, I talk about that too. But when the process becomes ridiculous, confusing, unnecessarily long, or disconnected from how candidates are treated, I talk about that as well. That is the experiment.

So thank you, Five Below, for today’s unexpected contribution to the research. I was planning on coffee this morning, but LinkedIn delivered a full corporate breakfast instead. And Doug, if I ever do test Five Below, keep the walkie talkie charged and make sure everyone knows the emergency code.

The raccoon may be coming.

Progressive Insurance and the One-Way Webcam

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Progressive Insurance application led into a timed, one-way video interview without a live interviewer.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question whether recording answers alone can capture the qualities companies claim they value.

For anyone new here, I have been running my own hiring experiment by applying to companies, going through their interview processes, and documenting what candidates actually experience.

This round was Progressive Insurance, and it started with one of my favorite inventions in modern recruiting: the one way video interview. Nothing says “we want to get to know you” quite like staring into a camera alone while a countdown clock reminds you that even your personality has a time limit.

A question appeared, I got a moment to think, then the camera turned on and suddenly I was hosting “Please Hire Me.” No recruiter. No hiring manager. Just me, a webcam and a raccoon level amount of emotional stability. I answered leadership questions, customer questions and the usual interview classics. At one point I finished an answer and paused, waiting for someone to respond. Nothing. Silence. My laptop gave me the same emotional support as a microwave.

Naturally, I tested the atmosphere. I joked that one way interviews are convenient because if I say something awkward, technically only the algorithm and my future therapist need to know. Still no laugh. Tough room. I finished, clicked submit and my personality disappeared into the corporate cloud.

Then came the good news. Progressive reviewed the recording and moved me forward to a live video interview. I had officially unlocked the human level. I logged in expecting the traditional face to face experience, professional smile ready, lighting adjusted, raccoon temporarily secured. The recruiter joined right on schedule.

Camera off. So after surviving an interview where I talked to nobody, I advanced to an interview where I was technically talking to somebody I still could not see. Hiring in 2026 is incredible. We have reinvented the telephone call and added bandwidth requirements. The recruiter was friendly, but I spent the conversation staring at a black square while trying to read body language that did not exist. I would answer a question,

pause and hear, “Great.” Was it actually great? Was she nodding? Was she eating lunch? Was she filing taxes? I had no idea. I almost said, “Blink twice if my answer is too long,” then remembered there was absolutely nothing available to blink.

We talked through my background, leadership experience, customer situations, and why I was interested in the role. The conversation flowed well, but the contrast was comedy gold. Round one: perform alone for a camera. Round two: speak to a human hiding behind a camera off icon. At this rate, the final interview may involve communicating with Progressive through smoke signals from a parking lot.

That is why I keep doing these experiments. Every company talks about candidate experience, but you learn more by actually going through it. Progressive moved quickly, communicated clearly, and the recruiter was pleasant. Apparently the reward for successfully talking to yourself on video is getting promoted to talking to a black rectangle.

POST 20 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

You Do Not Need to Interview the CEO to Have an Opinion

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Criticism of assessing a company through one hiring manager raised a question about what a single candidate interaction can reveal.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to defend thoughtful observations without pretending one interview reveals everything about an entire organization.

One thing I have learned from doing these interview experiments is that apparently I need to meet the CEO, CFO, HR department, receptionist, three regional managers, and possibly the person watering the plants before I am allowed to form an opinion about an interview.

I disagree. Clearly.

If I am interviewing with the hiring manager, I am meeting one of the people the company chose to represent the organization to candidates. That conversation tells me something. I do not need an archaeological dig through the employee handbook to notice how a hiring manager communicates, whether they are prepared, respect the candidate's time, and whether the conversation feels professional.

I am not claiming one awkward interview means 80,000 employees wake up every morning and throw staplers at each other. I am documenting the experience the company gave me. If the hiring manager joins 20 minutes late, has no idea what role I applied for, keeps the camera off, reads questions like bingo numbers, and ends with "HR

will let you know," I am allowed to notice that.

Could they be having a bad day? Absolutely. Maybe their dog ate the interview notes. Maybe Outlook declared war. Maybe they spilled coffee on the laptop before I joined. Maybe the company Wi-Fi is emotionally unavailable. But candidates do not interview with possible explanations. They interview with the person sitting in front of them.

Companies understand this perfectly when the situation is reversed. If I arrive late, look unprepared, forget the hiring manager's name, answer with one word responses, and spend half the interview staring at another screen, nobody says, "Maybe Alex had food poisoning yesterday. We should meet his neighbors and veterinarian before forming an opinion." No. They write "not a fit".

That same principle works both ways. A hiring manager is part of the candidate experience. Their behavior is a data point about the organization because the organization put them in that seat. It does not mean everyone at the

company behaves the same way. I am reviewing an interview process, not conducting a federal investigation into the entire workforce. Sometimes the experience is excellent. I say that too. I have interviewed with managers who were prepared, funny, transparent, respectful, and made the conversation feel natural. When that happens, I give them credit. I do not demand to interview 400 more employees before saying the manager represented the company well.

So when I describe an interview, that is exactly what I am describing: the interview I experienced. One meeting cannot tell you everything about a company. But pretending it tells you nothing is equally ridiculous.

The hiring manager is often a candidate's first real look behind the corporate curtain. If the curtain opens and someone is standing there confused, muted, 17 minutes late, and asking what position you applied for, I am going to write about the curtain. That is not pessimism. That is the experiment.

My Unpaid Second Job: Interviewing

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Months of applications, rescheduling, video screenings and panels began to feel like a full second occupation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain the work behind The Interview Games and remind readers why the candidate view deserves attention.

There is a strange point in any experiment where you realize you may have accidentally created a second job for yourself, except this one pays in awkward Zoom calls, rejection emails, ghosting, and stories that make normal people ask, “Wait... they actually did that?”

For months I have been applying to companies, testing interview processes, sitting through one way videos, panels, reschedules, dead cameras, late hiring managers, and enough “tell me about yourself” questions to consider changing my identity just to keep the answer interesting.

I started doing this because I wanted to understand what the candidate experience actually feels like from the inside. Not the polished career site version. The real version. The one where you upload your resume, retype it, answer questions already answered on it, wait three weeks, get invited to an interview, and then meet someone who looks surprised an interview was scheduled. People started following these experiments and sending me their own stories.

Now USA TODAY and Business Insider have scheduled interviews with me next week to talk about

this. Yes. I am now being interviewed about interviews I did while companies thought they were interviewing me. We have officially reached Interview Inception!!

I can already hear the questions. “So Alex, what have you learned?” “Well, I have learned that ‘we’ll circle back next week’ is not a timeline. It is a spiritual concept.” “Anything else?” “If a recruiter says the process is moving quickly, clear your calendar through Thanksgiving.”

The hardest part will be explaining this without sounding like I hallucinated corporate America. There was the manager who forgot the interview. The recruiter who joined with the camera off and blamed technology. The panels where six people stared at me like I was before the United Nations for crimes against PowerPoint. Companies searching for unicorns, purple squirrels, rock stars, ninjas, and apparently every creature except a qualified human being.

And then there is my inner raccoon, who has survived every interview with me. He has sat through repeated questions, late arrivals, awkward silences, bizarre

assessments, and enough rounds to qualify for a heavyweight championship. He deserves his own LinkedIn profile. Now I have to prepare for interviews about interviews. Do I research the journalists? Practice answers? Send a thank you note? If one of them says, “Tell me about yourself,” I may instinctively start explaining my leadership style and asking about the salary range.

But underneath the sarcasm, this is why I kept going. Candidates notice when companies respect their time, communicate clearly, and make interviews feel human instead of an escape room designed by HR after three energy drinks. So next week, the experiment gets another chapter: USA Today, Business Insider, and me.

I should probably prepare something intelligent to say. Naturally, I just want to know whether either interview has eight rounds.

Five Below: A Prepared Email and a Late Interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Five Below interview began with unusually helpful preparation instructions before the hiring manager arrived late.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give credit for what worked and describe how one avoidable delay can change the experience.

For those who are new here, I have somehow turned job interviewing into a full time side quest. I apply to companies, go through the real hiring process, document what happens, and share it so people can see what hiring actually feels like in 2026.

Sometimes it is professional. Sometimes it feels like a corporate escape room. Today's experiment was Five Below. The email before the interview was actually impressive. It explained what to expect, what we would discuss, and how to prepare. Clear and useful.

I logged in early. Camera on. Notes ready. Coffee nearby. Inner raccoon wearing an imaginary tie and trying not to touch anything. Then I waited. The hiring manager joined late, apologized, and we got started. For a moment I wondered if Five Below was not the company name but the official interview policy: arrive five minutes below schedule and see if the candidate is still emotionally available. Once we started, though, the conversation took off, and more than an hour later we were still talking. At some point I stopped

wondering whether I was interviewing for a job and started wondering if I had accidentally joined a podcast. We covered leadership, customer service, managing teams, decisions, accountability, and what happens when everything falls apart at once. Basically, retail leadership: smiling while three people call off, the register freezes, and a customer wants corporate because a \$5 item did not change their life.

At one point we were talking about fast paced environments, and I said, "I figured Five Below would be a good fit because five is also the number of minutes I can remain calm when somebody says, 'Quick question,' and then opens a PowerPoint." He laughed. Later I added, "Nothing develops leadership faster than someone asking for the manager because a coupon expired during the Obama administration." Another laugh. I considered that progress. The conversation felt natural. He asked thoughtful questions, let me finish answers, shared information about the role, and did not ask what kitchen

appliance best represents my leadership style. For the record, toaster. Reliable, slightly dangerous, and everyone pays attention when smoke appears.

I watch the small details during these experiments. Was the interviewer prepared? Did the conversation match the email? Did they listen? Did it feel human, or did I feel like I was being evaluated by a committee that recently discovered eye contact? Even with the late start, Five Below did a lot right. The interview lasted more than an hour, but it never felt like an interrogation. No panel of seven. No mystery executive appearing halfway through. Nobody stayed on mute for six minutes. Nobody asked whether I was spiritually compatible with a cash register.

The experiment continues because one conversation never tells the whole story. But this round was professional, conversational, funny, and surprisingly normal. In modern hiring, that may be the biggest plot twist of all. Welcome to hiring.

POST 23 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The Boss Who Could Only Talk Behind My Back

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A remembered leader seemed comfortable discussing concerns with everyone except the employee who needed to hear them.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to argue that direct, respectful conversations are a basic obligation of leadership.

Toxic leadership is fascinating because people with the biggest titles can somehow develop the courage level of a houseplant the second a real conversation is required. But ask them to sit across from someone and say, "Here is the issue, here is what I need from you," and suddenly everybody needs a pre meeting, HR's involvement, and possibly a weather delay.

I remember when I worked for a leader who had no problem talking about people. He could talk about you in meetings, talk about you to other managers, talk about you to HR, and probably talk about you to the office printer if it looked interested. But actually talking to you? Different story. I found out there was supposedly an issue with my performance from someone else. Not my boss. Not the person with the issue. Someone else. By the time the story reached me, it had toured the building and probably had its own Outlook calendar.

So, I asked my leader directly. The response was, "Well, nobody is saying there is an issue." Interesting. Because apparently everyone was

discussing the issue except the one person standing in front of me. Real leaders address things. Toxic leaders circulate things. Real leaders tell you where you stand. Toxic leaders tell three other people, let the rumor marinate, then act shocked when morale is terrible. And somehow this gets called "communication." No, Kevin. Communication is when the person you are talking about is actually included.

What toxic leaders often lack is not authority. A title gives you authority, but it cannot create the courage leadership requires. What they lack is courage. Courage to look someone in the eye. Courage to say something uncomfortable without hiding behind another manager. Courage to hear a response they may not like. Courage to admit that maybe the problem is not entirely sitting on the other side of the desk. Anyone can be brave in an email where the employee is not copied. Anyone can sound decisive after the person leaves the room. Anyone can preach transparency while operating like the CIA over a missing stapler. Leadership gets tested when the

conversation is uncomfortable and your title cannot do the talking for you.

I have had leaders tell me things I did not want to hear, and I respected the honesty because at least I knew where I stood. I have also had leaders smile, tell me everything was great, then produce a documentary after I walked away. One builds trust. The other builds screenshots. If you lead people, have the conversation. Say the hard thing respectfully. Give people a chance to respond. Stop making employees discover "feedback" through rumors, side meetings, and someone named Brad saying, "Hey, just so you know..." Courage is not standing on a stage talking about leadership.

Sometimes courage is closing the laptop, walking into someone's office, and saying the words yourself. If you are powerful enough to make decisions about someone's career, be courageous enough to have the conversation that comes with it.

Is the Experiment Fair to Other Candidates?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A question about applying to roles I may decline forced me to consider the ethics of testing hiring practices.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to address the concern directly and explain what I hope the research contributes to the broader candidate experience.

Some people collect stamps. Some people restore old cars. Apparently, I decided my hobby would be walking directly into the modern hiring process with a notebook and asking, “So... how weird is this going to get?”

Every once in a while, someone asks about The Interview Games: “Isn’t it wrong to apply for jobs you may not accept?” Fair question. Welcome to the laboratory I built out of applications, recruiter calls, one way videos, panel interviews, and enough “next steps” to qualify as cardio.

What I do is simple. I apply to jobs, go through real hiring processes, document what happens, and pay attention to everything candidates experience but rarely get to talk about. The ATS gymnastics. The recruiter who joins late. The hiring manager who cannot remember the role. The five person panel where three people are muted, one is answering email, and the last person looks like they learned my name during the meeting.

And yes, sometimes I get offers. When that happens, I decline them. I am not collecting jobs like airline

miles. I am trying to understand the process from the inside and share what candidates are dealing with. Nobody is waking up Monday with me on payroll because I clicked “Easy Apply.” The part that surprised me most is what happens afterward. Recruiters have reached out. PR teams have contacted me. People inside companies have thanked me for the feedback. Some have disagreed. Some have explained what happened behind the scenes. Some have told me conversations started internally about improving the candidate experience. People message me saying, “That happened to me too.”

That is why I keep doing it. Hiring has reached a place where a candidate can upload a resume, manually type the same resume into twelve boxes, record a video answering questions to nobody, take an assessment asking whether they strongly agree they enjoy organizing office supplies, survive multiple interviews, and then receive a rejection at 2:14 a.m. from an email address that cannot accept replies. Apparently all of that is normal. But me documenting it? Suddenly we

have called an emergency ethics meeting.

I understand why some people dislike the experiment. You do not have to agree with the method to understand the conversation it creates. My goal is not to embarrass random employees or turn recruiting into a prank. I am looking at the systems, communication, candidate experience, and the gap between what companies say their hiring process is and what applicants actually experience.

There are good stories too. I have met hiring managers who were prepared, funny, respectful, direct, and genuinely made me think, “Okay, somebody here understands humans.” I share those experiences too because the goal is not to prove every company is terrible. The goal is to see what happens.

So I keep applying, interviewing, and taking notes. Modern hiring built the circus. I just showed up with a notebook, a front row seat, and enough curiosity to keep buying tickets.

When “I’m Fine” Is Not the Whole Story

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on hiding the emotional aftermath of losing a job behind a confident public answer.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make room for honest feelings when a career setback has not yet become a neat comeback story.

Vulnerability online is a strange thing. The internet says it wants authenticity, but usually it means authenticity after the crisis has passed and the lighting is good.

People love the comeback story. They are less comfortable with the part where you are sitting at home, staring at your laptop, wondering if your career just got hit by a bus.

I remember when I was let go from a job, and for a while I did what a lot of people do. I told everyone I was fine. Completely fine. My career had just been drop kicked into traffic, my confidence was somewhere in the parking lot looking for its keys, and I was refreshing LinkedIn like the website owed me an explanation. But if anyone asked how I was doing, the answer was always, “Great.” Admitting something hurt was apparently going to kill the Wi-Fi.

That is the funny thing about vulnerability. We are comfortable sharing the polished version once we survive it. We post the new title, the smiling photo, the “excited to announce” paragraph, and suddenly the painful part becomes a motivational origin story. What we do not show as often is the middle.

The morning you wake up and forget briefly that you no longer have a job. The applications you send while wondering whether anyone will see value in you again. The moment you stare at your resume and think, “How did years of experience suddenly become one PDF nobody is answering?”

Eventually I started talking about it, not because I had everything figured out, but because I did not. Other people started talking too. People told me they had been laid off and had not told friends. People with big titles admitted they were scared. People who looked successful online were quietly sitting at kitchen tables wondering what happened. The internet felt less like a highlight reel and more human.

That changed how I look at vulnerability online. Being vulnerable does not mean turning LinkedIn into group therapy or sharing every private detail between a leadership quote and an ad for payroll software. Boundaries still matter. But there is power in saying, “This hurt.” There is power in admitting you did not have the perfect response. There is power in

telling someone else, “I have been there too.”

Vulnerability has connected me to more people than pretending I had everything under control ever did. Nobody actually has everything under control anyway. Some people just have better headshots.

So when I share awkward interviews, career failures, rejection emails, toxic leaders, embarrassing moments, or the times I genuinely had no clue what came next, I am not trying to look fearless. I am trying to be real. Because somebody reading it may be sitting where I once sat, staring at a laptop, questioning everything, and believing everyone else has life figured out.

They do not. Most of us are improvising with caffeine, calendars, and a suspicious amount of confidence. Sometimes the most useful thing you can share is not the victory. Sometimes it is the chapter before it.

Christian Brothers Automotive: Waiting on the Call

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview for a franchise operator opportunity at the Aurora location did not unfold as scheduled.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to examine what punctuality and follow-through signal to someone considering joining an organization.

I have now done enough interview experiments to know when a conversation is awkward and when it deserves its own emergency evacuation plan.

I have survived one way video interviews, panel interviews with enough people to form a jury, recruiters with cameras off, and hiring managers who apparently believe “tell me about yourself” is a personality test. But this Christian Brothers Automotive interview may have just taken first place in the category of “How is this still happening in 2026?”

The call was scheduled for a Franchise Operator opportunity at the Aurora shop. I showed up early, prepared, notes ready, professional face activated. Then I waited. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes. At some point I started wondering if I was interviewing for Franchise Operator or auditioning to become the person who tracks down missing hiring managers.

When he finally joined, there was not much acknowledgment of being fifteen minutes late. We just launched into the conversation like

time itself had signed an NDA. Fine. I can roll with that. This is an experiment. I am there to observe the process, the communication, the culture, and whether my inner raccoon can survive another corporate interaction without chewing through a power cord.

The interview then continued for more than an hour. More than an hour. At that point, we had officially spent longer together than some first dates, oil changes, and a few documentaries. The conversation wandered, circled back, took scenic routes, and somehow kept finding new exits. At one point I decided to test the temperature with a joke. I said, “If this interview goes another hour, do I get franchise equity or at least a punch card for a free oil change?”

Nothing. Not a laugh. Not a smile. Not even the tiny corporate exhale people make when they want you to believe they understood humor. My inner raccoon immediately packed its belongings and left. That was my favorite moment because it captured the entire experience. I was trying to create a human conversation while

the interview seemed determined to remain professionally refrigerated.

And that is why I keep doing these experiments. Candidates are told to arrive early, research the company, prepare examples, communicate clearly, show enthusiasm, ask smart questions, and respect everyone’s time. But candidate experience works both ways. The interview is also the company’s chance to demonstrate communication, culture, preparation, and how people are treated before they ever receive a badge or paycheck.

By the end, I had learned a lot. Maybe not everything about the Franchise Operator position, but definitely plenty about the experience. Fifteen minutes late. More than an hour long. One joke sent directly into the witness protection program. And enough awkward silence to qualify as a second interviewer.

The Interview Games continues. I came prepared for a career conversation. Apparently I should have brought snacks, a sleeping bag, and a laugh track.

How I Actually Get Interviews

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Repeated questions about my interview success prompted an explanation of testing multiple resume versions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to offer practical insight into changing language and format instead of pretending I discovered a recruiter shortcut.

People keep asking me the same question: “How the heck are you getting all these companies to move you forward in the interview process?”

Apparently, some people think I discovered a secret tunnel underneath LinkedIn where recruiters hand out interviews like Costco samples. I have not. There is no password, no handshake, and no secret recruiter society where someone whispers, “Let Alex through.” If there were, I would still be outside because the system would ask me to upload my resume and then type the entire thing again.

The answer is that I experiment with everything. I use multiple resumes, not one sacred document that I polish for six months and launch into cyberspace hoping somebody notices. I have different versions depending on the role, level, industry, and what the company wants. One version may lean harder into multi unit operations. Another may highlight leadership, sales, or process improvement. Same career. Same person. Different spotlight. At this point my resume has more outfit changes than a pop star on tour, and

somewhere an ATS wonders why I keep showing up differently.

I also read the job descriptions and watch the language companies use. If they keep repeating certain responsibilities, I make sure my experience is described in terms they recognize. I am not inventing experience. I am translating it. Because apparently in 2026 you can spend twenty years doing something successfully, but if your resume says “managed operations” and the software wants “operational leadership,” the computer may conclude you spent your career raising alpacas. Then it sends you a rejection email at 2:17 a.m. just to confirm the alpacas got the job.

And I track everything. Which resume got the response? Which title worked? Where did the process stall? Did applying through the company website work better than LinkedIn? I treat hiring like one giant A/B test that escaped from marketing and started asking me where I see myself in five years. I have spreadsheets, notes, different versions, application dates and enough data to make a normal person close the laptop. Yes. Completely normal behavior.

The other part is volume. I apply a lot. Everyone sees the interviews I write about, but nobody sees every application that disappears into the digital Bermuda Triangle. I get rejected. I get ignored. I get automated emails overnight. I have had companies reject me so fast I am convinced the ATS saw my name and yelled, “Absolutely not, he is back.”

That is the secret behind The Interview Games. I test resumes, timing, wording, job titles, application channels, and interview approaches. If something works, I study it. If something stops working, I change it. There is no magical resume and no trick that guarantees an interview. It is multiple resumes, constant experimentation, a spreadsheet that probably needs therapy, enough applications to frighten my browser history, and the willingness to keep adjusting.

Also coffee. An unreasonable amount of coffee.

Forty-Five Minutes at Nordstrom Became a Marathon

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Nordstrom interview at Oakbrook Center ran far beyond its advertised time for a seasonal retail role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how even a seemingly simple opening can ask far more time from candidates than they planned to give.

A job interview becomes a different experience when the calendar says 45 minutes and, around hour two, you start wondering whether you should ask where the employee break room is.

For those who are new here, I have been applying to companies and going through their interview processes as part of my ongoing hiring experiment. I want to experience what candidates actually experience after clicking Apply, because career pages make everything sound organized. Apply. Get invited. Show up. Answer a few questions. Shake a hand. Leave.

Today's experiment was Nordstrom at Oakbrook Center for a Seasonal Retail Cashier & Sales Floor Support position in men's apparel. My confirmation said 2:00 PM to 2:45 PM. Forty five minutes. I expected customer service questions, a conversation about availability, maybe a discussion about folding sweaters, and then freedom.

Two hours later, we were still talking. Still seated. The questions kept coming. "Tell me about a time you dealt with an upset customer."

"How would you handle several customers needing help at once?" "What does excellent customer service mean to you?" "Tell me about a time you worked with a difficult coworker." "How do you handle pressure during a busy shift?" And, naturally, "Why do you want to work at Nordstrom?"

That last question always wakes up the sarcastic department of my brain. The internal answer is, "Because I clicked Apply, you clicked Invite, and now we're both committed to seeing how this story ends." I kept that answer inside. Mostly. We talked about sales, teamwork, complaints, availability, difficult customers, and helping someone who has no idea what they want but expects you to know instantly. At one point I said, "If the customer is already angry before they meet me, technically I'm ahead. I haven't disappointed them yet." That got a laugh.

Then around the 90 minute mark, I looked at the time and said, "The email said 30 to 45 minutes. Are we still interviewing, or did I accidentally get promoted to assistant manager?" Another laugh.

And somehow, another thirty minutes. What fascinated me was the difference between the official process and the actual experience. The confirmation email had everything neatly arranged: date, time, location, what to expect, and how long the interview would take. Corporate hiring systems love precision. Real interviews sometimes look at precision and throw it out the window.

That is exactly why I keep doing these experiments. You cannot fully understand a hiring process from a polished career page or recruiter script. You have to sit in the chair, hear the questions, watch the process unfold, see whether the conversation feels human, and whether a 45 minute meeting somehow develops a sequel.

Nordstrom scheduled 45 minutes. The conversation lasted two hours. By the end, I knew more about the role, they knew more about me, and I'm fairly certain my parking spot had already filed a missing person report. Another experiment completed.

My Resume Dealership

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Readers asked for more detail about how I adapt resumes to different jobs and applicant-tracking systems.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to share the testing approach behind the results and show the difference between tailoring and inventing experience.

People keep asking me how I am landing all these interviews, and I wish I had a glamorous answer involving a secret recruiter or a guy named Steve living inside LinkedIn approving applications at midnight.

The truth is less exciting and more ridiculous: I treat job applications like an experiment. I do not use one resume for everything. I have multiple versions. Operations gets one. Retail gets another. Leadership gets another. Content gets another. I am basically running a small resume dealership out of my laptop.

Before I apply, I read the posting and look for the language the company is using. If the job says “multi unit leadership” and my resume says “oversaw several locations,” I am making the ATS play a vocabulary game. I adjust the wording so my experience lines up with the words they are searching for. Same experience. Better translation.

I keep the resume simple. No fancy graphics, no motivational quote, no headshot making me look like I am auditioning for a real estate billboard. Clean formatting, clear titles, measurable results, and enough keywords for the robot

guarding the front door to recognize me.

I test titles and summaries too. If I am applying for operations, I do not lead with a paragraph that sounds like I want to become a social media manager. If I am applying for content, I do not open with three sentences about automotive gross profit. Apparently employers like it when your application looks like it was meant for the job they posted. Revolutionary stuff.

I apply early whenever I can. Once a posting has 2,000 applicants, your resume is basically entering a raffle where the prize is a 30 minute Teams call. I track what I apply to, which resume I used, whether I heard back, and what changed. If one version gets more interviews, I pay attention. If another disappears into the ATS cemetery, I stop sending it out to die.

And yes, some of these interviews turn into actual offers. I have received multiple offers during this experiment. That creates my favorite final round because then I explain what I have been doing, decline the offer, and tell them the interview was part of my experiment. Somewhere, a recruiter

is still wondering how the candidate interviewed the company.

Salary questions are another test. If an application forces me to enter a number before anyone has said hello, I stay realistic so I do not price myself out early. I would rather discuss compensation with a human than get eliminated by a dropdown menu with the emotional range of a microwave. And no, every application does not become an interview. Plenty vanish into the corporate wilderness. I get rejected. I get ghosted. I get emails at hours reserved for raccoons and bad decisions. But I keep testing. Different resume. Different wording. Different timing. Different company. Then I compare the results.

There is no magic button. Just a mildly obsessive man with too many resumes, a spreadsheet, a sense of humor, and an ATS slowly learning my name.

When the Applicant Pool Becomes a Small Town

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A crowded application for a social-content role brought the scale of competition into focus.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to acknowledge how overwhelming the numbers feel without reducing job seekers to a single applicant count.

Nothing humbles a job applicant faster than opening an email and discovering you are not competing against a few qualified people. You are apparently auditioning against the population of a small town, somebody's cousin, and a stranger with a dream.

For those who are new here, I have been applying to companies and going through their hiring processes as part of my ongoing experiment. I want to see what happens after you click Apply, upload your resume, retype the same resume into twelve boxes, answer whether you are legally authorized to exist near a keyboard and finally hit Submit with the confidence of someone buying a scratch off ticket. This one was for a Social Content Editor role focused on Reddit and LinkedIn. I spend enough time on LinkedIn to qualify for residency and Reddit is basically the internet's basement where everyone has an opinion where a lawn mower discussion can become a 600 comment argument.

Then I got the update: "Alex, we're making our way through a pool of 2,030 candidates." Two thousand. Thirty. At that point, this stopped

feeling like a job application and started feeling like the opening ceremony of the Hunger Games.

I pictured the hiring manager staring at a giant monitor and whispering, "May the keywords be ever in your favor." What do you even do with 2,030 applicants? Applicant 1 has strong experience. Applicant 47 has a great portfolio. Applicant 811 used "synergy" four times and should probably be investigated. Applicant 1,204 attached a seven page cover letter. Applicant 1,677 uploaded a lasagna recipe. Applicant 2,029 is somehow related to somebody important. And then there is me, refreshing the Talent Portal like it contains classified documents.

The email politely explained that the hiring manager is "currently reviewing candidates." Currently? With 2,030 people, I hope that manager has snacks, hydration, permission from their family to return home before Thanksgiving. By applicant 1,700, nobody is reading accomplishments anymore. They are eliminating people based on whether the resume uses Calibri.

Naturally, the email ends with, "We'll be in touch as soon as we have an update." That sentence has more suspense than several Netflix series. They also reminded me I can check the Talent Portal anytime, because apparently this situation needs me monitoring my status among 2,030 strangers like fantasy football.

This is exactly why I keep running these experiments. Hiring in 2026 is fascinating. Companies receive thousands of applications, candidates spend hours tailoring resumes, recruiters get buried under volume, and somewhere in the middle everyone wonders why the process feels like speed dating, airport security, and Powerball combined. So now I wait. Me versus 2,029 other candidates. No pressure.

If I make it to the next round, I expect theme music, a smoke machine, and someone announcing my name while I walk onto a stage. At 2,030 applicants, a regular interview feels almost disrespectfully casual.

The Interview-to-Application Ratio

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone asked me to quantify how often my submitted resumes lead to first-round interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain what I measure in the experiment and why no single resume version tells the whole story.

At some point, a normal job search stops feeling like a job search and starts feeling like you accidentally opened a research lab with no funding, three resumes, six browser tabs, a calendar full of interviews, and one exhausted raccoon running quality control.

Someone asked me today, “What is your ratio of resumes submitted to first round interviews?”

I do not use one magical resume and fire it into the internet like a paper airplane hoping it lands on the desk of someone with hiring authority. I use multiple versions. Different formats. Different wording. Sometimes I change the summary. Sometimes I move accomplishments around. Sometimes I simplify it. Sometimes I make it more executive. Sometimes I test whether the ATS prefers an actual human being or a keyword casserole wearing a necktie. Then I watch what happens. I want to know what gets viewed, what gets ignored, what gets a recruiter call, what gets rejected in eleven minutes, and what somehow leads to seven interviews with seven people asking the exact same question like each person is

guarding one digit of the nuclear launch code.

And yes, I get interviews. A lot of them. I have had weeks where my calendar looked like I was running for office. Recruiter screen at 9:00. Hiring manager at 10:30. Panel at noon. Finance at 2:00. Then someone called a “Strategic People Partner” at 4:00 whose job remains classified... If it is not a role I intend to take, I decline it and explain the experiment. I am not collecting offer letters like Pokemon cards. I am documenting what candidates experience because hiring has somehow become one of the strangest forms of corporate theater in America.

The inconsistency is what keeps this interesting. One resume gets rejected instantly. A slightly different version gets an interview for nearly the same role. One company wants five rounds, a case study, references, a personality test, and possibly a notarized statement from my third grade teacher confirming I can work well with others. Another company talks to me for 45 minutes and asks when I can start.

So yes, the ratio matters, and I track it, but the behavior behind the ratio is far more interesting. Every application becomes a tiny experiment. Every interview adds another chapter. Every rejection email sent at 2:17 a.m. is proof that somewhere, a robot is working the night shift and apparently has no respect for my sleep schedule.

At this point, I am less interested in “winning” the job search and more interested in understanding the machine. Why does one version work while another disappears? Why does every company say they want authenticity and then immediately hand you a script, a personality test, and a box labeled “Tell us about yourself in exactly 90 seconds”?

That is what I am testing. The ratio is just the scoreboard. The real story is everything happening behind it. And if LinkedIn ever introduces standings or playoffs, I fully expect the raccoon and me somewhere near the top of the bracket.

Ageism Arrives Wearing Business Casual

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interviewer joked about retirement in response to years of experience on a resume.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge coded assumptions about age and remind readers that experience should not be treated as a punchline.

Ageism in hiring rarely walks into an interview wearing a name tag that says, "Hello, I'm ageism." Usually it shows up wearing business casual, smiling politely, and hiding behind words like "culture fit," "energy," "fresh perspective," or my personal favorite, "someone who can grow with the company."

When I do these interview experiments, I pay attention to everything. The little comments people think are harmless. The other day, a hiring manager looked at my resume, laughed, and said, "Wow, with this many years of experience, we might need to see if the retirement plan kicks in on your first day."

He laughed. I did not. There was an awkward pause. So I smiled and said, "That's the funny thing about experience. Companies spend years asking candidates to get it, then start getting nervous when someone actually shows up with it." Silence. Not angry silence. Corporate silence. The kind where somebody suddenly becomes very interested in the notes on their screen and you can practically hear HR opening a

document titled Candidate Feedback.

I could have laughed along. I could have ignored it. I could have pretended it was funny and moved on to the next question about where I see myself in five years, which is apparently acceptable as long as nobody answers, "Hopefully somewhere that doesn't make retirement jokes during interviews." But that is part of why I do these experiments.

Ageism is not always someone saying, "You are too old." Sometimes it arrives disguised as humor. Sometimes it is "overqualified." Sometimes it is concern that you may want too much money, challenge leadership, leave quickly, or somehow be unable to understand technology because you remember when phones had cords.

For someone who genuinely needs the job, those comments can hit hard. Maybe they have been applying for months. Maybe they are watching savings disappear. Maybe they are wondering when decades of experience became something they had to defend instead of something they earned.

Later that day, the email arrived. "We decided to move forward with other candidates." Ah yes. The national anthem of job searching. No mention of the joke. No mention of my response. Just the polished rejection template that has escorted millions of candidates out of corporate America.

Could the decision have been completely unrelated? Absolutely. That is why I document the experience instead of pretending I can read minds. But I know why I spoke up. Because the next person sitting in that chair may feel like they cannot. Experience should not require an apology. Gray hair is not a software bug. A long resume does not mean someone has reached an expiration date. Having enough years behind you to recognize a bad joke does not make you difficult. It means you have probably heard better ones.

If speaking up costs me another "we decided to move forward" email, fine. Apparently, I moved forward too. Apparently defending experience is not listed under preferred qualifications.

The Day the Badge Stops Working

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how quickly work relationships and routines can change after an employee leaves an organization.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to build lives and support systems that do not depend entirely on a company email account.

It's funny how quickly a workplace can go from "we're a family" to acting like you were a seasonal employee who accidentally wandered into the executive meeting.

One day your badge opens every door, your phone never stops ringing, people need your opinion on everything from payroll to where the extra printer paper is. Then the badge stops working, your email disappears, and suddenly half the people who used to call you before 7:00 a.m. develop a mysterious case of corporate amnesia.

That part always fascinated me. You can spend years working beside people, solving problems at midnight, covering shifts, taking calls on weekends, missing dinners, fixing disasters you did not create, and helping someone else look good in a meeting. You know their kids' names. They know yours. You have inside jokes, lunch routines, emergency coffee runs, and that one coworker who can tell by your face that the meeting is about to become a hostage situation. Then one day you leave, get laid off, get fired, resign, or simply move on, and suddenly some of those same people

act like remembering you might violate company policy.

I remember how strange that feeling was. Not because I expected a parade, a bronze statue, or my photo hanging next to the employee of the month board. I just thought relationships were relationships. Apparently, some workplace friendships come with an invisible expiration date printed directly on the back of your access card. Badge active: "Brother, call me anytime." Badge inactive: "New phone, who dis?"

And yes, it can hurt. Especially when you realize you were genuinely there for people. You defended them when they were not in the room. You helped them through bad days. You listened to their complaints about the same boss who is now apparently their best friend on LinkedIn. You celebrated promotions, births, birthdays, and the miraculous day someone finally quit replying all. Then your chapter ends and the silence gets surprisingly loud.

But time teaches you something valuable. The people who were real do not need a company email address to stay connected. They text.

They call. They check in months later without needing anything. They remember you when there is no title beside your name, no budget you control, and no meeting where your support can benefit them. Those are your people. Everyone else was part of the building.

I can laugh about it now because corporate life is hilarious when viewed from a safe distance. Apparently, some friendships require Wi-Fi access, a company issued laptop, and authorization from HR. The second your Microsoft Teams status changes permanently to Offline, you become a historical document.

So when you leave a company and certain people disappear, let them. Do not chase anyone through the virtual hallways asking why they stopped calling. Keep the memories, keep the lessons, and keep moving.

A badge can open a door. It should never determine who remembers you after it closes. The real ones remember you.

General Motors and a Better Interview Conversation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A discussion with a General Motors executive focused on bringing more structure and purpose to interviewing.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize a constructive approach and show that criticism of hiring is not the same as believing every company gets it wrong.

After more than 100 interview experiments, I have learned that most companies do not really have an interview process. They have a scavenger hunt with calendar invites.

You start with a recruiter, move to a hiring manager, meet people from departments you may never work with, complete an assessment, answer the same question four different ways, and eventually wonder whether the final round includes assembling an engine blindfolded.

That is why my conversation with an executive at General Motors stood out.

We talked specifically about how they approach interviews, and the biggest difference was that their process is built to actually learn about the candidate instead of simply exhausting them. The conversation was about structure, clear expectations, relevant questions, and making sure the people interviewing you understand why they are in the room. Revolutionary concept, I know. Apparently an interview can happen

without inviting twelve executives just so everyone can ask, "Tell me about yourself."

What impressed me was the focus on consistency. Candidates should understand the role, what the team needs, and what the next steps look like. The interviewers are supposed to be evaluating the same important things instead of one person judging leadership, another judging whether you smiled enough, and Gary from finance deciding your future because you did not laugh at his spreadsheet joke.

There was also an emphasis on conversation. Not interrogation. Not trying to catch somebody with a trick question from 2007. Not asking what kind of animal you would be and then quietly deciding that "raccoon" lacks executive presence. The goal is to understand how someone thinks, what they have accomplished, how they solve problems, and whether there is a genuine match between the person and the position. Apparently, simple.

I told him one of my favorite signs of a bad process is reaching the fourth interview and realizing nobody has

explained the actual job yet. Everybody knows my greatest weakness, but I still do not know who I report to. He laughed. I said, "If I make it to round nine, I expect a GM badge, parking privileges, and access to the employee coffee."

What separated General Motors for me was the culture behind the process. Good interviews do not need to feel cold to be professional. They can be organized without being robotic. They can be thorough without becoming an endurance sport. Candidates can be challenged without being treated like contestants on Corporate Survivor. That matters. When I shared things I have seen in other interview processes, the response was not defensive. We discussed why candidate experience matters and how communication, preparation, and respect can change how someone views a company.

General Motors stood out because the process sounded intentional. Not perfect. Not magical. Intentional. After studying so many companies, that is rarer than it should be. My raccoon is still waiting to see if they offer dental.

The Interviewer Knows Who I Am

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A hiring manager recognized The Interview Games during an interview, changing the tone of the conversation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explore how candor, scrutiny and personal recognition can affect the process I am trying to measure.

There is a specific moment in an interview when you realize the person on the other side of the screen already knows exactly who you are, and suddenly the interview feels like your own episode.

It starts normally. Calendar invite. Recruiter. Hiring manager. The usual “tell me about yourself” routine. Then somewhere around minute twelve, they lean back, smile, and say, “Alex... I know who you are.” That is the exact moment my inner raccoon closes the laptop, grabs a tiny suitcase, and starts looking for the nearest exit. Some hiring managers have seen my posts. Some recruiters follow The Interview Games.

And once they realize I am the guy who publicly talks about interview experiences, the atmosphere changes fast. Funny how quickly things improve when people know the candidate remembers details. At this point I half expect a company wide alert: “The raccoon guy is here. Everyone look busy, read the resume, and please make sure nobody says ‘circle back’ unless we actually plan to circle back.” Also, somebody test the camera

Suddenly everybody is on time. Cameras work. The hiring manager has actually read my resume. Nobody asks me to upload the resume and then manually retype it into seventeen boxes. The recruiter remembers my name. The Wi-Fi becomes stable. Next steps are clear. And somehow the phrase “we still have seven more rounds” disappears from the conversation. One person actually asked me, “Are we part of the experiment?” I said, “Well, you weren’t five minutes ago.” That created the kind of silence normally reserved for legal depositions.

The funniest part is watching people become extremely aware of the candidate experience in real time. Suddenly I am getting timelines, names, next steps, follow up expectations, and explanations about the process. I sit there thinking, “Apparently candidate communication was available the entire time. We just needed witnesses.” To be fair, I am not entering interviews hoping people fail. I am not hiding behind a plant with a clipboard waiting for somebody to say something ridiculous. I want to see what candidates actually experience.

Sometimes the process is terrible. Sometimes a company surprises me and does things exceptionally well.

But being recognized adds another layer because now I have to wonder: am I seeing the normal process, or the corporate version of cleaning the house because company is coming over? “Alex applied. Everybody act natural. Karen, answer his email. Steve, turn your camera on. Somebody hide the personality test. And for the love of God, nobody mention round eight.”

Maybe that is the strangest part. I started these experiments to understand hiring, and somewhere along the way hiring started recognizing me back. So if you ever interview me and already know who I am, relax. I am not expecting perfection. I am simply hoping the camera works, somebody read the resume, and nobody asks what animal I would be.

Because unfortunately, we already know the answer. It is the raccoon.

Tell Me About a Time... Again

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A string of familiar behavioral questions made an interview feel like a repetitive test of prepared anecdotes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask whether repeated formulaic prompts reveal genuine leadership ability or simply reward storytelling practice.

There are four words in a job interview that can turn a grown adult into a game show contestant: “Tell me about a time...” The moment I hear them, my brain opens every file it has stored, throws them into the air, and somehow selects a memory from 2009 involving a broken printer and a manager named Steve.

Suddenly I’m expected to produce a corporate bedtime story with a problem, an action, a measurable result, personal growth, teamwork, leadership, and a small miracle before the interviewer finishes a sip of coffee.

A while back, during an interview experiment, I sat down with a hiring manager who loved this phrase. “Tell me about a time you dealt with conflict.” Then, “Tell me about a time you failed.” Then, “Tell me about a time you had to influence someone.” By the fourth one, I was waiting for, “Tell me about a time you were stranded in the wilderness with only Excel and a company mission statement.” I answered every question, but internally my raccoon was yelling, “WE NEED MORE EXAMPLES!”

At one point he asked, “Tell me about a time you had to work with a difficult person.” I said, “Do you want the professional answer or do we have enough time for the director’s cut?” He stared at me. No laugh. Corporate face activated. I continued with a real example about disagreement, expectations, common ground, and getting the team back on track. When I finished, he nodded and said, “Great. Now tell me about another time.” Another time? Apparently the first difficult person had been eliminated and we needed a backup contestant.

Then came my favorite: “Tell me about a time you made a mistake.” I told him I once scheduled a meeting that could have been an email. I thought this was a recognized leadership failure. Still no laugh. So I gave him the polished answer about owning a mistake, fixing it, and changing the process so it wouldn’t happen again. He wrote something down. I’m hoping it was “candidate understands humor,” but based on his expression it may have been “monitor closely.”

The interview went on for more than an hour. By then, I’d told him about a time I led, failed, coached,

disagreed, adapted, prioritized, solved, delegated, communicated, recovered, and probably survived. I had basically narrated a season of my professional life while he checked boxes.

That is one reason I keep doing these experiments. Behavioral questions can be useful, but when every question starts the same way, the conversation can feel less like meeting a colleague and more like defending your career in front of a jury holding a STAR method handbook. Sometimes the best interview question is a real conversation. Ask what someone learned. Ask how they think. Ask what they would do differently today. Let the person across from you show up as an actual human being instead of desperately searching their memory for a story with exactly three bullet points.

And if you absolutely must ask me to “tell you about a time,” just know I have stories. Some even have charts.!!

The Performance Review After I Left

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An ex-boss reportedly began listing supposed shortcomings only after I was no longer there to respond.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question retroactive criticism and leaders who avoid direct feedback while an employee is still on the team.

It's amazing how quiet some people are about your performance while you still work there, and how detailed they become after you leave.

Apparently, resignation letters unlock hidden corporate memories. Suddenly your name is floating through meetings you no longer attend, your old boss is giving documentaries about your failures, and people are hearing about all the things you allegedly "weren't doing" while you were actually doing the opposite.

A while back, I learned that an ex boss had been telling other leaders there were "a lot of things Alex wasn't doing that he was supposed to." Interesting. Because while I was there, I was covering gaps, solving problems, answering calls, helping teams, fixing fires, pushing results, handling issues nobody wanted attached to their name, and still smiling in meetings like everything was normal. If I wasn't doing anything, I would genuinely like to meet the person who was doing all that work wearing my face.

That is the funny part about leaving a company. Your workload disappears from memory, but your

name somehow gets promoted to full time employee. You are gone, yet apparently you are still attending leadership meetings spiritually. Someone says sales are down. Alex. Staffing issue? Alex. Printer jammed? Probably something Alex failed to put in a process document before leaving. I expected someone to blame me for the weather.

What makes it less funny is knowing how hard you actually worked. People see the final result, but they rarely remember the calls after hours, the weekends, the problems you quietly fixed, the employees you coached, the customers you calmed down, or the pressure you carried home because you didn't want your team carrying it. Nobody creates a PowerPoint called "All The Things This Person Did That We Never Acknowledged." That presentation apparently does not exist.

And sometimes the person telling the story knows exactly what you were doing. That is what makes it sting. You remember the conversations. You remember being told to keep pushing. You remember the impossible expectations. You remember being asked to fix things

with half the resources and twice the urgency. Then you leave, and suddenly the narrative becomes that you simply weren't doing enough.

I used to want to defend myself every time I heard something like that. I wanted to call, explain, send screenshots, forward emails, produce witnesses, and arrive with Exhibit A through Exhibit Q like I was representing myself in Corporate Court. Now I look at it differently. If someone has to rewrite your contribution after you leave to make themselves look better, that says more about the storyteller than it does about the person who left.

People who worked beside you know. The teams you helped know. The people you supported know. Results have a memory, even when leaders suddenly develop convenient amnesia. So yes, my name may still come up. At least I know I left enough of an impact for them to keep saying it every day.

Workday Wants Me to Apply for My Password

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A returning applicant login and reset flow became its own obstacle before the actual job application could start.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted software teams to see how a small login barrier can turn an already frustrating process into a joke.

The other day I found a job I wanted to apply for, clicked the link, and Workday greeted me with “Welcome back,” which was cute because neither of us had any clue who I was.

Apparently I had created an account with this company at some point during one of those late night application marathons. Workday wanted my password. I tried the usual suspects. Wrong. Tried another one. Wrong. Tried the password I reserve for websites that demand one capital letter, one number, one symbol, one hieroglyphic. Still wrong. So I clicked “Forgot Password,” which sounds simple until Workday turns it into a federal identity investigation. At this point, I’d officially applied for the password itself.

First it asked for my email. Easy. Then it said, “We may have found an account.” May have? What is this, a cold case? Am I applying for a job or helping Workday locate a missing person? Then I waited for the reset email. Nothing. Checked spam. Nothing. Checked promotions. Nothing. Checked the email account I barely remember owning and there

it was, sitting quietly like it had been watching me suffer.

I clicked the reset link and Workday informed me my new password could not be similar to my old password. That would have been useful if I remembered the old password. I tried one. Rejected. Added a number. Rejected. Added a symbol. Rejected. By the fourth attempt, my password looked less like something a human should remember and more like the launch code for a submarine.

Finally, Workday accepted it. I logged in feeling like I had defeated the final boss, only to be greeted with, “This account does not exist for this organization.” Excuse me? Same Workday logo. Same blue screen. Same emotional damage. Completely different Workday kingdom. Apparently every company gets its own little universe where I must create a brand new account so I can upload the exact same resume again. Fine. I created another account, uploaded my resume and because technology has clearly reached its peak, Workday immediately asked me to manually type every single thing from that resume into separate

boxes. Work history, dates, education, certifications, phone number, address, previous employer, previous previous employer, and probably my favorite cereal if I kept scrolling.

Forty minutes later, I finally reached Submit. I clicked it. Workday responded, “Your session has expired.” Of course it had. We had been together so long I was considering listing it as a dependent. I signed back in using the password I had created twelve minutes earlier. Incorrect password. That was the moment I realized Workday is not an applicant tracking system. It is an escape room with benefits. The job posting is just the theme.

Your actual interview begins the second the website asks, “Forgot Password?” If you can reset it, create another account, retype your entire career, survive a session timeout, and still remember why you applied, congratulations. You are no longer a candidate. You are qualified to run IT.

Age Jokes Are Still Ageism

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled younger corporate leaders making jokes about older colleagues, technology and energy.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make clear that discrimination does not become harmless simply because someone smiles after saying it.

Ageism rarely walks into a conference room wearing a name tag that says, “Hi, I’m discrimination.” Usually it shows up dressed as humor. It hides inside a joke, gets delivered with a smile, and waits to see who laughs.

I remember working for a corporation where several of my bosses were in their 30s, and part of the leadership culture was making jokes about anyone old enough to remember when phones had cords. Somebody would make a comment about “older people,” technology, energy levels, being “set in their ways,” or how long someone had been around, and the screen would light up with corporate laughter. Others were doing that nervous workplace laugh that says, “I disagree, but I also enjoy direct deposit.”

I stayed quiet for a while. I watched experienced people become the punchline while everyone else played along because the people making the jokes controlled careers. Then one day, during another Zoom call, somebody made another age joke and I finally spoke up. I said, “It’s interesting how much we talk about inclusion here, but apparently

there’s an age limit on who gets included.” You could have heard an HR policy updating itself. Nobody laughed. Cameras froze spiritually. One leader looked like the person he thought would stay quiet had suddenly developed a spine.

Not long after that, I started hearing that I “wasn’t a culture fit.” Corporate America loves that phrase because it can mean anything while meaning nothing at all. Maybe you ask too many questions. Maybe you disagree with leadership. Maybe you do not clap hard enough during town halls. Or maybe you committed the unforgivable offense of pointing out that the joke was not funny. Once I spoke up, everything changed. Small things became “concerns.” Normal disagreements became “attitude.” Direct communication became “tone.” Suddenly people were documenting things that had never mattered before. It felt less like leadership development and more like Corporate CSI: Find a Reason.

That is the part people do not always understand. Speaking up sounds brave when you tell the story later. In the moment, it can be lonely. You replay the call. You wonder if you

should have stayed quiet. You question whether telling the truth was worth putting a target on your back. You watch people who privately agreed with you suddenly become very interested in avoiding eye contact. Eventually you realize the issue was never that you were difficult. The issue was that you made people uncomfortable by saying out loud what everyone else was thinking.

I still would not take it back. Ageism does not become acceptable because somebody adds a laugh track. Experience is not a punchline. Getting older is not a character flaw. If a company’s definition of “culture fit” requires people to laugh at disrespect just to prove they belong, maybe being labeled “not a culture fit” is not the insult they think it is. Sometimes not fitting in means you refused to shrink yourself enough to make bad leadership comfortable.

Bob's Discount Furniture: Sell Me the Couch

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Bob's Discount Furniture interview began with the applicant waiting on a couch and unfolded into a retail-sales exercise.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show the comic side of interview role-play while considering how candidates are evaluated.

Most people apply for jobs because they want the job. I apply since I turned modern hiring into a science experiment with Wi-Fi.

For anyone new here, I apply to real companies, go through their interview process, test how recruiters and hiring managers communicate, and document the experience. I watch whether people show up on time, how many rounds appear, and the moment a normal interview turns into corporate improv.

This week's experiment brought me to Bob's Discount Furniture, and the interview started perfectly. I walked in, checked in, and was told to sit on a couch and wait. Of course I was. Apparently even the waiting room was part of the audition. So there I was, sitting on a couch, thinking, "If someone asks me for a credit application before the interview starts, I'm leaving." Then the hiring manager came out and we started talking. Normal questions. Leadership. Sales. Customer service. Then he looked at me and said, "Sell me this couch."

Perfect. I had been sitting on that couch long enough to develop a relationship with it, so I felt qualified. I said, "Before I sell you this couch, do you have kids? Pets? In laws? Anyone who says they're stopping by for ten minutes and somehow requires dinner and your Netflix password?" He stared. Naturally, I kept going. "This is not just a couch. This is a domestic command center. This is where you watch one episode and wake up four episodes later wondering why Netflix is asking if you're still alive. Decorative pillows cost \$40 each and immediately get thrown on the floor because apparently their job is unemployment."

Then I told him the couch had excellent cross functional seating capacity. The left cushion was operations. The middle cushion was HR because nobody completely understood what it was doing. The recliner was senior leadership because it leaned back while everybody else carried the weight. At that point, I knew: I was getting the job, or my name was being added to a PowerPoint titled "Candidates We Need to Discuss."

Then he asked, "What if the client says it's too expensive?" I said, "I find out what they're comparing it to. If the alternative is folding chairs until 2032, suddenly this sectional looks less like furniture and more like financial planning." He smiled. Then came, "What if they still say no?" I said, "I thank them, keep the relationship open, and let them leave. I do not chase them through the parking lot carrying an ottoman. Legal gets weird about that."

That finally got the laugh. And underneath the jokes, this is why I do these experiments. Interview questions tell you a lot about how a company thinks. Sometimes they test sales skills. Sometimes they test how you handle pressure. Sometimes they reveal someone believes leadership can be measured by your ability to form an emotional bond with a sectional.

I think I sold the couch. Now I'm waiting for the couch to send me a rejection email at 2:17 a.m. saying it decided to move forward with another candidate.

The Ethics Committee Meets the Interview Games

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone directly asked whether testing interviews might take opportunities away from candidates who need a job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to confront an important criticism of the experiment rather than treating every question as an attack.

Every once in a while, someone asks a fair question that makes me stop, laugh, and stare at my laptop like it just scheduled another one way video interview for 7:00 a.m.

Today's question was basically this: if I'm doing interview experiments and I'm not planning to take every job, am I taking an interview away from someone who really needs it? Welcome to the part of The Interview Games where the contestant becomes the ethics committee.

I apply to companies, go through their hiring process, sit through interviews, answer questions, test the systems, and document what candidates actually experience. I do this because the modern hiring process has become a strange combination of game show, obstacle course, personality test, software glitch, and hostage negotiation with Workday. Upload your resume. Now type your resume. Create an account. Forget the password. Reset the password. Answer 47 questions. Record yourself talking to nobody. Then wait three weeks for an email at 2:14 a.m. saying they "decided to

move forward with other candidates."

The concern is that by accepting an interview, I might be taking a spot from someone who wants the job. I understand that argument. The job market is rough, qualified people are getting ignored, and plenty of candidates would trade a kidney for fifteen minutes with a hiring manager instead of another automated rejection from a robot named Talent Acquisition.

But here is the other side. Companies do not usually have one sacred interview chair. They interview multiple candidates, schedule multiple conversations, add rounds, remove rounds, ghost people, reopen jobs, repost jobs, and sometimes interview someone for a position that mysteriously disappears before lunch. I also do not drag these processes out once the experiment has given me what I need. I am not reaching round nine, accepting the company car, choosing my office furniture, and then saying, "Surprise, this was content."

The point is to test the process while behaving like a real candidate. That means seeing whether recruiters show up on time, whether hiring managers know the role, whether interview questions make sense, whether candidates are treated with respect, and whether the experience matches all those beautiful career-page sentences about people being the company's greatest asset.

And occasionally, companies listen. I have had people reach out after posts, ask questions, explain what happened, and look at parts of their process differently. That matters because complaining about hiring from the outside is easy.

Experiencing it from the inside gives you receipts. Still, I appreciate the criticism. If I am going to publicly question companies about integrity, fairness, and wasting candidates' time, people are allowed to question me too. That is how this works.

Just remember one thing: I am not trying to win every job. I am trying to understand the game. And based on what I have seen so far, the game could really use a software update.

Starbucks: The Unofficial Corporate Convention

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Saturday-morning conversation about hiring at a crowded Starbucks provided a familiar cast of laptops and serious faces.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to find humor in everyday corporate habits and the places where hiring talk seems to follow us.

Starbucks on a Saturday morning is less of a coffee shop and more of an unofficial corporate convention where nobody remembers registering.

This morning I met someone there to talk about hiring, interviews, and the circus that has become the job market. I figured we would grab coffee, sit down, and have a normal conversation. That was adorable of me. The place was packed. Every table had a laptop open, someone was wearing AirPods, and at least three people looked like they had been “circling back” since 2022. One guy had two monitors somehow. At Starbucks. On a Saturday. Very relaxing. Very normal.

We finally found two chairs squeezed between a guy whispering into AirPods about “leveraging synergies” and a woman conducting what sounded like a job interview over Zoom. Nothing says relaxing weekend coffee like hearing, “Tell me about a time you handled conflict,” over a screaming blender while someone nearby argues about oat milk.

The person I met asked why I keep doing these interview experiments and I told him because hiring has become one of the strangest experiences in corporate America. Companies ask candidates to upload a resume, retype it, complete an assessment, record a one way video, meet a recruiter, meet a manager, meet another manager, meet someone who apparently just wandered into the meeting and then wait three weeks for an automated email saying they decided to move forward with someone whose qualifications more closely align.

At that point, I said, “I’m starting to think the final interview is just surviving the process.” The guy at the next table laughed. The person I was meeting laughed. The barista laughed. Somewhere, I assume, an applicant received a rejection email. We talked about how candidates are expected to be enthusiastic through every round while companies sometimes cannot even explain what the role does. I told him about interviews where the hiring manager joined late, cameras stayed off, job descriptions changed mid conversation, and everyone kept

saying “culture” like it was a coupon code. Meanwhile, candidates are told to bring energy. Of course we have energy. We have consumed three coffees because your interview process has entered its second fiscal quarter.

What I enjoy most about these conversations is hearing how many people have similar stories. The missed interviews. The ghosting. The mystery assessments. The “urgent” role that disappears for six weeks. The recruiter who promises an update Friday and apparently never specifies which Friday. By the time we finished, Starbucks had somehow become even busier. Another laptop opened. Another meeting started. Someone ordered something with seventeen modifications that sounded more complicated than most compensation plans.

And I realized Saturday morning Starbucks might actually be the perfect place to discuss modern hiring. Everyone is waiting. Everyone is caffeinated. Half the room is working. And nobody is entirely sure what meeting they are in, somehow.

What Happens If I Accept the Offer?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I considered extending my hiring research beyond interviews to the moment an offer is accepted and employment begins.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explore how far meaningful candidate-experience testing can go, and what ethical questions come with the next step.

At some point, every experiment reaches the moment where you either stop, or you look at the button labeled “probably a terrible idea” and think, well, that seems educational.

I’ve been thinking about taking my interview experiments to the next level. Not just applying. Not just making it through the recruiter call. Not just surviving the panel interview where six people stare at you like you’re trying to enter a secret society. I mean actually passing the interview, accepting the offer, getting hired, and documenting what happens during the first few weeks inside the company.

Because honestly, the interview is only the trailer. I want to see the movie now. What happens after the cheerful “Welcome to the team” email? Does the company that spent four interviews talking about communication communicate? Does the hiring manager who said, “My door is always open,” mysteriously become harder to locate than a printer technician? Does the legendary company culture survive contact with Monday morning?

I want to see the onboarding. The training. The first team meeting. The systems everyone assumes you already know. The person who says, “We’ve always done it this way,” before you’ve even finished your first coffee. I want to experience the moment someone gives you a 96 page handbook and says, “You can skim that,” as if there won’t be a quiz hidden inside your soul later.

Week one would probably be introductions. Forty seven names, twelve departments, three people named Mike, and one person nobody can explain. By Wednesday I’d be smiling confidently while silently trying to remember whether Kevin is in Finance, Operations, IT, or simply appears whenever the snacks arrive. Then comes week two, when the corporate honeymoon starts wearing off. Suddenly the “fast paced environment” becomes seventeen urgent emails. “Collaborative culture” becomes a meeting about scheduling another meeting. “We work hard and play hard” becomes someone putting leftover donuts in the break room and calling it employee appreciation.

And I would be sitting there taking mental notes like a wildlife photographer observing management in its natural habitat. The real experiment would be whether reality matches the interview. Companies spend enormous energy selling candidates on culture, leadership, opportunity, growth, communication, flexibility, and values. I want to know what those words look like after the badge works and the recruiter disappears.

Do the promises survive the first 30 days? Does the manager still talk about development once there are deadlines? Does “work life balance” make it past Tuesday? Maybe everything is fantastic. Maybe I discover a company that actually does what it promised. That would be worth documenting too. Or maybe by day nine I’m sitting in orientation wondering why the fire extinguisher has an employee ID.

Either way, I’m starting to think the next chapter of The Interview Games might not end when I get the offer. It might begin there.

Executives Invite Me to Test Their Hiring

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Company executives reportedly began inviting direct feedback by asking me to apply through their processes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize organizations willing to be examined from the outside rather than defending an untested promise.

Something funny is happening with these interview experiments: executives from companies have reached out and asked me to apply so I can experience their hiring process.

I never expected to write that, but somewhere between one way videos, six round interviews, personality assessments, ghosting, and hiring managers joining Zoom calls from an airport bathroom, this became something companies actually want tested. Corporate curiosity officially entered the chat.

For those new here, I experiment with hiring processes. I apply to real jobs, go through the interviews, take notes, and then talk about the candidate experience. Not the polished career page version. I mean the real version. The recruiter who joins late. The hiring manager who has not read the resume. The job description that changes between Tuesday and Thursday. The interview scheduled for 30 minutes that becomes a documentary series.

When the experiment is over, I email a recap directly to the hiring team. Not an angry manifesto. Not a 47 page investigation labeled CONFIDENTIAL. A professional

recap of what worked, what did not, where the process felt confusing, and what the experience looked like from the candidate side. Sometimes I get silence. Sometimes I get a thank you. Sometimes someone from PR magically discovers my email address. A few companies have even told me they made changes after reading the feedback.

The part that makes me laugh is when an executive says, "You should apply here and see how we do it." Challenge accepted. If your company says it has an amazing culture, great communication, candidate first values, and a world class hiring process, I am curious. Does that survive the application? Does the recruiter communicate? Does the hiring manager show up prepared? Does someone explain what the job is before interview number four, or are we all just improvising with confidence? Every company thinks its process is normal. "We only have six rounds." Only? That is not an interview process. That is a limited series. By round five, I should have opening credits and a parking space.

Then come the questions. "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

Hopefully not still interviewing here. "Tell me about a time you handled ambiguity." Three people have already explained this role differently, so technically we are doing it right now. Sometimes the process is fantastic. People are prepared. Communication is clear. Interviews start on time. The role makes sense. Follow up happens. Those companies get mentioned too, because this experiment is not about hunting for failure. It is about seeing whether the experience matches the promise.

So to the executives inviting me to apply, I appreciate the confidence. Just remember, if I do, I am paying attention. I might become a candidate. I might become an employee. And after it is over, your hiring team might receive a detailed email from me explaining how the whole adventure went.

Please make sure somebody charges the Zoom camera.

Great Performance, Suddenly the Problem

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described years of work and results followed by an unexpected, unfair-sounding judgment from leadership.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how organizations damage trust when their evaluations conflict with employees' real contributions.

There is a special kind of corporate magic that happens when you spend years doing what leadership asks, hit the numbers, cut costs, take on work that was never yours, and somehow end up being told that you are the problem.

Someone sent me a message today that felt less like a career story and more like a deleted scene from a business comedy. Four years with no write ups. No reprimands. No dramatic HR meetings where someone slides a folder across the table and says, "We need to talk about your attitude." Instead, this person was running fixed operations, doing more because there was no general manager, cutting headcount, reducing expenses, and still ranking #1 or #2 in gross profit out of more than 50 locations. In most universes, that sounds like the part where someone says, "Great job." In corporate America, it can also be the part where someone opens Excel and asks, "What else can we eliminate?"

Then comes the termination. Not for poor performance. Not because the place was falling apart. Not because customers were chasing employees through the parking lot with

pitchforks. A "technicality." And just to add corporate seasoning, the severance language apparently said, in effect, take this tiny package and we will call it without cause; otherwise, things may become much more "with cause." Nothing says appreciation for four years of performance like a document written by Legal after three coffees and a meeting called Risk Mitigation.

None of us outside the room can know what happened behind closed doors. Maybe there is context missing. Maybe there are details we will never see. But you can understand why someone would look at the timing and ask: Did I just spend months cutting costs, doing three jobs, keeping the operation profitable, and accidentally finish the company's checklist right before my own name became the next line item? That is the strange part of corporate cost cutting. Leadership will tell everyone to "do more with less." So you do. You stretch. You cover vacancies. You protect margin. You make the numbers look better. You become the human version of duct tape holding the operation together. And then one

day somebody realizes the duct tape has a salary.

I always find it fascinating when companies talk about loyalty right up until the spreadsheet gets opened. Employees are expected to give notice, stay professional, protect the brand, train their replacement, return the laptop, leave the keys, and smile on the way out. Meanwhile, the company can go from "You are critical to this operation" to "Your access has been disabled" before your coffee cools down.

If you have ever been blindsided after years of solid performance, you are not alone in wondering whether the official explanation and real business reason were sitting in two different conference rooms. Sometimes the "technicality" is the explanation. Sometimes the budget is the plot twist.

And somewhere, a PowerPoint deck is calling all of it "organizational efficiency."

POST 46 / SATURDAY, OCTOBER 03

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The Coworker Who Became an Unpaid Detective

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on coworkers who closely watch everyone else's time, habits and personal business.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at office surveillance while defending the ability to do good work without constant gossip.

I remember when I thought the most dangerous person at work was the toxic boss. Turns out sometimes the boss is just sitting in an office while your coworker is three desks away running the investigation into your life, your lunch, your schedule, your facial expressions, and why you left five minutes early on a Tuesday in March.

Toxic coworkers are a special category. They do not manage you, but somehow they have promoted themselves to Assistant Regional Director of Everybody Else's Business. They know who is late, who took a long lunch, who got a raise, who looked annoyed in a meeting, and who used the good creamer without replacing it. They have no actual authority, but carry themselves like the CEO personally handed them a clipboard and said, "Please monitor Kevin."

I worked with someone like this once. Every morning started with, "I'm not trying to start anything, but..." which means, "Please clear your schedule because I absolutely came here to start something." Then came the updates. Who said what.

Who was mad at whom. Who told the manager something. Who was getting written up. Who might be leaving. By 9:17 a.m., I knew more office intelligence than the government.

The funniest part was how nice toxic coworkers could be to your face. "Hey! How was your weekend?" Translation: "Please provide details I can misinterpret by noon." You would mention that you were tired and somehow by Friday the rumor was that you hated your job, were interviewing with competitors, selling your house, moving to Montana, and joining a traveling circus. And they loved the phrase, "I'm just looking out for you." No, Karen, you are looking AT me. Constantly. There is a difference.

Then there is the coworker who complains about management every single day, but the second the manager walks in, their spine straightens like they just heard the national anthem. Five minutes earlier they were ready to overthrow corporate America. Now they are volunteering to organize the holiday party and asking if

anyone needs coffee. My favorite toxic coworker was the one who would tell me, "You can trust me." That sentence should come with flashing lights and a waiver. If someone at work repeatedly tells you that you can trust them, there is a decent chance your private conversation already has a sequel, a podcast, and a limited series.

The lesson I learned is that toxic workplaces are not always created by the person with the biggest title. Sometimes they are built one whispered conversation, one fake concern, one screenshot, and one "don't tell anyone I told you this" at a time. So yes, toxic bosses deserve attention. But toxic coworkers deserve their own employee handbook section. Right between "Workplace Safety" and "Please Stop Replying All."

Because nothing destroys teamwork faster than someone whose actual job is accounting but whose true passion is amateur surveillance. And if you are wondering whether your office has one, do not worry. They already know you asked.

The Movie Theater Manager Sees a Threat

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A story about an experienced assistant-manager applicant suggested the interviewer felt threatened by the applicant's experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question leaders who mistake competence for competition and punish qualified candidates for it.

Some interviews do not need a red flag. They need a marching band, fireworks, and a giant sign that says, "RUN." Because if the person interviewing you looks at your years of experience and thinks, "This person is coming for my chair," we are no longer having a job interview. We are watching insecurity put on a name badge.

A man applied for an assistant manager job at a movie theater. He had more than ten years of management experience. You would think that would be good news. Instead, the manager looked at the resume like it had just threatened his family and said, "You have more experience than I have years of age. That makes me think you would come for my position." Sir. Nobody was coming for your position. Until that sentence, I am not sure anyone knew your position was worth coming for.

This is one of those interview moments where the candidate should have been handed popcorn because the manager was screening his own thriller. The job posting said assistant manager. The interview became "Protect the Throne: Cinema Edition." And can we talk about the

logic? We constantly hear companies say they want experience. They want leadership. They want maturity. They want someone who can hit the ground running. Then somebody walks in with all of that and management starts clutching the office keys: "Not THAT much experience!"

What exactly is the preferred amount? Seven years? Enough to solve problems, but not enough to make Brad nervous near the soda machine? The candidate's response was beautiful: "Why, are you doing things wrong and against company policy?" I would have paid movie theater prices to see the manager's face after that. Throw in the \$14 popcorn. Take my money. Was it the most polished corporate answer? Probably not. Was it a perfect response to an absurd question? Absolutely. Sometimes professionalism gets tired too.

This is the part of ageism nobody likes to admit. It is not always someone saying, "You are too old." Sometimes it shows up wearing a polo shirt and asking whether your experience makes you a threat. Sometimes a candidate is not rejected because they cannot do the

job. They are rejected because they might do it too well and make an insecure manager uncomfortable. That is not hiring. That is ego protection with an applicant tracking system.

Good leaders hire people who know things they do not. Good leaders want people around them. Good leaders do not look at a strong resume and imagine a workplace coup taking place between the concession stand and Theater 6. If your first reaction to a qualified candidate is fear that they may replace you, perhaps the candidate is not the biggest risk in the room. And to every experienced worker who has been made to feel like your years in the business are somehow suspicious: keep the experience. Keep the confidence. Keep asking questions.

Because apparently some interviews are not about whether you can do the job. They are about whether the manager can survive your resume.

The One-Way Interview and the Windows Update

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another automated video-screening discussion highlighted the awkwardness of explaining interpersonal skills to an empty webcam.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge the assumption that convenience for employers automatically creates a good assessment for applicants.

Nothing says “people are our greatest asset” like making those people audition for a webcam because your company couldn’t spare an actual person. I’m supposed to prove I can build relationships to a device that just asked me to update Windows. The chemistry is unreal.

Someone asked me how I get past these things. Honestly I prepare examples, answer the question, and try to sound like a functioning adult. Then I sprinkle in enough enthusiasm to suggest I have a framed picture of their mission statement above my bed. I can feel my soul submitting its two week notice.

The invitation always says, “We’re excited to get to know you!” Wonderful. Who is “we”? Because right now I’m getting to know my own reflection and a loading circle. I’ve had more meaningful conversations with the self checkout machine. At least that lady talks back. This thing just watches me explain a workplace conflict like I’m confessing to a crime. Then comes the practice question. “Tell us something interesting about yourself.” Well, I used to believe

interviews involved another person. Apparently that was a little hobby from the olden days, along with pensions and being able to afford groceries. Now I’m auditioning for employment in my dining room while praying nobody flushes a toilet during my answer about executive presence.

You get sixty seconds to describe a complex achievement. Sixty. The company needed four paragraphs to explain where to click, but I should summarize fifteen years of experience before the microwave finishes reheating soup. “Describe a time you transformed a struggling team.” Absolutely. First, there was a staffing issue, then I implemented a new... RECORDING COMPLETE. Fantastic. They hired the suspense. And the retakes? Nothing builds confidence like watching yourself say “I’m a strong communicator” immediately before forgetting every word ever invented. By take three, I’m smiling like a hostage holding today’s newspaper. By take five, I’ve developed a personal feud with the houseplant behind me. It doesn’t need health insurance.

For my experiments, I keep going because I want to see what happens next. Sometimes I get through. Sometimes I don’t. Passing one doesn’t make this process brilliant, and getting rejected doesn’t mean you lack talent. You’re trying to show a human being who you are through a recording, without their questions, reactions, or clarification. That’s a strange obstacle to put between people and a paycheck.

The funniest part is advancing to a live interview and finding the recruiter has their camera off. I had to perform like a motivational speaker trapped inside a ring light, but you get to be a black square named Jennifer? Lovely. I hope my lighting met the standards of your invisible face.

Companies, if communication matters that much, perhaps demonstrate some. Ask a question. Listen to the answer. Have a conversation. I promise the candidate won’t demand a documentary crew. We’d just like proof that somebody works there.

HR, Why Does This Take Six Rounds?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation with an HR leader turned tense when I questioned the need for six panel interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to examine whether their process respects candidate time rather than relying on slogans about respect.

There is a moment in every corporate conversation when you realize you have questioned something nobody was supposed to question. Mine happened when I asked an HR leader why a company needs six rounds of panel interviews to hire one person. Based on her reaction, I may as well have asked whether we could cancel all meetings and let the office printer make final hiring decisions. Apparently, I had challenged the system.

This HR leader is all over LinkedIn talking about “respecting candidates,” “moving with urgency,” and “creating a human hiring experience.” So I asked: if we care so much about candidates’ time, why are some companies scheduling six panels, three reschedules, and just to decide whether one human can do one job?

She did not agree with me. Apparently, every stakeholder brings a “unique perspective.” I said, “At six panels, I’m not interviewing anymore. I’m testifying before Congress.” She explained that multiple interviews reduce bias and improve alignment. Fair enough. But when the fifth person asks, “Tell

me about yourself,” I start wondering if the company has discovered email yet. By the sixth time, I’m changing the story. “Well, I was raised by wolves, trained dolphins for the Navy, studied spreadsheets in Switzerland, and survived Teams.”

Then come the classics. “Tell me about a time you handled conflict.” This hiring process. “Where do you see yourself in five years?” At this pace? Still waiting for round nine. “What questions do you have for us?” Yes. Who makes the hiring decision, and have they been notified that this position is open? She told me panels also allow candidates to meet more of the team. I said, “That’s wonderful. I don’t meet every employee at Costco before buying toilet paper.” That earned me the classic corporate smile.

I understand the logic. Different perspectives can make hiring better. But there is a point where due diligence turns into corporate speed dating with name tags. More interviews do not automatically make the decision better. Sometimes they create twelve opinions, four scheduling conflicts, three people

saying “I thought you were covering that,” and one director who opened your resume during the interview and now has veto power over your career.

Then, two weeks later, comes the legendary email: “After careful consideration...” Careful? You considered me so carefully my family started asking when my dental benefits begin. Every interview should have a purpose. If nobody can explain what interview six will uncover that the first five missed, maybe the answer is not another calendar invite. She still disagreed, and that is fine. We can form a committee, create a scorecard, invite Legal, ask Finance for feedback, schedule a follow up, reschedule it, and circle back sometime before retirement.

Meanwhile, tomorrow someone will post on LinkedIn: “Hiring needs to be faster, simpler, and more human.” I’ll probably like it. Then I’ll check my inbox to see whether round seven has been scheduled.

Overqualified: The Fortune Cookie of Hiring

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The phrases “overqualified” and “afraid you’ll leave” came up as familiar reasons given to experienced applicants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show why vague fears about retention should not replace a candid discussion with a qualified person.

There are two phrases in hiring that always make me laugh because they sound less like interview feedback and more like fortune cookies written by nervous managers: “You’re overqualified” and “We’re afraid you’ll leave soon.”

Overqualified is such a strange complaint. Imagine going to a restaurant and the chef says, “I’m sorry, sir, this steak is too good for you. We’re concerned you may enjoy it too much.” That is basically what happens when a company looks at years of experience, leadership, problem solving, and results and says, “Whoa. That seems dangerous.” I’ve heard it enough times that I’m tempted to respond, “Don’t worry. I can forget some things before Monday.”

The funniest part is the job description usually asks for everything. Ten years of experience. Leadership. Strategy. Operations. Budgeting. Analytics. Coaching. Crisis management. Excel. PowerPoint. Maybe the ability to land a small aircraft during a thunderstorm. Then you show up with those qualifications and suddenly everybody gets nervous.

“Wow, you’ve done a lot.” Yes. That was the assignment. You ordered the deluxe package, and now you’re surprised it came with options.

Then comes my favorite: “We’re afraid you’ll leave soon.” That one fascinates me because apparently we are planning my resignation before I’ve received the offer. I haven’t gotten a badge yet and somehow HR has already imagined me dramatically throwing it onto a desk six months from now while inspirational music plays in the background. My response is simple: if the work is meaningful, the compensation is fair, the leadership is good, and the culture is healthy, why are we assuming I’m already looking for the emergency exit? Maybe ask why people leave instead.

Experienced candidates are not automatically flight risks. Sometimes they are exactly what you need: people who have already made mistakes somewhere else, learned from them, and can save you the exciting opportunity of making the same expensive mistakes again. And yes, experienced people know their value. That should be useful. If I apply for the job, interview for the

job, explain why I want the job, and keep showing up to your seven calendar invite hiring marathon, there is a good chance I actually want the job. I’m not collecting interviews like baseball cards. That says plenty.

Being “overqualified” does not mean someone expects to become CEO by Thursday. Sometimes people want different priorities. A better culture. Less travel. More purpose. A new industry. A shorter commute. Or maybe they are simply tired of spending every waking hour inside a conference call named “Quick Sync” that somehow lasts 93 minutes. So if you think I’m overqualified, ask me why I want the role. If you think I’ll leave, ask what would make me stay. Those are conversations.

“You’re overqualified” is corporate astrology. “We’re afraid you’ll leave soon” is an exit interview being conducted before orientation. At least let me steal a pen from the supply closet first.

Pace Transportation: One Job, Five Jobs Worth of Duties

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Reviewing a Pace Transportation Services commercial director posting raised questions about the scope bundled into one role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to write realistic job descriptions and be clear about the responsibilities they are asking one person to own.

Some job descriptions explain the job. Others make you wonder whether the company is hiring one person or quietly replacing an entire executive committee.

The other day I sat down with a hiring manager and reviewed a posting from Pace Transportation Services for a Commercial Director of Retail Parts Sales & Operations. I wanted to experience it as a real candidate would: read the description, figure out what the company needs, decide whether the role makes sense, and measure how long it takes to apply. The title sounded simple enough. Then I started scrolling. Revenue. Gross profit. Sales strategy. Inventory. Pricing. Customer retention. Warehouse processes. Purchasing. Marketing. People Operations. Recruiting. IT systems. Supplier relationships. Facility performance. By the halfway point I was expecting a bullet that said, “Must be able to unload a trailer, negotiate a vendor contract, conduct a performance review, and fix the printer before lunch.”

I looked at the hiring manager and said, “Just so I understand, are we

hiring a director or assembling a small government?” He laughed, which was already a better candidate experience than interviews I have attended. Then we went line by line and talked about what was important versus what had simply accumulated over time. This happens more than companies realize. One responsibility gets added. Then another. Somebody remembers a project from 2019. Eventually the job description becomes the corporate version of a junk drawer: everything is in there, but nobody remembers why.

Then we timed the application. Finding the posting was easy. Reading it carefully was not. A serious candidate is comparing their background to the requirements, researching the company, adjusting a resume, answering questions, reviewing everything twice, and wondering whether “Easy Apply” was named by the same people who call a two hour panel interview a “quick conversation.” By the time someone hits submit, they may have invested time before a human at the company has even seen their name. That is why companies should

occasionally complete their own hiring process. Read every word. Click every button. Upload the resume. Answer every question. Count every minute.

Candidate experience does not begin when a recruiter schedules an interview. It begins the second someone sees the posting and decides whether your company is worth the effort. Pace Transportation Services gave me a great example of why these conversations matter. The role may be a strong opportunity, but when one description combines sales, operations, finance, inventory, customer growth, people development, purchasing, supplier management, and enough responsibilities to qualify for its own zip code, candidates have to work harder to understand what really matters.

My experiment keeps teaching me the same thing: hiring processes usually make perfect sense from inside the company. Then you experience them from the candidate side. Suddenly, you notice everything.

The Resume That Pretends to Be Younger

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Advice to remove years and dates from resumes exposed the tension between showcasing experience and trying to avoid age bias.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question a market that encourages professionals to conceal the very background they worked hard to build.

Apparently one of the strangest career strategies in 2026 is pretending you have less experience so somebody will finally notice how much experience you have.

I keep hearing the same story from talented professionals: “Take the first ten years off your resume. Remove the graduation date. Shorten the timeline. Make yourself look younger on paper.” We spend decades building skills, leading teams, adapting to new technology, fixing problems no training video could prepare us for, and then somebody whispers, “Great background. Now hide half of it so Talent Acquisition doesn’t accidentally realize you remember dial-up internet.”

It is not just changing a resume. It is being told that parts of your life, your growth, your sacrifices, and your accomplishments may count against you. Imagine telling a marathon runner, “Congratulations on finishing 26 miles. For the application though, can we say you only ran 12? We don’t want to intimidate the treadmill.”

And ageism rarely announces itself honestly. Nobody sends an email saying, “We loved your

qualifications, but unfortunately you possess dangerous levels of wisdom.” Instead, it gets dressed up in corporate language. “We’re looking for someone with more energy.” “We want someone who can grow with us.” “We’re seeking a fresh perspective.” Fresh perspective? I have yogurt in my refrigerator with a fresher perspective than some companies’ hiring processes.

This is one reason I keep talking about the hiring experience. People are not statistics sitting behind resumes. They are human beings trying to pay mortgages, support families, rebuild after layoffs, and stay relevant in a system that sometimes treats experience like an expired coupon. And then companies turn around and post, “We can’t find qualified candidates.” Of course not. You told half of them to delete the qualifications.

The part that gives me hope is what so many people eventually figure out: sometimes your network becomes the door when the resume system becomes the wall. A conversation lets someone hear the story behind the dates. A hiring manager can see the person instead

of counting how many presidents were in office during your career. But we should not need resume camouflage to be considered valuable. Nobody should have to erase ten years of their life just to earn a 30 minute conversation with someone who is going to spend the first five minutes saying, “Tell me about yourself.”

If you are in your 40s, 50s, 60s, or beyond and someone has made you feel like your experience is suddenly a liability, remember this: companies spend millions trying to buy institutional knowledge, judgment, resilience, and problem solving. Then some hiring processes reject the people who already have it because the graduation date made the spreadsheet nervous.

Experience is not something to apologize for. It is not a typo to delete. And it definitely should not require a fake mustache, a TikTok account, and a resume that mysteriously begins in 2014.

Would You Be Comfortable With a Younger Team?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview question about working with younger colleagues shifted attention from results toward the candidate's age.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how seemingly polite age-coded questions can reveal assumptions a candidate should not have to answer for.

You can learn a lot about a company before you ever get the job. Sometimes it takes one hiring manager, one awkward question, and eleven seconds to see exactly what kind of training the company forgot to provide.

The other day, I was talking with a hiring manager when the conversation took a sharp left turn from leadership, results, and experience into what felt like a polite age investigation. He looked at me and said, "You've been doing this a long time. Would you be comfortable working with a younger team?" There it was. Not, "How do you lead different generations?" Nope. Just the corporate version of, "So... do you know what TikTok is?"

I smiled and said, "Absolutely. I've worked with younger teams, older teams, mixed teams, and teams where everyone acted thirteen before their second cup of coffee." No laugh. Then he followed with, "Would you have any issue reporting to someone younger than you?" I said, "Only if they schedule a 7:00 a.m. meeting to discuss why we have too many meetings." Still nothing. At that point, I realized my experience

was no longer being treated like an asset. Somehow it had become suspicious evidence.

This is why companies need to train hiring managers. Ageism does not always show up wearing a sandwich board that says, "WE PREFER YOUNGER PEOPLE." It hides behind phrases like "culture fit," "energy," "long term potential," "fresh perspective," or questions about whether someone can keep up with a younger team. Sometimes it is simply a manager who was never trained. That matters every time.

Companies spend thousands building employer brands. They create culture videos, publish values statements, and post smiling employees carrying coffee through bright offices. Then Bob from Operations joins the interview and asks whether you can "handle working for someone younger." Congratulations. Bob just destroyed six months of employer branding work before the recruiter finished her latte.

Interviewing is a skill. If you want to know whether someone can adapt, ask about change. If you want to

know whether someone understands technology, ask about technology. If you want to know whether someone can lead younger employees, ask for examples. If you want to know whether someone can report to a younger leader, ask yourself why the leader's age matters.

Experienced candidates are not asking for a senior citizen discount on the interview process. They want the same thing every candidate deserves: to be evaluated on their ability to do the job. Ask about results. Ask about leadership. Ask about mistakes. Ask about learning. Ask about conflict. Ask about growth. Just skip the part where the interview accidentally becomes "Guess What Year I Graduated."

My experiment keeps teaching me the same thing: the candidate experience is only as professional as the person conducting the interview. Train your hiring managers. Because one careless question can reveal more about your culture than fifty pages of corporate values ever will.

The Job Posting That Keeps Coming Back

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A VP interview prompted the question of why a repeatedly removed and reposted position never seemed to stay filled.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted greater transparency about whether recurring listings represent a real, active opening.

At some point, a job posting that keeps disappearing and coming back stops looking like an opening and starts looking like a seasonal decoration.

Recently, I had an interview with a VP for a position I had been watching. The role had been posted, removed, reposted and refreshed so many times that I figured LinkedIn should send it a birthday cake.

When the conversation opened up for questions, I asked the one thing candidates notice but rarely ask: “Why does this job keep getting reposted?” There was a pause. Not a normal pause. An executive pause. The kind where you can hear Legal and HR meeting inside his head. The VP smiled and explained that they were “still looking for the right person.” How right are we talking? Are we looking for a qualified leader, or a unicorn with fourteen years of experience in software created last Tuesday, an MBA, perfect culture fit, and the salary expectations of a summer intern?

I asked how many people they had interviewed. “Quite a few.” Some had the experience but were not the right culture fit. Others made it far, but leadership decided to “reassess

the profile.” Corporate language for: “We ordered a cheeseburger, interviewed twelve cheeseburgers, then decided we may actually want sushi.” I asked whether the company ever considered that maybe the candidate pool was not the problem. Another pause. I said, “If hundreds apply, dozens are screened, several are interviewed, nobody gets hired, and the job keeps returning, at what point does the job posting itself get placed on a performance improvement plan?” He laughed, because there are only two outcomes after making that joke to a VP: laughter or your Zoom meeting suddenly becoming much shorter.

The conversation improved. He admitted expectations had changed. Different leaders wanted different things. Responsibilities expanded. Every time they got close to someone, another opinion entered the room. Basically, they were assembling the Avengers, but nobody had agreed which superhero they needed. One person wanted strategy, another operations, somebody else transformation, and I was waiting for someone to ask whether the

candidate could also fix the office copier.

This is one of the strangest things I keep seeing during my Interview Games experiment. Companies repost the same role for months while candidates stare at the listing wondering what magical qualification they are missing. Sometimes, nothing is missing. Sometimes the company is still deciding whether it wants Batman, an accountant, or Batman who also knows Excel. Budgets change. Candidates decline offers. Priorities shift. A reposted job does not automatically mean a bad company, but when a position keeps coming back like a corporate boomerang, asking why is fair.

Candidates are expected to explain every gap, move, short tenure, and comma on their resume. The job posting can answer a few questions too. At this rate, some of these roles are not being filled. They are being renewed for another season.

Listening In on a Panel Interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone invited me to silently listen to a panel interview and assess the questions and participants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how interviews also reveal the culture and preparation of the people asking the questions.

Some interview rooms are designed to evaluate the candidate. Others accidentally reveal the people doing the evaluating. The other day, someone asked me to listen in during their panel interview. They put me on speaker phone and told me not to say anything, so there I was listening like a budget FBI operation sponsored by LinkedIn.

The interview started normally enough. Leadership. Results. Team development. Conflict. Strategy. The usual questions companies ask when they want someone experienced enough to solve their problems but apparently not experienced enough to remind them that time has passed. Then one of the panelists said, "You've been doing this a long time. How would you feel reporting to someone younger than you?" I stopped what I was doing. Then another person laughed and said something about whether the candidate could "keep up with the younger crowd." That sentence hit differently because ageism rarely arrives with someone announcing, "Welcome to our age discrimination portion of the interview." It slips in through jokes, hides behind culture, and gets dressed up as concern about energy,

adaptability, technology, or whether an experienced person will be "comfortable" around younger leadership.

I sent the candidate a text: Ask them the same question in reverse. A few minutes later, the panel asked whether they had any questions. The candidate said, "Would you ask a 30 year old candidate if they were comfortable reporting to someone in their 50s?" Silence. Not awkward silence. Premium corporate silence. The kind where everyone suddenly remembers the HR training they let play in another browser tab while answering emails. One panel member said, "That's not really what we meant." The candidate calmly replied, "I understand. I'm just curious why age became relevant when discussing my ability to do the job." I almost applauded into the phone.

That is the part people misunderstand about calling out ageism. You do not have to scream, insult, or turn the interview into a courtroom drama. Sometimes you just hold up a mirror and let people hear their own question coming back at them. Experience is not a warning label. Gray hair is not a

software compatibility issue. Having worked through multiple economic cycles does not mean someone needs help finding the power button, and knowing what a fax machine does does not disqualify from understanding Teams.

The candidate stayed professional and finished the interview. No meltdown. No lecture. Just calm confidence. And maybe that is why the moment mattered so much. Candidates are constantly told to prove they can adapt, learn, change, lead, and fit the culture. Companies should be able to prove something too: that they can look at experience without treating it like an expiration date.

Sometimes one question can expose more about a workplace than six rounds of interviews ever will. That question did not derail the interview. It simply forced everyone in the room to hear what had just been said.

7 Brew Adds Protein to the Job Search

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A 7 Brew Coffee run and an advertised protein boost became the backdrop for a joke about hiring-marathon stamina.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give readers a funny everyday intermission from the heaviness of job searching.

Earlier today I drove to my local 7 Brew Coffee because apparently job hunting in 2026 requires caffeine, protein, emotional support, and stamina for a six round interview marathon.

I pulled into the drive thru expecting something cold, sweet, and strong enough to make me believe the recruiter who said, “We’ll circle back by Friday,” might actually circle back by Friday. Then I saw 7 Brew now offers a Protein Boost with 15 grams of protein, and suddenly my coffee had better benefits than half the jobs I’ve applied for.

Naturally, I had questions. If I add protein before an interview, am I now a stronger candidate? Does 15 grams cancel out a one way video interview? If I order two, can I survive a panel of seven people asking the same question in different corporate dialects?

Job searching has become an endurance sport. You need a customized resume, a cover letter nobody may read, three passwords for Workday, an assessment, a recruiter screen, a hiring manager interview, a panel, another panel, and finally an executive who joins

twelve minutes late and asks, “So, what brings you here today?” Sir, at this point, destiny.

That’s why I respect the Protein Boost. It is honest. Fifteen grams of protein. No “competitive protein package.” No “protein range based on experience.” No assessment to determine whether I’m culturally aligned with vanilla. Imagine if hiring worked like ordering coffee. “Hi, I’d like the Operations Director position.” “Full time?” “Yes.” “Great. Salary range is on the menu. One interview, decision tomorrow. Want benefits with that?” I would climb through the drive thru window and hug somebody.

Instead, job descriptions read like they are hiring Batman. Fifteen years of experience, MBA preferred, expert in twelve systems, willing to travel 70%, available nights and weekends, inspirational leader, strategic thinker, therapist, magician, and must thrive in a fast paced environment. Salary: “competitive.” Competitive with what? My electric bill?

By the time I got my drink, I realized this protein thing might be perfect for job seekers. We need strength. Strength to open another rejection

email beginning with “After careful consideration.” Strength to smile when the interviewer says, “We’re like a family here.” Strength to avoid asking which family, because I’ve watched enough documentaries to know that sentence can go several directions.

At least the coffee doesn’t ghost me after asking me to complete an assessment before breakfast. I still didn’t go to the gym. But I did apply for jobs, survive corporate websites, remember my Workday password on the third attempt, and prepare for another interview where someone may ask where I see myself in five years. Hopefully not still interviewing.

At this point, forget a Protein Boost. Job seekers need an Interview Boost: protein, caffeine, unlimited patience, salary transparency, and a tiny voice from the cup whispering: “You are qualified. The recruiter is just running late.”

Three Engineers. Three Different Hiring Processes.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described three referred AI-engineer candidates facing inconsistent assessments for the same role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge unequal processes that make it difficult to compare people fairly.

Sometimes the hiring process does not need another interview. It needs a referee and project manager because apparently three qualified candidates can enter the same process and somehow compete in three completely different events.

Someone sent me a story about referring three strong engineers for the same AI Engineer role. You would think that means same process, same expectations, same test, same finish line. That was adorable.

Candidate number one gets through HR, receives the technical assignment, asks the recruiter who should be given access to the GitHub work, and is basically told, "They'll assess it." Assess what? The vibes? Were the interviewers expected to place two fingers on the laptop and whisper, "I sense clean architecture"? Nobody had access. Candidate loses.

By candidate number two, the company has discovered the technology known as "inviting people to Git." Progress! Except now the technical expectations have changed. The written instructions

still say one thing, but a committee has decided the test means something else. Candidate two delivers what the instructions requested and loses because the secret answer key was rewritten in invisible ink.

Then candidate number three arrives. This person survives HR, the submission, the technical assessment, the trick questions, the architectural debate. Two days later, the recruiter says: "We love you. Next step is the behavioral interview with the CTO. Final step." And then... silence. Corporate silence. The kind that lives somewhere between "circle back" and "we're aligning internally."

After two follow ups, the answer finally arrives: the company has decided they want a different profile for the role. Of course they do. Nothing says "strategic hiring" like putting three people through three versions of the same obstacle course and deciding after someone reaches the finish line that you were actually looking for a swimmer.

Sometimes candidates are not failing. The process is changing

underneath them. Different recruiters hear different instructions. Different leaders want different things. The job description becomes historical fiction. The assessment becomes a scavenger hunt. Every new executive opinion adds another requirement until the company is no longer hiring an AI Engineer. They are searching for Iron Man with Python experience, executive presence, weekend availability, and the ability to repair the office copier.

Then, after weeks of interviews, the candidate gets the famous line: "We decided to go in a different direction." Apparently that direction was discovered after everyone else had already been driving for six exits.

Companies, before asking candidates to prove they can solve complex problems, maybe solve one yourselves: What exactly are you hiring for today? Because if three candidates enter the same race and each gets a different track, different rules, and a different finish line, that is not a hiring process. That is Mario Kart with dental benefits.

Netflix: The Application Before the Interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Netflix hiring experiment encountered friction in the lengthy application before any conversation could begin.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to remember the job seeker's first experience of the company is often its application software.

Most people only see the job posting. My experiment starts where the candidate experience begins: the application, assessments, technology, interviews, and every strange obstacle between “Apply Now” and “We’ll be in touch.”

Netflix became a tough hiring experiment, and the first challenge showed up before I ever spoke to a human. The application took so long that halfway through I started wondering whether I was applying for a job or producing a documentary about my employment history. Resume uploaded. Employment history entered again. Questions answered. By the time I clicked submit, I expected Netflix to ask, “Are you still applying?”

Then came the A.I interview. Sitting in front of a camera answering questions for technology to evaluate is nothing like talking with a recruiter who can smile, react, or ask a follow up. It was just me, a camera, a question, a timer, and the knowledge that my responses were being analyzed before I ever reached the humans. Am I talking too quickly? Too slowly? Did I use the right words? Did I blink too much?

My imaginary scorecard: Leadership: 92. Communication: 88. Confidence: 90. Suspicious eyebrow movement: under review.

Eventually, I made it through that stage and reached the humans. Then came the panel interview. I remember thinking, finally, a normal conversation. Netflix apparently had approved another season. The panel was intense. Questions came about leadership, conflict, mistakes, difficult decisions, and results. One person would finish and another would jump in with the sequel. Very on brand. I kept waiting for somebody to say, “Skip intro.” One question focused on making a major decision without all the information. I explained what I knew, what I didn’t know, the decision I made, and the outcome. Then came silence. Only a few seconds, but in an interview that feels approximately three fiscal quarters. My brain whispered, “Excellent. We are unemployed forever.”

Then another question came. And another. By the end, I felt like I had completed a marathon application, auditioned for an algorithm,

defended a dissertation, and appeared before a corporate jury, all for the possibility of receiving an email beginning with, “After careful consideration...”

That is exactly why I do these experiments. Companies are evaluating candidates, but candidates should be evaluating companies too. Did the technology improve the experience, or simply add another gate? Did the interview allow you to show who you are, or reduce you to scores, keywords, and timed answers?

Technology can make hiring faster, but faster does not automatically mean better. There is still a real person on the other side of that screen who spent time applying, preparing, answering questions, making it through automated stages, and sitting in front of a panel hoping the process measured more than performance inside a hiring obstacle course.

Netflix was one of the toughest experiments I have done. Great content. Very difficult season finale.

The People Who Applaud and Secretly Compete

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on colleagues who appear supportive in public but treat another person's success as a threat.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to protect their progress and recognize the difference between real support and professional jealousy.

Not everyone wants you to succeed. Some people will clap for you in public, congratulate you in the comments, shake your hand in the hallway, and then privately act like your progress is a software bug that needs to be reported to IT.

I remember when I started doing well in a role and suddenly a few people around me became part time detectives. They were interested in how I possibly got recognized. Every compliment I received created a small internal investigation. Every win required a congressional hearing. If the boss said, "Great job," someone nearby looked like they had just bitten into a lemon they paid \$14 for.

That is when I learned something important: envy rarely introduces itself honestly. Nobody walks into your office and says, "Good morning, I am deeply irritated by your success." No, it arrives wearing business casual. It smiles. It says, "I'm just concerned." Concerned about what? That I hit the goal? That customers liked me? That the numbers were good? Apparently excellence had become a workplace safety issue.

The funniest part was watching people suddenly become experts on everything I was supposedly doing wrong. They could not explain their own numbers, but they had a 46 slide presentation ready on mine. I would hear, "Well, Alex only succeeded because..." and then came a story so creative Netflix should have bought the rights. Luck. Timing. Favoritism. Easy territory. Mercury in retrograde. Anything except the possibility that maybe I worked my tail off. I wanted everyone to understand my intentions. I wanted people to know how much effort happened behind the scenes. The late nights. The early mornings. The mistakes. The pressure. The moments when I doubted myself. I thought if people knew the whole story, they would stop judging the ending.

They did not. Eventually I realized I was wasting energy trying to convince people who had already decided my success offended them. Here is the emotional part nobody talks about: sometimes the hardest thing about growing is discovering who liked you better when you were struggling. Some people are

comfortable cheering for your potential because potential is harmless. But once potential becomes results, promotions, opportunities, confidence, or a bigger platform, suddenly the applause gets quieter.

That hurts, especially when it comes from people you supported. But it also teaches you. You learn who celebrates you without needing to compete with you. You learn who asks how they can help instead of asking who helped you. You learn that real friends do not need you to shrink so they can feel tall. And you learn that your job is not to make your light less bright because someone else forgot to replace their batteries.

Let them talk. Let them investigate. Let them hold emergency meetings about your success next to the broken copier. You do not need permission to grow. And if your progress makes someone uncomfortable, wish them well, hand them a pair of sunglasses, and keep moving.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

Before I close this edition, I keep thinking about how much happened in a single week. There were automated interviews, a suspiciously fast rejection, an application system that turned password recovery into a career obstacle, job descriptions that appeared to require multiple human beings, and panels that could have filled the opening scene of a courtroom drama. There was also a conversation with a leader who took feedback seriously. Those are the moments I pay attention to: not just when a system fails, but when someone decides it can be better.

The Interview Games has become a funny name for something that is not always funny. There are people looking for work after losing a job they depended on. There are parents staring at bills while waiting for a call. There are experienced professionals who are tired of being told they are “overqualified,” as though decades spent learning how to solve problems are now evidence against them. And there are younger applicants who deserve a genuine opportunity instead of a twenty-step audition for a job that may already be filled.

I make jokes because sometimes a joke is the only safe way to say something everyone recognizes. It lets us talk about the recruiter who vanishes, the hiring manager who joins late, or the webcam that wants to measure charisma. But comedy is not a substitute for accountability. If every candidate is laughing at the same absurd situation, the company should be asking why. The useful question is not “How do we stop people posting about this?” It is “Why did they experience this in the first place?”

That is also why I have to recognize the people who get it right. One company leader who listens to a candidate can teach an entire organization something about respect. One recruiter who communicates clearly can make a difficult week feel a little lighter. One hiring manager who reads the resume before the interview can perform an act so revolutionary that somewhere a corporate committee will want to name an award after it. I hope we eventually stop treating those ordinary courtesies as exceptional.

There is another lesson running through these posts: your career is bigger than the title on your business card. A role can end suddenly. A badge can stop working before the goodbye conversations begin. An old boss can decide to write a new history of your performance after you leave. And some coworkers will congratulate you in public while privately asking why you were recognized. None of that changes the results you delivered, the teams you helped or the person you were when nobody was watching.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

I think about the message from the reader who said these posts help her and her daughter through the search. That matters to me more than a clever line about Workday. A candidate can spend hours trying to be perfect and still receive a cold rejection in minutes. If a story makes that person laugh, feel seen, or decide to keep going tomorrow, it did something worthwhile. The shared experience is more important than making a company the butt of a joke.

Companies, here is the simplest improvement I can suggest: go through your own process as an ordinary applicant. Start with the job posting. Create the account. Reset the password. Upload the resume. Type the resume again because the software apparently distrusts attachments. Answer the timed video questions to an empty camera. Wait for the interview. Try asking when the decision will be made. Then look at how long it takes to receive an answer, or whether you receive one at all.

If that journey feels respectful and useful, you have something to be proud of. If it feels like you are trying to enter a secret society through a broken vending machine, perhaps schedule fewer brainstorming meetings and fix the vending machine. The candidate experience is not a side project. It is the first example of how a company treats the people who might work there. No employer-brand video can erase what the person actually experienced.

To everyone applying right now: be thoughtful about your time. Ask clear questions. Keep learning, but do not let a computer make you feel less capable. Rejection is information about one hiring decision, not a complete review of your worth. Experience is not an expiration date. A layoff is not your identity. A nervous interview answer is not your entire career. You are allowed to be disappointed, to laugh at the nonsense, and to try again when you have the energy.

And to the executives, recruiters and managers who are reading along: you are welcome here. You do not have to agree with everything I write. Tell me where I am wrong. Tell me what you have fixed. Invite feedback. The most useful thing a leader can do with an uncomfortable story is learn from it rather than summon three departments to decide whether the word “raccoon” violates the social-media policy.

I am going to keep documenting the stories, the successful experiments and the glorious corporate confusion. My goal has never been to prove that everybody in hiring is terrible. It is to make the process a little more human, one awkward interview at a time. If we can do that while sharing a few laughs, maybe this strange experiment will leave something worthwhile behind.

Until next time, protect your time, respect your experience, and remember that behind every application is an actual human being. If a company needs nine interviews to discover that, somebody may want to schedule a tenth meeting to review the calendar.