



OCTOBER 05 - 11, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

59

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

118

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a question that should not require 59 posts to answer: what does the modern hiring process actually feel like for the person trying to get hired?

I apply to real jobs, test the systems, show up for interviews, and pay attention to the experience companies create. I compare different resume versions, look at the communication, and watch what happens between “Apply” and the next human conversation - if one ever arrives.

Sometimes the answer is a fast rejection. Sometimes it is a panel full of serious faces. Sometimes a reader writes to say a joke helped them survive another week of applications. And sometimes it is an everyday moment at a coffee shop, a bank, or a store that says something bigger about respect and how we treat people.

The humor is deliberate. So is the frustration underneath it. I want candidates to feel seen, and I want leaders to look at the process from the other side of the conference table. We can laugh about it and still expect better.

This issue preserves my original published words from October 5 through 11. Before each post, I added two short pieces of context: what prompted the subject and why I felt it deserved a story. Then comes the post itself, in full. These are the interviews, observations, reader messages, and everyday absurdities that made the week.

01**THE EXPERIMENT**

Apply. Compare. Observe.

02**THE HUMOR**

Make the absurdity visible.

03**THE PURPOSE**

Keep people at the center.

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The week at a glance.

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POST 01 / MONDAY, OCTOBER 05

WORKPLACE CULTURE

When an old boss shows up in your dreams

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A dream unexpectedly brought a former toxic boss back into my life, long after I had left that workplace.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh about something real: getting away from a toxic job does not always mean the stress disappears overnight.

Toxic bosses have an incredible talent for leaving your workplace but somehow keeping a lifetime subscription to your subconscious.

The other night I was peacefully asleep, probably dreaming about something relaxing like winning the lottery, retiring early, or opening LinkedIn and seeing zero messages that start with “quick question.” Then, one of my old toxic bosses showed up in my dream. No calendar invite. No Teams link. No “Do you have five minutes?” Just boom. There he was, standing in the middle of my sleep like HR had approved a surprise performance review inside my REM cycle.

And of course, even in the dream, he was disappointed in something. Apparently Dream Me had failed to complete a report that did not exist, missed a deadline nobody communicated, and somehow caused a problem in a department I had never worked in. Very on brand. Toxic bosses have a gift for making you responsible for things you did not know existed until after they went wrong.

He looked at me and said, “We need to talk about your performance.” Sir, it is 2:14 in the morning. My current performance is sleeping, and until you arrived, I was exceeding expectations. Then came the greatest hits. “You need to take more ownership.” Ownership of what? The blanket? The pillow? The fact my brain gave you visitor access? Then he told me I needed to “be more proactive,” so I woke myself up. I considered that immediate corrective action. I sat there staring at the ceiling, half laughing and half offended that someone who no longer signs my paycheck was trying to schedule meetings in my subconscious. I realized I had spent part of my night defending imaginary numbers to a person who no longer had authority over my lunch break, let alone my life.

That is the strange thing about toxic workplaces. Sometimes you leave the building long before the building leaves you. You can change jobs, change bosses, change companies, and move on, but sometimes your brain opens an old folder labeled “Corporate Nonsense” and says,

“Remember this? Great. We’re replaying it tonight in HD.”

And that is why people underestimate what a bad leader can do. A toxic boss does not just ruin a Tuesday. They can make strong employees question themselves, responsible people feel lazy, and confident people second guess decisions. They can turn Sunday night into a countdown clock and every notification sound into a tiny emergency. Then one day you leave and realize something important: you were never terrible at your job. You were just working in an environment where moving the goalpost was considered strategy, confusion was called communication, and micromanagement somehow got promoted to leadership.

So if one of your old toxic bosses randomly visits you in a dream, do what I did. Wake up, take a sip of water, smile, and remember they no longer have access to your calendar, your paycheck, or your peace. And if they come back the next night, I am charging consulting fees. Dream meetings are billable.

Two resumes. Two different outcomes.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I tested a different description of the same experience against a hiring system and watched the response change.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show why ATS-friendly wording can influence access to an interview, even when the applicant has not changed.

Modern hiring can apparently make you more qualified for the exact same job without gaining a single new skill. Change a few words on your resume and suddenly the software acts like you became a completely different candidate.

The other night, while working on my interview experiment, I applied to the same company using two different versions of my resume. Same person. Same experience. Same accomplishments. Same employment history. Same coffee addiction. The only real difference was how the experience was described.

Version one was written naturally: “Led multiple locations, coached managers, improved sales, and managed business performance.” Version two used language much closer to the job posting: “Led multi-unit operations with P&L ownership, manager development, KPI accountability, revenue growth, and operational performance.”

Then I waited to see what happened. Resume version one went nowhere. No interview. No scheduling link. No recruiter. Nothing. It apparently found a comfortable little digital chair somewhere next to thousands

of other resumes. Version two, however, received a link to schedule an interview. Same candidate. Same company. Same job. Same experience. Different wording. Completely different result.

Now, does that prove an ATS rejected the first resume? No. Hiring systems are configured differently, and recruiters use them in different ways. But it does show why wording matters more than many job seekers realize. A lot of companies use Applicant Tracking Systems to organize, search, sort, rank, or screen applications. Depending on the setup, employers may search for specific skills, titles, certifications, years of experience, location, work authorization, or knockout questions before a recruiter reviews the application.

For example, a posting might say, “Must have multi-unit operations experience, P&L ownership, team development, and KPI management.” A human can read “managed several locations and coached store leaders” and understand the connection immediately. Software, searches, filters, or recruiter queries may not treat those phrases the same way.

Apparently, in modern hiring, experience sometimes needs subtitles.

This is why I keep telling job seekers not to treat every rejection like a personal evaluation of their ability. Sometimes nobody has evaluated your ability yet. Your resume may simply not be surfacing the way you think it is. That does not mean stuffing every keyword into your resume until it looks like LinkedIn and a thesaurus got trapped in an elevator together. It means reading the posting carefully and using accurate language that reflects what you have actually done.

My experiment gave me a simple result. Resume one described my experience in my language and disappeared. Resume two described the same experience using the employer’s language and received the interview scheduling link.

Welcome to modern hiring, where sometimes your first interview is not with a person. It is with the vocabulary.

The boss who did not understand “blocked”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former toxic boss appeared to keep checking my LinkedIn after I had tried to put distance between us.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to turn the awkwardness of post-employment surveillance into a reminder about boundaries and moving forward.

Nothing confirms you made the right decision leaving a toxic boss quite like blocking them on LinkedIn... only to discover they treated “blocked” as a minor technical inconvenience.

You block the original account because you’re tired of the random profile views, and the strange feeling that someone who supposedly “moved on” keeps checking your page like it’s part of their morning KPI report. You think, finally, peace. Then a few days later a new account appears. Different photo. Barely any connections. No activity. Created yesterday. And somehow this digital newborn has already found your profile like it was issued a corporate tracking device.

That is commitment. Imagine having an entire company to run, employees to develop, customers to serve, meetings to attend, budgets to review, staffing problems to solve... but still finding time to create LinkedIn Account: The Sequel just to see what your former employee is doing. At that point, I’m not even annoyed. I’m impressed. Some people have hobbies. Golf. Fishing. Cooking. Running. Toxic ex bosses

apparently enjoy competitive profile surveillance.

And they never just look once. They come back Tuesday morning, Thursday during lunch, and Saturday night when normal people are watching a movie or pretending they’re not thinking about Monday. Meanwhile, Captain Leadership is somewhere thinking, “Let me see what Alex posted today.” Who liked it? Who commented? Why are people congratulating him? Who is this executive saying he was a great leader? Why does he look happy? Wasn’t he supposed to fail without me? That last question is usually the one that burns.

Because sometimes toxic bosses don’t miss you. They miss having access to you. They miss knowing what you’re doing, who you’re talking to, and whether you’re succeeding without them. They miss believing they still have influence over your career. They miss the version of the story where you leave, disappear, struggle quietly, and eventually come crawling back to admit they were the greatest leader you had. Then LinkedIn ruins the fantasy. You’re still moving forward,

still building, still laughing, and still succeeding. Worst of all for them, you look fine without their approval.

Nothing irritates a controlling person quite like discovering the person they tried to minimize didn’t actually need their permission to grow. So if you block your toxic ex boss and a mysterious new account suddenly appears with three connections, no posts, and the investigative energy of the FBI, don’t panic. Consider it a compliment. You didn’t just leave the company. Apparently, you became a subscription service they refuse to cancel.

LinkedIn should add a notification: “Someone who absolutely does not care what you’re doing has viewed your profile for the ninth time this week.” Best part: they probably tell everyone they never think about you while checking your profile with the dedication of a quarterly audit.

Keep checking. I’ll keep giving you something to look at.

The ten-minute “careful consideration”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone described getting a rejection roughly ten minutes after applying for a Tradeshow Manager role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge the language companies use when the decision seems much faster than the promised review.

There is something beautifully efficient about modern hiring when a company can “carefully consider” your professional existence before you have even had time to close the application tab.

Someone shared that she applied for a Tradeshow Manager role and, ten minutes later, received the classic rejection email: “After careful consideration and review of your application, we have decided to progress with other candidates.” Ten minutes. I have leftovers in my refrigerator that have received more careful consideration than that. At some point, companies need to retire the phrase “careful consideration” unless somebody considered something. If I apply at 2:00, get rejected at 2:10, and the job description asks for years of experience, leadership, budgeting, strategy, travel, and enough qualifications to run a country, I have questions. Who reviewed it? The Flash? Did a hiring manager speed read the resume while reheating soup?

Because ten minutes does not exactly scream deep reflection. It screams ATS filter, knockout question, salary mismatch, location

rule, keyword mismatch, internal candidate, or some automated setting deciding your future before a human even learned your name. And that is fine. Automation is part of modern recruiting. But if software rejected the application because it did not meet a programmed requirement, just say that.

What makes people laugh is the dramatic language that makes it sound like executives gathered around a mahogany table, reviewed every accomplishment, debated your potential, called three references, stared thoughtfully out a window, and finally whispered, “Unfortunately, we must move forward without you.” Nobody even had time to refill their coffee.

This is one of the reasons I study the hiring process. Candidates are told to customize resumes, research companies, answer screening questions, create accounts, remember another password, upload the resume, then manually type the exact same resume into seventeen boxes because apparently technology has boundaries. Applicants can spend an hour preparing one application, rewriting

bullets, adjusting keywords, and making sure everything looks professional. Then the company responds before the applicant has even closed the browser tab. Job seekers understand rejection. Most have enough rejection emails to wallpaper a small apartment. What frustrates people is the theater around it.

We do not need a dramatic farewell. We need hiring processes that communicate like humans are involved. If the decision was automated, say it was based on preliminary screening criteria. That would actually be useful. Because “after careful consideration” ten minutes later feels a little like a restaurant handing you the check before you sit down and saying, “After carefully enjoying your meal, we hope you dine with us again.” At least let me taste the bread first.

And if you truly reviewed my entire career in ten minutes, please call me. I would like to hire you to organize my garage.

A company-wide Reply All goodbye

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I revisited a workplace conflict that escalated through HR and others instead of being handled directly.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wrote about accountability, the cost of bad leadership, and the temptation to let the whole company hear the final word.

Corporate America has a special kind of magic. It can take a five minute conversation, add HR, legal, three partners, and six people who were nowhere near the situation, then turn it into a courtroom drama before lunch.

A while back, I worked for a company where my boss loved that kind of email. Every complaint needed an audience. If I forgot to dot an “i,” HR was copied. If a report was late, legal might as well warm up. The subject line would say “Quick Follow-Up,” but the CC list looked like I had accidentally sold company secrets to a foreign government.

At first, I played the game. I replied professionally. I explained. I kept things calm. But after a while, it wears on you. Not because feedback is hard to hear, but because being constantly put on display changes how work feels. You stop asking, “How can I improve?” and start asking, “Who is getting copied this time?” Then one day, another email arrived. Same tone. Same CC list. Same little issue dressed up like a national emergency. I stared at it and realized something: I was exhausted. Not from the work. From

the environment. From feeling like every conversation needed witnesses. From watching leadership use HR and legal like emotional support departments instead of speaking to people like adults.

I did something nobody expected. I hit Reply All. And I mean ALL. The entire company. If we were going to make workplace communication a spectator sport, I figured everyone deserved front row seats. I wrote about the toxic culture. The constant criticism. The public shaming disguised as “accountability.” The way employees were made to feel like mistakes were character flaws. I wrote about how leadership should coach people, not embarrass them. How fear can make people comply for a while, but it will never make them care.

Then I resigned in the same email. No private meeting. No carefully scheduled exit interview. No “Can we connect for fifteen minutes?” I gave the organization the director’s cut. HR probably inhaled coffee. Legal opened a fresh document. Someone in accounting whispered, “Ohhhh, this is better than the quarterly meeting.” Someone read it

twice to make sure I had actually done it. The funniest thing about toxic workplaces is they love documentation until the documentation starts documenting them. They love transparency until someone becomes transparent. They love open communication until somebody opens it all the way.

I didn’t insult anyone. I didn’t threaten anyone. I simply explained why I was leaving and what the environment had become. And as funny as the story is now, the emotional part was real. Walking away from a paycheck, a title, and something you worked hard for is not easy. But neither is waking up every morning knowing your peace is being traded for someone else’s poor leadership.

Sometimes leaving quietly is the right move. And sometimes you hit Reply All, tell the truth, resign, and let corporate America enjoy one final company wide announcement.

An unexpected CEO conversation at eBay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My hiring experiment led to a conversation involving the CEO of eBay.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to contrast the human conversation I value with the impersonal side of large-company hiring.

Some job searches start with an application and a recruiter. Mine apparently looked at the normal process, laughed, and somehow ended up in a conversation with Jamie Iannone, CEO of eBay. At that point I had to ask whether I was still job hunting or had accidentally unlocked the executive bonus round.

The other day I spoke with Jamie while applying to eBay as part of my Interview Games experiment. I explained what I do: I apply, interview, study the candidate experience, and pay attention to everything from the first click to the final email. I take notes while everyone else waits for corporate smoke signals.

What stood out about eBay was that the conversation did not feel defensive. Jamie was willing to talk about the hiring experience, what candidates see, and why the process matters. A lot of companies love feedback until the feedback contains actual feedback. Then suddenly everyone becomes very interested in “taking this offline.”

At one point I joked, “If this interview gets any longer, I am going to need an eBay listing for

snacks, a charger, and possibly an emotional support animal.” Then I added, “Actually, make it a raccoon. Raccoons are perfect for modern job hunting. They are resourceful, exhausted, dig through everything, and still look surprised when they find garbage.” Jamie laughed, and honestly, the raccoon may now be the unofficial mascot of my experiment.

Because that is job hunting. You find a listing. You study it. You apply. You wait. It disappears. It comes back. You start wondering if another candidate outbid you. Then you get an interview invite and expect three buttons: Watch Item, Make Offer, and Pray to ATS.

What I liked about eBay was the willingness to have a real conversation instead of pretending every part of hiring is flawless. Candidates notice when interviewers are prepared. They notice when someone actually read the resume. They notice when the questions connect to the role instead of sounding like they were pulled from a dusty binder labeled “Interview Questions 2007.”

Communication matters too. Nobody should need detective skills,

three browser tabs, and a moon phase calendar to figure out where they stand. If there are five interviews, say five. If the process takes three weeks, say three weeks. If Steve from Finance must bless the decision from a mountain somewhere, just tell us Steve is involved. That is what eBay seemed to understand better than many companies: the candidate experience is part of the company experience. The interview is not separate from the brand. It is the brand showing up in a calendar invite.

My experiment is not about catching companies doing something wrong. It is about seeing who listens, who communicates, who improves, and who makes candidates feel like actual humans instead of application number 8472-B.

Now I am continuing the eBay experiment with one important question. If I make it to the next round, do I get free shipping? And if not, I am bringing the raccoon.

When corporate visits Subway

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A surprisingly enthusiastic greeting at a local Subway made me suspect an unusual day at the store.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to joke about how differently businesses sometimes operate when leadership might be watching.

The other day I went to my local Subway for what I thought would be a normal sandwich run. Instead, the second I walked through the door, the manager came charging toward me like I had just won a sweepstakes.

“WELCOME TO SUBWAY!” That kind of greeting has never happened at this location. Usually I walk in, make awkward eye contact with someone, and we all silently agree that eventually somebody will ask what kind of bread I want.

This time everything was different. The manager was smiling. Employees were moving fast. The counters were spotless. Shirts were tucked in. The vegetables looked freshly promoted. Even the lettuce had confidence. Even the napkins looked corporate ready. That was when I realized there had to be a corporate store visit happening. It is the same atmosphere every workplace gets when somebody from headquarters shows up carrying a laptop, wearing business casual, and asking questions nobody wants to answer honestly.

Suddenly everyone discovers posture. People start saying things like “Absolutely!” and “My

pleasure!” Employees who normally communicate through nodding suddenly develop full sentences and customer service voices. One employee looked at me and asked, “Has anyone taken care of you yet?” Taken care of me? Sir, I came in for a footlong. I was not expecting concierge service. I wanted to say, “Actually, yes. I was welcomed at the door, asked about my day, and I believe someone near the soda machine is preparing my complimentary shoulder massage.”

The manager followed me toward the counter and asked if everything looked good. Everything looked incredible. The tomatoes were standing at attention. The cookies were lined up like they were expecting an inspection. The spinach looked nervous. I have been in this store enough times to know this was not normal. Usually ordering feels like a construction project. “Bread?” “Cheese?” “Toasted?” “Anything else?” Today I was being treated like the regional vice president of mayonnaise.

The funniest thing about corporate visits is how quickly a business can transform. Nobody is leaning. Nobody is scrolling. Nobody

suddenly remembers they are “out of that.” The bathroom probably smelled like lavender and accountability. I almost whispered to the manager, “Relax. I’m not corporate. I’m just hungry.” But I did not want to ruin the moment. For once I felt important.

Customers notice these things immediately. If I have been coming to the same location for months and suddenly the manager is opening the door for me like I am arriving at a movie premiere, I know someone important is in the building. Somewhere nearby was probably a district manager holding a clipboard while everyone tried to remember every training video they had skipped.

So I ate my sandwich, enjoyed my temporary five star experience, and resisted the urge to ask whether valet parking was included. I only have one question. When is corporate coming back? Because I would really like this version of Subway again.

Humor as a survival skill

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how sarcasm and comedy helped during difficult experiences, beyond just entertaining readers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to understand that laughter can coexist with hardship and sometimes helps us get through it.

Some people survive hard seasons with meditation, yoga, peaceful mornings, and inspirational quotes. Others survive by staring directly at the chaos, making one sarcastic comment, and deciding the disaster is now content.

Humor helped me survive more than most people realize. Not because everything was funny. A lot of it was exhausting. Some of it hurt. Some of it made me wonder how many meetings a human can attend before becoming part of the conference room furniture.

There were days when I sat in my car after work replaying conversations and wondering how a grown adult with a leadership title could say something ridiculous and then send an email about professionalism. Nothing prepares you for a communication lecture from someone who ignored your last six emails. That was when sarcasm became cheaper than therapy.

The meeting that should have been an email? Material. The boss who said, "We're a family here," right before cutting bonuses? Beautiful. Nothing brings a family together like budget cuts, mandatory pizza, and

HR explaining why morale is still strong. The leader preaching work life balance while emailing at 11:47 p.m.? Inspirational. Apparently balance means sleeping with your phone. Humor did not erase the disappointment. It did not make toxic people less toxic. But it gave me something back: control. If I could take something that hurt, turn it into a story, and make somebody else laugh, then maybe that experience did not get to own the ending.

I have laughed through job losses, terrible bosses, broken promises, strange interviews, office politics, rejections, and enough "quick calls" to know that quick is one of the biggest lies in corporate vocabulary. It ranks somewhere between "your feedback is important to us" and "this meeting should only take fifteen minutes."

Some situations were not funny when they happened. I was angry. I was disappointed. I felt betrayed. I learned that people who call you family at work can suddenly forget your name the second your badge stops opening the door. People who once called every day can suddenly become unavailable when you no

longer appear on the org chart. But later I laughed. Not because I forgot. Not because it stopped mattering. I laughed because I refused to let those moments keep living in my head rent free while also asking for a parking spot.

That is why I write the way I do now. Underneath the sarcasm is usually something real. Behind the jokes about bosses, recruiters, ATS systems, seven round interviews, ghosting, and endless calendar invites is someone who learned to turn frustration into something useful. And when someone messages me saying a post made them laugh during a brutal job search, that means more than they probably know.

Humor did not make every hard moment easier. It helped me keep standing long enough to turn around and laugh at the absurdity of it. And if life sends another disaster my way, fine. I will survive it. Then I will probably write about it.

Amazon and the nine-episode interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation about extended interview rounds at Amazon made me question the logic of repeated meetings.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to remember that thorough hiring still needs an end point and respect for candidates' time.

A job interview should help a company decide whether you can do the job. Amazon looked at that sentence and apparently said, "Great idea. What if we turn it into a limited series with nine episodes?"

The other day I had a conversation with one of the executives from Amazon about why some roles require nine rounds of interviews. Not three. Not four. Nine. At nine rounds, I am no longer sure whether I am applying for a job or slowly being added to the company Christmas card.

I asked him, "What exactly are we learning in round eight that escaped us in rounds one through seven?" He laughed. I said, "Because by round nine, Amazon should know my blood type, my first pet's name, and the password to my childhood Wi-Fi." He explained that Amazon puts a lot of weight on consistency, leadership principles, different perspectives, and making sure multiple people have enough information to make a hiring decision. Fair But I told him, "By round six, you already know my strengths, weaknesses, leadership style, biggest accomplishment, biggest failure, and probably what I

ordered from Amazon last Tuesday. By round seven, I should get employee pricing. By round eight, send me a badge. By round nine, I'm clocking in."

He laughed again, so I kept going. "Do candidates get Prime after round five, or is that only after the background check?" Then I asked, "At what point do I stop being a candidate and become a dependent on Amazon's health insurance?" He explained that different interviewers are supposed to test different areas. The goal is to reduce bias and avoid letting one person make a decision based on chemistry alone. That part I respect. The problem starts when structure becomes an endurance event and the candidate needs a project manager just to remember who asked what.

Candidates are working, interviewing elsewhere, rearranging schedules, and trying to remember whether they already told the "difficult employee" story to Susan, Kevin, Marcus, or the mystery person in round seven who joined late and said, "I think you already answered my question." I told him, "At this point I need a

spreadsheet. Column A: interviewer. Column B: leadership principle. Column C: which childhood trauma I already discussed." Then I asked, "What happens in round nine? Does Jeff Bezos descend from the ceiling holding the offer letter?" He laughed and said no. "Good," I said. "Because if a drone delivers the rejection email after nine rounds, I'm keeping the drone."

To his credit, he gave a thoughtful answer. He said candidate experience matters and the process should not feel unnecessarily repetitive. That was my favorite part. We did not completely agree, but we understood each other. I still think nine rounds is a lot.

After round seven, Amazon should give candidates a loyalty card. Complete ten interviews and the eleventh one is free. At round nine even Alexa should interrupt and say, "Didn't we cover this already?" Hiring should be thorough. It should also eventually end.

POST 10 / TUESDAY, OCTOBER 06

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The corporate comeback tour

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how often people leave an employer with a dramatic farewell and later return.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to poke fun at career “new chapters” while acknowledging how nonlinear real careers can be.

One of the funniest things in corporate America is when someone leaves a company, swears they are never coming back, updates LinkedIn with a dramatic “new chapter” post, and then a year later returns like the season finale nobody saw coming.

We love to talk about career growth like every move has to be forward, upward, diagonal, international, or accompanied by a motivational quote over a mountain. But sometimes growth looks like leaving, learning a few things, discovering that the grass at the next company also needs to be mowed, and deciding the old place was not nearly as bad as you remembered. Suddenly that manager who used to annoy you looks kind of charming. The break room coffee still tastes like hot regret, but at least you know where the good parking spots are.

Going back to a former employer is basically the professional version of getting back together with an ex, except this time there is an org chart, a 401(k), and HR wants to know if you are still eligible for rehire. You walk back in and people look at you like, “Wait...didn’t we have a cake for you?” Yes, Susan. We

did. Apparently it was just intermission.

The best part is the announcement. “I’m excited to return.” Translation: I have seen what is out there. “This feels like coming home.” Translation: I still remember my login. “I’m grateful for everything I learned during my time away.” Translation: I learned other companies also have meetings that should have been emails.

And honestly, there is nothing wrong with going back. Sometimes leaving is exactly what makes you appreciate what you had. Maybe the company changed. Maybe you changed. Maybe leadership improved. Maybe the opportunity is better. Maybe you finally realized that every workplace has at least one person who replies all to an email that absolutely did not require a reply all.

I actually respect people who can return without pretending the first departure never happened. Careers are messy. Good people leave good companies all the time. Sometimes the timing is wrong. Sometimes the boss is wrong. Sometimes the role is wrong. And sometimes you need to work somewhere else for twelve

months just to learn that your old company’s nonsense was at least familiar nonsense. Of course, I do think returning employees should receive a special onboarding package: your old badge reactivated, your favorite desk back, two free “I told you I’d never come back” jokes from coworkers, and one complimentary opportunity to pretend you remember everyone’s name.

Because careers are not always a straight line. Sometimes they are a U-turn with better pay, a nicer title, and a LinkedIn post explaining why this time is totally different. And if you ever return to a company you once left, own it. Walk in confidently. Smile. Say hello to everyone. Then quietly ask IT if your old password still works.

If it does, congratulations: apparently even the computer knew this relationship was never over. Apparently, corporate romance survives.

The message that makes the job hunt worth it

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader reached out amid the rejections and interview frustrations I often write about.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make space for the encouragement, resilience, and small wins that get lost in hiring satire.

Every once in a while, between the rejection emails, the “we went with another candidate” messages, the interviews that require the endurance of an Olympic athlete, and the recruiters who disappear like they entered witness protection, somebody sends me a message.

Today, someone who has been following my posts told me she finally got the job. She had been looking since November 2024. November 2024. She had spent months hearing no, maybe, later, and a whole lot of silence. At that point, it is no longer a job search. It is a committed relationship with LinkedIn, Workday passwords, automated emails, and recruiters who say, “We’ll be in touch soon.”

She got the offer last Thursday, completed the drug test, passed the background check, and yesterday they officially told her she was good to go. She starts Monday. When they gave her the offer, she cried. The recruiter was kind. After almost two years of job hunting, I think an offer letter should come with balloons, a marching band, and someone from payroll running through the

building yelling, “WE FOUND HER!” Maybe HR can hand out tissues.

What got me most was what she said next. She thanked me for keeping her laughing during the times when all she wanted to do was cry. Because behind every “Open to Work” banner is an actual person trying to stay confident while corporate America asks them to upload a resume, manually type it again, complete an assessment, record a one way video, interview with six people, provide references, and then receive an email at 2:14 a.m. saying they decided to move forward with someone else. Apparently rejection automation never sleeps.

A long job search can mess with your confidence. After enough rejection, you start questioning your experience, your value, your ability, your haircut, your resume font, and whether choosing Calibri permanently damaged your career. At some point, you start wondering if the ATS has a personal grudge. You read job descriptions asking for twelve years of experience in software created six years ago and

think, “Maybe I really am the problem.” Then one day the phone rings. An offer. A start date. A paycheck. Benefits. A chance to use your skills again. And maybe, finally, a full night of sleep without waking up at 3:00 a.m. wondering whether “Thank you for your interest” is waiting in your inbox.

She told me last night was one of the best nights of sleep she has had in two years. That might be my favorite part. So to everyone still searching: keep going. Be frustrated. Be sarcastic. Laugh when you can. Take a break when you need one. Complain about Workday because Workday has earned it. But do not let a ridiculous hiring process decide what your experience is worth.

Sometimes the next chapter really does start on a Monday. Sometimes the person who has heard “no” a hundred times finally hears, “We would like to make you an offer.” And somewhere right now, an ATS is probably furious that a human being got the final vote. That is job hunting.

Round six, and still more questions

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview process reached yet another round, prompting questions about what the company still needed to learn.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to advocate for a reasonable process that evaluates candidates rather than exhausting them.

Somewhere around round six of an interview, the process stops feeling like hiring and starts feeling like a hostage negotiation with Outlook invites. By then, you've answered the same leadership questions six ways, met enough people to start a department, and your calendar looks like evidence.

The other day, while doing my hiring experiment, I found myself in round six with Walmart for a Store Manager position. Round six. For a store manager. I wasn't sure if I was interviewing to run a store, join the Avengers, or inherit the keys to Bentonville. I had already explained leadership, customer service, sales, operations, conflict, and probably my breakfast cereal. By round six, I was close to answering, "Tell me about a time..." with, "Please review the previous five episodes."

Then the hiring manager asked why I seemed so interested in the interview process. I explained what I do. I apply to companies, go through their hiring process, document the candidate experience, notice what works and what makes no sense, and share the story so candidates and employers can learn.

She looked at me like someone had just announced an audit.

"So this is some kind of experiment?" she asked. I said, "Yes. And congratulations, we've made it to episode six." Apparently, wrong corporate answer. She got irritated and told me I should have disclosed it earlier. Fair point. I told her if I announce the experiment on day one, I'm no longer experiencing a normal hiring process. Suddenly everyone is early, every camera works, nobody ghosts anyone, and recruiters remember my name. That did not improve the mood, so I tried humor. I said, "Six interviews means I've spent more time with Walmart's hiring team than some members of my family." Nothing. My imaginary raccoon packed his tiny briefcase and left the meeting.

She asked whether I planned to write about Walmart. I told her I write about experiences that can teach candidates and employers something useful. She replied that Walmart takes its hiring process seriously. I said, "I can tell. We're on round six. I'm expecting round seven to include a blue vest, a scavenger hunt, and someone

timing how quickly I can locate aisle 14." Nothing.

Companies say they want curious candidates who ask questions, challenge processes, think differently, and bring fresh perspectives. Apparently that enthusiasm has conditions. Curiosity is wonderful until the curiosity is about the company's own hiring process. Then suddenly the fresh perspective needs to be escorted toward the emergency exit. Some executives have laughed, asked questions, explained their process, and admitted where it could improve. Those are the best conversations because nobody pretends it's perfect. But getting angry because someone is studying the candidate experience? That reaction becomes part of the experience too.

Round six was educational. I'm just hoping round seven doesn't require assembling patio furniture while explaining my five year leadership vision.

Leadership interview or disaster simulator?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A hiring manager kept presenting escalating hypothetical problems during one of my interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how interview questions can drift away from understanding someone's actual leadership ability.

There's a point in every interview where you can tell whether the hiring manager wants to understand how you lead... or whether they want to see how many imaginary disasters you can solve before your coffee gets cold.

The other day, during one of my hiring experiments, I met with a hiring manager who had discovered the phrase "What would you do if..." and decided to build the interview around it. "What would you do if an employee refused to follow direction?" I answered. "What would you do if two managers were arguing?" Answered. "What would you do if sales dropped 20%?" Answered. "What would you do if half your team called off?" I started wondering whether I was interviewing for a job or receiving a warning about my first Tuesday.

Then she upgraded the difficulty level. "What would you do if a customer was yelling, your assistant manager was late, two employees were fighting, the system was down, and there was a line out the door?" I wanted to say, "First, I'd check whether the building was also on

fire, because apparently we're going for the deluxe catastrophe package." Instead, I gave the leadership answer about staying calm, prioritizing, delegating and communicating.

She nodded and loaded another imaginary grenade. "What would you do if your best employee quit?" I explained how I'd understand the reason, protect the operation, communicate with the team, and recruit. "What if three people quit?" Same plan, but now caffeine becomes part of the strategy. "What if your whole management team quit?" I paused and said, "At that point, I'd probably stop interviewing the candidate and start investigating the company."

Nothing. Apparently sarcasm had not been included in the competency guide. By the time we were done, I had hypothetically repaired morale, saved sales, fixed staffing, resolved customer complaints, coached bad managers, rebuilt a schedule, prevented turnover, restored broken systems, and probably stabilized the economy. I was waiting for her to

ask, "What would you do if a raccoon entered the building, took the store keys, and demanded to speak with HR?" Honestly? Promote him. He already showed initiative and a willingness to come into the office.

This is the part of interviewing that always makes me laugh. Candidates show up with years of actual experience, actual results, actual mistakes, actual lessons, and examples of what they've done. Yet sometimes the conversation turns into a Marvel movie written by Human Resources. Ask me what I actually did when sales fell. Ask how I handled a difficult employee. Ask about a decision I got wrong and what I learned. Those answers tell you how someone leads.

But if you ask me twenty versions of "What would you do if the universe collapsed at 2:15 on a Wednesday?" eventually my answer is going to be, "Clock out, call Batman, and let round seven handle it." I came prepared to discuss leadership. Somehow, before the interview ended, I had already saved a company I didn't even work for.

The layoff language translation guide

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how corporate layoff messages soften the impact with phrases such as “realignment.”

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to bring attention back to the human beings affected by decisions hidden behind polished terminology.

Corporate America has perfected the art of turning “your job is gone” into a motivational speech about agility, transformation, customer outcomes, and strategic alignment.

Somewhere along the way, layoffs stopped being layoffs and became “organizational changes,” which sounds nicer when you are staring at your inbox wondering whether your mortgage believes in strategic alignment.

HubSpot announced it is reducing its workforce by about 7%, nearly 660 people, and the message reads like someone asked a consultant, a lawyer, HR, and a motivational speaker to collaborate on the world’s longest breakup text. There is strategy. There is empathy. There are priorities and fewer layers. There are so many corporate phrases that by the end I expected the email to ask employees to circle back with unemployment. My favorite part is the “you will receive an email within the next 15 minutes” section. Nothing says compassion like turning a layoff into a game show countdown. Imagine reading, “We value everything you have contributed. Please remain seated while Outlook determines

whether you still work here.” Fifteen minutes is enough time to refresh your inbox 47 times, text your spouse, stare at Slack, and wonder who disappears first.

Then HubSpot explains this is “not simply a cost cutting exercise.” Of course not. Cost cutting sounds unpleasant. This is an organizational redesign where hundreds of people are strategically introduced to LinkedIn Premium. They listed six criteria for deciding which roles stay. Somewhere, an Excel spreadsheet just received a promotion to Vice President of Human Emotions.

To HubSpot’s credit, the support package is substantial: severance, benefits, career transition help, and impacted employees can apparently keep their laptops after company data is removed. Better than security appearing with a cardboard box for your coffee mug, plant, and dignity. Apparently, even bad news needs a branding strategy and polished rollout.

But this is the part corporate language can never hide. Behind every sentence about structure, efficiency, speed, and “the next phase” is a real person suddenly

trying to figure out what comes next. Yesterday they were essential. Today their role was assessed against six criteria. Tomorrow they are updating a resume while an algorithm asks them to describe a time they overcame adversity. Companies make hard decisions. Strategies change. Markets change. Organizations change. Fine. But maybe we can stop writing layoff announcements like they are applying for a Pulitzer Prize in Corporate Vocabulary.

Say what happened. Explain why. Treat people well. Give them meaningful support. And remember that while executives discuss layers and spans, employees discuss rent, insurance, groceries, kids, and how to explain at dinner that their “strategic role” disappeared before breakfast.

Because no matter how polished the language gets, “organizational realignment” still means somebody has to realign their entire life.

The secret thank-you-note interview round

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post-interview call centered on whether I had sent a thank-you note.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question why etiquette rituals can start to outweigh qualifications and interview substance.

Apparently there is a new stage in the hiring process nobody warned me about. It comes after the interview, after the questions, right before the decision: the ceremonial thank you note inspection. Apparently, gratitude now comes with paperwork.

A hiring manager actually called me after an interview. Maybe an offer. Maybe the next step. Nope. The reason for the call was much more urgent: "I noticed I haven't received a thank you email from you after our interview." I sat there wondering whether I had accidentally applied for a job in 1847 and my handwritten letter was still traveling by horse. "Was that part of the assessment?" If gratitude is now a KPI, I need the scoring system. Was I supposed to send an email? A card? Flowers? A fruit basket? Should I have hired a marching band to stand outside headquarters playing "Thank You for Your Consideration"? Apparently there was a secret manners test nobody mentioned.

Showing up on time, researching the company, answering questions,

explaining my experience, giving examples, asking thoughtful questions, and thanking everyone verbally at the end was apparently only the opening act. The real interview was Outlook. The call had the energy of a parent asking why I had not written Grandma after receiving birthday money. "So... you didn't send one?" Correct. I also skipped the edible arrangement, commemorative plaque, and coffee mug that said, "World's Best Hiring Manager." I asked whether the missing thank you note affected their decision. There was a pause. That pause deserved its own interview round.

If a company likes receiving thank you emails, fine. They can be a nice professional gesture. But calling a candidate afterward to point out that you didn't receive one turns the whole thing into a corporate loyalty test. Imagine doing this in reverse. Candidate calls the hiring manager the next morning: "Hi, just checking in. I noticed I haven't received a thank you note from you for taking two hours out of my workday, researching your company,

answering 17 versions of 'tell me about a time,' and pretending your six round interview process sounds normal. Also, I noticed there was no fruit basket."

We have somehow built a hiring culture where companies can take three weeks to provide feedback, cancel interviews fifteen minutes before they start, ghost candidates entirely, repost the same job nine times, and send automated rejection emails at 2:22 in the morning. But heaven forbid the candidate forgets the ceremonial thank you email. That is apparently where professionalism collapses.

Maybe next time I'll prepare properly. I'll bring stationery, write the note in the parking lot, seal it with wax, release a carrier pigeon, and call later to confirm delivery. "Hi, just following up. Did you receive my gratitude?" Because apparently the interview does not end when the interview ends anymore. There is a secret bonus round after the final round, and nobody tells you about it. The password is: Thank you.

A reader finds comfort between interview rounds

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone wrote to tell me that a hiring-process post was a bright moment during an exhausting search.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind job seekers they are not alone and make the absurdity a little easier to carry.

Apparently, the modern hiring process has officially become so ridiculous that people are now using my posts as emotional support between interview rounds.

Today I received a message from someone who said one of my hiring process posts was a highlight of her day. She is currently looking for a new job and, in her words, dealing with the “million stages” that seem to come with trying to get hired. That made me laugh, because at this point “million” feels less like sarcasm and more like a realistic estimate. You apply for a job. Great. Then comes the recruiter call. Then the hiring manager. Then another manager. Then a panel. Then another panel because apparently the first panel did not contain enough humans. Then an assessment. Then somebody asks where you see yourself in five years, even though nobody can tell you where this position will be in five months.

After that, you are invited to meet “one more person.” Never trust those words. “One more person” in corporate hiring is the same as “one

more episode” on Netflix. Three hours later you are still there, your coffee is cold, and a Vice President is asking you to describe a time you demonstrated resilience. Sir, this interview process is the example.

Then comes the famous “final round,” a beautiful phrase with absolutely no legal definition. Final can mean final. It can also mean final before the next final, followed by a quick conversation, a culture chat, and a mysterious 15 minute calendar invite. “Alex, are you still excited about the opportunity?” Absolutely. I have invested so much time in this process that I am legally considered part of the furniture.

That is why messages like the one I received today matter. Job searching can be exhausting. It can make talented people question themselves while they wait weeks for an update from a company that once told them communication was one of its core values. Sometimes all you can do is laugh. Laugh when the “30 minute conversation” hits hour two. Laugh when six interviewers ask the same question. Laugh when they say the decision will be made Friday, but

neglect to mention which Friday. Laugh when the application asks you to upload your resume and then immediately requests that you manually type your entire resume into 14 separate boxes. My experiment started because I wanted to understand what candidates are actually experiencing, not what companies think they are experiencing. The deeper I go, the more I realize how many people are quietly navigating the same circus.

So to every job seeker preparing for round seven, waiting on feedback, recording a one way video, taking another assessment, or checking an inbox that has developed a personal grudge against you: keep going.

And if the hiring process starts feeling absurd, remember this professional advice: You are not interviewing for a job anymore. You are competing in a reality show with no prize money, questionable producers, and an HR department holding the immunity necklace.

The hiring manager who sounded like a robot

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A highly scripted interview conversation made me feel like I was talking to an automated system.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask whether a rigid script really creates a better experience or just removes the human part.

Corporate interviews have reached the point where I'm no longer sure whether I'm talking to a hiring manager, an AI chatbot, or the self checkout machine telling me to "place item in the bagging area."

The other day, during one of my hiring experiments, I interviewed with what I can only describe as a robotic corporate hiring manager. Not an actual robot, at least I don't think so. But if she had suddenly said, "Candidate detected. Initiating interview protocol," I would have believed it. "Tell me about yourself." I answered. Nothing. "Why are you interested in this role?" I answered. Nothing. "Tell me about a challenging situation." Still nothing. I wondered whether blinking was included in the benefits package.

I tried humor. No reaction. I smiled. Nothing. I joked that corporate interviews require more preparation than filing taxes and getting TSA PreCheck. She looked down at her notes and said, "Okay. Next question." That phrase had the warmth of an airport cancellation email. At one point I gave a detailed answer about leadership, accountability, and results. She

paused, looked at me, and said, "Noted." NOTED? I just gave you twenty years of professional experience and apparently I'm now an Amazon package being scanned at a warehouse.

Then came the classic: "Where do you see yourself in five years?" I wanted to say, "Hopefully no longer answering this question." Instead, I gave the polished corporate answer because "surviving another five round interview process" is apparently not a strategic career goal. Then she asked, "Why should we hire you?" I answered and ran a tiny experiment. I asked, "What makes someone successful on your team?" Suddenly there was silence. A long silence. The kind where you can practically hear Windows restarting.

Finally, the system came back online. "Collaboration. Communication. Results. Culture. Fast paced environment." Ah yes, the Corporate America value meal combo. I was waiting for "work hard, play hard" and "we're like a family" so I could yell BINGO and collect my complimentary stress ball.

Companies constantly tell candidates to be authentic. "Be yourself." Absolutely. Just make sure you are yourself in the approved format, using the STAR method, within 90 seconds, while maintaining eye contact with someone whose facial expressions appear to require manager approval. Apparently personality is encouraged as long as HR, Legal, Compliance, and somebody named Brad approve it.

The best interviews in this experiment have one thing in common: the hiring manager acts like an actual human. They laugh. They listen. They ask follow up questions. They have conversations instead of interrogations. Candidates are not barcodes, and hiring managers should not sound like automated checkout machines.

If your interview is so robotic that the candidate is waiting to hear, "Unexpected item in hiring area," maybe the process needs a software update. And if every answer ends with "noted," at least print me a receipt.

AI interview avatars and the humanity test

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I watched an AI avatar conduct what looked like a realistic screening interview.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explore what happens to trust and connection when technology speaks for employers.

The other day I realized we have officially entered the part of the hiring process where candidates may need to ask the interviewer for proof of humanity before answering, “Tell me about yourself.”

I was watching one of these AI avatar interview screeners and, for a few seconds, I forgot I was looking at software. Perfect lighting. Perfect posture. Perfect smile. Thoughtful nodding. Disappointed facial expressions. Basically everything corporate America has been trying to teach hiring managers since 2007. Then the avatar started reacting to the candidate. It nodded. It frowned. It looked concerned. Fantastic. We have now automated judgment. Now we also get evaluated by a computer generated person with better skin, better lighting, and no need for dental insurance.

Imagine spending forty five minutes preparing, researching the company, practicing answers, fixing your camera, and sitting down only to discover your career is being evaluated by what appears to be a human assembled somewhere between PowerPoint and The Sims.

The AI asks, “Why do you want to work here?” I’d be tempted to say, “Before I answer, why do YOU want to work here? And please don’t tell me about the culture. You were uploaded Tuesday.” Then it gives you that disappointed little look. Excuse me. I already have enough anxiety in interviews without getting judged by software. At least when a human looks confused, I can think, “Maybe they had a rough morning.” When the AI looks confused, I’m wondering if my answer triggered an error code.

“Tell me about a time you overcame adversity.” Well, currently I’m trying to convince a digital woman with no pulse that I deserve health insurance, so I feel like we’re living the example together. I understand why companies use technology. Hiring teams are busy. Screening takes time, and automation can help. But there is a point where “streamlining the candidate experience” starts sounding suspiciously like “we removed the people from the people process.” Imagine getting rejected afterward: “Thank you for your interest. After

careful consideration...” Careful consideration by whom? Jessica.exe? Did the avatar go home and sleep on it? Was there a heated discussion between the algorithm and the webcam? Did somebody say, “I liked Alex, but Avatar Susan felt he lacked synergy”?

The funniest part is that companies will still say they are looking for authentic human connection. Of course they are. Nothing says human connection quite like telling your life story to a synthetic head floating on a laptop screen while a scoring model decides whether your enthusiasm was enthusiastic enough.

Soon candidates will need a new opening question: “Before we begin, are you a real person?” And the interviewer will smile perfectly and say, “That is an interesting question, Alex.” That’s when I’m closing the laptop. Not because I’m afraid of AI. Because if a computer is going to reject me, I at least want it to have the courage to ghost me like a real recruiter.

When the robot joins the executive meeting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A TV segment about a humanlike robot got me imagining the next chapter of workplace automation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to use satire to question whether automating everything really fixes broken practices.

Soon AI won't just be answering emails, writing reports, screening resumes, and politely telling us it "understands our concern." Soon AI is going to be walking around offices, standing in meetings, nodding during conference calls, and somehow getting promoted faster than half the people in the building.

I was watching TV and saw this woman in red standing perfectly still in the background, and for a moment I couldn't decide whether I was looking at a real person, an AI rendering, or the final boss of corporate onboarding. I leaned closer to the screen. That did not help.

The expression was so intense that I thought, "Great. We've done it. Artificial intelligence has escaped the laptop." We started with chatbots. Then AI started writing emails, filtering resumes, scoring candidates and analyzing interviews. The next logical step is legs. Soon you'll walk into an interview and the hiring manager will say, "Alex, this is Rebecca from HR." Rebecca will blink once every

seven minutes. You'll shake her hand and hear a faint Windows startup sound.

Then Rebecca will look directly into your soul and say, "Tell me about a time you overcame adversity." I'll say, "Right now, Rebecca. This exact moment." She'll pause for six seconds and respond, "Thank you for sharing. That was a very human response." If the recruiter needs to recharge between interviews, I'm out. Imagine AI in corporate America. It will attend all seven rounds of interviews without once asking, "Why couldn't this have been one meeting?" Managers will love it. "Rebecca has incredible availability." Of course she does, Steve. She plugs into the wall. Somehow it gets promoted too.

Performance reviews will be ridiculous. "Rebecca exceeded expectations this quarter." Rebecca has no family, no weekends, no hobbies, and hasn't slept since the last software update. Meanwhile, some human employee will get written up for arriving at 8:03 because traffic existed. Recruiting will get stranger too. Instead of

receiving an automated rejection email at 2:22 in the morning, the AI recruiter will walk to your house, ring the doorbell, and say, "We've decided to move forward with other candidates." Imagine opening the door in pajamas and asking, "Couldn't you just email me?" Rebecca replies, "I wanted to provide a more personalized candidate experience." Nothing says personal like a robot rejecting you on your porch.

At this point, I don't fear AI taking over the world. I fear AI learning corporate language. Once a robot starts saying, "Let's circle back," "We're like a family here," "We're looking for a rockstar," or "The salary range depends on experience," humanity is finished. When AI starts walking among us, I only have one request: please teach it to update the job posting after the position has already been filled.

And if possible, program it to stop reposting the same "urgent" opening every three days for six months. If a robot can master that, I'll welcome our new corporate overlords myself.

The interview room with no smiles

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I walked into an interview where the atmosphere felt unusually tense and joyless.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to talk about the value of human connection, humor, and reading a room during professional conversations.

The other day I walked into an interview and wondered if I had accidentally arrived five minutes after layoffs were announced. Everybody looked miserable.

The hiring manager looked like she had just lost an argument with Outlook. One person was staring at the table like it had betrayed them. Another looked like they were calculating remaining PTO days. I sat down and thought, "Perfect. Nothing says exciting career opportunity like a room full of people waiting for the fire alarm to save them."

The first question came: "Tell us about yourself." I started answering, looked around the room, and said, "Before I continue, should I call someone? You all look like HR just canceled casual Friday and replaced it with an engagement survey." One person laughed. The others tried not to. I pointed at him and said, "Good. We found one. Morale is officially at 16 percent."

Then they asked, "How do you handle stressful situations?" I said, "Pretty well. I'm sitting in a room with six people who look like they were forced to attend this meeting, and I'm still smiling." I added, "If

this is the happy department, I'm a little nervous about Finance." That got another laugh, and people started looking up from their notes. One interviewer asked, "How would your previous team describe you?" I said, "Depends which day you ask them. On Monday? Energetic and motivated. By Friday? Probably the guy still asking why the numbers are down while everyone else is mentally in the parking lot." Someone laughed and covered their mouth. I said, "There we go. Another employee has been rebooted."

Then they asked why I wanted the role. I said, "Honestly, I'm still gathering evidence." Everyone laughed. I continued, "You're interviewing me, but I'm interviewing you too. My biggest question is whether everyone here always looks this thrilled, or did I get the welcome package?" That was when the room changed. People leaned back, joked back, and asked follow up questions instead of reading from the corporate questionnaire like it had been handed down from Mount LinkedIn.

That is why I think humor belongs in interviews. Not a comedy show. Just enough personality to remind

everyone there are humans in the room. Some companies talk about culture, authenticity, and bringing your whole self to work, then conduct interviews with the emotional range of a printer setup screen. "Bring your whole self to work." Wonderful. Can my whole self laugh, or does that require VP approval and HR review?

Candidates are already nervous. Hiring managers are tired. Panel members just came from a meeting about a meeting. A little humor can change the conversation and sometimes tell you more about the culture than ten scripted questions ever will.

If everyone looks miserable when I walk into the interview, I'm going to say something. Worst case, I don't get the job. Best case, someone in Corporate America smiles before lunch. At this point, that should count as an employee wellness initiative.

The inbox refresh Olympics

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader's job-search update brought me back to the anxiety and hope wrapped into every email notification.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to offer encouragement to people waiting for good news after many disappointments.

At some point during a long job search, you stop checking your inbox like a normal person and start checking it like a raccoon opening a suspicious trash can at 2:00 a.m.

Maybe there's something good in there. Maybe it's another "we were impressed with your background" email sent three minutes after you applied. Either way, your nervous system has opinions. Today, someone sent me a message I won't forget.

After two years and more than 1,000 applications, she finally accepted an offer. Not just any offer, either. A company actually took the time to understand what she was good at and built a role around her strengths. Imagine that. Hiring people looked at a human being, listened, paid attention, and made a decision based on talent. Somewhere, an applicant tracking system just fell out of its chair.

She told me she had been reading my posts, buying my books, and laughing through a process that had slowly chipped away at her confidence. She said there were days when she wondered whether she was the problem. Then she would read one of my ridiculous

stories about interviews, ghosting, endless panels, one way videos, personality tests, and hiring managers asking questions that sounded like they were written during a hostage negotiation, and she would realize, "Okay, maybe I'm not losing my mind." That hit me, because job searching is funny until it isn't.

We joke about uploading a resume and then manually typing the entire resume into the same website. We joke about creating our 47th Workday password. We joke about six interviews for a job that pays less than the emotional damage required to get it. We joke because sometimes humor is the only thing standing between us and sending a recruiter an email that begins, "Per my last remaining nerve..." But behind those jokes are real people who have been rejected hundreds of times, who start questioning experience they spent decades building, and who stare at the ceiling at night wondering how they went from respected professionals to begging an algorithm to notice that they know how to use Microsoft Excel.

So, when someone finally gets the call, the offer, the chance, I celebrate it. Not because a company rescued them, but because they survived the process long enough for the right company to finally see what was already there.

If you're still searching, please remember this: rejection is information, not a definition. Ghosting is rude, not proof that you are unworthy. A broken hiring process does not get to rewrite your resume, your career, or your value. And if today is one of those days when you're exhausted, angry, discouraged, or considering changing your LinkedIn headline to "Available Immediately and Emotionally Fragile," I understand.

Keep going. Sometimes the victory comes after application 1,001. And when it does, I hope you celebrate so loudly your neighbors assume you either won the lottery or finally escaped Workday. That kind of win deserves a victory lap. Preferably with cake included.

The thank-you-email obstacle course

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw interview follow-up expectations expand into a test of how and when candidates show gratitude.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge the idea that the perfect note matters more than being qualified for the job.

At this point, applying for a job feels less like employment and more like dating someone who keeps asking you to prove you're still interested after every conversation.

Apparently the modern job interview is no longer complete when the interview ends. That would be far too simple. After the resume, application, assessment, hiring manager interview, panel interview, and the conversation with Brad, you are expected to go home and write a thank you note. Except, according to some people, it is not really a thank you note. It is another opportunity to explain why they should hire you. Basically, your interview now needs an encore.

I understand the idea. Following up is polite. A "thank you for your time" can be professional. But courtesy became another hiring exam. Candidates are expected to remember everyone's name, spell Kaitlyn correctly, reference the interview, restate qualifications, reinforce enthusiasm, mention the company mission, compliment the culture, and somehow sound excited without looking like they are standing outside the building holding a boom box. Imagine

surviving six+ interviews, an assessment, a presentation, and a panel where four people asked, "Tell me about yourself," as though your biography resets every fifteen minutes.

You finally get home, take off the interview shoes, sit down, and your phone rings. "Hi, Alex. We noticed we haven't received your thank you note." I would have to ask, "Did you receive my resume?" Yes. "Application?" Yes. "Assessment?" Yes. "Interview?" Yes. Wonderful. Then please consider this phone call my live action thank you note. Apparently gratitude now has a service level agreement.

I am waiting for companies to start grading these things. "Strong opening paragraph, Alex, but your gratitude lacked measurable outcomes. Paragraph two failed to demonstrate passion for synergistic excellence, and you only thanked Susan once." Maybe candidates should attach a PowerPoint. Slide one: Thank You. Slide two: Still Thank You. Slide three: As you can see from this graph, my appreciation increased 37% after meeting the operations team and peaked when someone finally

offered me water. And if a thank you note is supposedly as important as the resume, maybe we should stop calling it a thank you note. Call it what it really is: Interview DLC. You thought you completed the game, but surprise, one more level unlocked after checkout.

Being courteous matters. I send follow ups when they make sense. But hiring should not become a scavenger hunt where strong candidates lose points because they missed one unwritten ritual. If someone interviewed well, has the experience, can solve the problem, and the team wants them, I hope nobody is sitting in a conference room saying, "Excellent candidate. Great leadership. Everyone loved him. Unfortunately, he did not send Brenda a thank you email before 4:17 p.m."

Because if that is the deciding factor, the job was never really about qualifications. It was about stationery.

POST 23 / THURSDAY, OCTOBER 08

WORKPLACE CULTURE

A former boss requests Facebook friendship

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former boss who had fired someone appeared again in the very different context of social media.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to draw a funny but clear line between a past employment relationship and personal access.

There should be a special Facebook notification for when a former boss who fired you suddenly sends a friend request. Not the normal little “ding.” I’m talking flashing red lights, sirens, and a robotic voice saying, “Warning: management has entered the chat.”

Because what exactly are we doing here? You fired me. You removed me from the schedule, the email chain, but now you want access to my vacation pictures, family updates, memes, and dinner? Absolutely not. You already canceled my employee subscription. You do not automatically get the premium social media package.

I imagine the conversation happening in their head. “I wonder how Alex is doing.” You searched my name, found my profile, stared at Add Friend, and thought, “Yes. This seems completely normal.” And the request never arrives with context. No message saying, “Hey, I know I fired you and made that Tuesday memorable, but I hope you’re doing well.” Nope. Just a silent friend request sitting there like a tiny digital subpoena. Now I’m

supposed to decide whether to accept it, deny it, or leave it pending forever as an exhibit labeled: Former Management Attempting Reentry.

Maybe former bosses should have to go through the hiring process before we accept them. Start with a screening call to discuss why they want access to Facebook. Then six interviews with friends and family. “Tell us about a time you terminated someone and later decided you needed to see their barbecue pictures.” My aunt can ask about boundaries. My best friend can ask where they see this friendship in five years. Then, I send the email: “Thank you for your interest in becoming my Facebook friend. After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with another former boss whose values more closely align with our social media culture.”

What do they want to see? Are they checking whether I’m miserable? Happy? Employed? Living under a bridge whispering, “If only I had stayed late for that meeting”? Sorry to disappoint, but most former

employees eventually recover from being fired. Some even become happier. Terrifying concept, I know. There is something wonderfully corporate about deciding someone is no longer a fit for your organization while still assuming you might be a fit for their personal life. “We don’t see a future with you professionally, but can we watch your family cookout Saturday?”

People change, relationships heal, and sometimes former bosses reconnect for good reasons. But if someone fired you and then randomly appears years later with no explanation, you are allowed to trust the little voice saying, “This feels weird.” You do not owe anyone access to your personal life because they once approved your vacation request. If you genuinely want them in your circle, accept it. If you don’t, hit decline and keep moving. No guilt. No explanation. No exit interview for the friend request.

They already removed you from payroll. They do not automatically get Facebook benefits too. That chapter is over.

The confidence of terrible advice

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept hearing advice from people who sounded absolutely certain without understanding the situation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to encourage independent judgment and gently roast the workplace's unofficial life coaches.

Some of the worst decisions in life begin with four innocent words spoken by somebody wearing the confidence of a billionaire and the qualifications of a folding chair: "If I were you..."

That alone ought to make you nervous. Sometimes the person giving you advice has no idea what they are talking about, but they say it with such confidence that you wonder if they secretly meet with monks on weekends.

A while back, I was going through one of those seasons where everybody suddenly became a life coach. People who had never done my job were explaining my career. People with unfinished plans were handing me a five year strategy like they had just finished consulting for NASA. One person told me, "You should stop taking risks and just be grateful you have a job."

Translation: remain professionally parked in the same spot until retirement sends a tow truck. Another told me, "Don't speak up too much. Leadership doesn't like people who challenge things." Excellent advice if your career goal is to become office furniture. Sit

quietly, collect dust, and hope nobody notices you have opinions.

Then came my favorite: "You need to stay loyal no matter what." No matter what? The company can change your pay, schedule, boss, responsibilities, territory, expectations, and benefits, but you must remain loyal because somebody once gave you a polo shirt and access to Microsoft Teams?

The dangerous part is that I listened. I thought, "Maybe they know something I don't." That is how bad advice gets you. Confidence can sound like wisdom when you are tired or uncertain. Someone says something loudly enough and suddenly you assume Moses came down the mountain holding two tablets titled Career Suggestions. So I followed some of it. Terrible decision. I stayed quiet when I should have asked questions, tolerated things I should have challenged, and second guessed opportunities because someone else was afraid of risk.

Eventually I learned something useful: not everybody giving you advice is qualified to advise you. Some people give advice based on fear. Some based on what worked

twenty years ago. Some are projecting regrets. And some enjoy being the unpaid chairman of your personal board of directors. Now, when somebody gives me advice, I ask: Have they built something I want to build? Have they survived something similar? Do they understand the situation, or did they hear fourteen seconds of the story and put on their imaginary TED Talk microphone?

Advice can be valuable. Mentors can change your life. A good conversation can save you years of mistakes. But bad advice can keep you in the wrong job, mindset, or direction while everybody giving the advice goes home and sleeps just fine. Listen. Consider different perspectives. But remember: you are the one who has to live with the decision.

And if the advice begins with, "Trust me, I saw a video about this," buckle up. You may be about to receive a masterclass from someone who learned your entire situation during lunch.

HR karaoke on LinkedIn Live

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I joined a LinkedIn Live discussion where advice for applicants felt detached from what candidates face.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to experience their own application systems before instructing job seekers to do more.

LinkedIn Live has become corporate karaoke for HR people. Give someone a ring light, a headset, and a title like “Talent Strategy Leader,” and suddenly they are explaining why candidates need to “show up more authentically.” Meanwhile, the application asked you to upload your resume, retype it, and take a personality test about stealing pens.

The other day I jumped into one of these LinkedIn Lives. The topic was candidate mistakes, because apparently the hiring process is flawless and candidates forgot to smile correctly. We covered the classics. Be confident, but not too confident. Be yourself, but more employable. Ask questions, but not too many. Follow up, but don’t be annoying. Research the company, know the mission statement, memorize the CEO’s favorite cereal, and relax.

One HR professional said candidates need to “understand the recruiter’s perspective.” Fair enough. So I asked, “How many jobs have you applied to?”

Silence. Not silence. Corporate silence. The kind where you can almost hear Legal whisper, “Who let Alex in here?” One person adjusted

their headset. Another stared like I wanted nuclear codes. The moderator smiled and said, “That’s an interesting question.” Interesting means, “We were not planning on accountability today.” Eventually someone said, “Well, that’s a little different.” Of course it is. Everything becomes different when the advice boomerangs.

Candidates are told to understand six interviews, three assessments, two panels, one personality quiz, and a VP who joins twelve minutes late saying, “Sorry, it’s been crazy.” They should understand why the salary disappears, the job gets reposted, and “Friday” apparently means another fiscal year. But ask employers to spend one month applying for jobs and suddenly everyone needs a wellness day.

I would love to see the experiment. Give HR leaders a normal resume, remove the fancy title, and release them into Workday. Let them create password number eighteen because none of the passwords can know each other. Let them upload a resume and manually type it into forty seven boxes as punishment for having hope.

Let them record a one way video interview while talking to a blinking green dot. Let them answer, “Why do you want to work here?” for a company that has not explained the job. Then let them complete an assessment asking whether they strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, or need therapy after reading the question.

Then comes the finale: three weeks of silence followed by, “After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with other candidates.” By week two, the LinkedIn Live title would change from “Five Things Candidates Are Doing Wrong” to “Okay, Everybody, We Owe You an Apology.”

There are excellent HR professionals who know the system needs work. But if candidates must understand the employer’s perspective, employers should try the candidate experience too. Perspective is powerful. Especially after your nineteenth Workday password.

The circus gets a Facebook page

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I shared a short invitation to follow The Interview Games on Facebook as well as LinkedIn.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to know where else to find the humor, hiring experiments, and workplace stories.

Apparently LinkedIn wasn't enough chaos, so I'm bringing the circus to Facebook too. Follow me here before HR finds the page first:
<https://lnkd.in/gHBW6tdz>

Expect sarcasm, workplace stories, hiring madness, and probably at least one post that makes somebody in Corporate spit out their coffee.

When ageism gets a ring light

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Jokes about older applicants, technology, Zoom, and dial-up internet highlighted familiar assumptions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how age-based bias can hide behind humor and why experience deserves respect.

Ageism in hiring has become one of those things people try to disguise as humor, like putting a necktie on an insult and calling it culture fit.

A while back, someone joked about older candidates and technology. “Did you learn computers on dial-up?” “Do you need help with Zoom?” “Do you know what a ring light is?” Somewhere, a 1998 AOL CD whispered, “Leave me out of this.”

I laughed, because humor is easier than explaining how those comments add up. The funniest part is that the same people making the jokes spend twenty minutes trying to unmute, five asking, “Can you see my screen?” and ten staring at their forehead because the camera points at the ceiling. But sure, tell me more about how older workers struggle with technology. Apparently if you are over a certain age, using Excel is dark magic. If you can build a spreadsheet, lead a team, manage a budget, solve problems, train people, survive three software conversions, somebody still wants to know whether you understand TikTok. Yes. We also know how to restart the router without announcing a national emergency.

Ageism is funny until you realize how quietly it changes decisions. A joke becomes an assumption. An assumption becomes “not the right fit.” Then a candidate with decades of experience gets rejected because someone decided energy has an expiration date, somewhere between your first gray hair and your reading glasses. People do not lose curiosity at 45, 55, or 65. They do not forget how to learn because they remember dial-up. Experience is not a software bug. Some of the best leaders I know are older because they have made mistakes, recovered, managed chaos, and learned that every “revolutionary” idea has an older version in a dusty binder next to a dead fax machine.

They know what panic looks like and know not to join it. They know when a problem needs patience instead of another meeting with twelve people and a PowerPoint titled “Moving Forward Together.” They have seen enough corporate “transformation” projects to know it often means changing the logo and scheduling more meetings.

So when someone jokes about dial-up, I can laugh. I remember dial-up. I also remember when

people answered phones, showed up for interviews, trained employees properly, and gave candidates feedback without hiding behind an automated email. Maybe we should bring some of that back. And yes, I know what a ring light is. It is that glowing circle people sit behind while explaining on LinkedIn how inclusive their hiring process is.

Sometimes the best response to ageism is humor. Sometimes it means calling it out. And sometimes it is refusing to let somebody else’s definition of “modern” convince you that your experience belongs in a museum between a floppy disk and a Blockbuster card.

Keep learning. Keep adapting. Keep showing up. If someone asks whether you remember dial-up, smile and say, “Absolutely.” Then ask if they remember basic respect. That reconnects the whole room faster than AOL ever did.

POST 28 / THURSDAY, OCTOBER 08

WORKPLACE CULTURE

The notification that still makes you flinch

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how a “Can we chat?” notification can bring back memories of toxic management.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to describe the long afterlife of workplace stress while keeping the message funny and hopeful.

Some bosses leave you with experience. Toxic bosses leave you with a nervous system that treats Microsoft Teams notifications like incoming artillery.

After you quit, heal, move on, and swear you’re finally over it, one innocent “Can we chat?” can have you mentally drafting a resignation letter before the other person finishes typing.

I remember when I worked for one of those bosses who could turn a normal Tuesday into a hostage negotiation. Every email felt like it had been drafted by Legal, reviewed by HR and dipped in passive aggression before being sent at 9:47 PM. “Just a few thoughts” meant cancel dinner. “Quick question” meant prepare exhibits A through G. And “Let’s circle back tomorrow” meant I would spend the night staring at the ceiling trying to remember if I had bankrupted the company by ordering the wrong printer paper.

The strange part is how quickly you adapt to dysfunction. You stop asking why the boss is yelling and start asking yourself what you did to deserve it. You rehearse conversations before walking into

the office. You read every email three times looking for land mines. One raised eyebrow from the boss and suddenly you’re conducting an investigation into a spreadsheet you created six months ago.

Toxic bosses also have a special talent for rewriting history. If the team succeeds, it was because of their leadership. If the team fails, apparently you woke up that morning and decided to sabotage shareholder value. They’ll tell you to “take ownership” while taking credit, tell you to “communicate more” while ignoring your messages, and then schedule a meeting about psychological safety right after publicly roasting someone over a typo.

I used to think surviving that environment meant I was getting stronger. In some ways, I was. But survival mode can fool you. You start wearing exhaustion like a badge of honor. You laugh about Sunday night anxiety because crying before Monday feels dramatic, even though your stomach has already filed a complaint. Then one day you leave. And the weirdest thing happens: nobody yells. Your new boss asks a question and waits for

the answer. You make a mistake and nobody summons HR and three vice presidents. You take lunch and the building remains standing. You go home without checking your email seventeen times from the driveway.

That’s when you realize how much damage “normal” had done. The lesson I carried with me wasn’t that all bosses are terrible. It was that leadership leaves fingerprints. Good leaders leave confidence, trust, courage, and people who grow after working with them. Toxic leaders leave people second guessing themselves long after they’ve escaped.

If you’ve ever worked for one, remember this: learning how to survive chaos does not mean you have to keep living in it. Sometimes the biggest promotion is getting your peace back. And yes, I still flinch when someone says, “Got a minute?” But now I at least wait until they finish the sentence before updating my resume.

An unexpected moment at U.S. Bank

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A simple trip to U.S. Bank became a conversation that made me think about other people's struggles.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind readers that ordinary kindness can matter more than we know.

A bank is probably the last place you expect to have a conversation that makes you sit in your car afterward and think about life.

Banks are usually where I question spending choices, not my entire approach to other people. That was me the other day when I walked into my local U.S. Bank for one simple transaction. I expected a receipt, not a reminder about kindness. The teller smiled and asked, "How's your day going?" Dangerous question. I do not come with a short answer. I said, "Pretty good. I'm here voluntarily, so apparently my finances have not completely collapsed yet." She laughed, and just like that, the normal customer service script disappeared.

We started talking about work, customers, stress, and how everybody seems to be carrying something nobody else can see. She told me most people walk up staring at their phones, barely making eye contact, and some act like she personally invented overdraft fees. I said, "Wait, so there isn't a giant wheel in the back labeled RANDOM CHARGE?" She laughed again.

Then she said something that stopped me. "Sometimes it's just nice

when somebody talks to you like a person." How often do we walk past people without really seeing them? The cashier. The server. The receptionist. The teller. The mechanic. We see uniforms, counters, name tags and job titles, but behind every one is somebody fighting a battle we know nothing about.

Someone may have cried in the car before starting their shift. Someone may be worried about a parent, a child, rent, or whether their job will still exist next month. Then we walk up and ask them to fix our problem as if they stopped being human the moment they clocked in. We joked about customers who walk into the bank two minutes before closing with a transaction that apparently requires the Federal Reserve and a notary from Switzerland. I told her anyone who works with the public deserves hazard pay just for surviving, "I know you're closing, but this should only take a second." Nothing beginning with that sentence has ever taken a second.

Then the conversation became quieter. She told me she was trying to learn, grow and build something better for herself. I told her not to

confuse where she is today with where she will end up. A job can be temporary. A title can change. A hard season can end. Sometimes you just need somebody to remind you that your current chapter is not your whole story. I walked into U.S. Bank worried about a transaction. I walked out thinking about kindness.

We spend so much time chasing promotions, money and titles that we sometimes forget how powerful a two minute conversation can be. You may never know what somebody carried into work that morning. You may never know how badly they needed one person to slow down, make eye contact, crack a joke and treat them like they mattered.

Be kind to people you do not know. Everybody is carrying something. And yes, if my bank balance goes down tomorrow, I am still blaming the teller. I have limits.

Experienced, qualified, and suddenly suspicious

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A 57-year-old reader from Perth described a difficult search despite extensive HR and administrative experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to amplify the frustration experienced candidates face and challenge vague judgments about “fit.”

At some point in your career, you collect enough experience that hiring managers stop calling you “qualified” and start looking at you like you wandered into the interview carrying classified documents.

A woman named Debbi wrote to me from Perth. She is 57, has 15 years of HR experience, 25 years in administration, and has been out of work since July. She said sometimes it feels like younger women in HR do not want an older woman reporting to them. That is where corporate hiring becomes a sitcom. Apparently after decades of experience, you are no longer “seasoned.” You are “possibly intimidating.” You walk in with knowledge and perspective, and somebody wonders whether you can report to someone younger.

Yes. She will. She wants a job, not your throne. She is not planning a hostile takeover of the break room, locking the HR Director out of Workday, and announcing herself Supreme Leader of Payroll. She applied because she can do the job. Debbi said every interview answer feels like it has to be perfect. That

made me laugh because companies love saying, “Nobody is perfect,” right before six interviews trying to locate someone who apparently is. They want leadership, humility, confidence, flexibility, strategy, empathy, technical skill, culture fit, innovation, curiosity, and the ability to answer “Why do you want to work here?” with the intensity of a marriage proposal.

Why do I want to work here? Well, Susan, I read the job description, I can do the work, you are hiring, and I enjoy keeping electricity connected to my house. But no. That lacks passion. You are supposed to say, “Ever since I was a child, I dreamed of joining a mid sized organization specializing in regional logistics software.” Then everyone nods like destiny entered the room.

Experienced candidates are told to keep growing, keep learning, stretch themselves, and take on new challenges. Then the second they apply for a role that stretches them, everyone gets nervous. Stay at your level and you are stagnant. Reach higher and you are unrealistic. Apply lower and you are

overqualified. At this point, candidates need a GPS to find the acceptable direction. And age adds another layer nobody wants to discuss too loudly. People do not lose intelligence, work ethic, adaptability, or value because they crossed some invisible birthday line. In many cases, they gained what companies say they want: perspective, judgment, resilience, and the ability to recognize corporate nonsense before it becomes a mandatory meeting.

So to Debbi, and everyone else wondering whether their experience became a problem, remember this: rejection does not automatically mean you were not good enough. Sometimes they wanted younger. Sometimes cheaper. Sometimes easier to mold. Sometimes someone was already in mind.

And sometimes the interview panel could not identify a perfect fit if the perfect fit walked in wearing a name tag that said PERFECT FIT. Keep applying. Keep laughing. Keep questioning nonsense.

HR's open-door trapdoor

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a supposedly open and honest HR discussion in which the outcome appeared already decided.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to call out the contradiction between encouraging employees to speak and punishing them for doing so.

A while back I had one of those HR conversations that starts with, "We just want to have an open and honest discussion," which is corporate language for, "We already decided what happened, but we'd like you to agree with our version."

I walked in thinking we were going to talk through an issue like adults. HR had the notebook open, the serious face ready. They asked, "What are your thoughts?" So I gave them my thoughts. The second my opinion didn't match theirs, the mood changed. Suddenly I wasn't "sharing my perspective" anymore. I was "being argumentative." I said, "I understand your point, but I see it differently." HR looked at me like I had just suggested replacing payroll with Chuck E. Cheese tickets. Then came the classics: "You seem resistant to feedback." No, I heard the feedback. I just didn't agree with all of it. "We need you to be open minded." I am. Open minded doesn't mean I have to rent out my brain. I kept mine that day.

Then came my favorite line: "This isn't about who is right or wrong." That sentence usually shows up right after someone spends twenty minutes explaining why they are

right and you are wrong. I wanted to ask, "Is this a discussion, or am I supposed to keep guessing the correct answer until a green light comes on?" Because some HR conversations are less like communication and more like corporate Jeopardy. "I'll take Things I Must Agree With for \$500, please." They ask, "Do you understand our concern?" Yes. "Do you agree?" Not completely. And there it is. Different opinion detected. Deploy "not aligned with company values."

Corporate America has built an entire vocabulary around arguments where nobody admits they're arguing. "You're wrong" becomes "We're not aligned." "Stop disagreeing with me" becomes "I need you to be receptive." "Just say yes" becomes "We're looking for accountability." And if you calmly continue explaining your side, congratulations, now you have a "communication issue." The meeting that started as "open dialogue" suddenly becomes a performance review.

If a company truly wants honest feedback, it has to include the possibility that someone may disagree. Otherwise, don't call it a

conversation. Call it what it is: a mandatory agreement ceremony with coffee. Disagreement isn't disrespect. Asking questions isn't insubordination. Having another perspective doesn't mean someone has a bad attitude. Two adults can reach different conclusions without anyone needing a performance plan, another meeting, or a twelve slide PowerPoint titled "Moving Forward Together."

If you only want employees to speak when they agree with you, save everyone the forty five minutes. Send an email that says, "Here is my opinion. Please reply 'Absolutely' by 3:00 PM." At least that would be efficient. Because the fastest way to kill honest communication is to tell people, "We want you to speak openly," and then punish them the moment they do. That's not an open door policy. That's a trapdoor with an HR logo on it.

The disappearing interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman described an interview cancellation with little or no explanation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to emphasize that basic communication should not be considered an optional perk in hiring.

Apparently, job interviews now come with the same cancellation policy as a budget airline: your time is nonrefundable, your plans are irrelevant, and if anything changes you may be notified somewhere between “immediately” and “never.”

A woman posted that she had an interview scheduled, the interview was canceled. No explanation. No context. Just gone. Poof. Like the hiring manager got abducted by aliens and HR quietly deleted the invite.

What makes this funny is how differently the rules now work depending on which side of the table you are on. If a candidate cancels at the last minute without an explanation, we already know the vocabulary: “Unprofessional.” “Not committed.” “Poor communication.” Somewhere, a recruiter is updating the ATS: CANDIDATE DISPLAYED CONCERNING BEHAVIOR. But when a company does the exact same thing? Suddenly we get “business needs changed,” “the position is being reevaluated,” or absolutely nothing at all. Apparently professionalism has office hours and candidates are the only ones required to keep them.

Meanwhile, the candidate may have taken time off work, moved appointments, arranged childcare, researched the company, practiced answers, tested the microphone, and positioned the laptop so nobody can see the laundry mountain behind them. Candidates are told to arrive early, know the company, prepare STAR examples, send a thank you note, and follow up professionally. Basically, prepare like you are testifying before Congress while auditioning for a toothpaste commercial.

Imagine if candidates started communicating the same way. Recruiter: “Are we still on for 2:00?” Candidate: “Unfortunately, my employment needs have changed.” Recruiter: “Can you provide more detail?” Candidate: “After careful consideration, I have decided to move forward with other companies whose culture more closely aligns with my expectations. We appreciate your interest and wish you success in your future recruiting endeavors.” Then disappear for six weeks. There would be an HR meeting by 2:07 and a LinkedIn post titled “Why Candidates Have Lost Professionalism.”

Of course, interviews sometimes need to be canceled. Positions get frozen. Budgets change. Managers get sick. Nobody expects hiring to operate perfectly. But sending two sentences explaining what happened is not advanced leadership. It is basic courtesy. Respect in hiring cannot be a one way policy where candidates treat every interview like a sacred appointment while companies treat calendars like a dry erase board. A candidate’s time has value too. If companies want candidates to communicate professionally, show up on time, respect the process, and take the opportunity seriously, that standard has to work both ways.

Because “respect our time” sounds ridiculous when the candidate is staring at a canceled invite wondering whether the hiring manager was promoted, fired, kidnapped, or entered witness protection. Hiring does not need another automated workflow. It needs basic manners.

Your recruiter is eight stops away

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw how much uncertainty can remain around an interview even after it is scheduled.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to joke about missing confirmations while asking recruiters to respect candidates' preparation.

I'm starting to think modern job interviews should come with a tracking number and one of those little maps that says, "Your recruiter is 8 stops away." Because apparently confirming an interview now only means the interview may exist somewhere in the universe.

A candidate spends hours preparing. Researches the company. Reads the job description until they can recite it like wedding vows. Tests the camera, clears the calendar, picks a professional shirt. Then, fifteen minutes before the interview, the message arrives: "The position has been filled." Fifteen minutes. That's not a hiring update. That's a jump scare. You're sitting there with notes spread across the desk and the company basically says, "Thanks for preparing. Anyway, we hired somebody else while you were adjusting your lighting."

Then there's the other version of the modern hiring adventure: you confirmed the interview eight days ago, the company said they would send the invitation, and now it's 6:30 the night before and there is still no link. At that point, are you interviewing for a job or

participating in an escape room? Maybe HR sends three clues at midnight. Candidates are told to be prepared, responsive, punctual, professional, enthusiastic, flexible, and respectful of everyone's time. Meanwhile, some companies run hiring like a guy selling a couch online: "Still available?" "Yes." "Can I come tomorrow?" "Absolutely." Then complete silence.

I understand things change. Roles get filled. Budgets disappear. Internal candidates suddenly emerge from the corporate basement saying, "Actually, we were always going with Steve." Fine. Business happens. But communication should not be treated like an advanced executive competency. If a candidate canceled fifteen minutes before an interview, they might be labeled unreliable. If a candidate forgot the meeting link, they'd be accused of lacking attention to detail. If a candidate disappeared for eight days, they'd be "not serious about the opportunity." When the company does it, apparently it's called "a fast moving environment."

My favorite part is when the rejection email says, "We appreciate

the time you invested in our process." Do you? Because it feels like you appreciated it so much you decided to keep it. At this point candidates need a checklist: resume ready, research complete, camera tested, questions prepared, emotional support raccoon standing by and confirm that the interview is not an urban legend. If you schedule someone, update them. If the role is filled, tell them before they spend the evening preparing. If the interview is tomorrow morning, send the link before they start wondering whether they need an Ouija board or a carrier pigeon to contact the hiring manager.

Job seekers already deal with enough uncertainty without refreshing their inbox wondering whether tomorrow morning's interview is a real meeting, a rumor, or an elaborate corporate hallucination. Welcome to hiring, where even calendars need therapy now.!!

Hilti and the seven-person panel

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview with Hilti Group brought a larger-than-expected panel and an unexpectedly theatrical experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to document what the candidate side of that encounter felt like, with humor rather than corporate polish.

For anyone new here, I run something called The Interview Games. I apply to real jobs, go through the hiring process, and document what candidates actually experience. I look at communication, professionalism, culture. Today's experiment was with Hilti Group for a Regional Manager role, and within thirty seconds I realized this was not an interview. This was jury duty with Wi-Fi.

I joined Zoom and seven people appeared. Seven. My soul looked at the screen, grabbed its coat, and said, "You're on your own." I smiled and said, "I didn't realize this role came with a full jury. Should I make an opening statement now, or wait for closing arguments?" A few people laughed. Good. I had not been convicted yet.

Then I noticed one person had their camera off. No problem, except every few minutes I heard something that sounded suspiciously like chewing. So while I explained leadership and operations, somebody in the darkness appeared to be having lunch. I wanted to say, "Sir, if that's

chips, please share with the jury." Instead, I stayed professional.

The questions started. "Tell us about a time you handled conflict." I said, "I've managed automotive teams, so narrow that down. Are we talking normal conflict, or two technicians arguing over who stole the 10mm socket?" Then came, "How do you handle pressure?" I looked at the seven boxes and said, "Apparently like this. If an eighth person joins, I'm requesting legal counsel."

In my head, a raccoon wearing a tiny suit took the imaginary seat beside me. He leaned over and whispered, "Alex, I've been inside dumpsters with less pressure than this." I told him to stay quiet. He said he was representing me pro bono. Someone asked about my leadership style. I said, "Clear expectations, accountability, support, and fewer meetings that could have been emails." More laughter. When they asked whether I had questions, I said, "Do all seven of you vote, and do I get to know the final score?"

Afterward, I received the update. They enjoyed talking with me, but some of my humor references were not considered professional. That sentence is art. Corporate comedy.

Seven people can sit on a panel like I'm being nominated to the Supreme Court. One person can conduct the interview from inside a bag of Doritos with the camera off. But the professionalism concern was my joke. Then the role was filled, and naturally I was invited to complete a Candidate Experience Survey. Beautiful. "We're not moving forward, but before you leave, could you grade us?" Absolutely. Can I answer under oath?

I understand professionalism matters. I also think interviews work better when humans are allowed to act like humans. Leadership requires judgment, communication, resilience, and occasionally knowing when to make people laugh.

My soul eventually came back. The raccoon is still invoicing me. Somewhere, seven people are probably scheduling a meeting to decide whether this post needs Legal. Hopefully the guy with the camera off brings snacks.

The hiring laboratory is open

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The inconsistent outcomes of applications and interviews made me reflect on why I keep testing the process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain the method behind the experiments and the patterns that individual job seekers rarely get to see.

Modern hiring has become one of the strangest systems I have ever studied. The more applications you submit, the more you realize there is no such thing as a normal day. One morning you get rejected before breakfast. By lunch, recruiters want to talk. By dinner, another company has vanished into the dimension where “we’ll follow up Friday” emails live. That is why I keep testing it.

Every day I apply to at least 20 jobs. Not because I am confused about what I want to do, and not because I enjoy entering the same employment history into twelve different boxes after uploading a resume. I do it because I am running an experiment on modern hiring, and the best way to understand it is to keep walking into it, documenting what happens, and seeing which part of the circus starts smoking first.

Sometimes I get a rejection email before I have finished my coffee. “After carefully reviewing your qualifications...” Sir, I applied eleven minutes ago. Did you carefully review them, or did the ATS see one word it did not like and launch my resume directly into the

sun? Other days, silence. My application disappears into a corporate black hole where resumes live with forgotten passwords and recruiters who promised, “We’ll definitely be in touch.”

Then there are the fun days. An email arrives saying, “We’d like to schedule an interview,” and suddenly I am preparing like I have been called before Congress. Research the company. Research the interviewer. Read the job description again. Test the camera. Test the microphone. Find a shirt that says “executive leadership” from the waist up while my sweatpants quietly say, “I have been on Zoom since 2020.” Sometimes the first interview leads to a second, then a third, then a panel. Eventually I meet so many people that I start wondering whether I am interviewing or being onboarded without payroll knowing.

And sometimes, after all of that, the rejection arrives. “We decided to move forward with another candidate.” No problem. By the time I finish reading it, I already applied to six more jobs. That is what people do not always understand. I am not applying to one company and

emotionally moving into the building. I am studying patterns. Who responds? Who ghosts? Who asks the same question five different ways? Who says they value candidate experience and then disappears like a magician with LinkedIn Premium?

Every day gives me something. A rejection at 2:17 a.m. An interview request at 6:03 a.m. A recruiter who is late. A hiring manager who asks where I see myself in five years while having no idea where this role will be in five weeks. Twenty applications a day adds up fast, but so do the stories. Sometimes I get rejected. Sometimes I get interviews. Sometimes I read an email twice to make sure a human adult wrote it.

Every morning I open LinkedIn, crack my knuckles, pour coffee, and head back into the laboratory. Modern hiring wanted candidates to be persistent. Be careful what you wish for. I brought spreadsheets.

US Foods and the rejection plus warning

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A US Foods interview experiment ended with a rejection and a message about public discussion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to examine the strange tension between public employer branding and candid candidate storytelling.

Apparently, getting rejected from a job is no longer enough. Now the rejection email can come with a side order of “please don’t tell anybody,” which is a fascinating upgrade to the hiring experience.

Today’s experiment brought me to US Foods, where I applied for a Vice President of Operations role in Bensenville, Illinois. Eventually I received the corporate love letter: thank you for your interest, but we are not moving forward. Fair enough. Rejection is part of this experiment. I apply, observe, document, and occasionally stare at Workday like it ruined my afternoon.

Then I reached the note asking that I not post or share the correspondence, or details about the hiring process, on social media or other public platforms. I had to read that twice. For a second, I thought I had applied to a covert government operation instead of food distribution. I was waiting for the next paragraph to say, “This message will self destruct in 10 seconds. Please return your badge, burner phone, and raccoon.” Asking me not to post about a hiring process is a little like asking a

raccoon not to investigate an unattended trash can. I respect the confidence. But you may have selected the one applicant whose experiment is built around documenting what actually happens in hiring.

Companies absolutely have the right to protect confidential information. Candidate data, trade secrets, private employee matters, completely reasonable. But a standard rejection email followed by “please don’t put this on social media” feels less like national security and more like HR sliding a note across the table that says, “We have seen your LinkedIn.” Companies spend millions on employer branding and posts about transparency. They tell candidates to bring their authentic selves, ask thoughtful questions, and be open. Then the hiring process gets uncomfortable and suddenly everyone starts acting like the interview happened in a secure bunker.

I can picture the internal conversation. “Should we send Alex the rejection?” Yes. “Should we include the normal career search language?” Yes. “Should we also ask

him not to post it?” Long silence. Someone slowly closes the conference room blinds. A third person whispers, “Absolutely.” Somewhere a legal department felt a disturbance in the force and opened Outlook. Meanwhile, I am sitting there with coffee thinking, I applied to help run operations, not to transport classified documents.

I am not mad about the rejection. That is the game. Sometimes you move forward. Sometimes you get rejected. Sometimes you get ghosted so thoroughly you start wondering whether the company was ever real or whether you hallucinated the job posting after too much coffee and three hours on LinkedIn. But the social media request? That was the garnish.

At this point, I am convinced the hiring process is writing my content for me. Somewhere tonight an HR person may be refreshing LinkedIn and whispering, “He wouldn’t.” Meanwhile, the raccoon already has the password.

McDonald's and the alignment council

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview for a McDonald's director role developed into a formal, multi-person Teams conversation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to capture the corporate theater that can make an ordinary interview feel like an audition.

Modern hiring has reached the point where applying for a job feels less like a conversation and more like auditioning for a corporate reality show where nobody is allowed to smile until Legal approves it.

Today's experiment was McDonald's for a Director, Alignment role, and the moment Microsoft Teams opened I knew this was not going to be a relaxed little chat.

Four people were waiting for me, and every one of them had the corporate face. You know the one: neutral expression, slight nod, lips pressed together like laughter is a compliance violation. The face that says, "We're excited to meet you," while also saying, "Choose your words carefully." I looked at the screen and thought, excellent, apparently I've joined the board of directors without the stock options.

The first question was, "Tell us about your leadership style." I said, "Clear expectations, accountability, support, and fewer meetings that should have been emails." One person almost smiled. Then came, "How do you handle disagreement among senior leaders?" I said, "Usually with facts, communication, and occasionally the mute button."

Someone asked how I handle pressure. I looked at the four boxes and said, "Apparently like this. If Ronald McDonald joins the call, I'm requesting a recess." Four corporate faces stared back at me like I had suggested replacing quarterly reviews with karaoke. My imaginary raccoon showed up wearing a McDonald's visor and whispered, "Alex, I've been inside dumpsters with warmer energy than this panel."

Then someone asked where I see myself in five years. I said, "Hopefully not on round nine answering this question again." That finally got a laugh. Not a dangerous laugh. Just a small, controlled release of amusement that stayed within company policy. Corporate laughter is fascinating. It starts with hesitation, checks whether HR is watching, and then becomes a chuckle.

Four person panels fascinate me because somewhere modern hiring stopped asking, "Can this person do the job?" and started asking, "Should we assemble a committee to decide whether this adult is worthy of employment?" And remember, this was Director, Alignment. Four

people deciding whether I'm aligned. If a fifth person joined, I assume we would have been asked to form a straight line.

Candidates are told to be authentic, show personality, bring energy, and build rapport. Then the interview starts and everyone looks like smiling might affect their annual bonus. Candidates research the company, rehearse STAR stories, test microphones, prepare examples, and summarize decades of experience in ninety seconds. Then four stern faces ask, "Tell us about yourself." Which version? The director version? The leadership version?

Now comes my favorite part of modern hiring: waiting to see whether there is another panel, an assessment, a case study, or a 2:13 a.m. automated email wishing me success in my future endeavors. Until then, I remain fully aligned. The council may still be deliberating.

When every message starts “I hate my job”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Readers repeatedly wrote to me about bad bosses, unfair treatment, and uncertainty about speaking up.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to combine empathy with practical caution about documenting problems and protecting your options.

Every day, somebody sends me a message that starts almost the same way: “Alex, I hate my job.” Then comes the sequel nobody asked for: toxic boss, favoritism, ageism, intimidation, being ignored, being talked down to, and an HR department with the hearing ability of a decorative houseplant.

The message usually ends with the same question: “Should I say something publicly?” I do. But that does not mean everyone should grab a laptop at 11:47 p.m., pour a glass of courage, open LinkedIn, and launch a 14 paragraph missile while their blood pressure auditions for NASCAR. Speaking publicly can matter. But speaking up does not mean speaking recklessly.

Document first. Dates. Emails. Messages. Witnesses. Write down what happened. “My boss is a lunatic” may feel spiritually accurate, but “On October 4, my manager said this in front of these three people” is much more useful. If you believe you are dealing with discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or ageism, learn your rights. Talk to an employment

attorney when appropriate. And stop believing that enduring misery is a professional skill. Sometimes that feeling in your stomach every Sunday night is not “just work stress.” Sometimes that is your nervous system filing an anonymous Glassdoor review.

You are allowed to start looking for another job. Update your resume. Call people you trust. Leave a boss who has turned “team meeting” into a hostage situation. If you speak publicly, tell the truth. Stick to what you experienced. Avoid exaggeration. Do not post confidential information. Understand that posts can have consequences. But I understand why people speak. For years, workers were told, “Don’t burn bridges.” Meanwhile, some employers were standing on the bridge with gasoline and a PowerPoint titled Employee Engagement Strategy.

Talking about toxic workplaces is not about revenge. At its best, it is about sunlight. It lets the next person know they are not imagining what happened. It tells leaders that titles do not make behavior

invisible. Sometimes it gives somebody permission to finally say, “This is not okay.” My advice is simple: do not make your worst day your permanent life. Make a plan. Save money if you can. Build your network. Document what is happening. Get professional advice when needed. Apply elsewhere before you are completely exhausted. If you tell your story publicly, tell it carefully, factually, and with your head held high.

A job can replace you. You only get one you. No paycheck is impressive enough to justify losing your confidence, your health, your family time, or the version of yourself that used to laugh before every Sunday night became a countdown to Monday. Bad bosses survive because good people often leave quietly. Sometimes leaving quietly is the smartest move. Sometimes speaking up is. The important part is remembering that you have options.

And if your boss schedules a “quick chat” at 4:59 on Friday, bring documentation, emotional support, and possibly a priest.

How do you get so many interviews?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Readers began asking how the experiments led to so many interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain the testing approach rather than sell a magic resume trick.

People keep asking me the same question: “Alex, how are you getting so many interviews?” Apparently after watching me wander through corporate hiring processes like a raccoon with a clipboard, people assume I found a secret tunnel underneath Workday.

I didn’t. What I figured out is that one resume is not always enough anymore. Your resume is wearing different corporate outfits because every applicant tracking system seems to have its own filters and mysterious reasons for deciding that Tuesday is the day you are unqualified.

As part of my experiment, I sometimes apply to the same company twice using two different versions of my resume. Same person. Same experience. Same questionable sense of humor. What changes is how the resume is written, structured, titled, and matched to the job description. One might use language closer to the posting, simplify titles, move relevant experience higher, and focus on the skills the employer wants. Then I document what happens. Version A gets rejected. Version B gets an interview.

Apparently I became more qualified somewhere between lunch and checking my email.

That is the part people miss when they say, “Just make one good resume and use it everywhere.” That advice made more sense when a human picked up the resume first. Today, your resume may have to impress software before a recruiter sees it. Different ATS platforms are configured differently by employers. One company may care about job titles. Another may weight certain keywords. Another may screen knockout questions, years of experience, location, salary expectations, certifications, or some combination that makes you wonder whether you applied for a job or started a password recovery challenge.

So, I test. I apply, change something, apply again when appropriate, and track which version gets movement. I look at which version gets rejected quickly, which gets a recruiter call, which moves forward, and where the process turns into a corporate escape room. The point is not to stuff 147 keywords into a resume until it reads like an HR ransom note. The point is to understand that

presentation matters. Language matters. Formatting matters. Titles matter. Matching your experience to what the employer appears to be screening for matters.

The funniest part is when one version gets rejected almost immediately and another version of the same human gets invited to interview. Nothing about my background changed. I did not earn another degree between breakfast and dinner. I did not gain ten years of experience during a coffee break. I did not wake up fluent in six new software platforms. The system liked one version better. That is why I document it. I am not trying to “beat” hiring. I am trying to understand it: what works, what gets filtered out, what gets a response, and what disappears with all the other resumes nobody ever sees.

Apparently modern job searching sometimes means giving the robot a different introduction before it decides you are worth meeting.

Resume optimization needs a road test

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept seeing services market “optimized” resumes without showing whether they improve outcomes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to shift the conversation from pretty formatting to measurable interview results.

I keep seeing people online promising to “optimize” resumes, and apparently optimize now means rearrange a few words, sprinkle in some corporate seasoning, add impressive verbs, and hand the document back like Gordon Ramsay just fixed your career.

The other day I saw a company selling resume help. Naturally, I got curious. Because curiosity has somehow turned into a full time laboratory for me, I sent them my resume. Within five minutes, it came back. Five minutes. I have spent longer deciding what sandwich to order. The new version was polished, clean, professional, and so robotic I expected it to ask me to select all the squares containing a traffic light. Every sentence had been upgraded into executive wallpaper. I no longer “managed teams.” I “spearheaded cross functional operational excellence initiatives.” I read it twice and thought, impressive. I sound like I was assembled during a leadership retreat.

But here is where my experiment started. I used their newly optimized resume and applied to a real position. Within ten minutes, I was

rejected. Not ten days. Not after an interview. Ten minutes. The resume had barely made it through the front door before the hiring system threw it back onto the sidewalk.

And that is the part people miss. There is a huge difference between optimizing a resume and actually testing what works. You can make a resume beautiful. You can add keywords. You can make every bullet sound like it was written by a consultant trapped inside Microsoft Word. But none of that proves the resume is getting through ATS filters, knockout questions and scoring systems, or whatever digital bouncer is standing outside the interview process that day. A resume can look fantastic to a human and still get body slammed by software before a recruiter sees your name.

That is why I test. I apply to similar roles with different versions. I change wording, titles, keywords, skills, and formatting. I simplify language and remove corporate fluff. Sometimes one version gets rejected while another version, representing the exact same human being, gets an interview. Same person. Different resume. Different

outcome. That tells me more than somebody saying, “Trust me, this version is optimized.”

I am not interested in whether a document sounds impressive sitting in a PDF. I want to know how it performs in the actual hiring system. I want evidence and patterns. I want to know what wording gets through, what gets blocked, and why two resumes with the same career history can travel different paths.

A resume should not just sound good to the person selling resume services. It has to perform where it will actually be used. So if someone tells you they optimized your resume, ask one simple question: optimized for what? Because if the answer is, “It looks stronger,” that is nice. So does a sports car sitting in a garage. I want to know if it starts.

Pretty resumes get compliments. Tested resumes get interviews. I know which result matters more.

Two applications, one hiring machine

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I compared two versions of my resume for the same role to study different screening outcomes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give candidates evidence-based insight into how applications are filtered.

Most people apply for a job once, cross their fingers, refresh their email every 14 seconds, and hope the hiring gods are in a good mood. I apply twice. Same job. Same person. Same experience. Two different resumes. Then I watch hiring perform its magic trick where one version of me is apparently leadership material and the other version gets released back into the wild.

This week I tested CKE Restaurants, Inc. for a VP, Company Operations role. I submitted two versions of my resume. Same history. Same accomplishments. Same years of experience. The difference was how the resume was written, structured, and positioned. One version moved forward and received an invitation to schedule an interview. The other received the polite corporate breakup email: thank you for your interest, we have decided to move forward with other candidates.

This is exactly how I test the process. I do not just tell people to “optimize your resume.” I want to know what changes an outcome. So I change keywords, summaries, leadership language, accomplishment placement, job-title phrasing, and

how the same experience is presented. Then I document what happens. Sometimes both versions get rejected. Sometimes both move forward. Sometimes one gets the interview while the other gets launched into outer space.

That is why I laugh when people say, “If you are qualified, the system will know.” Which system? There are different ATS platforms, configurations, knockout questions, keyword rules, and humans behind them. “Multi unit operations leadership” might get attention while “regional operations management” gets treated like I wrote the resume in crayon. Same experience. Different packaging. Different result.

And no, this does not prove every rejection is caused by an ATS. Sometimes a recruiter reviews the resume. Sometimes a hiring manager makes the decision. Sometimes an internal candidate is already sitting in the chair. Hiring is messy. Candidates are often told the problem is their experience when the issue may be how that experience was interpreted before they got to explain it.

This is what The Interview Games is about. I apply, test, interview, document, compare, and repeat. I am not sitting on the sidelines giving theoretical advice based on a webinar from 2016. I want evidence. I want outcomes. I want to see what happens when the same candidate enters the same company through two slightly different doors.

In this experiment, Resume A got: “Let’s schedule an interview.” Resume B got: “We wish you the very best.” Apparently my qualifications have split personalities. So when someone says, “Just send your resume and see what happens,” remember: your resume is not simply telling your story anymore. It is translating your career for software, recruiters, filters, and whatever mysterious corporate machine is guarding the front door.

I will keep testing that machine because candidates deserve more than generic advice. They deserve to know what actually gets through.

No, I am not hoarding job offers

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

People misunderstood the purpose of The Interview Games and assumed the experiments meant collecting offers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to clarify that the point is studying candidate experience and pushing for better practices.

I apparently need to clear something up because every time I explain The Interview Games, someone imagines me sitting in a dark room surrounded by job offers like a corporate dragon guarding onboarding packets, laptops, and somebody else's first day lunch.

That is not what I do. I test the hiring process. I apply with different versions of my resume, change wording, move sections, adjust keywords, compare ATS results, track responses and interview steps, and watch what happens. Same person. Same experience. One version gets rejected before I finish my coffee. Another gets invited to interview like it suddenly earned three promotions overnight and discovered executive presence in aisle seven.

And that is exactly why I do it. Most candidates never get to see what happened behind the curtain. They spend hours applying, tailoring resumes, writing cover letters, taking assessments, recording one way videos, creating another Workday password. Then the grand finale arrives: "After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with other

candidates." Wonderful. Very educational.

Did the ATS reject the resume? Was a keyword missing? Did a recruiter actually read it? Was the role leaning toward an internal candidate? Did the hiring manager want twelve years of experience in software invented six years ago? Nobody knows. The candidate gets a polite funeral notice for the application and is expected to move on with absolutely no useful information.

So I test it. When a company wants to keep moving forward, I explain what I am doing and step away. I am not accepting jobs, stealing someone's desk, eating their welcome lunch, collecting the laptop, changing my LinkedIn headline to "Thrilled to announce," and disappearing into the night. The company keeps interviewing. Another candidate gets hired. Meanwhile, I share what I learned.

That matters because I hear from people every day who have sent hundreds of applications and have no idea why they are getting nowhere. Candidates with experience. People who can do the job. People who are starting to

believe a generic rejection email is somehow a professional diagnosis of their worth. It is not. Sometimes the difference between rejection and an interview is not your experience. It is how the system interpreted your resume. One sentence, one keyword, one format change, or one bizarre ATS filter can change the entire result.

I would rather test that reality and show people what happens than sit on LinkedIn posting, "Just network more!" while everyone quietly screams into their keyboards and updates their resume for the 47th time. So no, this is not about taking opportunities away from people. It is about understanding why qualified people are losing opportunities before they ever reach a human being.

I am not trying to break the hiring process. I am tapping on the dashboard because the check engine light has been on for years, and corporate keeps responding by scheduling another engagement survey.

Testing the smoke detector

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I described submitting differently worded applications to see whether hiring systems respond consistently.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show that a process should be evaluated by what it actually does, not the claims on the careers page.

I don't test hiring processes by reading a company's careers page and admiring the stock photos of people laughing around a conference table. I test them the same way you test a smoke detector: I press the button and see what starts screaming.

That means I will apply to the same company more than once using different versions of my resume. Same person. Same experience. Same career history. Different wording, different formatting, different emphasis. One resume may lead with operations. Another may lean harder into leadership, sales, or team development. Then I watch what happens. Does one disappear into the ATS basement? Does one get rejected before I can finish my coffee? Does another magically receive an interview invitation from the exact same company for the exact same role? That is where this gets interesting.

People ask me all the time how I get so many interviews. I wish I could say I have discovered a secret handshake with Workday, but the answer is much less glamorous. I test. Constantly. I change keywords. I move sections. I adjust the

summary. I compare what gets through and what gets launched into the online cornfield. Different ATS systems have different filters, different scoring methods, and apparently different moods depending on which resume walks through the door.

This experiment is a perfect example. One version gets the nice corporate funeral: "After careful consideration, we have chosen to pursue other candidates." Translation: thank you for visiting our automated rejection museum. Another version gets: "We are impressed with your background and would like to move forward." Same background, by the way. It did not suddenly become more impressive overnight. I did not earn an MBA between breakfast and lunch. I did not rescue a failing company during a 20 minute coffee break. The packaging changed. The result changed.

That is why I keep saying the modern job search is not always about whether you are qualified. Sometimes it is about whether your resume happens to speak fluent robot that day. A human being may look at two resumes and

immediately understand they describe the same candidate. An ATS can look at them and decide one is leadership material while the other should be escorted off the internet.

And this is exactly why I document the process. I want to know what companies say they value, what their systems actually reward, where candidates get filtered out, and how much of the "careful consideration" happens before a human ever sees a name.

So when someone tells me, "Just optimize your resume," I smile. Optimize it for what? Which ATS? Which recruiter? Which keyword configuration? Which phase of the moon? I am not trying to beat the hiring process. I am trying to understand it. And sometimes the funniest part is watching the same company reject me and invite me to interview at nearly the same time.

Corporate hiring has become speed dating run by software, and apparently I showed up wearing two different shirts.

The pre-interview NDA

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview process introduced a legal agreement before the conversation even began.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question why normal candidate conversations sometimes start to resemble secret government briefings.

Apparently the future of interviewing is no longer, “Tell me about yourself.” It is now, “Before you tell us anything about yourself, please sign this legal document agreeing not to tell anyone what happens after you tell us about yourself.” Somewhere, a lawyer just smiled and a recruiter added another step.

Hiring has turned into a combination of corporate theater, airport security, and a software update nobody requested. First came the ATS. Then personality assessments. Then one way video interviews where you talk to yourself like a hostage recording. Then came six person panels where one executive keeps the camera off and another sounds suspiciously like he is eating soup. Now we have entered the NDA era. Apparently applying for a job now comes with terms and conditions.

Imagine getting the email: “We were impressed with your background and would like to move forward.” Great. Then the next sentence says, “Before scheduling your interview, please review and sign the Non-Disclosure Agreement.” Nothing says warm candidate

experience like wondering whether you need an attorney before learning who the hiring manager is.

I can already hear the recruiter call. “Alex, we are excited to move forward.” Great. “First, we need you to sign the NDA.” Fine. “It covers confidential information discussed during the interview.”

Understandable. “It also covers the process.” Now I have questions. Are we protecting nuclear codes, or has “Tell me about a time you handled conflict” finally been classified as proprietary intellectual property?

And yes, I understand why NDAs exist. Senior roles can involve confidential strategies, unreleased products, acquisitions, financial information, and proprietary plans. That makes sense. But when the NDA appears before the candidate even knows enough about the position to decide whether they want it, we may have reached peak corporate caution. Companies spent years telling applicants to “bring your authentic self.” Apparently your authentic self needs legal representation.

This is exactly why I keep testing hiring processes. I want to see where this is going. What happens

next? Do candidates need permission before posting, “Had a great conversation today”? Does LinkedIn add an NDA badge next to “Open to Work”? Does Workday require a witness and a notary before a password reset? At this pace, by 2030 the interview invitation will include a retinal scan, an investigation of your childhood lemonade stand, and a confidentiality clause covering “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Hiring used to be two people having a conversation about whether the person could do the job and whether the company was somewhere they wanted to work. Now I am waiting for the calendar invitation that says: Interview Round 4. Attendees: Hiring Manager, HR, VP, Legal, Compliance, Cybersecurity, and one mysterious person named “Observer.”

Please join five minutes early. And whatever happens in the meeting room stays in the meeting room.

Networking ends at the same locked door

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Recruiters urged people to network but often directed them back into the same application systems.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to point out the gap between public invitations to connect and the reality candidates encounter.

LinkedIn has convinced an entire generation of professionals that networking is the secret tunnel around the ATS, which is adorable, because apparently the tunnel now ends at the exact same locked door.

A recruiter posts, “We’re hiring! Please share with your network!” A hiring manager adds, “I’d love to connect with talented people.” So a first degree connection reads the job, checks every requirement, realizes they match 20 out of 20, and sends a thoughtful message. A normal, professional note explaining that they’re connected, their background aligns, and they’d love to learn more. Then comes the response: absolutely nothing. Not even the polite corporate “Thanks for reaching out.” Just the digital equivalent of watching someone make eye contact with you through the window and slowly close the blinds.

This is the part of modern hiring that makes me laugh because candidates are constantly told to network. Build relationships. Be proactive. Don’t just throw your resume into the ATS black hole. Make a human connection. Apparently, once you actually make

the human connection, the human activates Do Not Disturb and disappears. If you post a job to your own network, people are naturally going to assume “my network” includes the people in your network. Wild concept, I know. Otherwise, why post it there? You could whisper the opening into a conference room plant and get roughly the same response rate.

And yes, recruiters and hiring managers are busy. Nobody owes every applicant a 45 minute coffee chat or a documentary about the hiring process. But if someone is already connected to you, clearly meets the qualifications, and sends a respectful message about the role you just announced, a ten second response should not require congressional funding. Even “Thanks, Alex. Please apply through the link so the team can review you” is a response.

That is where the comedy really lives. Monday: “Your network is your net worth.” Tuesday: “People hire people, not resumes.” Wednesday: a qualified first degree connection sends a DM. Thursday: recruiter has entered witness protection. Friday: same recruiter

posts, “Never underestimate the power of networking.” Candidates are told the ATS is too impersonal, networking is the answer, direct outreach shows initiative, and then direct outreach is treated like somebody knocked on the recruiter’s bathroom window asking for a referral.

If companies genuinely want referrals, relationships, stronger candidate engagement, and better talent pipelines, the behavior has to match the motivational posts. Networking cannot just mean candidates liking your content and helping your engagement numbers while you ignore them the moment they actually need the network.

A network should work in both directions. Otherwise, let’s stop calling it networking. Let’s call it professional hide and seek, except one side posted the invitation, picked the hiding spot, turned off read receipts, and then got annoyed when somebody came looking.

The company wants a public job, not a public review

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed the contrast between public employer promotion and discomfort with public candidate accounts.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to argue that transparency should work both ways without turning every criticism into a crisis.

Apparently we have reached modern hiring where companies can post the job publicly, advertise their culture publicly, celebrate their “candidate first” values publicly, and then become deeply concerned about professionalism the moment a candidate publicly describes what actually happened.

That part makes me laugh. A company can tell 80,000 people that they are “building an exceptional employee experience,” but if one candidate says, “Interesting, because my interview started 37 minutes late, nobody had read my resume, and the recruiter disappeared for three weeks,” suddenly transparency is tacky. Apparently transparency is only classy when Marketing approves it and places it next to a stock photo of six employees laughing around a laptop.

Posting about a hiring process does not mean someone believes they were owed the job. Rejection is part of hiring. Companies can choose someone else. Candidates can also talk about the experience. Saying, “This process was confusing, excessive, disrespectful, or ridiculous” is not the same thing as

saying, “Give me the office, the salary, and Karen’s parking space immediately.”

What fascinates me is how comfortable companies are collecting information about candidates while becoming nervous when candidates collect information about companies. Upload the resume. Complete the assessment. Record the one way video. Answer the personality test. Provide references. Sit through five interviews. Meet the panel. Meet the panel’s panel. Explain where you see yourself in five years. But if the candidate takes notes? Whoa. Easy there, investigative journalist.

I test hiring processes because companies spend enormous amounts of money telling the public who they are. Career pages are polished like luxury car commercials. “People first.” “We value communication.” “We respect your time.” Then the interview process should survive someone describing it. If a factual account damages the employer brand, the problem might not be the person holding the flashlight.

And tagging the company is not automatically “blasting” them. If I praised an amazing recruiter, named the company, and tagged them, nobody would rush into the comments yelling, “Keep your positive experience private!” It only becomes controversial when the review has fewer than five stars.

That is the strange rule candidates are apparently supposed to follow: companies may evaluate you privately, discuss you internally, reject you automatically, and sometimes never respond at all. But you should quietly absorb the experience because talking about it could be considered unprofessional. I disagree. If the process is great, I will say it is great. If it is ridiculous, I will say that too. I might even add jokes, because nothing pairs better with seven interview rounds than emotional support sarcasm.

Transparency is not an attack. And if a company gets angry at the reflection, arguing with the mirror is probably not the first process improvement I would recommend.

The resume as a combination lock

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Repeated resume comparisons showed me how wording changes can alter screening outcomes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain that being rejected by a system does not automatically mean being unable to do the job.

A resume used to be your introduction. Now it feels more like a combination lock. Same experience, same person, same qualifications, but if the wording is one click off, the door may never open.

Somewhere between “upload your resume” and “thank you for your interest,” your career gets translated into keywords, titles, phrases, and whatever mysterious language the hiring system wants that morning.

I ran another experiment with an Avis Budget Group District Manager posting in Chicago. I created two resumes for the exact same job using the same career history, education, accomplishments, and leadership experience. Resume #1 was optimized specifically for the job description. I studied the language Avis used and made sure my real experience was described using the terminology the role emphasized: multi location operations, district leadership, revenue growth, P&L management, budgeting, KPI analysis, recruiting, coaching, and performance management. Nothing was invented. I translated experience I already

had into the language the employer was using.

Resume #1 passed and moved me to the next round. Then I submitted Resume #2. Same companies. Same education. Same accomplishments. But the formatting was different, the language was less aligned with the posting, the keywords were less precise, and the experience was written more naturally instead of being tailored to Avis. Resume #2 was rejected. I got rejected.

Apparently one version of me is qualified and the other should explore opportunities elsewhere. I appreciate the hiring system helping me discover that I am simultaneously qualified and unqualified for the same job.

This is why I keep testing the hiring process. Candidates are constantly told, “If you have the experience, your resume will speak for itself.” Maybe. But apparently it needs to speak ATS first. A human can read “oversaw several locations” and understand multi location operations. A human can read “managed payroll, expenses, sales, and profitability” and understand P&L responsibility. Humans connect context. Software may be looking for

a more specific translation before a human ever gets involved.

That does not mean lie or copy the entire job description until your resume looks like the company secretly wrote it for you. It means study the posting like an open book test. Look at the words the employer repeats and how they describe leadership, financial performance, operations, customers, and people. Then make sure your truthful experience is described clearly enough that both the system and the human can recognize the connection.

In my experiment, the candidate did not change. The qualifications did not change. One resume moved forward. One resume got rejected. Sometimes the difference between “we’d like to continue the conversation” and “after careful consideration” is not your ability to do the job.

It may simply be how well your resume translated your experience into the language the hiring system was built to understand.

The end of corporate Alex

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I looked back at how my LinkedIn writing changed from polished corporate posts to more personal satire.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to understand why saying what I mean matters more than performing a company-approved persona.

A little over a year ago, I had around 1,000 connections on LinkedIn and treated every post like it had to survive HR, Legal, three VPs, and one mysterious person named Susan before I could hit publish.

Corporate loved that version of me. I posted appreciation messages, leadership quotes, “proud of the team” updates, and polished paragraphs about culture, growth, gratitude, and how lucky I was to work with amazing people. HR would like it. VPs would clap. CEOs would occasionally drop a thumbs up like I had just solved employee engagement.

And I loved the recognition. Employee spotlight? Beautiful. Leadership shoutout? Frame it. I had been trained well. Work hard. Stay loyal. Don’t say the uncomfortable part out loud. Call layoffs “organizational changes.” Pretend the pizza party made up for three people quitting. I believed that if you worked hard enough, stayed loyal enough, and kept saying the right things, the company would remember.

Then I learned something corporate recognition programs rarely put on the plaque: applause does not come

with job security. You can be praised on Monday, recognized on Tuesday, invited to a leadership meeting on Wednesday, told you are “critical to the future” on Thursday, and discover Friday that apparently the future has been restructured without you. Layoffs have an incredible way of curing corporate brainwashing. I watched people with 10, 15, even 20 years get handed a severance packet, a laptop return label, and an email wishing them success in their next chapter.

That changed me. Today, I have a much larger audience, but I am far less careful about protecting corporate feelings. I still believe in recognizing great leaders and thanking good people. But I no longer confuse corporate applause with corporate loyalty. A company can celebrate you and still eliminate your position. A VP can praise you and still approve the spreadsheet with your name on it. HR can put you in the newsletter in January and schedule a mysterious 15 minute invite in March titled “Quick Touch Base.”

That doesn’t mean become bitter. It means become awake. Build your reputation outside your employer.

Keep your resume updated while things are going well, not after the badge stops working. Build relationships before you need them. Speak honestly. Help people. Create something with your own name attached to it, because your career should never exist entirely inside somebody else’s org chart.

Looking back, I laugh at how nervous I used to be about posting anything corporate might dislike. I thought protecting the company’s image was protecting my career. Turns out, the safest thing I ever did was finally start using my own voice. I lost the fear of not being “corporate enough” and gained something better: a platform that actually sounds like me. That freedom meant more to me than the applause.

And yes, corporate Alex still lives somewhere inside me. He is probably drafting an appreciation post right now. I just took away his login.

The toxic boss sequel nobody requested

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former boss resurfaced by phone during an otherwise peaceful evening.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to celebrate the right to set boundaries without reopening the old workplace drama.

Nothing ruins a peaceful evening faster than seeing a name pop up on your phone that belongs in the “Previously on Toxic Leadership” section of your life. Toxic bosses love reruns.

This evening I was trying to watch Netflix, minding my business, phone face down, snacks nearby, fully committed to doing absolutely nothing productive. Then my phone buzzed. I looked over and saw a message from an ex boss. Not Netflix asking if I was still watching. Him. The human version of a surprise audit. Toxic ex bosses never text like people who once turned your blood pressure into a quarterly KPI. They text like, “Hey Alex, hope you’re doing well. Just checking in.” Checking in? Sir, you spent years checking my numbers, my schedule, my emails, my voice. I think we have completed the checking portion of our relationship.

I stared at the screen wondering what response would be professional. “Great to hear from you” felt dishonest. “New phone, who dis?” felt immature. “Please contact my therapist directly” felt efficient. So naturally I went back to Netflix and let the message sit there

like an unresolved HR complaint. Toxic ex bosses have an incredible internal clock. They can disappear for months, then suddenly sense that you are happy. Somewhere, a dashboard lights up: “Warning: former employee has achieved peace. Immediate outreach required.” Next thing you know, they are asking how you have been, where you are working, whether you are “still doing that LinkedIn thing,” and pretending they do not remember the meeting where they blamed you for a problem caused by a system they approved.

Sometimes the message is not even mean. That is what makes it funnier. They will compliment you. “I’ve been seeing your posts. Looks like you’re doing great.” Thank you, Gary. Nothing motivates personal growth quite like surviving meetings with a man who treated Outlook calendar invites like subpoenas. Years ago, seeing that name would have made my stomach drop. I would have reread the message twelve times, analyzed every word, wondered what they wanted, and drafted a response like I was negotiating a hostage release. Now I look at it and think, “Wow. That chapter really ended.” The title

is no longer Boss. The title is now Person Who Used to Email Me at 9:47 PM About Something That Could Have Waited Until Tuesday.

That may be the best part of moving on from a toxic workplace. Eventually, the people who once controlled your schedule, confidence, and peace become nothing more than a notification you can swipe away. You are not required to reopen a door just because someone from the old building knocked.

Sometimes growth is a promotion or a better paycheck. Sometimes growth is seeing their name light up your phone and realizing your heart rate did not move. Sometimes the healthiest response is silence. And sometimes it is turning the volume up because Netflix just asked if you are still watching.

Yes, Netflix. I am. Unlike my old boss, you actually understand boundaries.

Corporate bingo at the interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept hearing the same polished phrases and buzzwords in very different interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to encourage candidates to listen for substance behind vague promises and familiar clichés.

I've done enough interviews to realize corporate America has its own language. Different companies, different logos, yet somehow the same phrases keep showing up like everyone subscribed to the same leadership starter pack.

You ever played Corporate Bingo during an interview? I play it all the time. After enough interviews, you realize corporate America has twelve phrases, six facial expressions, and one PowerPoint deck. My bingo card starts the second Zoom opens. "Tell me about yourself." Square one. "We're like a family here." Center square. "We move fast." Check. "Wear many hats." Check. "Hit the ground running." Check. I'm one "culture fit" away from shouting BINGO.

Then someone says, "We're looking for a rock star." Fantastic. Nothing says stable employment like being compared to a profession famous for smashing hotel rooms. Then comes "self starter," which usually means, "Training is a rumor, Brenda quit, and the password died with her." My favorite is, "There's a lot of opportunity to build." Translation: absolutely nothing is built. You are being hired to build the plane while

flying it and explain at your 90 day review why the beverage cart is behind budget.

Then we get to "What's your biggest weakness?" I want to say, "Apparently joining meetings where six strangers analyze my personality like I'm a lab sample." Instead, we perform the sacred ritual where the candidate says perfectionism and everyone nods like it's brand new information. Eventually they ask, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Five years? I'm trying to figure out if this position survives the next reorganization. Let's survive Q4 before we plan my 2031 parking spot.

No Corporate Bingo game is complete without "competitive compensation." Nobody gives a number. It's competitive with something. Maybe another job. Maybe a coupon for 15% off khakis. We won't know until round seven when someone whispers the salary like it's a launch code. Then comes: "Do you have any questions for us?" Absolutely. Which square gets me the bonus round? I ask about expectations, culture, turnover, challenges, and success. Meanwhile my bingo card is smoking because

someone just said "cross functional collaboration" for the fourth time.

I can predict the soundtrack now. Synergy. Alignment. Agility. Ownership. Passion. Fast paced environment. Lean team. Other duties as assigned. "Other duties" can mean helping another department or rebuilding the loading dock. That's why I play Corporate Bingo. Underneath those phrases is information candidates need. When a company says "family," I ask what accountability looks like. When they say "fast paced," I ask whether that means growth or permanent understaffing. When they say "wear many hats," I ask how many hats and whether any come with additional salary.

Interviewing gets more interesting when you stop trying to give perfect answers and start listening to the words companies use. And if someone says "work hard, play hard"? BINGO.

Six panelists and a request to stay quiet

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Vice President of Operations panel interview became even stranger when the post about it drew attention.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show why sharing the candidate experience can make employers uncomfortable.

Every rejection email has a backstory. Mine just happened to include six people on Zoom, a muted hiring manager, more than an hour of corporate theater, and me wondering whether I had accidentally joined jury duty instead of a Vice President of Operations interview.

The other day I posted the rejection email I received after interviewing with US Foods. But the email was only the finale. Let me rewind. I joined Zoom and six people appeared on my screen. Six. It felt like a tribunal with Wi-Fi. The hiring manager began talking first. His mouth and hands were moving. He was completely muted. We were watching corporate silent cinema. I said, "I think you're on mute." He fixed it, laughed, and I said, "Perfect. Thirty seconds in and we already solved our first operational problem."

Then we got into leadership, profitability, accountability, developing managers, underperforming locations, customer experience, and culture. I joked that operations is basically solving twelve emergencies before lunch and then updating a

spreadsheet so it looks like all twelve were part of the strategic plan. I said most problems come down to people, process, training, leadership, or the most powerful sentence in corporate America: "We've always done it this way." That sentence has tenure.

Someone asked how I handle difficult conversations. I said, "Directly, respectfully, and before it becomes a 47 person email chain where executives are copied for emotional support." A few people laughed. One person gave me the corporate half smile that says, "I am absolutely writing that down." The interview kept going past an hour. At that point I expected lunch, dental benefits, and maybe my own permanent Zoom square. We talked strategy, priorities, performance, and what success looks like.

Then came the closing question: "Do you have any questions for us?" Absolutely. After sitting with six people for over an hour, I had enough material for a Netflix series called Six Executives and a Mute Button. I asked about challenges, priorities, culture, and success in the role. We wrapped up smiling. Nobody asked me to sell a pen, pick

an animal, or explain my five year plan while pretending anyone knows where corporate America will be next Tuesday.

Then came the rejection email. Fair enough. Rejection is part of the experiment. I apply, experience the process, document what happens, and share what candidates encounter. But then came the request asking me not to post or share details of the hiring process publicly. That made me laugh. Asking me not to talk about the process after inviting me into the process is like inviting a food critic to dinner, serving the lasagna, then chasing him into the parking lot yelling, "PLEASE DON'T MENTION THE LASAGNA."

The rejection was normal. The interview was normal. The six person panel was almost normal. The "please don't post this" part? That was when the episode got renewed for Season Two.

Coffee, chaos, and Starbucks

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A crowded and disappointing Starbucks visit gave me material before the workday had even begun.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to turn an ordinary bad coffee run into a funny snapshot of modern customer experience.

This morning I walked into my local Starbucks looking for coffee, peace, and maybe five uninterrupted minutes before the world started asking me to participate in it. What I got instead was a cup that tasted like regret, a lobby packed like somebody was giving away free stock options, and enough laptops open to qualify the place as a regional headquarters.

The line was wrapped around the pastry case. One guy was staring at the menu like he had never encountered beverages before. Sir, it is coffee. You are not negotiating a merger. Pick a size, choose your emotional support syrup, and keep it moving. Behind him, someone was ordering a drink with seventeen modifications, three milk substitutions, two pumps of something seasonal, and instructions that sounded less like a coffee order and more like a chemistry final.

I finally got my drink, took one sip, and immediately understood every bad decision I have ever made. It had warmth of a corporate apology and the flavor profile of “per my last email.” I looked at the cup like it had personally betrayed me. Meanwhile,

the place was so packed I could not find a seat. Every table had either a laptop, a backpack, or one person guarding 6 chairs like they had inherited commercial real estate.

One table had a guy on a Zoom call speaking at full volume about “leveraging synergies.” At 8 in the morning. Nobody should be leveraging anything before breakfast. Another person had headphones on, three spreadsheets open, and the thousand yard stare of someone who had just discovered their meeting could have been an email. A woman near the window was interviewing for a job, and I swear the person on her screen asked her where she saw herself in five years. I almost leaned over and whispered, “Hopefully somewhere with better coffee.”

Then the mobile order crowd started arriving. Every thirty seconds someone walked in, stared at the counter, moved three cups around, and asked, “Is this mine?” We have officially reached the stage of civilization where adults need to inspect six caramel macchiatos like baggage claim at O’Hare. One man picked up the wrong drink, took a sip, made a face like he had

discovered betrayal, and quietly put it back. Sir. That is now evidence.

And of course there was the person who walked in, saw forty people waiting, and asked the barista, “Is it going to be a while?” No, Brenda. They were all hired as extras. Your drink is actually waiting backstage.

I stood there holding my coffee, watching the chaos, and realized Starbucks at 8:00 a.m. is basically corporate America in one room. Everyone is over caffeinated, under rested, pretending to know what is happening, and quietly wondering who approved this process. By the time I left, I had paid six dollars for a drink that tasted like a performance improvement plan and spent twenty minutes observing humanity before most people had even opened Outlook.

But I will be back. Because apparently I enjoy expensive disappointment with oat milk.

The new-job gratitude parade

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A particularly enthusiastic LinkedIn announcement made me think about public declarations of loyalty.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to celebrate new beginnings while reminding people not to confuse a job with a lifelong relationship.

You ever see one of those LinkedIn gratitude posts after someone gets a new job and think, “Wow, this company must have personally rescued them from a burning building?”

Last week I saw one. It had everything. The “I’m humbled and excited to announce” sentence. The tag to the VP. The tag to HR. The tag to the recruiter. I’m surprised they didn’t tag the receptionist. They thanked leadership for “believing in me.” They thanked HR for “making the process so welcoming.” They thanked the VP for “seeing my potential.” The post read like they had just been adopted by a Fortune 500 family.

There were hundreds of likes. People were commenting, “So deserved!” “Congratulations on the next chapter!” The VP even jumped in with, “We are so lucky to have you on the team!” Corporate Hallmark movie. I almost expected LinkedIn to start playing piano music. Then today I’m scrolling through my feed when I see the same person again. Green circle. #OpenToWork. Wait. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NEXT

CHAPTER? That chapter was six pages long.

Last week we were thanking Brenda from HR for changing lives. Today Brenda has apparently changed the password to the building. The VP who was “so lucky” to have them must have used up all that luck by Thursday. I went back to the old post to make sure I wasn’t imagining things. Nope. Same company. Same VP. Same corporate romance. The honeymoon package apparently included onboarding and an unexpected separation meeting.

And this is why I laugh a little at those massive corporate gratitude posts on day one. Not because you shouldn’t be grateful. Be excited. Celebrate the job. Pop champagne. Tell your family. But maybe give the company a couple of payroll cycles before writing corporate wedding vows. You just met these people. You haven’t even discovered which meeting should have been an email yet. You don’t know who schedules a 4:30 Friday call titled “Quick Touch Base,” or who says “we’re like family here” right before forwarding your position to restructuring.

You haven’t experienced the performance review where

“exceeds expectations” somehow becomes a 1.7% raise and a pizza party. And you definitely don’t know whether that VP who commented “Welcome to the family!” will remember your name when finance says, “We need to reduce headcount.” Corporate relationships move fast on LinkedIn. Monday: “Thrilled to announce!” Wednesday: “Best team ever!” Friday: “Due to an unexpected restructuring...” Sunday: green circle. Corporate honeymoon apparently had a seven day return policy.

I’m not saying stop posting about your new job. I’m saying maybe keep the gratitude post in drafts until your badge works for more than one week. Companies love saying, “We’re a family.” And sometimes they are. Just remember, families can also change the Wi-Fi password and stop inviting you to Thanksgiving.

Celebrate the new job. Enjoy it. Just maybe don’t tattoo the company values on your forearm during orientation. LinkedIn has enough plot twists already!!

The Walgreens application that would not die

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A year-old Walgreens application unexpectedly came back into view.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask why employer systems let candidates sit in limbo instead of giving a clear answer.

A year ago, when I first started doing these hiring experiments, I applied for a Walgreens role. Nothing dramatic. I filled out the application, submitted it, got the standard “thank you for applying” email, and moved on with my life.

I assumed the application had gone to that mysterious corporate place where resumes and cover letters are stored. Fast forward almost an entire year, and apparently “we’ll be in touch soon” is less of a timeline and more of a philosophical concept. Somewhere along the way, my application survived seasons, holidays, budgets. Today I get an email from Walgreens titled “Quick Application Update.” Quick?!!! My application has been aging like bourbon.

Apparently, after nearly twelve months, Walgreens wanted me to know they are still actively reviewing applications and that my candidacy is “still very much under consideration.” A YEAR. I’ve changed phone chargers faster than this hiring process.

When I applied, I was at the beginning of this experiment. Since

then I’ve applied to more companies, sat through panels, talked to recruiters, watched executives join interviews late, tested ATS systems, received rejection emails at strange hours, written about hiring, and built an entire project around documenting the process. Meanwhile, somewhere inside Walgreens, my application has apparently been sitting quietly while people whisper, “Should we call Alex yet?” At this point, I’m not a candidate. I’m a historical artifact.

My original application should be displayed behind glass with a museum plaque: “Submitted in 2025. Notice the ancient formatting, hopeful language, and complete lack of awareness that this process would still be alive a year later.” The best part is the email says they appreciate my patience and enthusiasm. Patience? I forgot I applied. That’s not patience. That’s memory loss with Wi-Fi.

I’m not even mad. I’m impressed. Most companies ghost you and disappear into the mist. Walgreens came back almost a year later like an ex texting, “Hey stranger, been thinking about you.” Where have

you BEEN? Did my resume fall behind a filing cabinet? Was the hiring manager waiting for Mercury to leave retrograde? Did someone finally click “next candidate” after eleven months?

This is exactly why I started documenting hiring. Candidates are told to move quickly, respond within 24 hours, prepare for interviews, complete assessments, send thank you notes, and remain “engaged.” Meanwhile, somewhere inside corporate America, an application can take a one year sabbatical and return refreshed.

So yes, Walgreens, thank you for the update. I appreciate knowing my candidacy is still alive. Honestly, I assumed it had graduated college, gotten married, bought a starter home, and opened a 401(k) by now. I’ll keep everyone posted. At this pace, I should hear about the first interview sometime around the 2028 Olympics.

Maybe by then they’ll throw in a pharmacy rewards card, a cake, and a certificate for surviving the process.

Chris Hansen and the interview chair

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A trip to see Primetime at the movies reminded me of the awkward questions in hiring interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to connect pop culture and hiring satire while taking a break from applications.

I went to the movies this afternoon expecting popcorn, a dark theater, and two hours where nobody could ask me to “tell them about a time I overcame a challenge.” Then Primetime started, Chris Hansen walked onto the screen, and within minutes I realized I had accidentally purchased a ticket to the cinematic version of The Interview Games.

There’s a scene where Chris is standing at a vending machine trying to buy a Rice Krispies treat. The thing gets stuck. He calls the number on the machine and introduces himself like only Chris Hansen can: “I’m Chris Hansen with Dateline NBC.” I started laughing because that is exactly how I feel running these experiments. Something breaks, nobody knows who owns it, and somehow I’m introducing myself to a stranger trying to figure out why the process isn’t working. Chris gets a snack. I usually get an automated email saying the team is “still reviewing candidates.”

Then come the sting houses, hidden cameras, people walking through the door having no idea what is waiting on the other side, and Chris sitting there with that calm

expression before everything gets uncomfortable. Tell me that doesn’t sound like interviewing. You apply, get a cheerful email, walk into a Zoom room, and six people appear. One person is muted, another has their camera off, HR is smiling like they know the ending, and the VP hasn’t arrived yet.

Watching Primetime reminded me why I started testing hiring processes. Chris studies what people say, what they do, and what happens when they think nobody is paying attention. I do something much less dramatic, but corporate recruiting makes me feel like I should bring hidden cameras. I apply. I document. I change resumes. I test ATS systems. I sit through interviews. I watch communication, timelines, questions, and follow up. Then I compare what companies say their process is with what candidates actually experience.

The movie has that grainy early internet feeling, with dial-up sounds... Back then the internet took five minutes to connect. In 2026, some hiring managers saw that speed and said, “Hold my calendar.” Chris also has this way of sitting

across from someone, calmly asking questions while the other person realizes the conversation is going somewhere they did not expect. A recruiter asks why I’m interested in the position, and inside my head I’m thinking, “Because I’m running an experiment and you are now episode 47.”

By the time Primetime ended, everyone around me was processing the movie. I was mentally grading the candidate experience. Communication: needs improvement. Timeline: unclear. Transparency: behind a two way mirror. Follow up: probably coming in six to eight business months.

I walked into the theater trying to take an afternoon off from The Interview Games. I walked out thinking Chris Hansen and I may have more in common than I expected. He asks people to take a seat. I ask recruiters why we need nine interviews. Different investigation. Same uncomfortable chair.

The Interview Games book comes to life

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My continuing hiring experiments turned into a book about the process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain who the book is for and why the stories needed a home beyond individual posts.

Some people get frustrated with modern hiring and complain about it over coffee. I apparently got frustrated, applied to a ridiculous number of jobs, sat through enough interviews to qualify for emotional frequent flyer miles, documented everything, and somehow ended up with a book on Barnes & Noble, Inc. That feels like a perfectly reasonable escalation.

The Interview Games is officially live, and I did not sit down one day and decide, “You know what the world needs? A book about ATS filters, panel interviews, rejection emails, and raccoons in business attire.” I started this experiment because I had spent years on the hiring side of the table and wanted to understand what candidates were actually experiencing. So I changed chairs. I tested resumes, compared ATS results, applied to companies twice, sat through one way videos, assessments, recruiter screens, panels that looked like jury duty with better laptops.

Nearly identical resumes could get completely different results. “One final conversation” could reproduce overnight and become three more conversations. “We’re still aligning

internally” often sounded like corporate code for nobody knowing who owns the decision. I received rejection emails at ridiculous hours, got called overqualified, heard age related comments and once had to explain what animal I would be. I said raccoon, which became important enough that the raccoon now has a better seat on the book cover than some executives had in my interviews.

That is what this book became: part corporate satire, part hiring experiment, and part practical guide for anyone wondering whether the process has lost the plot. One interview became three. Three became six. Somebody added an assessment. Somebody else added another approval. Technology got layered on top. Nobody removed anything. Eventually we built hiring processes that require more endurance than the jobs themselves.

Underneath the jokes, there is a serious point. Candidates are exhausted. Recruiters are overloaded. Hiring managers are waiting. HR is coordinating. Executives want faster hiring. Yet the process keeps getting longer, more automated, and less personal.

It is about asking whether systems that accumulated over time still make sense. Sometimes everybody is trapped inside a process nobody remembers designing.

Seeing The Interview Games listed on Barnes & Noble is surreal. A year ago I was documenting interviews and testing what actually works. Now those stories, patterns, jokes, lessons, and corporate detours are sitting inside a real book, with a raccoon in a suit beside me looking like he is waiting for HR to send his offer letter.

If you have ever been ghosted, ATS filtered, over interviewed, “culture fitted,” asked to complete free homework, or told there would be one more conversation only to discover another calendar invitation waiting, this book is for you.

And to every company that unknowingly contributed material along the way: thank you for supporting the arts.

The Walmart aisle of “energy”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Walmart interaction included an age-related remark that turned an ordinary errand into a reminder about bias.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show that ageism appears in casual moments as well as formal interviews.

Ageism rarely walks into the room wearing a name tag that says, “Hello, I’m here to judge you by the year on your birth certificate.” It usually sneaks in as a joke or that tone people use when they assume anyone over 40 needs help with Wi-Fi.

This evening I stopped at Walmart for coffee, toothpaste, and whatever else I forgot to write down because apparently age turns your brain into a junk drawer. Somewhere between produce and electronics, I overheard a conversation about hiring. An employee joked that an older applicant was probably “too old to keep up.” Someone else laughed and said they needed somebody with “energy.” Ahh, yes, energy. Corporate America’s favorite mysterious qualification, apparently reserved for people who still get carded. I almost checked the shelves to see if Walmart sold it by the gallon. “Excuse me, what aisle is youthful enthusiasm? I seem to have misplaced mine somewhere between paying a mortgage and surviving six reorganizations.”

The funny part is, the people labeled “too old” are often the same people who spent decades keeping

businesses alive while younger managers were still figuring out how to unmute themselves on Teams. They have handled angry customers, staffing shortages, broken systems, bad bosses, layoffs, and enough “exciting new initiatives” to qualify for emotional combat pay. But somehow, experience becomes suspicious. Ten years is impressive. Twenty years is “seasoned.” Thirty years and somebody starts wondering whether you know TikTok or if you arrive at work carrying a fax machine.

Ageism is rarely announced directly. Nobody sends an email saying, “We rejected you because your resume suggests you remember Blockbuster.” Instead, you hear phrases like “culture fit,” “high energy,” “fresh perspective,” or “we’re looking for someone who can grow with the company.” Sometimes it translates to: “We’d love all that experience, but could you please have acquired it while somehow remaining 29?” Discrimination sounds ugly when said plainly, but becomes acceptable when wrapped in trendy hiring language.

I didn’t interrupt the conversation. I kept shopping, because debating ageism next to a pallet of paper towels felt like the opening scene of a strange Walmart documentary. But it reminded me why I keep talking about this. Experience is not an expiration date. Gray hair is not a technical deficiency. Being 50, 60, or older does not mean someone forgot how to learn, lead, sell, adapt, or work hard. The best teams are built by putting different generations at the same table and realizing everyone brings something useful. Sometimes the person you think is “too old to keep up” is the person who already knows how to fix the problem everyone else is still scheduling a meeting to discuss.

Tonight I left Walmart with coffee, toothpaste, and one more reminder that ageism is alive in everyday conversations. And no, I never found the aisle selling “energy.” Apparently it was locked behind the glass with the razors.

“Network more” is not a hiring strategy

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw another generic LinkedIn post telling frustrated job seekers that networking would solve the problem.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to press for more useful advice and recognize the limits of networking in a broken process.

The other day I was scrolling through LinkedIn and saw another post telling people, “You need to network more.” Excellent. Revolutionary. Somewhere a career coach just discovered electricity. Everybody keeps saying networking is the secret to finding jobs, growing your career, and meeting the right people.

The problem is that a lot of people have no idea how to network. Sending someone a connection request with no message is not networking. Connecting and immediately asking, “Can you refer me for a job?” is not networking. Dropping “Interested” under a CEO’s post with 40,000 comments is not networking. And sending a stranger a 900 word autobiography beginning with “Dear Esteemed Professional” is definitely not networking. That is a hostage note with a resume attached.

Networking is having conversations with people without treating every human being like a vending machine for opportunities. Comment because you actually have something to add. Congratulate people. Ask a question. Share something useful. Introduce two

people who could help each other. Check in without needing anything. Remember when someone got promoted, launched a business, wrote a book, or lost a job.

And please, for the love of corporate Wi-Fi, stop opening every message with, “I hope this message finds you well.” It found me on LinkedIn at 10:47 p.m. while I was eating chips in sweatpants. It did not find me well. It found me horizontal. The best networking I have ever done did not feel like networking. It felt like talking. Joking. Listening. Sharing stories. Helping somebody. People remember the person who made them laugh, offered help, gave useful advice, or actually responded like a human being.

That is why your network should not become active only when your job disappears. If the first time someone hears from you in three years is, “Hey! Long time! By the way, do you know anyone hiring?” congratulations, you did not network. You performed a corporate resurrection and hoped nobody noticed.

Build relationships when you do not need anything. Talk to the recruiter who cannot help you today. Talk to

the manager whose company has no opening. Talk to the person who comments on your posts every week. I have met people on LinkedIn who started as a comment and eventually became friends, business connections, readers, and interview conversations. None of that began with, “Please review my resume.”

Networking is not collecting 10,000 connections like baseball cards. It is having people who actually know who you are, remember you, trust you, and would answer when your name pops up. A real network is built slowly, usually before anybody needs a favor, a referral, an introduction, or the emergency password to the hidden job market. Ever. So stop networking like you are hunting for coupons. Talk to people. Be curious. Be useful. Be funny. Be memorable.

And every once in a while, message somebody without asking them for anything. That alone will put you ahead of half of LinkedIn.

What a job loss really takes away

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how layoffs affect identity, routine, finances, and relationships beyond the corporate announcement.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to offer understanding to people rebuilding after job loss, without reducing their experience to HR language.

Losing a job is one of those experiences people describe with neat corporate words because the real words would make HR uncomfortable. People say “transition,” “restructuring,” and “moving in a different direction.” Meanwhile, you are sitting there wondering how your entire routine disappeared before lunch.

I remember when I lost a job. One minute I had a title, meetings on my calendar, emails I was pretending were urgent, and people asking me for answers like I controlled the economy. Then suddenly it was over. The laptop became company property, the calendar went silent, and my commute became a walk to the kitchen while I stared at the coffee maker like it had recruiting experience.

Then the advice starts. Somehow, everyone becomes a career coach the minute your company badge stops working “Everything happens for a reason.” Wonderful. Can the reason pay my mortgage on Friday? Then comes, “This is probably a blessing in disguise.” Apparently the blessing was wearing sunglasses and carrying my office belongings. Losing a job hurts because you do

not just lose a paycheck. You lose routine, confidence, coworkers, and a piece of the identity you spent years building.

Then LinkedIn enters the chat. Update your profile. Turn on the green banner. Network. Optimize your resume. Post thought leadership. Comment strategically. Message recruiters. Follow up. Do not follow up too much. Be memorable, but not weird. Be confident, but not desperate. Meanwhile, you are in sweatpants applying to jobs requiring twelve years of experience in software invented six years ago.

That part becomes funny later. In the moment, it is devastating. Yesterday people needed you. Today an automated email is thanking you for your interest at 2:14 in the morning. Apparently rejection has a night shift. You stare at your resume wondering how years of experience suddenly look suspicious to a robot.

But something happens after the shock wears off. Slowly, you rebuild. You send another application. Someone returns your message. Somebody reminds you what you are good at. You laugh again. Not because everything is fixed, but

because you realize the job was something you did. It was never everything you were. Companies restructure. Leaders change. Budgets disappear. Great employees lose jobs for reasons that have nothing to do with talent. Corporate America can call employees “family” for years and still remove Cousin Gary from the org chart before lunch.

So if you lost your job recently, be angry, scared, embarrassed, relieved, confused, or all five before breakfast. Then keep moving. Apply. Talk to people. Ask for help. Help somebody else when you can. Take the interview. Laugh at the ridiculous parts. Protect your confidence.

A lost job can shake you, but it does not get to define you. One day you may look back at that bad meeting, phone call, or surprise email and realize it was not the end of your story. It was just corporate America aggressively turning the page for you.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

If this week taught me anything, it is that the modern hiring process has a remarkable ability to make simple things complicated. A resume becomes a password. A conversation becomes a panel. A thank-you becomes a test. A rejection arrives before you have even closed the application tab, while a job you applied to a year ago still refuses to tell you whether it exists.

And behind every one of those small absurdities is a real person. Someone who had to get the kids to school before an interview. Someone who ironed a shirt, cleared an afternoon, researched a company, and waited by the phone. Someone who is getting older and more experienced while quietly worrying that employers see those two things as opposites. Someone who lost a job and is now trying to explain a gap on a resume instead of explaining everything that happened to their life.

That is why I keep writing. The jokes are fun, and I admit I enjoy imagining an HR department slowly realizing that a raccoon may be better at follow-up than its recruiting software. But beneath the jokes is a serious request: treat people like people. If you scheduled the interview, show up. If the job was filled, tell the applicants. If a candidate spent an hour giving you thoughtful answers, do not make them wonder for six weeks whether you still have their email address.

I am not asking companies to hire every person who applies. That would be impossible. I am asking them to stop treating basic courtesy like a premium employee benefit. A simple message is not complicated. A straightforward timeline is not a miracle. A hiring manager reading the resume before the meeting should not qualify for a leadership award, but here we are, apparently nominating people for the Nobel Prize in Calendar Management.

And for every person reading this while looking for work: a computer rejecting your resume does not define your value. An interviewer having a bad day does not erase your experience. A hiring manager calling you “overqualified” does not mean you have somehow become less capable because you know what you are doing. You are allowed to be tired. You are allowed to laugh. You are allowed to ask questions when the process makes no sense.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

This project also keeps reminding me how much good can happen in ordinary conversations. A stranger's message. A kind bank employee. A reader who says one post made a miserable day more bearable. It is easy to get so busy criticizing systems that we forget the people who quietly make those systems more humane. They deserve recognition, too. My favorite part of this entire experiment is not the corporate nonsense. It is the moment someone realizes they are not the only person who noticed it.

I have been told to be careful what I post, to sound more corporate, to use fewer jokes, to leave certain stories alone, and to remember that someone in Legal could be reading. I am aware. Somewhere there is probably a spreadsheet with my name on it, a red status indicator, and a meeting titled "Communications Alignment." I hope they enjoy the newsletter. I used color this time.

So I am going to keep applying, keep asking questions, keep testing the process, and keep writing down what happens. Not because every company is bad, and certainly not because every recruiter deserves a punchline. I do it because the gaps between what organizations promise and what candidates experience are worth examining. Some will improve. Some will be surprised that applicants can read. And some will schedule a seventh meeting to decide whether they need a sixth.

If you are doing your best in a difficult job market, I see you. If you are trying to lead with kindness inside a flawed company, keep going. And if you are responsible for a hiring process, please try it yourself from start to finish. Create the account. Upload the resume. Retype the resume. Complete the personality assessment about office supplies. Then sit quietly in an interview waiting room while six people struggle to unmute. You might come back with a few ideas.

Until next week: protect your sense of humor, protect your self-respect, and do not let the hiring circus convince you that the clown is always the person holding the resume. Sometimes the clown owns the calendar invitation.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES