



SEPTEMBER 7 - SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

60

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

120

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a question that should be easier to answer than a password-reset puzzle: what does hiring actually feel like for the person applying? Not the version on an employer's careers page, where everyone laughs in perfect lighting. The real one, with the repeated application forms, the screening calls, the odd questions, the panel interviews and the silence afterward.

I step into those processes myself. I apply to jobs, observe the screens and questions, join interviews when invited, and document what happens. I also listen to readers who share experiences that reveal how common the same frustrations have become. The goal is not to declare every employer terrible. It is to show the gap between the polished promise of hiring and the experience the applicant actually receives.

Humor is how I open the conversation. The sarcasm is the wrapping paper; the real message is that candidates deserve prepared interviewers, clear expectations, honest communication, reasonable steps and respect for their time. A hiring process can be selective without becoming a game show. A recruiter can be busy without disappearing. And technology can help without removing every human being from the room.

September 7–13 was an especially revealing week. I revisited eight Amazon interviews, tested ALDI and Target, described a Bosch interview, questioned virtual interviews at Walmart, and wrote about candidate ghosting, strange resume filters, age bias and workplace culture. In between those stories came coffee adventures, Labor Day corporate speeches and bosses who treat motivational quotes like an employee benefit.

This edition brings together the complete commentary text from the original LinkedIn export for September 7–13, in Chicago local time. Each post is accompanied by two short editorial reflections: what appears to have prompted the story, and why I chose to write about it. These reflections are interpretations of the posts; the original words are not rewritten. Welcome back to the experiment. Apparently nobody told recruiting the cameras were rolling.

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The week at a glance.

OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

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POST 01 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

LINKEDIN & NETWORKING

When Networking Starts to Feel Like Flirting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A new connection asked what prompted me to reach out, leading me to explore how awkward professional introductions can become.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind people that networking can be a normal human conversation, not an interrogation with a headshot.

Every now and then, LinkedIn reminds me that “professional networking” is really just adult socializing with job titles, polished headshots, and a mutual agreement to pretend we’re all here strictly for business.

I connected with someone recently, and a little while later she sent me a perfectly normal message: “Thanks for the connect, Alex. Always good to have more people in the network. Curious what brought you my way. Something you’re working through, or just keeping the network sharp?” Now, this is where LinkedIn becomes dangerous, because there are two possible answers. The professional answer is: “I enjoy connecting with interesting people, expanding my network, and learning from leaders in different industries.” Very respectable. Very corporate. Totally strategic.

The other answer is the one my brain immediately supplied: “Your smile.” And suddenly what was supposed to be a networking conversation became the opening scene of LinkedIn: After Dark. Relax, I behaved. Mostly.

But you have to appreciate the comedy of this platform. LinkedIn wants us to believe every connection request is powered by strategic alignment,

professional curiosity, shared industry interests, and a passion for thought leadership. Sure. Sometimes you admire their work. Sometimes you like what they write. And sometimes the algorithm drops somebody on your screen with a great smile and your thumb says, “Congratulations, we’re networking now.”

That does not mean I’m turning LinkedIn into Tinder. I still have standards. I need at least one mutual connection, a respectable headline, and preferably no post beginning with “I’m humbled to announce” followed by a 14 paragraph autobiography. What made the message even funnier was how politely she asked. “Curious what brought you my way.”

Ma’am, please do not ask questions on LinkedIn that require me to choose between honesty and employability. Because LinkedIn honesty would destroy half the platform. “Why did you connect with me?” Because your post made me laugh. Because we work in similar industries. Because LinkedIn suggested you seventeen times and eventually I surrendered. Because I was scrolling while eating breakfast and apparently making networking decisions before coffee.

Or, occasionally, because you have a really nice smile. We spend so much time making networking sound complicated that we forget people still connect with people. Not resumes. Not titles. Not mission statements written by six people in a conference room. People. A conversation can start because of a shared industry, a funny post, a mutual friend, a business idea, or something as simple as someone seeming approachable.

So if you ever receive a connection request from me, don’t overthink it. Maybe I liked your work. Maybe I enjoyed your post. Maybe I thought you seemed interesting.

And if you have a great smile, apparently my networking strategy has now developed a visual component. I’ll update the LinkedIn skills section accordingly.

POST 02 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Same Sarcasm, Another App

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I decided to invite my LinkedIn audience to find the same stories on Facebook.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers who enjoy the jokes and recruiting commentary to know where else to follow along.

Apparently LinkedIn wasn't enough chaos, so I'm bringing the sarcasm to Facebook too. Follow me for corporate nonsense, hiring madness, toxic bosses, and the occasional questionable life observation. Same sarcasm. Different app. Probably fewer "thought leaders."



<https://lnkd.in/gHBW6tdz>

POST 03 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

RECRUITING RED FLAGS

The Mystery Recruiter With a Harvard Introduction

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader in Canada shared an odd outreach from a recruiter whose impressive credentials came with very few concrete job details.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted job seekers to question vague offers and verify opportunities before trusting someone who contacted them.

Every now and then, someone sends me a job search story that makes me wonder whether recruiting has quietly merged with internet phishing.

A woman in Canada told me she was contacted by a faceless recruiter from the United States who described himself as “Harvard educated.” He said he was recruiting for a senior level position and her background aligned perfectly. Sounds promising, right? Except when she asked, “Where is the job located?” his response was basically: send me your resume. She asked again. Could they have a conversation first? Could he share more about the role? Could he prove he was human and not three raccoons operating a LinkedIn account? Nope. Same answer: send me your resume here.

At that point, the interaction had the energy of a guy in a trench coat whispering, “Don’t worry about what’s in the bag. Just give me your Social Security number.” She refused to send anything until he provided information, and suddenly Mr. Harvard disappeared. No follow-up. No explanation. Just silence. Apparently Harvard offers an advanced concentration in Ghosting

When Asked Reasonable Questions.

Here is the part that bothers me: candidates have been conditioned to feel guilty for asking for information. Somehow, if a recruiter contacts you, you are expected to immediately hand over your resume, phone number, employment history, salary expectations, availability, and your first childhood pet before they tell you what the actual job is. That is backwards. If you approach someone about an opportunity, you should be able to explain it. What company is it? Where is it located? What does the position involve? Why did you contact this person? And most importantly, who are YOU?

Those are not unreasonable questions. That is basic adult communication. Yes, legitimate recruiters sometimes need discretion. Confidential searches exist. But even then, a professional recruiter can provide context, schedule a conversation, and establish credibility before asking a stranger to hand over personal information. If someone refuses to answer anything and repeatedly demands your resume like a broken vending machine asking for another dollar, you are allowed to walk

away.

The job market is already difficult enough. Candidates are dealing with ghosting, fake postings, endless interviews, unpaid assignments, automated rejection emails, and job descriptions apparently written by committees trapped inside an escape room. We do not need mystery recruiters adding another carnival tent. So if someone contacts you with an “amazing opportunity” but cannot tell you anything about themselves, the company, the location, or the role, trust your instincts.

You are not being difficult. You are doing due diligence. And if asking one question causes the recruiter to vanish into the digital wilderness, congratulations. You may not have lost a job opportunity. You may have just passed the most important interview question: “Can you recognize nonsense when it messages you first?”

POST 04 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

SOCIAL MEDIA & HIRING

When the Interviewer Researches Your Entire Profile

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled a hiring manager repeatedly reviewing my LinkedIn activity around an application.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show that candidates can research employer culture just as thoroughly as employers scrutinize candidates.

Hiring managers have developed a fascinating new skill: they can investigate your entire internet existence before replying to an email.

I remember when I applied for a position and later realized the hiring manager had been all over my LinkedIn profile. Not once. Not twice. Enough times that I wondered whether I had applied for a job or joined a documentary. They looked at my posts, experience, connections, comments, and zoomed in on my picture trying to determine whether my facial expression demonstrated “culture fit.” Meanwhile, the resume I spent two hours tailoring probably received the traditional corporate review: six seconds, one sip of coffee, and a quick “Hmm.”

That is modern hiring. You submit a resume explaining years of accomplishments, leadership, results, and experience, and someone immediately says, “Interesting. Let’s see what he posted on LinkedIn in March of 2022.” Suddenly your social media history is being examined like evidence. You liked a post about bad bosses? Suspicious. You wrote something about broken hiring processes? Suspicious.

You congratulated someone who left a toxic company? Somebody alert Human Resources.

And LinkedIn makes it even funnier because there is a decent chance you can SEE them looking. Nothing says stealth investigation like “Vice President of Talent Acquisition viewed your profile” five minutes after you submitted the application. Then comes the interview. They sit across from you smiling like they know absolutely nothing. “So, Alex, tell us a little about yourself.” Ma’am, you have visited my LinkedIn four times this week. At this point you probably know what conference I attended in 2018. You tell ME about myself.

I understand companies doing basic research. Candidates research companies too. Before an interview, most of us have looked at the website, read reviews, checked LinkedIn, searched leadership, and discovered that the “fast paced collaborative culture” apparently has a 2.7 star employee rating. Fair is fair.

But there is something hilarious about organizations demanding authenticity while quietly grading your online

personality. “We want you to bring your whole self to work.” Wonderful. Just make sure your whole self has never criticized layoffs, toxic leadership, pointless meetings, salary secrecy, ghosting, bad recruiters, or mandatory fun. Your qualifications should matter. Your experience should matter. Your character should matter. A sarcastic LinkedIn post about meetings that should have been emails probably does not require a risk assessment.

So yes, hiring managers may search you online. Recruiters may read your posts. Executives may scroll through your comments while pretending they are simply “reviewing your professional presence.” Remember: while they are researching you, you should be researching them too.

Because if they can investigate whether you fit their culture, you are absolutely allowed to investigate whether their culture requires therapy afterward.

POST 05 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

A Labor Day Message From a Toxic Boss

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A cheerful holiday greeting contrasted sharply with memories of pressure and intrusive management the rest of the year.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recognition and respect to mean something on ordinary workdays, not only in a holiday message.

There is something beautifully ironic about getting a “Happy Labor Day!” message from a toxic boss who spent the other 364 days treating labor like a renewable resource.

Today I received one of those cheerful messages, and I had to laugh. “Hope you’re enjoying a well deserved day off!” Well deserved? Sir, last month you acted like taking lunch was a suspicious gap in productivity. You once scheduled a “quick check-in” at 6:47 p.m. and opened with, “I’ll keep this brief,” which is corporate code for cancel your evening plans. But yes, thank you for recognizing rest now that a holiday forced it onto the calendar.

Toxic bosses love holiday messages because apparently one festive sentence can erase an entire year of nonsense. Happy Labor Day from the person who questioned your dedication because you left when your shift ended. Happy Holidays from leadership after they denied your vacation request because “we really need everyone to pull together.” Nothing says appreciation like a greeting from the same person who made you feel guilty for having a dentist appointment.

And the messages always sound so warm. “We couldn’t do it without you.”

Correct. You literally could not. That is why we have been asking for more staffing since February. “Take time today to relax and recharge.” Fantastic idea. I would have tried that in July, but somebody kept calling me during PTO because apparently the building cannot function unless I answer a question already explained in three emails, two meetings, and a spreadsheet titled PLEASE READ.

My favorite part is when they talk about honoring hard work. Suddenly the boss who spent all year acting like your job could be replaced by Tuesday morning has discovered the dignity of labor. Yesterday, you were “not being flexible.” Today, you are “the heart of the organization.” Tomorrow morning at 8:03, you will receive a Teams message asking why a report nobody mentioned Friday is not finished yet.

A holiday message does not make someone a bad boss, of course. Plenty of good leaders appreciate their people. They show it before the holiday. They respect boundaries, recognize effort, pay people fairly, communicate like adults, and understand that employees have families, lives, and nervous systems outside the office.

Appreciation is not supposed to arrive once a year between a flag emoji and a

company logo.

So when that toxic boss sends “Happy Labor Day,” smile and enjoy the comedy. Maybe even respond, “Thank you! I’m celebrating by not checking email.”

Because if Labor Day is really about honoring workers, perhaps the greatest tribute we can give ourselves is remembering that being employed does not mean being permanently available, endlessly grateful, or emotionally sponsored by the company.

Happy Labor Day to everyone who has ever received an appreciation message from a boss and thought, “Wow. I wish you communicated like this when I actually worked for you.” Enjoy the day. Tomorrow we return to being “resources.”

Why Should We Hire You? Why Should I Choose You?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An old interview question made me wonder why only the candidate is expected to explain their value.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted both sides of the interview table to remember they are making a choice.

A while back I sat in an interview and got hit with one of corporate America's favorite questions: "Why should we hire you?"

I had to stop myself from looking around the room and asking, "Didn't you invite me here?" You posted the job. I applied. They reviewed my resume. Someone decided I was qualified enough to schedule an interview. I rearranged my day, researched the company, learned the job description, and put on pants with a zipper. And now we had reached the part where I needed to convince everyone that recruiting had not made a terrible administrative error.

"Why should we hire you?" According to the job description you wrote, I have the experience. According to the resume you supposedly read, I have the background. According to the recruiter who called me, I am "a strong fit." But apparently none of that counts until I perform the late night infomercial. "Hire me because I bring leadership, passion, strategic thinking, collaboration, innovation, adaptability, and enough buzzwords to summon a regional vice president." What they really want is confidence without

arrogance, enthusiasm without desperation, experience without being expensive, ambition without threatening anybody, and personality without saying anything that might reveal it.

And heaven forbid you answer honestly. "Why should we hire you?" Because you have an open position and I enjoy having health insurance. Probably not the answer they printed in the interview guide. The funniest part is that candidates are expected to explain why the company should choose them while the company provides little explanation for why the candidate should choose the company. You ask about culture and get, "We're like a family." You ask about turnover and suddenly everyone becomes fascinated with the conference room table. You ask why the previous person left and receive a response that sounds like six attorneys edited it.

Maybe interviews should work both ways. Why should you hire me? Fair question. Why should I work here? Why is this position open? How long did the last person survive? Why has this same job been reposted four times? Why does "fast paced

environment" appear seven times in the description? And why did everyone exchange glances when I asked about work life balance?

Candidates should be prepared to explain the value they bring, but hiring managers should remember they are selling something too. Employment is not a royal invitation to enter the kingdom. It is an agreement between two parties exchanging time, skills, money, expectations and occasionally their remaining patience.

So the next time someone asks, "Why should we hire you?" give them a strong answer. Talk about your results, your experience, the problems you can solve, and the value you can bring. But remember there is another question across the table that matters just as much: "Why should I choose you?" Because interviews become a lot more interesting when both sides remember that both sides are being interviewed.

POST 07 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

SOCIAL MEDIA & WORK

The LinkedIn Personality Makeover After Getting Hired

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how quickly some people stop criticizing hiring once a new company starts paying them.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at corporate language while defending the value of an authentic voice.

It is amazing how quickly a LinkedIn personality can disappear the moment direct deposit starts hitting again.

One week someone is posting jokes about recruiters, ghosting, seven round interviews, fake job postings, and hiring managers asking questions that sound like they came from a corporate fortune cookie. The next week they get hired and suddenly every post sounds like it was approved by HR, Legal, and three vice presidents who all use the word “alignment” differently.

The other day I saw someone I had followed during their job search. For months, their content was hilarious. They roasted companies that made candidates upload a resume and then type the entire thing into fourteen separate boxes. They joked about “competitive salaries” competing with rent, recruiters saying “we’ll circle back” and disappearing, and companies wanting ten years of experience in software invented three years ago. Then they got hired, and within 48 hours the transformation was complete.

Gone were the jokes. Gone were the stories about toxic leadership. Gone

were the posts asking why companies ghost candidates after four interviews. Suddenly it was, “Thrilled to begin this exciting new chapter with an organization that truly values innovation, collaboration, and people.” Excuse me, Kevin. Last Tuesday you called corporate culture “a pizza party held over the grave of work life balance.” Now you are honored, humbled, energized, and apparently passionate about stakeholder value?

Even the profile photo changes. During unemployment, it is relaxed and approachable. After employment? Suit jacket. Arms crossed. Slight smile. Two weeks earlier: “Why do recruiters ghost people?” Two weeks later: “Strong organizations understand that intentional communication creates meaningful outcomes.” Brother, they got you. Somewhere during onboarding they gave you a badge and quietly confiscated your personality.

And I understand why it happens. Once you are employed, you become very aware that coworkers, managers, HR, executives, and Brenda from payroll are watching LinkedIn. That sarcastic post about useless meetings hits differently when your boss comments, “Interesting

perspective.” There is a difference between humor and setting your career on fire for engagement.

But getting a company email address should not require surrendering your entire personality at orientation. You can have a job and still admit corporate life is weird. Meetings can still be ridiculous, too. Buzzwords can still be funny. Leadership can still make mistakes. And “we’re like a family” can still activate your internal smoke detector.

So congratulations when someone lands the job. Celebrate it. Update the headline. Tell us you are excited. But if you spent six months making everyone laugh about corporate nonsense, please do not get hired Monday and start posting about “leveraging authentic alignment to unlock collective excellence” by Wednesday.

We remember who you were. And yes, we have screenshots.

POST 08 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

AI & ATS

Microsoft Says Strong Match. The Rejection Disagrees.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shared a Microsoft Careers screenshot identifying a strong match despite a contradictory outcome.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to notice how confusing automated matching labels can be for applicants.

Apparently, in 2026, even your job application can get mixed signals from the same company before lunch. Welcome to hiring, where even the software is unsure of the rules.

Someone sent me a screenshot from Microsoft Careers that deserves an exhibit in the Museum of Modern Hiring. Right there on the posting for Senior Category Manager was the badge: "Strong match." The system looked at the resume, checked the keywords, and whispered, "Yes. This person belongs here." Then came the rejection from Microsoft: "Unfortunately, you haven't met the requirements for this position." A strong match who does not meet the requirements. That is not recruiting. That is a dating app telling you, "You two are 98% compatible," and then immediately sending, "Sorry, you're not really my type."

And I love the confidence of it all. The website does not say, "Maybe a match." It does not say, "Possibly worth a look." No. It says "Strong match," like the algorithm stood up and announced the engagement. Then another part of the process walks into the room, flips the table, and says, "Absolutely not."

Somewhere between clicking Apply and opening the rejection email, your qualifications fell out of the system. Maybe they were placed in the same corporate folder where salary ranges, recruiter follow-ups, and "we'll get back to you by Friday" go to disappear forever.

Then comes my favorite part: "You may qualify for a number of other positions." Wonderful. Which ones? The "Excellent match" role that rejects you because of a requirement nobody mentioned? The "Perfect fit" position asking for 12 years of experience with software released three years ago? Or perhaps Microsoft has an opening for Senior Director of Interpreting Mixed Signals, because candidates are already getting hands on experience. Imagine answering an interview question this way: "Yes, I'm highly qualified. Unfortunately, I do not meet my own requirements, but I encourage you to consider me for other versions of myself."

This is what makes hiring so exhausting. Companies spend money on AI, recruiting platforms, candidate matching tools, automated screening, dashboards, analytics, and software

designed to identify talent more efficiently. Then the candidate experience becomes: "Congratulations, our technology believes you are highly qualified. Unfortunately, our other technology has reviewed the findings and would like you to leave." That is like your doctor saying, "Your results look excellent," then handing you a pamphlet titled Preparing for the Worst. Or an airline sending, "Your seat is confirmed," followed by the gate agent saying, "Interesting theory."

Microsoft, I appreciate innovation as much as anyone, but perhaps the next update can include a feature called "Make the Messages Agree." Until then, congratulations to everyone who has been labeled a "Strong match" and then immediately informed they were not qualified. You have officially unlocked another level of The Great American Hiring Circus.

POST 09 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

When the VP Is Watching Your Reactions

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described leadership scrutiny over LinkedIn reactions rather than anything she had written.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask why ordinary social media engagement becomes a management issue.

Apparently, we have entered a new phase of corporate life where your boss may not care what you post on LinkedIn, but someone three floors above them is carefully auditing which little emoji you clicked.

Someone recently shared a story with me that belongs in the Corporate Nonsense Hall of Fame. She was contacted by her leader because an unnamed VP had apparently reached out about her reactions to certain LinkedIn content. Not comments. Not posts. Not a 14 paragraph manifesto written at 2:00 a.m. Just reactions. Somewhere in an executive office, a grown adult apparently saw a tiny thumbs up, lightbulb, or support icon and thought, "This requires escalation."

The best part? Nobody would tell her which reactions were offensive or which mysterious VP had been emotionally injured by them. She was simply told to clean up her history. So now we are not just managing our careers, performance reviews, deadlines, customers, budgets, coworkers, and bosses. We also need to perform forensic analysis on every digital thumb movement we have made since creating a LinkedIn account.

Imagine the meeting. "Your

performance is excellent. Your team respects you. Your projects are on schedule. However, on March 14 at 7:42 p.m., you clicked 'Celebrate' on a post someone in leadership did not enjoy." Security will be waiting downstairs. This is where corporate culture becomes absolutely fascinating. Companies love telling employees to "bring your authentic self to work," right up until your authentic self accidentally presses Like on something that makes an executive uncomfortable. Then suddenly authenticity needs to be reviewed by Legal, HR, Communications, three vice presidents, and perhaps a priest.

And what exactly is the approved reaction policy? Can we get a handbook? Green circle means safe. Lightbulb requires manager approval. Heart reaction must be submitted two weeks in advance. "Insightful" is permitted only between 9:00 and 5:00. Laughing at anything related to leadership automatically schedules a meeting titled "Quick Chat."

The most ridiculous part is the chilling effect. People begin deleting reactions, avoiding harmless topics, second guessing every click, and turning their professional profiles into beige digital wallpaper because somebody

somewhere might be watching. You no longer scroll LinkedIn. You navigate it like a bomb technician. Before reacting, you check your surroundings. Is leadership online? Is this post controversial? Could a VP misunderstand the lightbulb? Should I consult HR before acknowledging that I enjoyed an article?

Meanwhile, companies keep wondering why employees stop engaging, stop speaking honestly, and stop feeling connected. Maybe because we have created workplaces where even clicking a button can become career strategy. At this point, silence itself probably needs VP approval.

Corporate America used to tell us, "Be careful what you say." Apparently the updated policy is, "Be careful what your thumb thinks."

POST 10 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

JOB SEARCH SAFETY

The Recruiter Who Asked for a Payment First

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described a purported recruiter turning a promising opportunity into a paid requirement.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted candidates to recognize the difference between legitimate hiring and someone trying to sell access.

Job hunting has officially reached the point where I'm no longer sure whether I'm applying for employment or wandering through a late night infomercial. Every week there seems to be a brand new fee or "career solution" standing between a qualified person and a real interview.

Someone messaged me today about a recruiter who reached out with what sounded like a legitimate opportunity. Then came the twist: before anything could move forward, the candidate supposedly needed to work with a specific resume writer and spend up to \$500 getting everything "optimized."

Of course. Because apparently your resume can survive years of employment, promotions, leadership roles, reorganizations, layoffs, acquisitions, difficult bosses and impossible customers, but suddenly it becomes medically unfit the moment a mysterious recruiter looks at it. Thankfully, this recruiter just happens to know a specialist. What luck. For \$500, I'm expecting more than bullet points. That resume better walk into the interview by itself, shake the hiring manager's hand, explain my accomplishments, negotiate extra vacation, reject the lowball offer, and text me afterward with my start date.

The part that isn't funny is who this nonsense targets. Job seekers are already exhausted. They've been told their resume is wrong, their LinkedIn profile is wrong, their keywords are wrong, their interview answers are wrong, their salary expectations are wrong, and now the final obstacle is apparently a credit card transaction.

That isn't recruiting. That's a sales funnel wearing an HR nametag. And to be clear, legitimate resume writers absolutely exist. There are talented professionals who help people improve how they present their experience. They explain their services, charge for their work, and don't pretend there's a secret job waiting behind the checkout button.

That is very different from someone introducing themselves as a recruiter, dangling an opportunity, and then suddenly deciding your career cannot continue until you purchase the deluxe resume resurrection package from their conveniently recommended expert. Next we'll hear, "The hiring manager loved your background, but unfortunately your LinkedIn aura tested below company standards."

No problem. For \$149, someone can cleanse it. Then comes the \$99 ATS blessing, the \$249 interview energy alignment, and the premium \$399 package where a consultant whispers "synergy" over your resume under a full moon. Job hunting is already ridiculous enough. Candidates shouldn't also have to investigate whether the person contacting them is actually recruiting or just running a side hustle with a job description attached.

So if someone reaches out about an amazing opportunity and the conversation suddenly becomes about paying their preferred expert hundreds of dollars before you can proceed, remember this:

The biggest red flag may not be hiding somewhere in your resume. It may be sitting in your inbox asking for your credit card.

POST 11 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

CORPORATE CULTURE

Labor Day, Brought to You by Corporate Buzzwords

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A CEO holiday message struck me as a collection of lofty phrases instead of genuine appreciation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to replace performative language with clear thanks for people doing the work.

There is a special kind of corporate magic that happens on holidays, when executives suddenly discover inspiration, open LinkedIn, and type something that sounds profound enough to make absolutely no sense.

Earlier today I saw a CEO wishing everyone a happy Labor Day. Nice gesture. Except the message read like someone fed a motivational poster, a quarterly earnings call, and three leadership books into a blender and hit “synergy.”

The post talked about “honoring the journey,” “building tomorrow through today,” and “celebrating the people who make possibility possible.” I read it twice. Then a third time. By the fourth read, I was less interested in Labor Day and more concerned I had suffered a corporate concussion. I wondered whether the message had been translated from English into executive, then back into English by PowerPoint.

But here’s the best part: the post had over 1,000 likes. Of course it did. Because nothing brings professionals together faster than pretending they understood what the CEO meant. The comments were exactly what you

would expect: “Powerful message.” “So well said.” “This really resonates.” “Leadership in action.” Resonates with what, exactly? A sentence with seventeen words and no identifiable destination?

Meanwhile, an hourly employee was probably working on Labor Day wondering whether “celebrating the people who make possibility possible” included time and a half. That’s the beauty of corporate holiday posts. The same organization that schedules six meetings before a three day weekend suddenly becomes emotional about rest, balance, gratitude, and the dignity of labor. “Today, we honor our incredible workforce.” Wonderful. Can we honor them by not sending emails marked URGENT at 7:14 p.m.? Maybe recognize them with something revolutionary, like adequate staffing? No? Another inspirational paragraph it is. You know it.

And I’m convinced CEOs could post literally anything and receive 1,000 likes. “On this Labor Day, remember that excellence is not where we go, but how we become the destination.” Boom. 1,700 likes. “True leadership means empowering tomorrow to

discover yesterday’s potential.” 2,300 likes and somebody from HR reposts it with “THIS.” “People are the heartbeat of purpose, and purpose is the compass of people.” Congratulations. You’ve been invited to speak at a leadership conference.

Corporate LinkedIn has created its own language where the less something means, the more inspirational it sounds. Nobody wants to be the person who comments, “Sir, respectfully, what are you talking about?” So everyone applauds, reacts, reposts, and adds “Great perspective” because professional networking apparently isn’t about understanding the message anymore. It’s about being seen agreeing with it.

Happy Labor Day to the people actually doing the labor. And to the CEO who wrote that post: thank you for reminding us that more than 1,000 people can agree with something without having any idea what they just agreed with.

POST 12 / MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Three Reasons We Should Not Hire You

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I came across an interview question asking candidates to argue against their own employment.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how gimmicky questions can derail a useful hiring conversation.

Interview questions have officially reached the stage where I'm convinced somebody in HR has a secret deck of cards labeled "Ways to Make This Weird."

I saw someone say they were once asked, "Give me three reasons why I should NOT hire you?" And that question deserves an award. Imagine showing up prepared to explain your experience, accomplishments, leadership style, and what you can bring to the company, only to discover they'd like you to help assemble the rejection email. Three reasons? Absolutely. Reason one: I applied to a company where the interview process includes asking the candidate to build the case against themselves. Reason two: I recognize when an interview has turned into a courtroom drama and I've somehow become both defendant and prosecutor. Reason three: if you need me to explain why you shouldn't hire me, I'm starting to wonder why either of us cleared our calendars.

What exactly is the expected answer here? "Well, Susan, I'm occasionally early, I ask dangerous questions like 'What's the salary range?' and I have the controversial belief that meetings should have an agenda." Should I confess that I don't enjoy unpaid

overtime? Admit lunch should involve food instead of another Teams meeting? Reveal that whenever a company says "we're like a family," I check whether the exits are clearly marked?

Maybe they're hoping you panic and give them one of the classics: "I care too much." "I work too hard." "I'm a perfectionist." Beautiful. The Holy Trinity of interview nonsense. Somewhere, a hiring manager is nodding while writing "self aware" on a legal pad they'll lose later.

Then companies wonder why candidates are exhausted. You tailor a resume, upload it, retype the entire thing into the application, complete an assessment, wait three weeks, survive multiple interviews, and then somebody asks you to explain why they should reject you. At that point I'd be tempted to say, "I can give you one reason: this question." Interviews should determine whether the candidate and company are a good fit. They should be conversations about experience, leadership, expectations, culture, and whether both sides want to work together. Instead, modern hiring keeps inventing psychological escape rooms.

Sell me this pen. What animal would you be? Now explain your own rejection. At this rate the next interview will require a PowerPoint by dawn.

The funniest part is that companies asking questions like this will later post about their "candidate first hiring experience." Nothing says candidate first like asking someone to professionally roast themselves while you take notes. If you want to know whether someone belongs on your team, ask what they've solved. Ask how they lead. Ask what they learned from failure. Ask what kind of environment helps them perform at their best.

But asking someone why you should NOT hire them? Careful. Some candidates have been interviewing long enough to give you three convincing reasons why they shouldn't work for you.

POST 13 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The Panel Interview Game Show

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A crowded Zoom interview brought to mind the strange questions and performances that panels can encourage.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to measure real ability rather than reward whoever handles the oddest question most smoothly.

Zoom panel interviews are becoming less like job interviews and more like game shows where nobody explained the rules, the prize is questionable, and six strangers are staring at you while one person is clearly answering emails off camera.

The other day I joined one expecting the usual questions. Tell us about yourself. Walk us through your experience. Why are you interested in the role? Maybe the classic five year question too. Instead, about twenty minutes in, one panelist leaned toward the camera and asked, "What was your favorite class in middle school?" I froze. Middle school?

For a second I thought I had accidentally joined a parent teacher conference. I was waiting for someone to ask whether I preferred recess or lunch and whether my science fair volcano demonstrated strong cross functional collaboration. Then the interviewer corrected himself. "Sorry, I meant college." Ah. Perfect. Much better. Because naturally, after years of professional experience, leadership, deadlines, budgets, employees, customers, problems, successes, failures, and actual adult responsibilities, the key to determining whether I can do the job is

remembering what class I enjoyed years ago.

I wanted to say, "Whichever class didn't have group projects," because nothing prepares you for corporate life quite like doing 90 percent of the work while three people disappear and return five minutes before the presentation asking, "What slide am I reading?" But I stayed professional. That is the magic of panel interviews. One person asks about strategy. Another asks about conflict resolution. Then Steve, who has been muted for forty minutes, suddenly unmutes and asks what animal best represents your leadership style. Sir, I am currently a raccoon. I am tired, resourceful, surviving on coffee, and digging through this interview process looking for something valuable.

Panel interviews always have characters. There is the enthusiastic nodder. The person who never turns their camera on but somehow evaluates your "executive presence." The interviewer who asks a four minute question and looks confused when you answer it. Then the person who joins late and asks the exact question you answered ten minutes earlier. By the end, you are no longer interviewing for a job. You are trying to escape a virtual escape room using behavioral

questions as clues.

I understand companies want to know candidates. Culture matters. Personality matters. Communication matters. But somewhere along the way, interviews went from "Can this person actually do the job?" to "Let's see how they respond when asked something completely unrelated while seven faces silently observe them in little squares." Maybe next week I'll be asked my favorite subject in elementary school. For the record, it was recess.

Excellent leadership experience. I managed my own schedule, collaborated across playground departments, resolved disputes near the swings, and delivered results before the bell. Hire me.

POST 14 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

LIFE BETWEEN INTERVIEWS

7 Brew, a Coffee Line, and a National Emergency

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A simple stop at 7 Brew turned into a surprisingly crowded scene over a promotion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give readers a break from hiring stories while finding the same absurdity in everyday errands.

Yesterday I made what I thought was a simple adult decision: skip Starbucks, try something different, grab a coffee at 7 Brew Coffee, and continue with my day. No drama. Just caffeine.

Apparently I had chosen the one day America collectively decided coffee should come with a souvenir, a traffic jam and the energy of a Black Friday sale. I pulled up to 7 Brew and immediately knew something was wrong. The line looked less like a coffee drive thru and more like people were waiting for concert tickets and emergency assistance. Cars everywhere. Nobody backing out. I wondered if 7 Brew had accidentally announced free mortgages with every medium drink.

Then I found out about "Jackpot Day." Buy two medium or large drinks and receive a limited edition 7 Brew Doh squishy toy. A squishy toy. That was it. Not free coffee for life. Not a \$500 gift card. Not ownership in the company. A squishy toy had apparently brought civilization to a complete standstill. Somewhere in a conference room, somebody said, "What if we make a squishy thing, call it limited edition and see how many adults will rearrange their Monday around it?" The answer was apparently all of them.

I watched cars creep forward with the determination usually reserved for evacuation routes. People had already invested too much time to quit. Once you have been sitting in a coffee line for forty minutes, you are no longer buying drinks. You are defending your honor and your position in line. If someone tries to merge in front of you, they are no longer another customer. They are an enemy of the state. Meanwhile, I was sitting there thinking about Starbucks. Starbucks and I have had our differences. The prices make me feel like I should be receiving stock options with my latte, and the menu has enough vocabulary to require continuing education, but suddenly that green mermaid looked like an old friend.

At Starbucks, I might spend 7 dollars on coffee and question my financial decisions. At 7 Brew yesterday, I was apparently entering an endurance event where the grand prize was a tiny object designed to help me recover from waiting for the tiny object. Nobody seemed concerned that we had created rush hour traffic over something designed to be squeezed when stressed, even though obtaining it was creating the exact stress it was

supposed to relieve. That is brilliant. First they create the traffic. Then they give you the stress toy.

Eventually I got my coffee, looked around at the sea of cars and realized I had learned an important lesson: never casually "try somewhere different" without checking whether the place is running a nationwide promotion. I skipped Starbucks because I wanted a change of scenery. I got a caffeine fueled pilgrimage, a lesson in consumer psychology and front row seats to what happens when somebody puts the words "limited edition" in front of absolutely anything.

Next time I'm going to Starbucks. If they ever release a limited edition squishy Frappuccino, society is finished.

POST 15 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

WORKPLACE CULTURE

When the VP of HR Walks Away From the Culture

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former human resources executive shared how a once-admired workplace culture had changed.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask what it means when even the person charged with protecting culture decides to leave.

Every once in a while, someone sends me a story that explains workplace culture better than any employee engagement survey ever could.

A guy messaged me and said he used to be the VP of HR at a company that was once known for having an amazing culture. The VP of HR. The person who is supposed to protect the culture, improve the culture, investigate the culture, and remind grown adults how to behave at work. And even he eventually looked around and thought, "Yeah, I'm going to have to HR myself out of here." Apparently one toxic person had enough influence to slowly poison the environment. He saw it happening, knew what was causing it, and understood exactly what it was doing to morale. Yet somehow the toxic person stayed while the VP of HR changed careers, moved into sales. Imagine being responsible for human resources and realizing the best resource available to the human is the exit door.

That is the part companies still refuse to understand. Good employees do not always leave because they hate the company, the work, or the people around them. Sometimes they leave

because leadership keeps protecting one person everyone else is trying to survive. Then executives stare at turnover reports like archaeologists uncovering a mystery. "We've noticed an unusual increase in retention issues." Unusual? Karen from Toxic Operations has emotionally evacuated half the building and somehow we are blaming the labor market.

Companies will lose ten great employees before confronting one terrible leader. Then they hire a consultant, create a culture committee, order branded water bottles, launch new company values, and send an anonymous survey that somehow requires your employee ID. Meanwhile, the actual problem is still sitting in a conference room explaining that people are "too sensitive."

After he left, the company continued sliding and started having major retention problems. He admitted that sometimes it still bothers him that he was the one who had to leave. I understand that. There is something irritating about watching the reasonable person pack their desk while the toxic person keeps the title, probably gets promoted because

leadership calls their behavior "passion." But he also said something more important: the peace of mind he gained by leaving made it completely worth it. That part matters, because there comes a point where no title, paycheck, bonus, or fancy business card is worth spending Sunday night mentally preparing for Monday morning.

Sometimes the biggest career upgrade is not a bigger title, a larger office, or another line on LinkedIn. Sometimes it's waking up and realizing you no longer have to emotionally prepare yourself for one person's daily personality crisis. A healthy workplace should not require hazard pay just to attend a Tuesday meeting. And if the VP of HR has to leave the company to escape the culture, maybe the problem was never the employees.

Maybe the exit interview should have been held with the person who stayed.

POST 16 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

PANEL INTERVIEWS

Eight Amazon Interviews and Counting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Seeing another discussion about lengthy interview rounds reminded me of my own Amazon process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to question whether endless interviews actually improve hiring decisions.

Every time I see someone talk about eight interviews for one job, I get a little flashback to a hiring marathon I once experienced.

It reminds me of the time I went through eight panel interviews with Amazon. Eight. By the end, I had spoken to so many people that I started wondering if I was interviewing for a job or being slowly adopted by the company. The first few interviews felt fine. Tell us about yourself. Walk us through your experience. Give us an example of a challenge. Explain a time you disagreed with someone. Fine. Standard corporate Olympics. But somewhere around interview number five, I started running out of life experiences. By interview six, I was remixing the same three stories like a DJ at a wedding. "Here's the conflict story again, but this time with slightly different lighting."

Then came interview seven, and at that point I had already explained my leadership style, decision making process, strengths, weaknesses, failures, successes, ability to influence, ability to execute, ability to deal with ambiguity, and probably enough personal history for a documentary. I'm pretty sure one more behavioral question would have required me to

discuss middle school lunch. Then came interview eight. At that point, you do not feel like a candidate anymore. You feel like a recurring guest star. I had spent so much time with Amazon interviewers that I expected an employee badge, a laptop, and a reminder about the holiday party.

Here is what makes these marathon hiring processes so ridiculous. After five, six, seven, or eight conversations, if nobody can determine whether the candidate can do the job, maybe the problem is not the candidate. Maybe the hiring process has developed separation anxiety. Companies love to call this "rigorous hiring." No, rigorous is testing whether someone can actually perform the role. Eight hours of asking variations of "Tell me about a time..." starts feeling less like an assessment and more like a corporate podcast series nobody subscribed to.

And if you make someone complete that many rounds and reject them, at least give them something meaningful. Do not send the legendary automated email saying, "After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with other candidates." Careful consideration? You interviewed me enough times to write my biography and probably predict what I am going to

say. By that stage, I do not need a generic rejection. I need a season finale. Tell me what happened. Who voted against me? Was there a surprise judge? Did somebody hit the golden buzzer? Give me closure.

Hiring should be thorough, especially for senior roles. Nobody is arguing that companies should pick executives using rock paper scissors in the lobby. But there is a point where diligence becomes indecision wearing a corporate badge. If eight panels cannot reach a conclusion, maybe interview number nine should be with the hiring process itself.

And yes, I'll need it to explain its greatest weakness clearly.

POST 17 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

AGE DISCRIMINATION

The Beard Dye Test Nobody Should Face

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A 57-year-old reader joked about coloring his beard and shortening his resume to appear younger.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted experience to be seen as an asset rather than something candidates feel obliged to conceal.

There is a special kind of absurdity in realizing that after decades of experience, the modern job market may still make you wonder whether your biggest professional problem is the color of your beard.

Someone messaged me today and joked that he is 57, dyeing his beard, and trimming his resume down so he can look 40. I laughed, because that is exactly the kind of sentence that should be ridiculous enough to be satire, yet somehow feels completely believable in hiring right now. Apparently years of experience are valuable right up until they can be counted. Then suddenly the same background that used to make you “seasoned” makes you “overqualified,” “too senior,” or my personal favorite, “not aligned with the energy of the team.”

What does that even mean? Are we hiring people or selecting contestants for a trampoline park? The funny part is that companies will post a job asking for 15 years of experience, leadership, executive presence, industry expertise, strategic thinking, mentoring ability, and a proven record of surviving complete corporate chaos. Then a candidate with exactly that background shows up and somebody in the room

whispers, “Do you think he might be a little too experienced?” Yes. That is what you ordered.

Now candidates are out here editing resumes like they are cleaning up evidence. Remove the job from 1998. Delete the software nobody remembers. Cut the leadership experience because apparently knowing too much can frighten the hiring committee. Change “30 years of experience” to “extensive experience.” Maybe dye the beard. Adjust the lighting. Tilt the camera. If anyone asks about Blockbuster, deny everything.

Soon resumes are going to need an age filter. “Please upload your resume.” Absolutely. Would you like the original version, or the one where my career mysteriously began after Wi-Fi was invented?

And let’s talk about the beard. We have reached an incredible moment in professional history when someone can manage multimillion dollar accounts, lead teams, build strategy, understand customers, survive restructures, and still wonder if two gray hairs are going to destroy the interview. Meanwhile the company says it values authenticity, usually underneath a stock photo of six suspiciously young people laughing

around one laptop.

Experience should not be something candidates feel pressured to hide. If someone spent 20 or 30 years learning what works, what fails, how to lead people, how to handle pressure, and how to recognize a bad decision before it becomes a three-hour emergency meeting, that is not baggage. That is called value.

So keep the beard. Keep the experience. Keep the stories from the years when phones had cords and meetings ended without a follow-up meeting about the meeting.

Gray hair isn’t a flaw; it’s corporate scar tissue with good lighting and stories. And if a company thinks 57 is too old, just remember this: You are not aging out of the workforce. You are becoming overqualified for nonsense.

POST 18 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

LIFE BETWEEN INTERVIEWS

The Unexpected Case for 7-Eleven Coffee

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone suggested I try 7-Eleven coffee, and I approached that suggestion with unnecessary suspicion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted a small, funny story to remind readers that ordinary surprises deserve a little curiosity.

There are some questions that sound harmless until you realize they are about to make you question every bad financial decision you have ever made before 8 a.m.

The other day someone asked me if I had ever tried 7-Eleven coffee. I laughed because I thought they were setting me up for a joke. 7-Eleven? Coffee? The same place where I can buy a lottery ticket, beef jerky, and a hot dog that has been rotating since the Clinton administration? You want me to trust that place with my morning caffeine?

Apparently, yes. So I walked in expecting coffee with the flavor profile of burnt tires and poor decisions. I figured I would take one sip and wonder why I betrayed Starbucks. Then I tasted it. And now I have questions. First, why is it actually decent? Second, why have I been standing in drive thru lines for fifteen minutes behind someone ordering a venti half caf oat milk vanilla cinnamon cold foam emotional support latte when I could have poured coffee into a cup myself and been back in my car before they finished saying "light ice"?

At 7-Eleven nobody asks my name. Nobody misspells Alex as "Eric."

Nobody asks whether I want almond milk, oat milk, coconut milk, soy milk, or milk personally approved by a wellness influencer. You grab a cup. You pour coffee. You add whatever you want. You pay. You leave. It was so efficient I almost felt uncomfortable.

Where was the unnecessary conversation? Where was the tip screen asking me to choose between 20%, 25%, and "I would like to fund your retirement"? Where was the employee telling me my order would be ready shortly while I watched six people who arrived after me receive theirs first?

Nothing. Just coffee. I stood there thinking about all the money I have spent on premium coffee because apparently caffeine tastes better when the building has exposed brick and a menu only people with reusable metal straws understand. Meanwhile, 7-Eleven has been quietly sitting on the corner saying, "We have coffee too, genius." Apparently branding costs more.

I'm not saying I'm permanently abandoning fancy coffee. Sometimes I enjoy paying six dollars to stand around while someone performs chemistry with espresso. It makes me feel

sophisticated. Nothing says success like waiting twelve minutes for a beverage you could have made before leaving the house. But 7-Eleven has changed me. There is something beautiful about coffee that knows its role in society. It is not trying to become your personality. It does not need a seasonal launch, a secret menu, or a social media campaign featuring a pumpkin wearing sunglasses. It understands the assignment: you are tired, probably late, and need enough caffeine to survive your first meeting without saying what you are actually thinking.

So yes, I have officially tried 7-Eleven coffee. And I owe them an apology. For years I walked past that coffee station thinking, "There is absolutely no way." Now I drive past a twenty car coffee line thinking the exact same thing.

POST 19 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

GHOSTING & DELAYS

Shortlisted in April. Still Waiting in September.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader told me she had been shortlisted, placed on hold and then left waiting for months.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to see how prolonged uncertainty affects real people making real plans.

Apparently, some companies have discovered a new hiring strategy: keep candidates on hold so long they qualify for an anniversary card.

Someone shared a job search story with me that deserves its own documentary. She applied for a role in March. In April, the company told her she had been shortlisted, but the hiring process was “on hold.” Fair enough. Things happen. Budgets change. Leaders change. Somebody in finance opens Excel and suddenly nobody can hire until 2034. Then September arrived. Yes, September. Six months after applying, the company finally sent an email explaining that, due to “unforeseen circumstances,” the role would not be filled.

Six. Months. At that point, I’m not sure that qualifies as candidate communication. That feels more like a postcard from someone you dated in another lifetime. Imagine keeping a candidate parked in the corporate waiting room for half a year. You check your email. You wonder if the position is coming back. Meanwhile, the job posting is probably sitting in a forgotten folder next to the 2021 engagement survey and FINAL_FINAL_v7.

And I love “unforeseen circumstances.” Corporate language is beautiful because it can make absolutely anything sound like weather. We didn’t forget about you for six months. Unforeseen circumstances. The budget disappeared. Unforeseen circumstances. The hiring manager left, the department was reorganized, the position evaporated, and nobody remembered candidates existed until someone cleaned out the inbox. Unforeseen circumstances.

I’m impressed they eventually wrote back. Somewhere, one heroic person must have opened an old spreadsheet and said, “Wait...did anyone ever tell these people we’re not hiring?” Then the room went silent. HR whispered, “How long has it been?” “March.” And suddenly everyone became very interested in their coffee.

Companies tell candidates communication matters. They say candidate experience matters. They talk about respect and transparency. Then they leave someone on hold long enough to grow tomatoes. A candidate can spend hours customizing a resume, completing assessments, researching the company, preparing for interviews, and answering questions about where

they see themselves in five years. Apparently the company’s answer is: still waiting for us to close the requisition.

Nobody expects hiring to move perfectly. Roles get canceled. Plans change. Businesses pivot. But sending a simple update should not require six months, a task force, and permission from legal. “Hey, the role is still paused. We don’t have a timeline. We’ll update you if that changes.” It takes thirty seconds. Instead, candidates get silence so complete they start wondering if the company itself has been acquired by aliens.

And then, six months later, the email arrives. Thank you for your patience. Patience? At six months, that’s not patience. That’s a long term relationship. And adopted a dog. The least they could have done was send flowers and remember the anniversary.

POST 20 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

WORKPLACE ACCOUNTABILITY

Doing the Work While the Story Changes

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A workplace story raised questions about how employers describe someone whose contributions are still being used.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted truthful communication and basic respect to matter when a company controls the narrative.

Corporate America has officially reached the point where you can apparently be doing the work, answering emails, moving deals forward, keeping relationships alive, and still somehow be described like you vanished into the Bermuda Triangle.

Imagine this: your name is still being used in conversations, your work is still opening doors, somewhere in a conference room a leadership team has decided the best explanation for your absence is, "Oh, they're just on personal medical leave right now." Not "we mishandled this." Not "we're figuring things out." Not even the classic corporate favorite, "They're pursuing other opportunities." Nope. We have upgraded directly to a storyline written five minutes before the client walked in.

Meanwhile the leadership monkeys are flying around to meetings, shaking hands, collecting signatures, and using your credibility like a company owned rewards card. Every time someone asks where you are, they repeat the same rehearsed sentence. You can almost picture the prep meeting: "Okay, remember, if anyone asks about Alex, we all say medical leave. Nobody improvise. Last time Gary said sabbatical and nearly ruined

everything."

That is the part that always amazes me about dysfunctional workplaces. They can create a mess with Olympic level efficiency, but when it comes time to explain the mess, suddenly everyone becomes a screenwriter. There are carefully selected phrases designed to make absolutely nothing sound suspicious while somehow making everything sound more suspicious.

Nobody thinks about the obvious problem: clients talk. Partners talk. Employees talk. People compare notes. Eventually someone realizes the person who is supposedly "away" is still somehow connected to half the business being discussed. At that point, the corporate story starts developing more plot holes than a low budget soap opera.

If you ever find yourself in a workplace where leadership is more focused on controlling the explanation than fixing the situation, pay attention. Healthy companies solve problems. Unhealthy companies create narratives. Healthy leaders have difficult conversations. Unhealthy leaders rehearse sentences.

And somewhere in all of this, the person whose work helped build the

pipeline is probably sitting at home thinking, "Wow, apparently I'm on leave. I wish someone had told me. I would've slept in." Corporate America really does have a unique talent for turning basic accountability into theater. The work continues. The deals continue. The emails continue. The story changes depending on who is asking. Apparently, truth is optional now.

At this rate, the next employee handbook will not include policies. It will just include approved alibis, talking points, and a laminated card that says: "If a client asks where someone went, smile confidently and blame medical leave."

Because nothing says strong leadership quite like using someone's work, borrowing their reputation, and then giving them a fictional disappearance arc.

POST 21 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

HIRING TIMELINES

The Fast-Paced Company With a Slow-Motion Hiring Process

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Job descriptions promising speed seemed increasingly at odds with the delays candidates actually experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to compare their recruiting pace with the urgency they expect from employees.

Nothing says “we move fast” quite like a hiring process that moves with the urgency of a fax machine waiting for toner while three departments debate who should replace it.

You see it in job postings all the time. Fast paced environment. Agile team. Rapid growth. We make decisions quickly. Looking for someone who can hit the ground running. Apparently the only thing hitting the ground is your application, where it sits for three weeks while HR explains how excited they are about your interest. Then someone reaches out and says, “We’re hoping to move very quickly on this role.” At that point, quickly has become a historical concept. You applied Monday, heard nothing for two weeks, and now they want to schedule a 30 minute call nine days from Thursday.

Then comes my favorite part. The interviewer leans toward the camera and says, “We’re moving very fast on this role.” Fast compared to what? Continental drift? Construction on the interstate? A sloth carrying furniture uphill? Because we are almost a month into this relationship and I still do not know whether the hiring manager has seen my name. “We’ll be in touch very

soon.” Very soon, much like fast, operates on a calendar unavailable to candidates.

Next comes the process. Hiring manager. Panel interview. Another panel interview because apparently the first panel did not contain enough panel. Maybe an assessment. Maybe a presentation where you solve a company problem for free while six people stare at you like you are defending a dissertation on Excel. Then everyone disappears again. Candidates notice this stuff. If a company says it is decisive but takes six weeks to make a decision, people notice. If the posting says “urgent need” but nobody can find 30 minutes for an interview until next month, people notice.

No, every company does not need to hire in 48 hours. Good decisions take time. Schedules get complicated. But there is a difference between having a thoughtful process and advertising yourself like a Formula 1 pit crew while recruiting like a committee formed to study whether committees need more meetings.

If your process takes a month, say that. If there are five interviews, tell

candidates up front. Candidates can handle slow. What drives people crazy is slow dressed up as fast, silence dressed up as “careful consideration,” and a three week disappearance followed by an email asking whether you can interview tomorrow because suddenly the position is “urgent.”

The company vanishes for 19 days, then reappears: “Are you available tomorrow morning?” Absolutely. I’ve just been sitting beside my laptop since Memorial Day, waiting for your organization to discover urgency. Companies love saying culture starts before day one, and they are right. It starts with the job posting. It continues with communication.

And if your first demonstration of “we move fast” is making candidates wait three weeks for a 30 minute Zoom call, congratulations. You have already introduced them to the culture.

POST 22 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

CAREER TRANSITIONS

Open to Work, Suddenly Visible to Everyone

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered how exposed an employed person can feel after publicly signaling interest in a new job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to know they are not alone in the awkwardness of searching while still employed.

There should probably be a support group for people who turned on the “Open to Work” banner while still employed and then spent the next week pretending nobody at the office could see LinkedIn.

We all make rookie mistakes. Some people hit Reply All. And some of us put a giant green circle around our profile photo announcing to coworkers, managers, customers, and probably the guy in bay three that we may be considering other opportunities. I remember working for Pep Boys and learning quickly that the professional world is much smaller than you think. You believe you are quietly updating your profile at home after dinner, maybe updating your resume, and clicking that innocent little “Open to Work” button. In your mind, this is discreet career planning. On LinkedIn, it looks like you climbed onto the roof with a megaphone and yelled, “I AM JUST BROWSING. PLEASE DO NOT MAKE THIS WEIRD.”

Then you walk into work the next morning acting normal, and suddenly everyone is unusually interested in your happiness. “Everything good?” Absolutely. “You happy here?” Never better. “Any plans we should know about?” Nope. Just deeply committed

to the organization while my profile picture is surrounded by a fluorescent green evacuation signal. That banner has the subtlety of putting a FOR SALE sign in your yard and telling the neighbors you are only checking property values. Now every casual conversation feels like an investigation. Your manager says, “Can you stop by my office later?” and suddenly you are calculating unused vacation.

Of course, being open to opportunities while employed is not corporate betrayal. Careers change. Companies restructure. Good employees get recruited every day. The funny part is how some workplaces expect employees to behave as if even considering another opportunity violates the employee handbook somewhere between dress code and refrigerator etiquette. Companies interview employed candidates every day. Recruiters message employed people every day. Managers leave for better jobs and post that they are “excited to announce the next chapter.” But let an employee put up an Open to Work banner and suddenly the management team becomes Sherlock Holmes with Microsoft Teams, analyzing your new connections.

That is why many of us learned the

rookie lesson: if you are still employed and you care who sees it, maybe skip the giant green billboard. Keep networking. Keep your resume ready. Take the calls. Know your value. Explore opportunities. There is nothing wrong with keeping one eye on the market. And companies are always keeping both eyes on payroll anyway. Always.

Just remember LinkedIn is not a private journal. It is basically the office parking lot with Wi-Fi, screenshots, recruiters, and coworkers who somehow know you updated your headline before your own family does. And if you put a neon sign on your profile saying “MIGHT LEAVE SOON,” do not be shocked when your boss suddenly stops by smiling and asks, “So, how are things going?”

POST 23 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

When Initiative Becomes a Problem

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on companies that celebrate ownership until an employee acts independently.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to reward useful initiative instead of punishing the people who take the slogans seriously.

The fastest way to find out whether a company really values initiative is to show some. Not talk about it. Actually show up, care deeply, fix something broken, challenge an outdated process, help a customer, and watch how quickly “we love people who take ownership” can turn into “who told you to do that?”

That is one of the strangest parts of corporate life. Companies will spend years telling employees to think like owners, challenge the status quo, bring ideas, move faster, and go above and beyond. Then someone actually does those things and the room gets uncomfortable. Suddenly the person doing the bare minimum is considered “easy to manage,” while the person asking hard questions, improving results, and pushing for better becomes “too much.” Too driven. Too vocal. Too independent. Too willing to point out that the sacred process from 2009 might belong in a museum next to the fax machine.

And that can hurt, because the people who care the most are not trying to make anyone look bad. They are trying to make things better. They see a customer waiting too long, a team struggling, a bad process costing money, or an opportunity being

ignored, and their instinct is to help. They stay late. They take ownership. They solve problems nobody assigned to them. Then one day they realize the organization did not necessarily want improvement. It wanted obedience with enthusiasm.

That is when “stay in your lane” appears. Funny how companies love race car language until somebody passes the pace car. Sometimes the problem is not performance. It is insecurity. Strong employees can make weak leaders uncomfortable. Someone with results and confidence can become a mirror, and not everybody enjoys seeing what is reflected back. So initiative becomes “not following process.” Confidence becomes “attitude.” Questions become “challenging leadership.”

Then management holds another meeting about employee engagement because nobody can figure out why the best people keep leaving. You can only tell talented people to slow down, stay quiet, stop pushing, and stop caring for so long before they finally listen. And when they leave, everyone is confused. “Why didn’t they say anything?” They did. “Why didn’t they give us a chance?” They did. “Why are good people so hard to retain?” Because

retention is not free pizza or an inspirational email from a vice president who has never worked a Saturday.

People stay where they are trusted, heard, respected, and allowed to contribute without making leadership nervous. I have seen people leave jobs they once loved, not because the work became too hard, but because caring was exhausting. It is very sad watching someone who once brought energy into a building start conserving it just to survive the day. Eventually, many leave, and sometimes leaving is the first time in years they feel like themselves again.

Companies should worry less about employees who care too much. The bigger problem is when those employees finally stop.

POST 24 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

Sarcasm, My New Professional Skill

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

One more round of corporate absurdity made the line between comedy and coping seem especially thin.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted humor to expose habits that people have become too accustomed to accepting.

My level of sarcasm has reached a new level where I'm no longer sure if I'm joking, coping, or just narrating the corporate circus.

Recruiters ask, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" and I'm thinking, "Hopefully not answering this question in round seven." Toxic bosses say, "My door is always open," which is technically true because they need somewhere for employees to walk in and get blamed for things that happened before they were hired.

Recruiters have become their own genre of comedy. They message you like, "Your background is exactly what we're looking for," then disappear like they entered witness protection. Three weeks later, the same job is reposted with "Urgently Hiring" in the title. Apparently the urgency does not include replying to us. Then another recruiter asks why you want to leave your current company, as if "I enjoy paying my bills and would prefer not to lose my sanity" is too aggressive for LinkedIn.

And toxic bosses? They are motivational speakers with access to payroll. They tell you, "We need more accountability," which usually means everyone except them. Sales are down?

Your fault. Someone quit? Your fault. Printer jammed? Somehow your leadership style created a hostile environment for toner. Then they post a quote online about empathy and treating people well. Nothing says self-awareness like bullying employees at 9:00 and posting "People First" at 9:14.

My sarcasm has also reached the interview stage. "Why should we hire you?" Because apparently the resume, application, phone screen, personality test, panel interview, case study, background check, and interpretive dance were not enough evidence. "What is your greatest weakness?" Pretending this process makes sense. "Tell us about a time you dealt with conflict." Do you want the professional version or the one where I explain why Kevin from operations is no longer allowed near the group chat?

Corporate language makes it worse. "We're restructuring" means update your resume. "We're family" means boundaries are about to be violated. "Competitive salary" means competitive with 2014. "Fast paced environment" means three people quit and you now have their jobs. "Unlimited PTO" means try taking it and see what happens. "We value work

life balance" means they'll email you at 10:42 p.m. and start with "No rush."

At this stage, sarcasm is the only reason I can participate in professional conversations without requesting witness protection. I smile. I nod. I say, "Absolutely." Meanwhile, my inner narrator is documenting everything like a nature documentary. "Here we see the regional vice president explaining teamwork moments after taking credit for the department's work."

So when a recruiter ghosts me, a toxic boss discovers another leadership podcast, or someone schedules a "quick 15 minute chat" with eight executives, I don't get upset anymore. I just add it to the material. Corporate America keeps writing the jokes for me. I'm basically just the unpaid editor.

POST 25 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

JOB-SEEKER STORIES

A Reader Named Suzanne and the Toaster ATS

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Suzanne shared the frustration of bringing real customer service and sales experience to impersonal applications.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers who feel invisible to know their experience still matters beyond a screening system.

Job searching used to mean convincing another human being you were worth hiring. Now it feels like trying to impress a toaster with your resume while hoping someone in HR remembers there is an actual person attached to the PDF.

Suzanne sent me a message that captured what so many job seekers are feeling. She has spent years building a career around sales, customer service, persistence, loyalty, and caring about people. She's the employee companies describe using phrases like "customer obsessed," "results driven," and "passionate team player." Yet when she applies, she gets the greatest hits album everyone else gets: "Thank you for your interest." "We've decided to move forward with another candidate." Corporate rejection Mad Libs.

Suzanne spent TWO YEARS job searching before. Two years. She treated it like a full time job. She researched companies, wrote cover letters, customized applications, and didn't launch the same resume into cyberspace like confetti. Hundreds of applications later, the computer remained emotionally unavailable. Now she's three months into another search and learning the magical language of "keywords." Apparently being great at

sales isn't enough. You need "revenue optimization." Building customer relationships? Too human. Try "stakeholder engagement." Worked hard your entire career? Fantastic. Please translate that into six bullet points beginning with "leveraged," "spearheaded," and "strategically executed."

Years ago, Suzanne could walk into a business, meet a manager or owner, shake a hand, show determination, and people noticed. They saw her personality, confidence, persistence, and the fact that she wanted to work. Today, she has to impress an algorithm before a human being is allowed to discover she exists. Behind every resume is a person who spent hours tailoring an application, worrying about bills, and watching friends get hired because they knew someone while she collects rejection emails like depressing Pokemon cards.

Suzanne asked something that stuck with me: how long do you keep pushing before you start feeling hopeless? Nobody puts that question in inspirational job search posts. They just say, "Keep going!" Wonderful. After application 247, "keep going" starts sounding like advice from someone standing safely on shore while you're

swimming across Lake Michigan wearing business casual and carrying a laptop bag.

But Suzanne is going. Interviews are finally starting. Interest is appearing. And despite every form letter, keyword game, algorithm, ghosting recruiter, and hiring process designed by a committee trapped inside an escape room, she hasn't quit.

To Suzanne, and everyone else living this story: your experience didn't suddenly become worthless because an ATS couldn't find the phrase it wanted. You are not a keyword. You are not application number 68421. Somewhere, hopefully before retirement, a company is going to remember that hiring actual humans might still be a pretty good business strategy.

POST 26 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

TECHNOLOGY & HUMOR

The Foldable Phone for the Folded Job Seeker

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A new-device discussion inspired a joke about multitasking through applications and rejection emails.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to poke fun at technology that moves forward faster than the candidate experience.

Apple introduced the iPhone Duo, and I have to admit, this may be the first phone specifically designed for modern job hunting. It folds, which is perfect, because after six months of applications, twelve panel interviews, three personality tests, two unpaid presentations, and one recruiter saying “we’ll circle back,” you’ll also be folding emotionally.

The iPhone Duo starts at \$1,999, opens into a 7.6 inch display, and gives you enough screen space to multitask. Finally. One side can display the job description, and the other can display the rejection email explaining that they selected someone whose background “more closely aligns” with the exact experience you have.

On the left is the hiring manager asking, “Why do you want to work here?” On the right is Glassdoor explaining why nobody wants to work there. You can even keep LinkedIn open on one half while the other shows the same job you applied for three weeks ago being reposted with, “Be among the first 25 applicants.” Sir, I was among the first 25 applicants LAST MONTH.

Maybe the Duo can solve ATS systems too. Fold it once for “results driven.” Fold it twice for “strategic leader.” Fold

it three times and perhaps your resume transforms into whatever mystical document the algorithm wanted when it rejected 20 years of experience in 14 seconds. Recruiters are going to love this thing because they can ghost you on TWO screens simultaneously. “Great speaking with you!” on the left. “We’ll have next steps Friday” on the right. Friday arrives and both screens become decorative.

And think about toxic bosses. When your boss sends a motivational message at 6:14 a.m. about “winning the day,” you can fold the phone halfway and physically reduce the amount of leadership you’re exposed to. One side can show the PowerPoint nobody read, while the other lets you update your resume because Chad just said, “We’re like a family here,” and everyone knows that sentence usually appears shortly before a restructuring. I’m also excited about Apple Pencil support. Now candidates can personally sign their 11 page personality assessment before being rejected for lacking “culture fit.” Progress.

Of course, at \$1,999, purchasing the Duo while unemployed may require its own financing round. Apple: “Would you like AppleCare?” Me: “Do you offer

ApplicantCare? Because I’ve been ghosted seven times this week and my confidence has a cracked screen.” A folding phone represents corporate America beautifully. It looks impressive during the presentation, costs more than expected, everyone suddenly needs one, and nobody completely understands why.

And six months from now your boss will announce the company can’t afford raises while typing the message from his brand new iPhone Duo. At least job seekers will finally have enough screen space to see LinkedIn, Indeed, their resume, rejection emails, recruiter messages, and their rapidly declining optimism all at once. We truly are living in the future. Innovation never sleeps.

POST 27 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

COMMUNITY UPDATE

More Corporate Chaos on Facebook

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I shared a second invitation for readers who wanted to follow my writing on Facebook.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted the community to find the same stories, jokes and conversations beyond LinkedIn.

Follow me on Facebook. Apparently LinkedIn wasn't enough chaos for one person. Same sarcasm. Same corporate nonsense. Same recruiters ghosting people professionally. Same toxic bosses posting inspirational quotes five minutes after ruining someone's day.

Come join me over there. I promise absolutely nothing educational, but there's a strong chance you'll laugh and accidentally feel better about corporate America.

<https://lnkd.in/gHBW6tdz>

POST 28 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Motivational Quotes Before Sunrise

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled a former boss sending early motivational messages while creating stress throughout the workday.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted managers to understand that slogans do not replace decent leadership.

Nothing prepares you for the workday opening your phone before sunrise and discovering that your toxic boss has found a quote on Google Images.

A while back, I worked for one of those leaders who loved sending motivational messages early. Before coffee. Before most birds were awake. At 5:47 a.m. my phone would light up with, "Winners find a way." Sir, I am currently finding a way to the bathroom. Then came, "Great teams don't make excuses." Interesting, because by 9:30 a.m. he had blamed sales on the weather, staffing on HR, customer complaints on the customers, payroll on accounting, and his bad decision on "miscommunication."

The messages were always beautiful. Sunrises. Mountains. Lions ready for a conference call. Meanwhile, the workplace looked like a documentary called Surviving Tuesday. My favorite part was the emotional whiplash. At 6:02 a.m.: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." At 10:11 a.m.: "Why is this number down?" At 10:12 a.m.: "Who screwed this up?" At 10:13 a.m.: "I don't want excuses." By lunch, Gandhi had left the group chat.

Toxic bosses communicate like

inspirational calendars and manage like malfunctioning leaf blowers. Loud, chaotic, and somehow pushing every problem into someone else's yard. They love words like accountability, loyalty, ownership, culture, family, urgency, and attitude. Especially attitude. Nothing makes a toxic boss more uncomfortable than an employee developing one. And the messages always sounded personal. "Team, I believe in every one of you." Wonderful. Could you also believe in approving the vacation request I submitted three months ago?

Then came the greatest hits. "Your attitude determines your altitude." Perfect. My altitude is currently somewhere under my desk. "Pressure creates diamonds." Maybe. It also creates resignations, migraines, LinkedIn activity, and employees whispering, "Do you know anybody hiring?" Sometimes those messages worked for a few minutes. You wanted to believe today would be different. Maybe leadership had discovered empathy. Maybe somebody watched a leadership video past the first thirty seconds.

Then the first meeting started. Same yelling. Same blame. Same impossible expectations. Same people praised publicly and shredded privately. That is

when you learn something important: motivation without respect is just decoration. A quote cannot fix a culture. A sunrise cannot cover burnout. A lion meme cannot replace leadership. And "we are family" does not excuse treating employees like disposable batteries with name tags.

People do not need a motivational text before dawn. They need expectations, communication, recognition, support, fair treatment, and a boss who does not create the emergency they later congratulate everyone for surviving. Years later I barely remember the inspirational quotes, but I remember how that workplace made people feel.

That is the part leaders should think about before they hit Send at 5:47 a.m.

POST 29 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

INTERVIEW DYNAMICS

When a Hiring Manager Feels Threatened by Experience

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered interviews where the atmosphere changed once the conversation turned to substantive leadership experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted strong candidates to be evaluated for their abilities rather than whether they make someone uncomfortable.

There is a strange moment in some interviews when you realize you are no longer being evaluated for the job. You are being evaluated for how comfortable the hiring manager feels sitting across from you.

Let's talk about hiring managers who get intimidated by your presence.

I have been in interviews where everything was going perfectly until the conversation moved beyond the scripted questions. We started talking about operations, people, numbers, leadership. Suddenly the energy changed. At first it was, "Tell me about your experience." Ten minutes later it felt more like, "Could you please have slightly less experience?" You can almost see the moment happen. The smile gets tighter. The notes stop. The hiring manager leans back like you just explained their own department to them. "So you've managed teams larger than ours?" Yes. "Multiple locations?" Yes. "Improved struggling operations?" Yes. I also know how to use Microsoft Teams without calling IT, but I didn't want to overwhelm anybody.

Then comes my favorite phrase: "We're concerned you might be overqualified."

Overqualified is an interesting word. Sometimes it means, "You could probably do this job." Sometimes it means, "You might notice what is broken here." And sometimes it means, "If we hire you, I may eventually have to explain why you understand my department better than I do."

That is when interviews get weird. You answer confidently and suddenly you are "intense." You understand the business and now you are "very strategic." You ask a thoughtful question and they wonder whether you will be "happy in the role." Translation: Could you please be knowledgeable, but not so knowledgeable that anyone currently employed here becomes uncomfortable?

Experience should not be threatening. Confidence should not be mistaken for ego. A strong candidate should make a good leader excited, not nervous. Great leaders hire people who know things they do not know. They want people who challenge the room, improve the operation, develop others, and bring scars from problems they have already survived. Insecure leaders want someone impressive enough to do the work but quiet enough to never

become competition. After enough interviews, talented people start shrinking themselves. They soften accomplishments. They stop mentioning how much they have led. They pretend they do not know the answer immediately. They walk into interviews trying to look capable, but not too capable.

That is ridiculous. You spent years learning. Years failing. Years fixing mistakes. Years leading people through chaos. Years building judgment that cannot be downloaded from a leadership podcast. Don't apologize for bringing that into the room. If your knowledge intimidates the person interviewing you, imagine how uncomfortable your performance would make them once you actually started working.

Sometimes rejection is not proof that you were not enough. Sometimes you were simply too much for a room that was looking for less.

POST 30 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

CREDENTIAL GATEKEEPING

A Career Reduced to Missing College Credits

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described being blocked from an internal opportunity over remaining academic credits despite years of relevant work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to look at demonstrated capability alongside formal educational requirements.

Corporate America has discovered a fascinating new way to measure intelligence: apparently, if you completed most of college but missed the final handful of credits, your brain shuts off and all previous work experience becomes decorative.

Someone messaged me today and told me she has been working at her company for years. She applied for another role inside the same company. Not a fantasy role. Not “Chief Astronaut of Synergy.” A job involving work she has already done, skills she already uses, and responsibilities she clearly understands. She didn’t ask for the corner office, a private jet, or the CEO’s parking spot. She wanted an initial conversation.

The answer? No conversation because she has one year of college left. Meanwhile, she is already managing a territory that covers a continent and a half, communicating in Spanish, crushing her metrics, and But apparently the missing diploma has become the corporate version of a force field. Experience may approach, but it cannot pass.

And this is where hiring gets ridiculous. We say we want problem solvers, adaptable people, resilience,

communication skills, leadership, grit, and real world experience. Then someone walks in carrying all of that and HR says, “That’s wonderful, but do you have the piece of paper?” She joked that she was busy solving actual problems in life and ran out of time to solve hypothetical problems on an exam. Honestly, that might be the best qualification statement I’ve heard all year.

What bothered me most wasn’t even the rejection. It was what happened afterward. She started questioning whether she was entitled for believing she deserved a conversation. She wondered whether confidence had somehow turned into arrogance. That is what a broken system can do. It can take someone who has survived difficult years, rebuilt her life, performed well at work, taken on enormous responsibility, and still make her wonder whether asking to be seen is asking too much.

It isn’t. A degree can absolutely matter. Education matters. Credentials matter for plenty of professions. But when someone has already demonstrated abilities a role requires, refusing even to speak with them because one box remains unchecked feels less like talent evaluation and more like a software

setting nobody wants to challenge. Imagine telling someone, “You’re trusted enough to manage huge responsibilities for us, but not qualified enough for us to spend 30 minutes talking to you about doing more.”

That’s not a talent strategy. That’s a corporate escape room where the final clue is hidden inside a diploma frame. And if you’re on the receiving end of this, remember: a company’s checklist is not an appraisal of your human value. A rejection does not erase what you’ve built. A missing credential does not delete your experience.

Sometimes the funniest part of corporate America is that it keeps asking for proof you can do the job while ignoring the person standing directly in front of them already doing it.

POST 31 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

Why I Keep Testing The Interview Games

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Questions from new followers made it time to explain my firsthand approach to the hiring process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers and employers to understand that the stories come from observing real candidate experiences.

For anyone new here, I should probably explain why I keep voluntarily walking into hiring processes like a man who learned nothing from the last one. Longtime followers know exactly what I do: I apply to different companies, go through their interview process, document what happens, and then talk about it publicly.

I pay attention to the application, recruiter screen, interview rounds, assignments, follow-ups, ghosting, timelines, awkward questions, and the sudden silence after being told, "We'll be in touch very soon." Then I send a recap to the executive team explaining what worked and what didn't, where the candidate experience broke down, and what they may want to improve.

And no, I don't get paid. No consulting fee. No invoice. No expense account. Nobody mails me a fruit basket after round seven saying, "Thank you for surviving our hiring process." I do it because I'm trying to change the system, and sometimes the best way to understand candidates is to become one.

So I sit through recruiter calls, hiring manager conversations, panel interviews, personality tests, "quick assignments" that consume half a

Saturday, and final rounds that feel like I'm being considered for Secretary of Transportation. I upload my resume, then type the same resume into 47 boxes because apparently technology has limits. I answer where I see myself in five years while wondering whether the person asking will still work there by next Tuesday.

Companies talk constantly about culture, values, communication, transparency, employer branding, and being a "people first organization." Then some leave candidates waiting for weeks without an update, repost the position, or send an automated rejection at 4:13 in the morning like the recruiting robot developed insomnia.

Every application has a person behind it. Someone rearranged their workday, prepared, researched the company, practiced answers, put on a nice shirt for Zoom while wearing sweatpants below the camera, and allowed themselves to get excited. Sometimes all that effort is rewarded with silence.

That is why I keep doing this. I'm not sponsored by Indeed. LinkedIn has not awarded me a badge that says "Professional Interview Survivor." I'm trying to push the hiring system in a better direction, one recruiter call,

unnecessary panel, recycled interview question, assignment, and reposted job at a time.

If one executive reads my recap and fixes part of the process for the next candidate, that matters. If one hiring manager realizes candidates deserve communication, that matters. If one leadership team asks, "Wait, is this what people go through to work here?" then the experiment was worth it.

I may not be able to fix hiring overnight, but I can keep showing up, documenting what happens, laughing at the absurd parts, talking about the uncomfortable parts, and sending the receipts upstairs.

Apparently, I'm willing to do all of that for free. Which may be the strangest part of the entire hiring process.

POST 32 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The Meeting About the Meeting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered an organization where calendars filled up faster than meaningful decisions were made.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to choose action and accountability over another recurring invitation.

A while back I worked for a company where meetings were not something we used to solve problems. Meetings were the problem. We had meetings about meetings, pre-meetings to prepare for meetings, follow-up meetings to discuss why the first meeting accomplished nothing, and calendar invites that multiplied faster than actual results.

Corporate efficiency in action. I remember sitting in one of those rooms thinking there is absolutely no way anyone believes this is efficient. Twelve people. Two laptops open to spreadsheets nobody understood. One person saying, "Let's take this offline," which was funny because we were all already in the room. Someone else was creating an action plan for the action plan. Meanwhile, employees needed help, customers needed answers, stores needed support, and leadership was debating whether the next meeting should be 30 minutes or 45.

That was the culture. Eventually, I started talking about it publicly. Not trade secrets. Not confidential information. Just the kind of workplace behavior employees whisper about in parking lots, group chats, and while staring into the break room microwave wondering how their career ended up

here. Apparently, describing reality has a funny way of making people more uncomfortable than the reality itself.

Then one day I received a message with all the warmth of a tax audit. Remove the post immediately.

Non-disparagement agreement. Formal demand. Cease and desist letter coming. Nothing says "we definitely do not have a toxic culture" quite like threatening someone for talking about the toxic culture.

I remember reading it and thinking, wow, this is the fastest response I ever got from corporate. Suddenly, communication was excellent. Where was this urgency when employees needed support? Where was this response time when operational problems sat unresolved? Apparently, the secret to getting executive attention was not improving the business. It was posting about the business on LinkedIn.

And that is what always makes me laugh about toxic workplaces. They will ignore the smoke for months, but the second someone says, "Hey, I think the building might be on fire," they become furious at the person holding the fire alarm. Micromanagement becomes "accountability." Burnout becomes

"commitment." Constant turnover becomes "raising the bar." Seventeen meetings a week becomes "strong communication." And anyone who questions it suddenly has an "attitude problem."

My favorite corporate phrase will always be, "We encourage honest feedback." What they really mean is, "We encourage honest feedback as long as it confirms everything we already believe." I learned a lot from that experience. Mostly that if a company needs three meetings to schedule a fourth meeting, employee engagement is probably not the biggest problem.

And if a LinkedIn post gets a faster executive response than an actual operational issue, congratulations. You just discovered the company's most effective communication system.

Kevin and the Unicorn Panel Interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A crowded panel and an executive with impossible expectations became the centerpiece of an interview story.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to highlight how unrealistic wish lists obscure what a job actually needs.

There is always a moment in an interview when you realize you are no longer being evaluated for a job. You are being handed material for a story. Mine happened somewhere between the fifth introduction and the moment a VP explained that the ideal candidate should basically be him... only better. That was when I knew we had entered unicorn territory.

His name was Kevin. The other day I was on a panel interview with six people. Six. It felt less like an interview and more like I had been called before a committee to explain why I wanted health insurance. Everyone took turns asking questions and writing notes. Then Kevin started explaining what they were looking for.

He wanted someone like him. But better. I had to sit with that sentence because sometimes your brain closes a browser tab to protect itself. Kevin described this magical candidate as strategic but hands on, confident but humble, aggressive but patient, independent but collaborative, and able to challenge leadership without making leadership uncomfortable. Basically, they wanted Batman with an MBA, no ego, and salary expectations from 2014.

Kevin kept using himself as the benchmark. "I do this." "I would handle it this way." "I'm looking for someone who thinks like I do." After the fourth comparison, I realized this was not a job interview anymore. This was cloning with a budget. They were not searching for a candidate. They were searching for Kevin 2.0, except Kevin 2.0 needed stronger leadership skills, better communication, more experience, less ego, more flexibility, and the ability to operate inside Kevin's shadow. That is what I call the Unicorn Man interview.

Companies do this all the time. They create a job description around one imaginary perfect person, interview actual people, then act disappointed when nobody matches the employee they invented. They want executive presence without executive pay, strong opinions as long as those opinions match theirs, and someone who will "bring fresh ideas" while doing everything exactly the way it has always been done.

Then they meet someone qualified and say, "Not quite the right fit." Of course not. You are searching for a fictional character. By the end, I stopped wondering whether they wanted to hire me. I was trying to figure out

whether Kevin understood that he was interviewing people to compete against himself. Six people on a panel, one VP searching for his superior twin, and me wondering whether the benefits included access to the corporate cloning laboratory.

Hiring does not have to be this complicated. Sometimes the best person for the role is not someone exactly like the leader already sitting there. Sometimes the best hire thinks differently, leads differently, communicates differently, and brings something into the room that the room does not already have.

But if your dream candidate is "me, only better," I have bad news. You are not hiring. You are hunting unicorns. And apparently, Kevin already has the horn.

POST 34 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

JOB SEARCH & GHOSTING

LinkedIn Is Starting to Resemble a Dating App

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The waiting and mixed signals of applying for work began to resemble the same rituals people describe in online dating.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters to see how uncertainty and silence look from the applicant side.

I think modern job hunting officially crossed the line when I realized I was checking LinkedIn the same way people check Hinge and Tinder. Same nervous scrolling. Same polished profiles. Same weird process. Same moment where you think, “This one looks promising,” only to be ignored three days later by someone who was supposedly “very interested.”

On Hinge, you stare at a profile wondering if this could be the one. On LinkedIn, you stare at a job posting wondering if this could finally be the company that means “people first.” Then you apply. You wait. You refresh your inbox. Eventually, silence. On Tinder, someone says they want “something serious.” On LinkedIn, a company says they want “a long term fit.” Both statements need legal disclaimers.

Hinge says, “Designed to be deleted.” Corporate recruiting says, “Designed to make you create a password with 14 characters and your first supervisor’s blood type.” At least Tinder tells you quickly when nobody is interested. Job hunting gives you six interviews, an assessment, a case study, and a panel with Kevin from Strategy before sending an automated rejection at 4:07 a.m.

On Hinge, the red flag is, “I’m not really on here much.” In hiring, it’s, “We’re moving very quickly.” No, you’re not. I applied when summer started. Since then I’ve finished a book, changed my oil, and watched three CEOs announce “exciting transformations,” while your recruiter is still “aligning calendars.” Tinder has ghosting. Recruiting has professional ghosting, which is regular ghosting with a company logo and somebody promising to “circle back.”

Then comes corporate catfishing. The posting says Director. You interview and discover you’ll answer phones, fix the printer, manage six departments, cover weekends, shovel snow in January, and increase EBITDA before lunch. Salary: “competitive.” Competitive with what? My electric bill? And like dating apps, everybody has unrealistic preferences. “We want someone with 15 years of experience who is energetic, adaptable, strategic, hands on, visionary, and willing to accept \$68,000.” Congratulations. You’re not hiring a person. You’re building a unicorn in Workday.

Then after all those interviews they hit you with the corporate version of, “I’m just not ready for a relationship.”

“We’ve decided to go in another direction.” Which direction, Kevin? I just spent eight hours explaining my background to twelve people. I hope your direction leads somewhere without Teams. And the best part? Two days later, the job is reposted. That is the LinkedIn equivalent of seeing the person who said they “needed time to work on themselves” back on Tinder Friday night holding a fish.

Modern job hunting is two exhausted sides swiping through profiles, pretending they know what they want while rejecting good people because someone else might be 3% more unicorn. The only difference is Tinder might eventually buy you dinner. Corporate America sends you a survey asking how you enjoyed being rejected.

The ATS Escape Room

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another elaborate application process turned one uploaded resume into a long sequence of repeated fields and screens.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to try their own systems and remove pointless obstacles.

At some point, hiring stopped being a conversation between people and became an escape room designed by someone with unresolved issues about resumes.

You find a job, click Apply, and upload your resume. Then the website immediately asks you to manually type your name, work history, education, skills, titles, dates and probably your blood type into 38 separate boxes. Excuse me? You already have the document. It contains my entire professional life, but apparently the computer needs me to prove how badly I want the job by recreating it from scratch like it's 1997.

Then comes the personality assessment, because surviving the application wasn't enough. "Do you enjoy working with others?" Before this application, yes. "Are you comfortable handling repetitive tasks?" I think we're testing that now. "Would your coworkers describe you as patient?" Ask me again after I enter my employment dates for the fourth time because your portal erased everything. By question 47, I'm no longer sure whether I'm applying for a job or participating in an experiment involving dropdown menus and password rules.

And somehow, after all this technology, AI, algorithms, keyword scanners, chatbots, video screenings, scheduling links, and assessments, hiring has become less efficient and less human. We created technology to make hiring easier and somehow turned applying for one job into a side hustle. Candidates spend an hour applying. Recruiters spend seconds reviewing. Hiring managers want the "perfect fit." The ATS wants the perfect keyword. Meanwhile, a human being is wondering if anyone plans to have an actual conversation.

Then companies announce they can't find talent. Of course you can't. Half the talent is on page seven trying to remember the month they started a job twelve years ago. The other half gave up when the system asked them to upload the resume they already uploaded. Hiring is supposed to be about experience, judgment, personality, potential, communication, and solving problems. Instead, we've decided the first test of employability should be whether someone can survive a broken application portal without launching their laptop into the backyard.

I'm not against technology in hiring.

Use AI and automate. Use tools that make things faster. But if your technology removes communication, respect, feedback, common sense, and human interaction, you haven't improved hiring. You've just automated the frustration. Maybe one day we'll return to the radical concept of reviewing someone's resume, talking to them like a human being, making a decision, and actually communicating it.

Until then, upload your resume. Retype your resume. Answer 63 questions already answered on your resume. Create an account. Verify your email. Reset the password you created 90 seconds ago. Complete an assessment. Record a one way video. Wait six weeks. Then receive an automated rejection at 4:13 a.m. for a position that will be reposted tomorrow as "Urgently Hiring." Pure innovation.

Bosch and the Corporate Echo Chamber

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Bosch interview included a series of follow-up questions that repeated pieces of my own answers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to move toward genuine dialogue instead of scripted echoes.

You ever sit in an interview and realize the hiring manager is not really asking questions, they are just recycling the last few words you said and handing them back to you with a question mark?

That happened to me the other day during an interview with Bosch, and somewhere around question four I realized I had entered a Corporate Echo Chamber.

The hiring manager asked, "Tell me about your leadership style." I gave an answer about accountability, communication, developing people, setting expectations, and making sure the team understands the why behind the goal. He nodded and said, "The why behind the goal?" Yes. That was literally the ending of the sentence I just finished. So I explained it again. Then he asked, "Making sure the team understands?" Correct. Also from the same sentence. At that point I started wondering what would happen if I ended an answer with, "And that's when the llama entered accounting."

Would the next question be, "Tell me more about the llama?" I was tempted to find out. I mentioned building strong teams. "Strong teams?" Yes, those. I mentioned improving performance.

"Improving performance?" Still yes. I mentioned coaching underperforming employees. "Underperforming employees?" Now I'm wondering whether this is an interview or whether I accidentally activated Alexa. Good interviewers listen and ask follow-up questions, but there is a difference between active listening and becoming my human closed captioning system.

At one point I wanted to say, "My greatest professional accomplishment was teaching a raccoon to operate Microsoft Excel." "Microsoft Excel?" No, sir. The raccoon. Please stay with me. By the end, I wasn't even nervous anymore. I was entertained. Interviews usually have candidates trying to predict the next question. Here, I already knew it. Whatever words left my mouth last were coming back like a corporate boomerang.

Maybe this is the newest interview strategy. Forget behavioral questions, STAR responses, case studies, and leadership assessments. Just repeat the candidate's final phrase in a deeper voice and wait for more material. Candidate: "I increased sales by 20 percent." Hiring manager: "Twenty percent?" Candidate: "Yes." Hiring manager: "Yes?" Congratulations. We have achieved infinite interviewing. I

almost respected the commitment.

I walked away thinking I should have tested the system harder. My final answer should have ended with, "And that is why every executive meeting should include mozzarella sticks." Imagine the follow-up. "Tell me more about the mozzarella sticks." Now THAT is an interview I would happily attend for eight rounds.

Sometimes it's seven interviews. Sometimes it's a personality test. Sometimes it's a one way video where I talk to myself. And sometimes you meet a hiring manager who turns your own sentence into the next question. My only regret is not ending the interview with, "Unlimited PTO, a company car, and a \$200,000 salary." I wanted to hear him repeat that one.

POST 37 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

HIRING EXPERIMENTS

ALDI, the District Manager Interview Experiment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I tested ALDI's District Manager hiring experience and encountered a late recruiter and other unusual moments.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to document the candidate-side experience and encourage simple professional standards.

I've reached the point where I don't always apply for jobs because I want the job. Sometimes I apply because I want to see what the hiring process looks like on the candidate side. Think of it as mystery shopping, except I'm checking whether recruiting can survive Teams without becoming a comedy special.

I tested ALDI USA hiring process for a District Manager role. The recruiter arrived late, which made me laugh because candidates are told to join early, test the camera and microphone, research the company, prepare examples, dress professionally, have perfect Wi-Fi, and basically prepare for a NASA launch. Then the recruiter joins late like, "Sorry about that!" No problem. I've only been staring at my face wondering why Teams makes me look like I'm being interviewed at a police station.

Then came Lindsay, a Director of Operations. Lindsay was talking. I could see Lindsay talking. Unfortunately, Lindsay was muted. For several seconds I got the corporate experience: a senior leader giving an important speech while technology quietly said, "Absolutely not." Eventually the microphone was defeated, we continued.

Then came the question that made the experiment worth it: "Do you have an MBA?" I actually do. But because I was testing the process I said no. I wanted to see what happened next. Apparently that was the corporate emergency brake. I was told the company required an MBA, and the conversation looked headed toward an immediate conclusion. Years of leadership experience? Multi unit operations? Developing people? Improving sales, profitability, customer experience and performance? Interesting. But MBA? No? Thank you for participating.

Most candidates would have accepted the answer, closed Teams, opened the refrigerator and stared inside for emotional support. But I wasn't finished. I kept the conversation going because I wasn't interviewing anymore. I was gathering content. Companies talk about hiring great leaders, valuing experience, and finding people who make an impact. Then one checkbox appears and suddenly an entire career is standing outside the nightclub because it forgot its MBA wristband.

This isn't an argument against education. I have the MBA. That's why I tested it. I wanted to see whether the

conversation was about understanding the candidate or checking a box. If one answer can outweigh decades of results, maybe we aren't evaluating talent anymore. Maybe we're completing an expensive dropdown menu.

That's why I document these experiences. Sometimes it's eight interviews. Sometimes it's an assessment. Sometimes the recruiter disappears. Sometimes the hiring manager cannot unmute herself. And sometimes one tiny checkbox can outweigh an entire career.

Modern job hunting is incredible. You can manage hundreds of employees, millions in revenue, complicated operations, difficult customers, budgets, and performance. But apparently the two toughest questions remain: "Can everyone hear me?" And right after that: "Do you have an MBA?"

POST 38 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Ace Hardware and the Human Difference

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A store visit for my son's bicycle reminded me how powerful competent, attentive service can be.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to notice the value of employees who help people instead of hiding behind a process.

Sometimes the best lesson about modern hiring shows up in the last place you expect it. In my case, it happened at Ace Hardware Corporation while I was looking for accessories for my son's bike.

I walked in expecting a quick errand. Find the bike aisle, stare confidently at several parts I did not understand, buy the wrong one, go home, watch YouTube, return it, repeat. Basically the same process as applying for a job, except Ace actually had someone available to help me.

I met a man working there and told him what I needed. He didn't point toward aisle 14 and disappear into the witness protection program. He walked over with me, asked questions, looked at the options, and tried to figure out what would actually work. Within minutes I thought, "Is this what human interaction feels like?" Modern job hunting has trained me differently. Usually I explain exactly what I need to a computer, upload my resume, retype my resume, answer 47 questions, take a personality test, and then receive an email six weeks later from DoNotReply telling me they've decided to pursue other candidates.

At Ace, I asked a question and a human

answered it. Immediately. Nobody said, "We'll circle back after meeting with the bike accessory team." There was no second round conversation with the assistant store manager. Nobody asked where I see myself with this bicycle bell in five years. I wasn't required to complete a case study explaining how I would increase handlebar efficiency by 17%. The man simply helped me. I nearly asked if Ace was hiring recruiters.

Companies spend millions talking about candidate experience, AI recruiting platforms, assessments, and talent pipelines. Meanwhile the revolutionary strategy may simply be: put a knowledgeable human in front of another human and let them talk. Ace managed to accomplish in ten minutes what some companies can't in eight interviews.

And this man knew his stuff. He listened, explained the options, and didn't make me feel stupid for not knowing "that little thing that goes on the bike." In a job interview, if you forget one buzzword, suddenly six people on Zoom start writing notes like they just discovered you lied about graduating kindergarten.

I went into Ace looking for something

for my son's bike and left thinking about hiring. Maybe companies have overcomplicated everything. Maybe applicants don't need another portal, another assessment, another AI bot named Olivia asking if Tuesday at 2:17 works. Maybe they need someone who listens, answers questions, communicates clearly and treats them like they matter. My son got his bike accessories. I got a reminder that good people still make a business memorable. And somehow Ace Hardware gave me a better candidate experience when I wasn't even a candidate.

No resume. No panel interview. No personality assessment. No ghosting. Just helpful people. Corporate America, please visit aisle 14. The solution may be sitting between the bicycle accessories and the socket wrenches.

POST 39 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

SOCIAL MEDIA SATIRE

The Influencer Who Has It All Figured Out

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An online claim about leaving corporate life for an effortless six-figure income sparked some skepticism.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to laugh at glossy success stories that leave out the practical details.

The internet has officially convinced me that I made a terrible financial decision by choosing employment instead of becoming mysteriously rich at 26.

The other day I saw a post from an influencer who said she quit her corporate job, now makes six figures, and finally has the freedom to “live life on her own terms.” Naturally, I was curious. Maybe she built a company. Nope!! Her feed appears to consist mainly of rooftop parties, beach clubs, cocktails, airport lounges, hotel mirrors, and captions about “alignment.” Apparently I misunderstood entrepreneurship. I thought building a six figure business involved customers, invoices, expenses, taxes, deadlines, and occasionally staring at your bank account like it betrayed you. Turns out you just need a ring light, a passport, and the ability to stare at the ocean while someone photographs you from behind.

Every third post says, “I left corporate because I refused to trade my time for money.” Very inspiring, especially when followed by a sponsored video for protein powder or a course teaching you how to escape the 9 to 5. Then comes the advice: stop making excuses, bet on yourself, choose abundance.

Ma’am, Kevin from accounting cannot simply “choose abundance.” Kevin has three kids, a mortgage, braces to pay for, and a refrigerator making a noise that sounds medically expensive. But social media makes the transition look easy. Monday: quit corporate. Tuesday: heal. Wednesday: find yourself. Thursday: six figures. Friday: Ibiza. Saturday: champagne. Sunday: post a reel explaining that everyone else lacks discipline.

Meanwhile, the rest of us are sitting at work wondering why our Outlook calendar has a meeting called “Quick Sync” with 14 people invited. I am fascinated by the six figure claim because nobody ever explains which six figures. Revenue? Profit? Gross sales? Affiliate commissions? Monopoly money? I’m not criticizing anyone for building a successful life online. If you figured out how to earn great money while traveling and taking photos next to infinity pools, congratulations. I just want the tutorial to include the chapter between “I quit my job” and “Here I am holding champagne on a yacht.”

Show me the client acquisition. Show me the failed ideas. Show me the late nights, taxes, cancellations, refunds, contracts, anxiety, bad months, and the moment your business account had

\$47 in it. Show me the part where you questioned every decision before the photographer arrived. Instead, we get: “I chose freedom.” Wonderful. I chose dental insurance. Social media has created a career path where the job is apparently documenting how little it looks like you work.

Tomorrow I’m quitting everything, buying sunglasses, standing beside somebody else’s Lamborghini, and posting, “Six months ago I stopped chasing success.” Then I’ll sell a course explaining how you can stop chasing it too. Only \$997. Payment plan available. Because nothing says financial freedom quite like financing the instructions.

POST 40 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

INTERVIEW CULTURE

When Walmart Interviews Were Conversations

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Remembering earlier Walmart interviews made today's strange and highly scripted questions look especially unnecessary.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring managers to return to practical discussion of the work.

Interview questions used to be conversations. Two adults sat across from each other, talked about the job and experience, maybe laughed a little, and during the discussion both sides decided whether they could tolerate each other for eight hours a day.

I remember interviewing with Walmart years ago. We talked about leadership, operations, sales, people, customers, and what I had done. Nobody asked what animal represents my management style. Nobody asked where I see myself in five years while the interviewer had been there six months. Nobody stared into my soul and said, "Tell me about a time you failed," like Dateline was about to cut to commercial.

Today, interviewing feels like trying to defuse a bomb using corporate vocabulary. "What is your biggest weakness?" Apparently there are ten wrong answers and one acceptable answer that begins with, "Sometimes I care too much." Say perfectionist and you sound rehearsed. Say impatient and suddenly HR is hiding the staplers. Say you struggle delegating and now they think you're controlling. Say you have no weaknesses and somewhere a recruiter silently closes your application.

Then comes, "Tell me about a time you failed." I have one. I clicked "Apply Now" thinking it would take five minutes. Forty five minutes later I had created a username, invented another password, uploaded my resume, manually retyped it, entered my employment history twice, answered whether I was legally authorized to work three different ways, and completed a personality assessment asking whether stealing office supplies is bad. That was my failure. I should have closed the browser when Workday asked me to create an account.

And nothing beats, "Why are you leaving your current job?" Because I'm interviewing for yours, Linda. That seemed implied when I joined the Teams call wearing a button down shirt at 8:00 in the morning. But apparently the acceptable answer requires growth, alignment, development, opportunity, culture, and at least two words from the company mission statement.

Companies say they want authenticity, but interview authenticity has rules. Be yourself, make sure yourself completed media training. Be honest, but not the kind that causes the hiring manager to

write notes. Talk about conflict, but make sure nobody actually argued. Talk about failure, but make sure you somehow increased revenue afterward. Explain your weakness, but choose one that is secretly a strength wearing glasses and a fake mustache.

Maybe we should bring back normal interviews. Can you do the job? Can you lead people? Can you solve problems without scheduling six meetings about the problem? Can you handle customers? Can you show up without starting workplace drama? Great. You're hired.

Because if I need three mock interviews, a STAR worksheet, a personality test, a case study, and a rehearsed story about the time I "overcame adversity" just to manage a team, we are no longer interviewing.

We are casting Season 14 of Corporate Survivor.

POST 41 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

AI & ATS

The Robot Bouncer Guarding Your Resume

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The growing influence of automated screening and applications such as Workday frustrated the human side of the process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted candidates to have a fair opportunity to be seen beyond keywords and forms.

At some point, applying for a job stopped feeling like introducing yourself to a company and started feeling like trying to sneak past a robot bouncer who has never met you and has been told to reject anyone who forgot the right keywords.

That is modern hiring. We keep hearing about AI, ATS systems, automated screening, keyword matching, ranking tools, and “efficiency.” Efficiency for whom? From the candidate side, it can feel like you spent two hours tailoring a resume, answering thirty questions, uploading it, retyping it, and then getting rejected before your coffee cools down.

And then there is Workday. Workday deserves its own documentary. Episode one: Create an account. Episode two: We found your resume. Please type it all again. Episode three: What month did you start a job in 2007? Episode four: Your session has expired. Episode five: Thank you for your interest. Roll credits.

The bigger issue is what candidates cannot see. If companies use automated systems to sort, score, rank, or filter applicants, people naturally wonder what those systems are actually looking at. Is it experience and

skills? Keywords? Job titles? Graduation dates? Does the system accidentally favor one kind of career path over another while a perfectly qualified person disappears into the digital basement?

That is where “AI makes hiring more efficient” needs a bigger conversation. Technology can help recruiters manage thousands of applications. Nobody expects a recruiter to personally read 4,700 resumes before lunch. But efficiency should not become a fancy word for eliminating qualified people before another human ever knows they existed.

Candidates already know the game. Remove fancy formatting. Add the right keywords. Mirror the job description. Do not use unusual titles. Make sure the robot understands that “managed operations” and “operations management” are apparently distant cousins who no longer speak. Soon resumes are going to look less like career histories and more like ransom notes written for software: “Leadership. Strategy. Budget. EBITDA. Synergy. Please let me speak to a person.”

If AI is going to play a bigger role in hiring, companies should explain where

it is used, what it evaluates, and what safeguards exist so automation does not become an invisible wall between qualified candidates and hiring managers. Because the irony is incredible. Companies spend millions talking about culture, people, inclusion, belonging, employee experience, and human connections. Then the first person you have to impress is an algorithm named ATS-472.

I am not against technology. I am against pretending technology is automatically fair just because it can process a resume faster than Karen in recruiting. Use AI to help humans make better decisions, not to make candidates become amateur search engine specialists just to survive the application.

And please, Workday, if I upload my resume, I am begging you with every ounce of strength left in my body: read it.

POST 42 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

COMPENSATION & HIRING

Twenty Years of Experience, Entry-Level Pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw job requirements stretching far beyond the salaries attached to them.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to confront the gap between what they demand and what they offer.

Corporate America has somehow created a hiring formula that makes no sense: require twenty years of experience, demand a four year degree, prefer a master's, ask for leadership, strategy, budgeting, technology skills, and the ability to "thrive in ambiguity," then attach a salary that looks like it was approved during the MySpace era. Then recruiters say they cannot find qualified candidates.

Someone can spend fifteen or twenty years doing the work. They have led teams, grown revenue, fixed broken departments, managed budgets, trained employees, handled customers, survived restructures, and sat through enough "quick meetings" to qualify for a minor in corporate survival. Then the application asks one question: "Do you have a bachelor's degree?" You click no. Five seconds later: "Thank you for your interest." Twenty years of proven results just got defeated by a dropdown menu.

I am not against college. Education matters, and degrees have value. But somewhere along the way, a degree became a corporate access badge even for jobs where someone's actual experience should count for far more. You could have managed fifty people, opened ten locations, turned around

failing operations, increased profits, developed leaders, survived three CEOs, four reorganizations, and one motivational speaker named Brad yelling "OWN YOUR GREATNESS!" Still, HR needs to know whether you completed Economics 101 in 2004.

Then comes my favorite part: the compensation. Bachelor's degree required. Master's preferred. Ten years of experience. Advanced Excel. Strategic thinker. Strong communicator. Travel 30 percent. Available nights and weekends. Salary: \$54,000. Are you hiring a professional or asking someone to donate their education? Some job postings want Harvard credentials with Costco compensation and then wonder why the applicant pool looks thin.

The interview version is even better. "We love your background." Great. "You have exactly the leadership experience we need." Wonderful. "You have already done everything this role requires." Excellent. "And do you have a four year degree?" No. Suddenly the room gets quiet like you just admitted you have been living under a fake identity. That missing credential becomes more important than two decades of evidence in front of them.

Companies love talking about nontraditional backgrounds, transferable skills, diverse experiences, grit, resilience, and thinking differently. But sometimes their hiring process still says, "We value every path, provided your path included a university bookstore and a graduation gown."

Maybe the question should be simpler: Can this person do the job? Can they lead people, solve problems, learn quickly, make decisions, deliver results, and leave the business better than they found it?

A degree can be valuable. So can twenty years of actually doing the work. Really. Sometimes the person without the framed diploma has been solving problems longer than the person rejecting them has been working.

POST 43 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

INTERVIEW DYNAMICS

The Home Depot Interview That Went Sideways

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An earlier interview with The Home Depot came to mind as an example of an uncomfortable first impression.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to recognize how an interviewer's behavior shapes a candidate's opinion of the company.

You ever walk into an interview and know within the first sixty seconds that this is not going to be a normal conversation?

You haven't even finished sitting down and the hiring manager is already giving you the energy of someone who just found out you're the reason their lunch break got canceled. You smile, they stare. You say, "Nice to meet you," and they respond like you interrupted something important. At that point, you already know this interview is going to be less "tell me about yourself" and more "defend your entire career."

A while back, I interviewed with The Home Depot. I wasn't exactly dreaming about wearing an orange apron and discussing mulch with strangers. I wanted to test their hiring process, see what the candidate experience actually looked like. Think of it as mystery shopping corporate recruiting, except instead of checking whether the shelves are stocked, I'm checking whether the hiring manager can have a human conversation without making the candidate feel like they wandered into a disciplinary meeting.

The energy was obvious from the start. Every answer I gave was met with the same serious expression. "Tell me

about your leadership style." I answered. Stare. "How do you handle underperforming locations?" I answered. Another stare. "Tell me about a difficult employee." I answered. More staring. At one point I wondered if I had parked in his reserved space or personally raised the price of plywood. There was no back and forth, no natural conversation, no follow-up questions. Just scripted questions being fired across the table like I was testifying before Congress.

Once I realized I probably wasn't getting the job, I relaxed and started enjoying the show. Now I wasn't nervous. I was observing. I was taking mental notes like David Attenborough studying a rare corporate species. "Here we see the hiring manager in his natural habitat. Notice how he avoids smiling to establish dominance. If the candidate attempts humor, the hiring manager may retreat deeper into the job description." Suddenly it became entertainment. I wasn't trying to impress anyone. I was documenting it.

We shook hands, I walked out and I knew it. Sure enough, I didn't get the job. Was I devastated? Absolutely not. Home Depot got my application. I got content. That's why I keep testing hiring processes. Companies spend

millions talking about candidate experience, employer branding, culture, leadership, and attracting great talent. Then sometimes the actual interview feels like you interrupted someone during inventory.

Interviews are supposed to be a two way street. The company is interviewing you, but you're also interviewing them. I didn't walk away with the position, but I walked away with notes, laughs, and another reminder that sometimes the best thing you can get from an interview isn't an offer. Sometimes it's enough material for three LinkedIn posts, a chapter in a book, and one more story about corporate America trying very hard to act normal.

POST 44 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

HIRING EXPERIMENTS

ALDI PR Responds Faster Than Recruiting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

After I posted about the ALDI interview, the company's public relations outreach arrived quickly.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to compare public-facing responsiveness with the slower timelines candidates often experience.

Earlier today I posted about my ALDI USA hiring experiment, went on with my day and figured that was the end of it. Apparently corporate America has a bat signal, except instead of summoning Batman, it summons the PR team whenever a LinkedIn post starts moving faster than an internal email marked "urgent."

A few hours later, ALDI's PR team reached out to me. And I have to admit, that might be the fastest response I've ever received during a hiring process. Forget "we'll circle back next week." Forget the black hole where applications go to die. Mention the company publicly and suddenly everybody remembers where the Reply button is.

I laughed because this is exactly why I document these experiences. I'm not trying to destroy companies or launch a crusade against Microsoft Teams. I'm showing what the candidate experience feels like when nobody thinks a candidate is taking notes. Sometimes it is excellent. Sometimes it is confusing. Sometimes a senior leader gives an important speech to a muted microphone. And sometimes one question turns the entire interview into a corporate emergency brake. Those moments can define the entire

candidate experience.

The post was never really about ALDI. ALDI just happened to be today's contestant on "America's Got Hiring Processes." The bigger point was how companies say they want leadership, experience, results, judgment, communication skills, business acumen and people who can make an impact, then allow one checkbox to become more powerful than decades of actual performance. People were laughing because they've lived some version of it. They've been rejected for a credential nobody mentioned, gone through 5 interviews before someone noticed something on page one of the resume, completed assessments, presentations, case studies and enough online forms to qualify for a small government grant.

So when PR reached out, I respected it. At least someone was paying attention. Of course, part of me wanted to reply, "Great news. You have advanced to the next round of this LinkedIn post. Please prepare a 45 minute presentation explaining your candidate experience strategy, complete three assessments, provide six references, meet with a panel of eight commenters, and then wait two weeks while we repost the conversation." I considered adding,

"We expect to make a decision sometime between Tuesday and the collapse of civilization," but I behaved. Mostly.

I appreciate companies willing to engage when something uncomfortable gets public attention. That is better than pretending the post does not exist and hoping the algorithm buries it beneath a leadership quote from a CEO standing next to a mountain. The irony still makes me laugh. Candidate Alex waited for the hiring process. Content Creator Alex got corporate outreach the same day.

Maybe I've discovered the secret to getting recruiters to respond: stop sending follow-up emails and start creating follow-up posts. Modern job hunting remains undefeated. It still counts.

POST 45 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

EMPLOYER BRAND

Every Candidate Is a Potential Customer

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on what happens when a retailer creates a negative impression during hiring.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to see interviewing as a public demonstration of their culture and customer values.

Companies love to say every candidate is a potential customer. Then some of them conduct interviews like they're trying to make sure that person never shops there, works there, recommends them, or speaks kindly about them again today.

That's the part of hiring companies often miss. An interview is not just a screening tool. It is a live demonstration of your culture. The candidate is watching how prepared you are, how you communicate, whether you respect their time, whether you actually read the resume, and whether the smiling "people first" language on the careers page survives contact with an actual person.

To the hiring manager, it may be another 30 minute block squeezed between a budget call and lunch. To the candidate, it might be the conversation they prepared for all week. They researched the company, studied the role, practiced answers, rearranged meetings, tested the camera, found the one corner where the Wi-Fi behaves, and tried to look confident while Teams somehow made them look like they were being interviewed from a basement.

Sometimes the hiring manager is

excellent. Prepared, curious, respectful, and familiar with the resume. Other times you can practically watch them discover your career in real time. "Tell me about your current role." Absolutely. It's near the top of the document you're currently pretending to read.

That is where candidate experience becomes company reputation. Every person who interviews with you leaves with a story. Maybe they got the job. Maybe they didn't. Maybe they received a thoughtful rejection. Maybe they were ghosted so thoroughly they started checking local missing person reports for the recruiter. Either way, they now have an opinion about your company, and that opinion did not come from the polished careers page. It came from the human being representing you.

Companies obsess over customer experience. They track reviews, surveys, complaints, wait times, phone calls, and whether someone smiled while handing over a receipt. But candidate experience sometimes gets treated like, "Kevin has twenty minutes Thursday. Put somebody on his calendar." Congratulations, Kevin. You are now the company billboard.

Hiring managers absolutely have full plates. I understand that. But the candidate did not create the staffing shortage, quarterly deadline, scheduling disaster, or the meeting about the meeting. They simply showed up hoping for a fair conversation. You do not have to hire everyone. You do not even have to like everyone. But everyone can leave feeling respected.

Because a rejected candidate can still become a customer, a referral source, a future employee, or someone who tells ten people your company handled the process with class. Or they can open LinkedIn. And trust me, some of us take notes.

A thirty minute interview might disappear from a manager's memory by lunch. For the candidate, it can become a story they remember for years. That's a lot of reputation riding on one calendar invite.

POST 46 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

HIRING SATIRE

The Interview Games: Now Streaming

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The sheer number and variety of hiring experiences suggested a reality show practically writes itself.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted humor to make visible how theatrical a routine job search can become.

Netflix or Hulu needs to call me because at this point I have gone through enough interview processes with different companies to qualify as a reporter for corporate America.

Forget dating shows. Forget cooking competitions. The real survival show is modern hiring. Put me in a Microsoft Teams waiting room with a recruiter, a hiring manager, two leaders, one mysterious vice president, and I will give you twelve episodes before lunch.

Every company has its own obstacle course. One gives you a recruiter screen. Another gives you a recruiter screen, hiring manager interview, panel interview, personality assessment, case study, executive interview, and one final “quick conversation” with a guy named Brad who apparently controls the company from an airport lounge.

That is The Interview Games. Every week I test a different company’s hiring process and report back like a mystery shopper who wandered into Human Resources. Episode one: the recruiter joins late and asks me to walk through my resume. Episode two: the hiring manager asks something answered on page one. Episode three: someone discovers a requirement sitting on my resume since the application and reacts

like they just uncovered evidence in a federal investigation.

Then comes the panel. Six people join Teams. Two cameras are off. One person is eating. Another is answering emails. A dog is barking. After thirty seconds of silence, one executive finally says, “Why don’t you tell us about yourself?” Absolutely. I have only answered that question four times since Monday, but perhaps my childhood changed overnight. Then comes the assignment. “We’d like you to create a 30-60-90 day plan.” Of course you would.

Would you also like me to fix turnover, increase revenue, improve morale, redesign the org chart, locate your missing recruiter, and solve whatever happened in accounting last quarter? I can have it to you by Thursday. My favorite question is still, “Why do you want to work here?” Because you called me, Kevin.

But apparently I am supposed to explain that this company has been my lifelong dream. While other kids wanted to become astronauts, I was seven years old staring at the moon thinking, “Someday I hope to improve EBITDA for a multi unit organization.” At the end of each episode, I score the

company.

Resume reading: 3 out of 10. Communication: 5 out of 10. Same questions asked: 14. Chance the job gets reposted next Tuesday: 97 percent. Bonus points if the recruiter says, “We move quickly,” and then disappears long enough to qualify for a documentary on unsolved mysteries. Then we reach the finale. Did I get the job? Did they ghost me? Did they add another round? Did Brad finally return from the airport? Or did I wake up at 4:13 a.m. to the legendary email beginning, “After careful consideration”?

Netflix. Hulu. The material is already here. You bring the cameras. I’ll bring the resume, the sarcasm, and enough interview stories to keep this show renewed until retirement.

POST 47 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

HIRING EXPERIMENTS

The ALDI Interview Followed Me Into My Dreams

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The previous day's ALDI story was memorable enough to become the subject of a nightmare joke.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how even a single interview can linger longer than anyone expects.

Some interviews end when you click "Leave Meeting." Others follow you home, climb into your subconscious, and schedule a mandatory follow-up at 2:43 in the morning.

If you missed yesterday's ALDI USA story, here's why my brain decided I needed another round. I tested ALDI's hiring process for a District Manager role. The first recruiter joined late because candidates are told to join early, test everything, research the company, prepare examples, dress professionally, and basically perform a NASA launch sequence before clicking "Join meeting." Then I met Lindsay, a Director of Operations.

Lindsay started talking. At least I assume she did. Her mouth was moving, but her microphone was not. For a few seconds, I watched a silent film called "Senior Leadership Discovers the Mute Button." Eventually she found it. Then came the education question: "Do you have an MBA?"

I do. It was literally sitting there on my resume. But because I was testing the process, I said no. Suddenly years of multi unit leadership, operations, sales, profitability, training, and performance got body slammed by one missing checkbox. I was taking notes. I shared

the experience yesterday, laughed about the mute button, laughed about the MBA, closed LinkedIn, and went to bed. That should have been the end of it. My subconscious disagreed. Apparently ALDI still had questions for Dream Alex.

Last night I dreamed I was back in the interview with Lindsay. And yes, she was muted again. I could see her asking me something, but all I heard was silence. Finally the microphone came on and she said, "Alex, we need to clarify your education." Even in my sleep, I thought, "Lindsay, please don't."

She looked at my resume and asked, "Do you have an MBA?" I said yes. Then she asked, "And do you have a master's degree?" I said, "Yes, Lindsay. That is what the M has been doing this entire time." She wrote something down like I had just introduced a new academic concept.

Then another hiring manager entered. Then HR. Then someone with a laptop. Suddenly a PowerPoint appeared behind them titled DOES MBA MEAN MASTER'S? Slide one: MBA. Slide two: Master of Business Administration. Slide three: Ask Recruiting. Slide four: Circle Back. Slide five: Schedule Another Panel.

Every answer created another interviewer. One asked if I had considered graduate school. Another asked what MBA stood for. Someone asked where I saw myself in five years. I said, "Awake." Nobody laughed. That's how I knew it was still an interview.

Then Lindsay leaned forward and asked, "Would you be willing to go back to school and earn a master's degree?" I woke up immediately. No alarm. No noise. Pure survival instinct. I sat straight up in bed thinking, "LINDSAY, THE MBA IS THE MASTER'S DEGREE."

Yesterday ALDI was content. Last night it became a recurring nightmare. I'm not taking a nap today. I can't risk waking up in round three with Lindsay muted, HR holding my resume, and a case study asking me to explain the letter M.

POST 48 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

One Hundred Companies, One Ongoing Experiment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on the many employers and systems I had encountered while documenting modern recruiting.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain how comparing processes can lead to constructive criticism and better standards.

There are people who interview because they need a job. Then there's me. This year, I've interviewed with over 100 companies because I turned modern recruiting into a live experiment.

I test portals, recruiter screens, panel interviews, personality assessments, case studies, salary conversations, ghosting, and everything between "Apply Now" and "We've decided to move forward with another candidate." At this point, I'm less of a candidate and more of an unpaid quality control department.

So when people message me asking for help preparing for interviews, I understand why. Preparation once meant printing your resume, putting on a decent shirt, and practicing "Tell me about yourself" without giving a documentary about your childhood. Now you prepare for the recruiter, hiring manager, panel, executive panel, personality test, case study, presentation, the "quick follow-up," and Kevin in round six asking, "What does success look like to you?" At that point, success is everyone joining on time.

After more than 100 companies, I've

seen almost everything. Recruiters showing up late. Hiring managers reading my resume for the first time. Interviewers asking questions already answered in the application. Panels asking the same question three different ways. Companies assigning homework. My favorite is hearing, "We're still early in the process," after you've already met the recruiter, manager, director, vice president, HR, and some guy who has no idea why he was invited.

Candidates are expected to prepare like they're defending a dissertation. Research the company. Research the interviewer. Know the mission. Know the values. Prepare STAR stories. Have a 30/60/90 day plan ready in case someone turns Tuesday into Shark Tank. Meanwhile, the interviewer joins seven minutes late, looks at your resume, and says, "Remind me which role this is for?" Beautiful. Nothing says candidate experience like realizing you prepared more.

That is why I experiment. I'm not just listening to companies talk about candidate experience. I'm living it, documenting it, comparing it, and laughing at it because the alternative is

screaming into Microsoft Teams. After more than 100 interviews, the biggest lesson is simple: being qualified for the job and being good at interviewing are two different skills. You can be brilliant at what you do and still get thrown off when six strangers stare at you while someone asks where you see yourself in five years.

My advice is simple: know your story, know your numbers, know your value, and remember that you are interviewing them too. Watch how they communicate, whether they respect your time, and whether everyone describes the job the same way. If three people give you three versions of the role, that is not collaboration. That is a trailer for season one.

I never planned on becoming the guy people message for interview survival tips. Corporate America built the maze. I just decided to walk through it more than 100 times and take notes.

POST 49 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

HUMAN SIDE OF HIRING

Starbucks, a Waiting Candidate, and No Interviewer

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw a job seeker apparently waiting for an interview at Starbucks while the other person failed to arrive.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to focus on the preparation and hope that are wasted when someone does not show up.

Sunday mornings at Starbucks are supposed to be peaceful. Coffee, people pretending to read, someone ordering a drink with seventeen instructions, and me wondering why coffee now requires a financial plan. This morning, I walked into an episode of Interview Games.

A man was sitting a few tables away dressed like he had somewhere important to be. Nice shirt, resume folder, phone face up on the table, and the expression every job seeker knows: checking the door every eleven seconds. After about twenty minutes, I asked, "You waiting for someone?" He laughed and said, "Yeah. I have a job interview here." On a Sunday morning. At Starbucks. I was invested.

The hiring manager asked him to meet at 9:00. He got there early because candidates know the rules. Arrive early. Research the company. Bring your resume. Have questions ready. Smile. Show enthusiasm. So he did. Then 9:00 came and went. No hiring manager. 9:10, nothing. 9:20, still nothing. By 9:30, he had finished half his coffee, refreshed his email twelve times, checked spam and texts, and started wondering if the interview was a

psychological assessment disguised as caffeine.

I asked if they had messaged him. No. Called? No. Emailed? No. Fantastic. We have reached the stage where candidates can now be ghosted in person by someone who never even arrives. Around 9:40 he sent a polite message: "Good morning, I'm here at Starbucks. Just wanted to make sure we're still meeting today." Professional and respectful. Much nicer than what my soul wanted to send: "Hello, I have arrived for the scavenger hunt. Is the hiring manager hidden behind the espresso machine?"

Still nothing. By 10:00, even I was checking the door. At this point, the barista deserved a promotion because she had shown more interest than the person who scheduled the interview. Candidates are constantly lectured about professionalism. Miss an interview and you're unreliable. Show up five minutes late and you lack time management. Forget the thank you email and civilization collapses. But when a hiring manager doesn't show? "Things come up." Apparently basic courtesy was one of them.

The guy packed up his resume and left. No interview. No explanation. Just a Sunday morning, an overpriced coffee, and a reminder that candidate experience tells you a lot about a company before you ever receive a paycheck. I wished him luck and told him maybe the no show saved him several rounds, a personality test, a case study, a panel interview, and a rejection email at 4:13 in the morning. He laughed.

Somewhere out there, a hiring manager is probably saying, "We just can't find good candidates anymore." Meanwhile, their candidate showed up early, dressed professionally, brought his resume, bought his coffee, waited an hour, followed up politely, and then went home because the person interviewing him never bothered to appear.

He showed up. The hiring manager didn't. Welcome to hiring in 2026. Your coffee will be ready before your recruiter is.

POST 50 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The Toxic Boss With a Wall of Quotes

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled an office filled with inspirational leadership sayings that did not match the boss's behavior.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge leaders to practice the values they display on their walls.

You ever worked for a toxic boss who loved using other people's quotes like they were part of the company benefits package?

I did and I still remember walking into his office for the first time and realizing I had entered a motivational gift shop with payroll access. Every wall was covered in framed quotes about leadership, integrity, teamwork, courage, accountability, and "being the change." Winston Churchill was on one wall. Steve Jobs was on another. Anonymous Pinterest quotes were everywhere. You could not look in any direction without somebody famous trying to inspire you. Meanwhile, the man sitting under all that wisdom had the emotional warmth of a parking ticket and the leadership style of a smoke detector with a dying battery.

His favorite quote was, "Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge." Beautiful words, especially coming from a guy who once scheduled a 7:00 a.m. meeting to ask why morale was low. He would point at the framed quote before meetings and say, "This is what we need to live by." Then ten minutes later he would interrupt people, blame someone for a decision he made, move a deadline forward

without telling anyone, and finish by asking why the team had communication problems. Sir, I think the quote behind you is trying to file a complaint.

The best one was hanging near his desk: "People don't leave companies. They leave managers." That felt less like inspiration and more like evidence. I'm pretty sure half the building read it while updating their resumes. Ask for more staffing and suddenly we were discussing Henry Ford. Mention burnout and Gandhi got dragged into the meeting. Ask why three people quit in one month and he would lean back and say, "Pressure makes diamonds." No, pressure also makes people apply on Indeed during lunch.

He loved saying, "A team is only as strong as its weakest link," which was fascinating because most of us had already identified the link, and he had the corner office. There were quotes about trust everywhere, but nobody trusted him. Quotes about listening, but he only listened long enough to prepare his next speech. Quotes about accountability, but every mistake belonged to someone else. Quotes about positivity, usually followed by an email beginning with, "I'm disappointed in this team." Nothing builds culture

quite like decorative hypocrisy framed at eye level.

Eventually I realized those quotes were never there to guide him. They were camouflage. The office looked like a leadership seminar, but the behavior looked like an HR case study. Years later, whenever I walk into an office covered in inspirational quotes, I don't automatically assume the boss is toxic, but I do check where the exits are.

Great leaders rarely need twenty framed reminders telling everyone what leadership looks like. They just lead. And somewhere on that old wall, I'm convinced there is still a quote about self-awareness wondering why nobody ever introduced them.

POST 51 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

SOCIAL MEDIA SATIRE

Trouble Has LinkedIn Premium

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A few ordinary minutes scrolling LinkedIn somehow turned into another encounter with corporate nonsense.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to find humor in the strange dynamics of online professional life.

I don't go on LinkedIn looking for trouble. I really don't. I open the app with the same innocent intentions everyone else has: check a few messages, read a couple of posts, maybe pretend I'm going to be productive for ten minutes.

But somehow, trouble finds me anyway. LinkedIn has become the digital version of walking into a grocery store for milk and leaving with a lawn chair, a motivational quote, and an argument with a stranger about leadership.

Earlier today, I saw a post from a CEO thanking every employee for their hard work, dedication, sacrifice, resilience, commitment, flexibility, passion, loyalty, and probably their willingness to answer emails while eating dinner. It was beautifully written. Inspirational, even. The kind of post that makes you want to stand up, salute your laptop, and whisper, "We did it, team." There were hundreds of likes, dozens of comments saying "Great leadership!" and at least three people who used the word "visionary" before breakfast.

And I just sat there thinking: I wonder if the employees got the same message. Because corporate thank you posts are fascinating. Publicly, it's "Our people

are our greatest asset." Privately, someone is trying to get approval for a \$14 office chair because the current one has been leaning left since 2023. Publicly, it's "We could not do this without you." Privately, payroll is asking whether everyone really needs overtime. Publicly, it's a heartfelt tribute to the team. Privately, Susan has been doing the work of three people since February because "we're still evaluating headcount."

The CEO wrote about sacrifice, which is always a fun word when it comes from someone whose sacrifice probably involved changing the time of a board meeting. Meanwhile, somebody in operations skipped lunch, somebody in customer service got yelled at by a man named Gary over a coupon, and somebody in accounting is still trying to figure out who approved a subscription nobody remembers buying.

My favorite part is always the comments. "So proud to be part of this amazing family." Family? My family doesn't schedule a performance review because I took two sick days. My family doesn't send me a calendar invite titled "Quick Chat" and then invite HR. My family also doesn't announce a restructuring at 4:47 on a Friday.

I'm not saying CEOs shouldn't thank employees. They absolutely should. I'm just saying the thank you hits differently when it comes with decent staffing, fair pay, realistic expectations, functioning equipment, and maybe the revolutionary idea of letting people finish dinner before asking for a spreadsheet.

And somewhere, an employee read it at lunch and wondered if gratitude comes with PTO. But that's LinkedIn. I logged in looking for harmless professional content and accidentally found another corporate Hallmark card written by someone with a reserved parking spot.

I don't go looking for trouble. Trouble apparently has LinkedIn Premium and keeps sending me connection requests.

POST 52 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Follow the Chaos Beyond LinkedIn

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I invited readers to follow my hiring stories and sarcasm on Facebook.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to keep the community connected across platforms.

If LinkedIn hasn't already exhausted you, come follow me on Facebook too. Same sarcasm. Same corporate nonsense. Same hiring stories. Same toxic bosses. Same recruiters disappearing into the witness protection program. Basically, it's me... just on another app causing absolutely no trouble while trouble somehow keeps finding me. I promise nothing educational, but there's a very good chance somebody from HR gets nervous.

<https://lnkd.in/gSAc8ePr>

POST 53 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

ONE-WAY INTERVIEWS

Target and the Interview Without an Interviewer

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Testing Target's Guest Advocate process led to an invitation for an asynchronous video interview.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show what a candidate loses when a conversation becomes a recording.

I have officially expanded my unpaid recruiting research into retail, because interviewing with over 100 companies apparently wasn't enough chaos. This week's experiment: Target.

Sometimes I apply because I'm fascinated by what corporate America has turned hiring into. I want to see what happens after a candidate clicks "Apply Now." Not long after applying for a Guest Advocate position, I got the exciting news that I had been selected for a recorded video interview. Recorded. Video. Interview. Three words that sound harmless separately but together feel like something you should have an attorney present for. No recruiter. No hiring manager. Target apparently looked at the traditional interview and said, "This would be more efficient if we removed the interviewer." So I clicked the link, adjusted the camera, fixed my shirt, and prepared for my one man audition for discussing shopping carts later.

Then the first question appeared with a countdown timer, because nothing makes a candidate feel relaxed like watching numbers disappear while trying to remember every accomplishment from their career. "Tell us about yourself." Absolutely. I have years of leadership experience, an

MBA, managed large operations, built teams, improved performance, and apparently now spend my free time applying to Target to study recruiting. I stared into the camera while the laptop stared back with the emotional support of a microwave.

Then came the behavioral questions. Tell us about a time you helped a guest. Tell us about a time you worked with a team. Tell us about a difficult situation. At some point I forgot I was interviewing for Target and wondered whether I was qualifying for security clearance. Normally another human reacts. They smile. They nod. Here, I finished an answer and got nothing. Just my own face staring back like, "Well, Alex, I hope that worked."

At one point I finished early and couldn't tell whether the recording had stopped, so I sat there smiling at the camera. Somewhere inside Target's recruiting system there may now be footage of me smiling like a department store mannequin that just discovered consciousness. I didn't know whether the robot was finished interviewing me.

Companies love talking about the "candidate experience," and I like actually experiencing it. Sometimes it means recruiter screens, panels and

assessments. Sometimes it means sitting alone talking to a laptop while trying to convince an invisible audience that you understand customer service.

Target, thank you for participating in my investigation into modern hiring. I applied. I got the invitation. I dressed professionally. I answered questions to nobody. I maintained eye contact with a webcam. I survived the countdown clock. Now we wait to see whether I advance to the most exclusive stage of modern recruiting: actually speaking to another human being.

Technology really is incredible. We figured out how to make interviews even more awkward. We removed the interviewer.

POST 54 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

Am I Looking for Work or Advocating for Job Seekers?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A follower asked whether I wanted employment or a broader role speaking about job searches.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain that pursuing work and questioning the system do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Apparently, my LinkedIn profile has become a personality test. Today I got a message asking a fair question: am I actually looking for a full time job, or am I trying to become a job search advocate? Apparently my headline and banner need to pick a side.

Yes, I am open to the right full time opportunity. I also spend an unreasonable amount of time testing hiring systems, interviewing with companies, documenting the process, talking about ghosting, panels, personality assessments, case studies, recruiter screens, recorded interviews, and all the other creative ways corporate America has found to make getting a job feel like applying for citizenship on another planet.

Some people golf. Some people collect watches. I apparently collect recruiting experiences. At this point, I've interviewed with over 100 companies, tested portals, sat through panels, talked to recruiters who joined late, hiring managers who read my resume for the first time while I was speaking, and companies that somehow needed six meetings to decide whether they wanted a seventh.

So when someone asks, "What exactly are you trying to do here?" the answer is simple. Yes. I'm looking for the right role, but I'm also documenting the circus while I'm standing in the middle of the tent. Apparently LinkedIn prefers a cleaner brand. Pick one lane. Either be the executive looking for the next opportunity or be the guy pointing out that modern hiring has turned "Tell me about yourself" into a twelve week endurance event.

Unfortunately, I've never been very good at staying in one lane. If I go through a ridiculous interview process, I'm probably going to talk about it. If a recruiter asks me to upload my resume and then manually type my resume into seventeen boxes, I'm probably going to mention it. If a company sends me through eight interviews only to say they're "reevaluating the role," there is a good chance the internet is going to hear about Kevin from round six.

And somehow that has turned into its own thing. People message me their job search stories. They tell me about being ghosted after final interviews, being called overqualified, being asked to complete unpaid projects, being

rejected and then seeing the same position reposted three days later. They laugh because they recognize the insanity, and sometimes that matters more than another polished post about leadership synergy.

So maybe my LinkedIn is confusing. Maybe recruiters land on my page and wonder whether I'm a candidate, a commentator, a corporate mystery shopper, or a man who has spent too much time on Microsoft Teams. The answer is still yes. I'm not trying to build the perfect personal brand. I'm trying to talk about what candidates are actually experiencing while staying open to the right opportunity.

If that makes my headline harder to categorize, I can live with that. Corporate America already has enough people trying to fit perfectly into boxes. I've filled out enough boxes on job applications.

POST 55 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

RESUMES & ATS

The Resume That Changes Outfits for Every Algorithm

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone asked whether I submit a standard resume or customize it to each listing.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain the reality of tailoring applications without losing the person behind the keywords.

There was a time when a resume was supposed to be a simple summary of your career. You listed where you worked, what you did, and sent it off hoping a human being would read it. That was adorable. Modern job hunting has decided a resume should now be a customizable document that changes outfits depending on which company is reviewing it.

Someone asked me today if I apply with my “real” resume or customize it for the job description. I customize it. Of course I customize it. I have more versions of my resume than Netflix has documentaries about bad decisions. If the job description says “strategic leadership,” suddenly my resume is strategic. If it says “cross functional collaboration,” my resume speaks fluent collaboration. If it says “operational excellence,” I become exceptionally operational. Same career. Same experience. Same person. Just professionally rearranged so the ATS does not throw me into a digital basement.

I am not making things up. I am translating my experience into whatever corporate dialect the company chose that week. One

company wants a “people first leader.” Another wants a “results driven operator.” Another wants someone who can “influence without authority.” Now I need to influence people telepathically while building alignment, driving transformation, increasing profitability, and fixing the printer before lunch.

The funniest part is companies telling candidates to “be authentic.” I will be authentically rewriting the same bullet point 4 ways because your software cannot understand that “managed multiple locations” and “led multi unit operations” mean the same thing. Then I upload the resume and the application asks me to type my work history into 47 separate boxes. That is when I realize the resume was not the application. It was the appetizer.

By the time I hit submit, I am not even sure which version of myself applied. Was it Alex the strategic transformation leader? Alex the operational excellence executive? Alex the customer obsessed change agent? Somewhere on my laptop there is probably a resume version that qualifies me to manage a nuclear submarine if the job description uses

the right keywords.

Modern job hunting has turned resume writing into SEO. You are not only explaining what you have done. You are trying to predict which words will convince a robot that you deserve permission to speak to another robot before speaking to a recruiter who asks you to “walk me through your resume.”

And recruiters wonder why candidates have twelve versions saved on their laptops. We are not confused. We are adapting. If companies want every resume tailored to the job description, fine. I will tailor it, steam it, add the keywords, put it in a little corporate suit, and send it into the ATS looking like it owns the building.

Underneath all those carefully selected keywords, it is still me. Same experience. Same career. Same sarcastic personality. Just wearing whatever professional outfit your algorithm requested today.

POST 56 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

RECRUITER RESPONSIVENESS

When an @Mention Becomes the Follow-Up

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Repeated application silence pushed me to describe following up publicly on LinkedIn.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters to see that an answer, even a rejection, is better than silence.

Modern job hunting has taught me one important lesson: sometimes “following up professionally” means becoming your own customer service department.

Let me share a strategy that has actually worked for me. When I apply for a job and hear absolutely nothing for more than three days, I stop staring at my inbox like it owes me money. I go to LinkedIn, write my post, tag the company, and politely ask for a follow-up. Just a public reminder that somewhere inside their recruiting system sits a human being who clicked “Apply” and would enjoy knowing whether the application entered consideration or fell through a trapdoor behind Workday.

I know some people are reading this thinking, “Alex, that seems bold.” Correct. So does making candidates create an account, upload a resume, retype the resume, answer questions, complete an assessment, verify an email address, and then disappear into silence. If I spent forty five minutes applying, three days is enough time for my application to at least send me a postcard saying, “Still alive. Wish you were here.”

And here is the funny part: tagging the

company sometimes works. Suddenly someone from recruiting appears. “Hi Alex, thanks for bringing this to our attention. Please send us a message.” Amazing. I had been bringing it to your attention, but apparently my resume needed a LinkedIn press conference before anyone noticed it.

I am not saying people should attack companies online. That is not the strategy. Keep it professional, keep it factual. My post is basically the employment version of standing at a restaurant host stand after nobody has acknowledged you for twenty minutes. I am not flipping tables. I am just making eye contact and asking, “Are we still doing business here?”

The whole hiring process has become strangely one sided. Candidates are expected to respond immediately, show up early, research the company, customize the resume, prepare examples, smile on camera, send thank you emails, and remain “highly engaged.” Meanwhile, companies can go silent for two weeks and apparently that is called “the process.” So I created my own process.

Apply. Wait three days. Check spam because apparently hope lives there now. Hear nothing. Go to LinkedIn. Tag

the company. Ask for an update. Then sit back and watch the corporate social media team discover my application faster than recruiting did. Sometimes I get a response. Sometimes I get a recruiter reaching out. Sometimes nothing happens and I gain another story about modern hiring.

Would I recommend doing this recklessly? No. But I have learned that silence rarely improves because you stare at it harder. A respectful public follow-up can remind a company that candidates are not application numbers floating around inside software. We are actual people trying to figure out whether we should keep waiting or move on.

And if tagging the company gets someone to finally look at my application, wonderful. Apparently the modern cover letter is now an @mention.

POST 57 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Walmart and the Mute Button Olympics

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Walmart virtual interview featured awkward technology mishaps that consumed attention.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to apply the same preparation expectations to themselves that they place on candidates.

Some interviews test your leadership skills. Some test your experience. And then there are interviews that test whether several grown adults with laptops, headsets, Wi-Fi, and corporate email accounts can successfully locate the mute button on Microsoft Teams.

Two weeks ago, I went through Walmart's interview process, and somewhere between "Can you hear me?" and "I think you're still muted," I realized I wasn't just interviewing for a job anymore. I had joined a live demonstration of modern corporate communication.

As many of you know, I occasionally apply to companies because I'm curious about the candidate experience. Think of me as a mystery shopper for recruiting. I'm checking whether the interview starts on time, whether anyone read my resume, and whether the people interviewing me can operate the same software candidates are expected to master. I leave with content.

The process started with an email telling me to schedule a Virtual Meet & Greet. Then I noticed the scheduling link expired in eight hours. Eight hours. Apparently this wasn't an interview invitation. This was a flash sale. I half

expected another email saying, "Alex, other candidates are viewing this interview slot right now. ACT FAST."

Naturally, I scheduled it and prepared the way candidates are told to prepare. Camera checked. Microphone checked. Internet tested. Resume nearby. Job description reviewed. I joined early because candidates are told that being thirty seconds late may demonstrate poor time management and possibly the collapse of civilization. I was ready. Microsoft Teams had other plans.

The hiring manager joined and immediately asked, "Alex, can you hear me?" I said yes. A few seconds later, "Alex, can you hear me now?" I said yes again. Then came, "I'm not sure if Alex can hear me." I started wondering whether my voice was traveling through another dimension. I could hear everything. I was responding. I was practically waving at the camera.

Then another person started talking, except nobody could hear them. We could see the mouth moving and what appeared to be a fantastic answer developing. We just couldn't hear a word. Finally someone delivered the most important sentence in corporate America: "I think you're on mute." A few clicks later, we had audio. Progress.

Eventually we reached the actual interview questions, and the conversation went fine. But by then I wasn't sure whether I was interviewing for a leadership position or participating in IT disaster recovery training. Candidates are expected to research the company, prepare examples, explain their leadership philosophy, and maintain eye contact with a tiny camera dot. Then the interview begins with, "Can everyone hear me?" followed by, "No."

I enjoyed it because this is exactly why I keep testing hiring processes. Behind every polished careers page promising a seamless candidate experience is occasionally a group of professionals staring into webcams while someone says, "You're still on mute."

POST 58 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The Boss Who Turned Meetings Into Awards Shows

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled a former leader who made almost every discussion about himself.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to distinguish genuine leadership from the performance of being important.

Some bosses lead from the front. Some lead by example. And then there are bosses who treat every meeting like their personal awards show, complete with opening remarks, dramatic pauses, inspirational quotes, and the unspoken understanding that no matter what the agenda says, eventually the conversation will become about them.

I worked for one of those bosses, and if attention were a quarterly KPI, he would have exceeded target every month.

He loved being the center of attention. If the team had a great sales week, somehow it became a story about his leadership. If someone had a good idea, he would listen, nod, wait ten minutes, then repeat the same idea with different wording like he had just returned from a mountaintop. Meetings were less about solving problems and more about giving him enough airtime to remind everyone that he was the boss. Every call started with, "Before we get started, I just want to say something." Twenty minutes later we had heard a leadership story, a quote he probably found online, and a reminder about how much pressure he was under.

Then came the day I challenged him. I didn't yell, slam my laptop shut or announce a rebellion. I simply disagreed with one of his decisions in a meeting and explained why I thought it was the wrong move for the business. You would have thought I had challenged him to a duel. He looked at me and said, "Are you questioning my decision?" I said, "I'm questioning whether it's the best decision for the business." The room went silent. Not regular silence. Corporate silence. The kind where everyone becomes fascinated by their notebook because nobody wants to make eye contact with the person who just challenged Caesar.

He leaned back and started talking about "alignment." I learned that alignment sometimes means, "Please agree with me publicly so I can continue believing this meeting is going well." I brought numbers. I brought examples. I brought results. He brought volume. The louder he got, the calmer I became. Toxic bosses hate calm disagreement because it is hard to label someone difficult when they are politely presenting facts. Eventually he said, "You need to trust leadership." I

almost asked, "Which part? The data or the speech?" But I chose employment that day.

A few weeks later, the decision I challenged quietly disappeared. No announcement. No correction. No "Alex may have had a point." It vanished like a bad corporate initiative entering witness protection. Then a new plan was introduced to the team. My plan. Presented by him. Of course.

That experience taught me something I've never forgotten. Strong leaders can handle being challenged because they care more about getting the decision right than getting the credit. Toxic bosses want agreement, applause. They don't want strong people around them. They want an audience. And somewhere today, I'm sure my old boss is giving a speech about the importance of listening to different perspectives.

Probably using one of my quotes.

POST 59 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The LinkedIn Appreciation Gala

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept seeing extravagant public tributes to executives that sounded more like acceptance speeches than workplace feedback.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make room for simple, credible gratitude instead of exaggerated praise.

There is a very specific kind of LinkedIn post that always makes me stop scrolling, lean back, and wonder whether I accidentally wandered into a corporate wedding reception.

You know the one. Someone posts, "Today I want to publicly thank my incredible leader, mentor, visionary, coach, inspiration, and possibly the person responsible for gravity." Then comes six paragraphs explaining how this executive changed lives by approving a budget, replying "Great work!" to an email, and once remembering someone's name in the hallway. I'm all for appreciation. Good bosses deserve recognition. Companies should celebrate their people. But somewhere along the way, employee appreciation turned into corporate PDA.

Suddenly, nobody can simply say, "My boss is pretty good." We have to write like we're accepting an Academy Award. "I would not be the person I am today without Brad's courageous leadership." Brad manages regional logistics. "He taught me the true meaning of resilience." Brad moved the Monday meeting to Tuesday. "His vision inspires us every day." Brad just sent a spreadsheet called FINAL_FINAL_V7_USE_THIS_ONE.xlsx. And then the

comments arrive. "Best leader ever!" "So blessed to work here!" "Proud to be part of this amazing family!" Meanwhile, three of those same employees are in a private group chat called "How Is This Place Still Operating?"

That's the part that makes corporate social media so entertaining. Publicly, everyone is honored, humbled, grateful, inspired, energized, and thrilled. Privately, someone is typing, "If he schedules one more 7:00 a.m. meeting about work life balance, I'm updating my resume." Of course, some of the praise is sincere. There are leaders who truly earn loyalty because they support people when nobody is watching, give credit instead of taking it, protect their teams, communicate honestly, and don't require a LinkedIn tribute every time they buy lunch. That kind of leadership doesn't need a standing ovation. People feel it.

But when every executive memo becomes a public love letter and every employee response reads like it was reviewed by legal, communications, HR, and the boss's mother, I start getting suspicious. If you appreciate your employees, tell them. Pay them fairly. Promote the good ones. Give them credit. Respect their time. Don't make

them prove their gratitude in the comments section. And employees, if your boss is truly amazing, say it because you mean it, not because Karen from HR reacted with a heart and now everyone feels like participation is being tracked.

Corporate America already has enough performance reviews. We probably don't need performance appreciation too. If employees genuinely enjoy coming to work, you probably won't need a public tribute to qualify as a memoir to convince the internet.

Sometimes the most sincere workplace compliment is still the simplest: "Good boss. Good company. Nobody ruined my weekend this week." In today's corporate world, that might deserve its own trophy.

POST 60 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

HIRING SATIRE

Corporate America: Season Nine

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The familiar cycle of applications, interviews and reposted vacancies made recruiting seem like a serialized TV program.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted a playful ending that still asks why candidates must keep reliving the same confusing episodes.

Modern hiring has reached the point where I'm no longer sure whether I'm applying for a job or accidentally auditioning for a streaming series called "Corporate America: Season 9."

The process usually starts innocently enough. You upload your resume, retype your resume, answer questions already answered on your resume, create a password with one capital letter, one symbol, one number, one ancient rune, and the blood of your first manager. Then you hit submit and immediately receive an email saying, "We've received your application and will be in touch if your experience aligns." Translation: welcome to the waiting room.

Then, if you're lucky, comes the recruiter screen. Sometimes the recruiter is late. Sometimes they haven't read your resume. Sometimes they ask, "Tell me about yourself," while staring at the document that contains exactly that information. Then they tell you how excited the company is about the role, how fast they're moving, and how urgently they need someone.

Three weeks later, silence. Then, suddenly, you're invited to round two, where the hiring manager asks the

same questions the recruiter asked, but with stronger eye contact and a better title. After that comes the panel interview, where six people join the call, two are on mute, one is clearly answering emails, one has no idea why they're there, and someone named Kevin asks, "If you were a kitchen appliance, what would you be and why?"

At that moment, you start wondering whether unemployment has some underrated benefits. And just when you think you've made it through, they send an assessment. Personality test. Case study. Recorded video. Presentation. Maybe a writing sample. Possibly a 30-60-90 day plan for a company you don't technically work for. By round six, you know their business better than some employees, yet you still don't know the salary.

That's why I laugh when people tell me my hiring stories are funny. They are funny. They're also slightly terrifying.

Modern recruiting has somehow become part comedy, part psychological thriller, and part endurance sport. You laugh because the alternative is staring into the camera after a recorded interview and whispering, "Was that normal?" The

strangest part is candidates are expected to bring perfect energy through all of it. Be enthusiastic. Be polished. Be grateful. Be available. Be patient. Follow up, but not too much. Show interest, but don't seem desperate. Ask questions, but not the wrong questions. Mention salary, but apparently only when the moon is in the correct phase.

Meanwhile, the company may reschedule twice, ghost you for ten days, repost the job, then email at 4:12 a.m. saying they've decided to pursue candidates whose experience more closely aligns.

That's not a rejection email. That's the season finale. And somehow, a week later, the same job is back online. Coming soon: Season 10. Naturally I'll apply again. At this point I need to know how the next episode ends. I've invested too much.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

Another week of The Interview Games has ended, and my laptop is still recovering from the emotional strain of applying for jobs in an economy where the application portal remembers everything except the resume I just uploaded. Somewhere in corporate America, a committee is debating whether candidates have enough initiative while another committee is deciding whether the first committee should schedule a meeting. Meanwhile a qualified person is refreshing an inbox and wondering if the job that was advertised last Tuesday ever existed.

September 7 began with Labor Day, which seems like the perfect day for employers to tell everyone how much they value hard work. Some sent thoughtful messages. Others produced leadership essays that sounded like a motivational poster accidentally wandered into an earnings call. I do not need my boss to compare me to a lion climbing a mountain while holding a spreadsheet. I need the same respect on Wednesday that you expressed in a holiday message on Monday. Appreciation is a daily behavior, not a seasonal font choice.

That week also brought a familiar corporate contradiction: "We want independent thinkers," followed almost immediately by "Who authorized you to think independently?" Companies say they need initiative, accountability and bold problem solvers. Then someone tries to solve a problem and gets invited to a conference room to explain why they did not follow the established process for not solving it. If you hire people for judgment, you have to allow them to use it. Otherwise put "must nod enthusiastically" in the job description and save everyone some time.

The interview experiments offered their own lessons. At ALDI, the candidate experience became a story all by itself. The follow-up response from public relations seemed to arrive faster than some recruiting conversations. At Bosch, a question started to sound suspiciously like an echo of my previous answer. At Walmart, technology itself seemed interested in the interview, although not always capable of locating the mute button. These are funny details on the page. For a candidate deciding whether a company is competent and respectful, they are also evidence.

And then there is the growing parade of one-way interviews. Target became one of the stories about replacing a human conversation with a camera. A computer can collect an answer, but it cannot clarify the question, notice confusion, explain a role, or create the same confidence that two prepared people can create in an honest conversation. Efficiency matters. Human connection matters too. A hiring team does not have to choose one and erase the other.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

A recurring theme this week was the difference between a real assessment and a test of patience. I revisited an eight-interview Amazon experience and wondered how many rounds are enough to recognize whether a person can lead a team. I saw job descriptions promising a fast-paced company while the hiring process moved at the speed of a broken office printer. I heard another story of someone shortlisted in spring and still waiting for answers by fall. A candidate should not need a six-month subscription to uncertainty just to learn whether a vacancy is moving forward.

Hiring managers, consider the advantage you hold in these conversations. You can see the applications, compare candidates, ask for another meeting and sometimes disappear into a shared calendar. The applicant sees very little. They are making choices about time away from work, child care, transportation, confidence and money. A late recruiter might regard ten minutes as minor. A candidate who took an unpaid hour off may not. Respect is not expensive. Read the resume. Arrive when promised. Explain the role. Send the answer.

I also wrote about recruiters who asked for payment before a supposed opportunity could proceed. That part deserves less joking and more clarity. People searching for work may already be under enormous pressure. They should not be treated as convenient customers for a questionable career product, and they should not have to guess whether a stranger claiming impressive credentials represents a real employer. If an offer is vague, the fees arrive early and the job details remain missing, a candidate has every reason to ask hard questions.

Then there is the topic nobody should have to laugh about: age. A reader in his fifties joked about dyeing his beard and trimming years off his resume to look younger. Humor can make a difficult truth speakable. Experience is not a defect to hide, and a grey beard is not proof someone forgot how to learn new software. Employers say they value resilience, good judgment and the ability to manage change. Those qualities are often built across decades. We should not make candidates feel that the reward for acquiring them is to pretend they never happened.

And please, while we are improving the process, can we stop pretending that a degree line captures everything a person knows? This week included a story about an experienced employee being overlooked because a handful of college credits were missing. Formal education can matter enormously for many roles. But so can a history of actually doing the job, solving the problem and delivering results. A hiring requirement should be connected to the work, not maintained simply because nobody has challenged it since the fax machine was installed.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

Readers often ask why I keep going through interviews when I already know the process can be strange. The answer is that the stories keep arriving. Some come from interviews I attend, some from readers who trusted me with the worst week of their job search, and some from a moment at a coffee shop where a prepared candidate waits for an interviewer who never comes. The names and details change. The feeling is recognizable: a human being did their part, and the system did not.

Not every hiring manager is careless. Not every recruiter ghosts. Plenty of companies are trying to do better, and good people work inside systems that need repair. Those people deserve recognition. The purpose of The Interview Games is not to score cheap points at their expense. It is to bring the candidate experience into daylight, where it can be discussed, questioned and improved. Sometimes the lesson arrives as a serious observation. Sometimes it arrives dressed as a raccoon holding a calendar invitation. Both can get the conversation started.

If you are employed and someone in your network is searching, remember how quickly life can change. A badge works until it does not. A corporate title sounds permanent right up until someone turns it into a line item. Answer a message when you can. Make an introduction. Offer encouragement without turning the conversation into a lecture about personal branding. A person who has lost a job has not lost their experience, value, work ethic, humor or right to be treated with dignity.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

If you lead a company, here is an experiment worth trying before the next leadership retreat. Apply for one of your own jobs. Upload your resume, type the same information again, answer the personality questions, complete the automated screen, wait for a reply and count how many times you are told a real person will contact you soon. Ask what you learned about the job. Ask whether anyone made you feel welcome. Ask whether you would recommend the process to someone you care about. The answers may be more useful than another slide deck titled "Candidate Experience Transformation."

To everyone who reads, comments, messages or shares a story: thank you. Some of you are laughing because the jokes are familiar. Some are laughing because it is better than opening another rejection email. Some are reading between interviews, after a layoff, or late at night after checking an inbox one last time. I see the people behind those stories, and that is why I keep writing.

So I will leave you with this: show up for people. Be prepared. Keep your word. Be decent when you say no. Hire for ability instead of theater. And if the job still requires eight panels, a surprise personality assessment and three people discussing a mute button, invite me. At this point I deserve an honorary degree in Corporate Nonsense, with a minor in Waiting Rooms.

The joke is the door. Respect is the point. Behind every application is somebody's real life. Make the process worth their time.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS

Behind every application is somebody's real life.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES