



JULY 26 - AUGUST 1, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

45

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

90

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with one question: what does the hiring process really feel like from the other side of the table? Not the polished version in the recruiting video, where smiling employees walk past a sign that says PEOPLE FIRST. The real version. The application portal that asks you to upload a resume and then type it again. The interview that turns into an eight-part documentary. The rejection email that arrives while your mouse is still hovering over Submit.

I apply for jobs, speak with hiring teams, compare what companies promise with what candidates experience, and write about what I find. Some stories come from my own experiences. Others come from readers who trust me with theirs. I use sarcasm, personal reflection and the occasional raccoon because comedy gets people talking about topics corporate presentations tend to hide underneath a bullet point called 'candidate experience.' I am not trying to convince anyone that every recruiter is awful. There are good people working hard to make hiring more human, and they deserve recognition when they show it.

This week's edition covers July 26 through August 1, 2026. There are stories about eight-round interviews, AI-speed rejections, job postings that never die, an executive vaping through an interview, promises of promotions that never arrive, and what it feels like when a publishing platform takes down your work. There is also a company that responded to criticism and worked to improve its process. That matters. Satire should leave room for the possibility that someone might listen.

Behind each original post are two short editorial reflections. 'What Triggered It' explains the situation or idea described in the story. 'Why I Wrote It' draws out the larger point. The entire LinkedIn post follows, in its original wording. I want readers to have both the joke and the reason it landed. Every joke has a setup. Sometimes the setup is a career fair. Sometimes it is a person's life, and that deserves more than a punch line.

To the people still looking for work, to the recruiters trying to treat applicants with dignity, and to the leaders brave enough to admit when something needs fixing: this edition is for you. I hope you laugh. I hope you recognize yourself in a story. And I hope the next hiring process you encounter requires fewer calendar invitations than a moon landing.

FROM THE EDITOR

A strange week to be both a candidate and a human being.

There is a special kind of irony in writing about the hiring process while also being part of it. Every application is a tiny field test. Every automated message is evidence. Every panel interview is a chance to learn whether the people running the process have ever experienced the process themselves. Some days I take notes. Other days I wonder whether I need to bring a folding chair and snacks for Interview Number Eight.

This week made the contrast particularly clear. People wrote to me about toxic leadership that lingered long after they left the office. Others wrote about being judged for gaps on a resume, sitting through never-ending assessments, or discovering that the salary range in a posting was wide enough to cover two different tax brackets. Then a company responded to criticism about an application system. That is the kind of development worth talking about, too. A problem acknowledged is a better starting point than a problem wrapped in inspirational language.

You will notice that these pages make room for both laughter and tenderness. A reader's experience with an abusive boss does not become less serious because I can find a joke in the corporate language surrounding it. A person who is caring for family while unemployed has not become less valuable because they cannot point to a current work email address. And a new hire who receives a key instead of training is not unreasonable for wanting someone to explain where the fire extinguisher lives.

Every one of the 45 written posts from this week appears here in full, in chronological order. No chopped-down summaries and no replacement stories. The commentary around each post provides an editorial lens, but the writing itself gets the page it deserves. You can follow the links back to each LinkedIn entry, then decide which stories resonate with your own experience.

Welcome to another week inside The Interview Games. The snacks are imaginary. The recruiting emails are not.

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POST 01 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Faith on the Wall, Fear in the Office

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former manager frequently spoke about faith while treating the team with anger and little compassion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the difference between declaring values and practicing them when employees need fairness and kindness.

You ever work with a toxic manager who talks about God in every meeting, but somehow forgets every lesson about kindness, honesty, patience, and humility?

I remember working for one. Every Monday started with a speech about faith, purpose, and doing the right thing. By 9:12, he was yelling at someone for asking a question. By 10:00, he had taken credit for an employee's idea. Before lunch, he had blamed team for a problem he created. He kept a Bible on his desk, a cross on the wall, and compassion. He prayed before meetings, then spent the next hour interrupting people, embarrassing employees, and explaining why his mistakes were "learning opportunities" for everyone else.

His favorite phrase was, "We are all family here." That usually meant somebody was about to work late for free. If you asked for a raise, he reminded you to be grateful. If you requested a day off, he questioned your commitment. If you stayed late, it was expected. If you left on time, he wondered whether your heart was really in the mission. Apparently,

work life balance was available only after the resurrection.

Whenever anyone challenged him, he leaned back, smiled, and said, "I'll pray for you." That was not a prayer. That was a corporate warning wrapped in a church bulletin. Translation: "You have questioned my authority, and your performance review is about to become a testimony."

He loved talking about servant leadership, but the only thing he served was blame. When sales went up, it was because of his vision. When sales went down, the team lacked passion. When morale collapsed, he scheduled a meeting called "Rebuilding Trust" and made the least trusted person lead it.

He posted quotes online about grace and lifting others up. Then he walked into the office and managed people like grace had been removed from the budget. His social media made him look like a pastor. His employees knew him as Pharaoh with a company email address.

One afternoon, after humiliating an employee, he told the room, "God sees everything." I remember

thinking, "Perfect. Then we finally have a witness who outranks Human Resources." Real faith should make a leader more humble, not more controlling. It should make them more compassionate, not more comfortable using religion as protection from criticism. Values are not proven by what a manager says before a meeting. They are proven by how people feel after leaving the room.

The best leaders do not need to remind everyone how faithful they are. Their character shows up in how they handle pressure, how they treat the lowest paid employee, and whether they apologize without turning it into another speech about themselves.

That manager knew every quote about obedience, but somehow missed every lesson about character. He did not lead with faith. He used faith as office decoration while his ego ran the company.

That is when I learned the loudest person talking about values is sometimes the same person making everyone else question theirs.

POST 02 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

HIRING HYPOCRISY

The HR Executive's Positivity Lecture

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An HR executive criticized candidates for complaining while regularly posting complaints about workers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I pointed out that positivity rules cannot apply only to job seekers while leaders exempt themselves.

You ever notice how the people who lecture candidates about “staying positive” somehow built half their careers complaining about employees?

An HR executive sent me a message this morning. “Candidates should focus on solutions, not complaints,” he wrote. Fair enough. It sounded polished, like something printed on a leadership mug. So, I checked his profile because curiosity is free.

This man posted weekly complaints about employee accountability, quiet quitting, remote work, raises, leaving at five, and workers who did not seem excited about a mandatory meeting called “Culture Refresh.” Apparently, criticism becomes leadership when delivered from a corner office. When a candidate discusses a broken hiring process, they are negative. When an executive writes twelve paragraphs blaming workers for declining morale, it becomes thought leadership. Add a headshot and “Let that sink in,” and complaining suddenly qualifies as strategy.

Candidates are told not to mention toxic managers, layoffs, ghosting, eigh

round interviews, unpaid assignments, or job descriptions written during a power outage. We are expected to enter the interview smiling, carrying solutions for problems we were not hired to solve, while pretending the company’s process has been flawless. Meanwhile, executives can post, “Nobody wants to work anymore,” from a retreat where accountability is discussed after lunch.

The candidate says, “Your application asked me to upload my resume and then type it all again.” Negative attitude. The executive says, “Employees today lack resilience.” Bold leadership insight. The candidate says, “I completed six interviews and never received an update.” Complaining. The company says, “Only selected candidates will hear back.” Efficient communication. Silence is professional when the company does it, but frustration is a character flaw when the candidate notices.

I wanted to reply, “Thank you for the feedback. My solution is for companies to stop creating so many complaints.” Candidates are not

always being negative. Sometimes they are simply describing the weather while executives hold an umbrella and insist the sun is shining. There is a strange rule in corporate life: the higher your title, the more professionally your frustration is packaged. Employees complain. Managers provide feedback. Directors identify gaps. Vice presidents raise concerns. Executives publish an article titled “Why Everyone Below Me Needs to Improve.”

Maybe the problem is not that candidates complain too much. Maybe some companies have become so comfortable controlling the conversation that honesty now feels disrespectful. A candidate who points out a broken process is not necessarily bitter. They might be observant. They might even be offering the solution everyone claims to want.

So I thanked the HR executive and checked his latest post. It was another complaint about employees lacking self-awareness.

I almost commented, but I did not want to interrupt the leadership.

Melanie's Story and the Credit Nobody Gave

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Melanie described the inequity she experienced while generating business at a firm with unequal power and recognition.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to see the personal cost of workplace unfairness that a witty corporate slogan cannot fix.

The other day, a woman named Melanie sent me a message that stopped me in the middle of laughing at corporate nonsense so I don't start screaming into a speakerphone.

Years ago, she worked at a firm where the men were partners and the women were associates. She built relationships, brought in clients, generated business, and did exactly what leadership seminars tell employees to do: take initiative, create value, and act like an owner.

Unfortunately, her boss heard "act like an owner" and translated it as "thank you for building something I can steal."

He took her work, took her clients, and fired her for being "too independent." It happened the Monday after Mother's Day. Her husband had just left his job to stay home with their three children. Their youngest was six months old, and Melanie had once gone into the office with all three kids 48 hours after giving birth.

That loyalty should earn respect, support, and a parade. Instead, she was escorted down the freight elevator, put into a taxi, and sent back to the park and ride to tell her family

that the breadwinner no longer had a job. Corporate gratitude knows how to make an exit memorable.

Years later, she accepted a voluntary layoff with a golden parachute and gave herself one summer to breathe. By then, she was a single mother. She remembers the fear. Her children remember picnics, bike rides, and more time with Mom. That is the strange thing about survival. Adults remember the fear. Children sometimes remember the love inside it.

Today, Melanie has a paycheck, grown children, a child looking for a first job, and a father in failing health whom she helps from three states away. She knows her workplace is hurting her mental health, so she quietly searches while trying to remain grateful for the job she has.

Her last interview was six weeks ago, and the company says she is "still in the running." At this point, I'm not sure whether she applied for a job or a marathon.

She also feels guilty that finding another position might take an opportunity from someone unemployed. That feeling lives

somewhere between survivor's guilt and corporate hunger games. But people with jobs can be drowning too. Some are searching from unemployment. Others are searching from offices where they have learned to cry quietly, clear their browser history, and return to a meeting called "Employee Wellness."

Having a paycheck does not mean you are safe. Being employed does not mean you are respected. Staying because people depend on you does not mean you are weak. Sometimes it means you are carrying more than anyone realizes.

Melanie's message was not just about one career. It was about millions trying to survive a job market that demands confidence while handing out reasons to lose it.

So let us extend grace to the unemployed, the underemployed, and the employed people secretly applying during lunch. Everyone is trying to reach shore.

Some just have to pretend they are not wet during the interview.

POST 04 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

INTERVIEW CIRCUS

Eight Interviews and Still No Decision

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An extended eight-round hiring process offered more meetings than clarity about the opportunity.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned the idea that endless interviews automatically produce better hiring decisions.

There was a time when an interview meant you met a manager, answered a few questions, shook hands, and waited for a call. Now getting hired requires the same approval process as launching a satellite, selecting a pope, and adopting a raccoon.

I recently went through an eight round interview process. Not because I believed there was a job at the end of it. I wanted content. At some point, you stop being a candidate and become a journalist embedded inside corporate confusion.

Round one was with the recruiter, who told me I was “exactly what they were looking for.” This was encouraging, because by round four I learned nobody knew what they were looking for.

Round two was with the hiring manager. We discussed my experience, leadership style, and whether I was comfortable working in a “fast-paced environment,” which I have learned is corporate language for, “Three people quit and you will inherit their passwords.”

Round three was a panel interview. Six people joined. Two had cameras off. One was answering emails. Another

asked me a question that had already been asked twice, but added the word “strategically” so it sounded new.

Round four was with someone from another department who admitted they had no idea why they were included. Honestly, that made two of us, and for a moment, we bonded.

Round five was a culture interview. They asked what kind of environment helps me thrive. I said one where decisions can be made before everyone retires.

Round six was a case study. They gave me a fictional company with falling sales, low morale, poor communication, and weak leadership. I thought it was fictional until I realized they had removed their company logo.

Round seven was with an executive who showed up twelve minutes late and asked me to “walk him through my background.” At this point, I had walked so many people through my background that I should have installed benches and a gift shop.

Round eight was called the “final conversation,” which is corporate language for, “We are not done confusing you yet.” They asked

whether I had any concerns about the process. I said that I had spent less time qualifying for a mortgage.

Then came the silence. After eight interviews, three personality assessments, a case study, and enough calendar invites to qualify as a part time employee, I received the classic email: “We have decided to move forward with another candidate.” I was disappointed for almost seven seconds. Then I realized I had gained something far more valuable than a job: material.

The company kept the job offer, but I kept a better prize: several posts, a future chapter for my book, and enough corporate nonsense to remind everyone that hiring should not take longer than renovating a kitchen, applying for a mortgage, or training a raccoon.

Eight rounds should not be the norm. By round five, either hire the person or admit the role is a group therapy project for indecisive executives.

And if a ninth round appears, I am sending an invoice.

POST 05 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

JOB SEARCH & HOPE

Getting Up Can Mean One More Application

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader's difficult exit and ongoing search underscored the quiet effort required to keep trying.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people facing rejection to recognize resilience even when it does not look dramatic.

Sometimes getting back up does not look powerful. Sometimes it looks like sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at a rejection email, and deciding you are at least going to brush your teeth before another career crisis.

A woman messaged me and said she had spent years giving everything to a company that treated her like a printer: useful until one bad day, then suddenly everyone wanted to replace her. She survived a toxic boss, watched coworkers who once called her “the backbone of the team” become furniture during meetings, and was pushed out after challenging decisions that hurt people.

The official story was that she was “not aligned.” That phrase has become corporate duct tape. It covers favoritism, retaliation, weak leadership, and executives with no idea what they are doing.

After she left, she applied everywhere. She rewrote her resume until even she was no longer sure who she was. Strategic leader? Hands on operator? Culture builder?

Results driven problem solver? By week six, she was considering “available immediately and owns a reliable laptop.”

Then the rejections started. “We were impressed.” “We have decided to move forward.” “We will keep your information on file.” She told me she had enough information on file to qualify as a national archive. One morning, another automated rejection arrived before sunrise, and she broke down. Not the dramatic movie kind with inspirational music and rain. She sat in her kitchen, wearing one slipper, eating crackers over the sink because even the toaster felt too ambitious.

She wondered whether the toxic boss had been right about her. That is the cruelest part of being torn down for a long time. Eventually, the person who hurt you moves into your head, stops paying rent, and starts narrating your life.

But that morning, she opened her laptop again. Not because she felt confident. She did not. Not because she had a perfect plan. She did not. She opened it because giving up felt

like letting someone else write the ending. She applied for one job. Then another. She called an old coworker. She asked for help without apologizing. A few days later, she got an interview. Then a second. The process was not magical. Nobody arrived with balloons, a signing bonus, and a LinkedIn photographer.

But she got the job. When she told me, she did not say, “I proved them wrong.” She said, “I finally started believing they were wrong.” That line stayed with me. Getting back up is rarely one heroic moment. It is a collection of small, stubborn decisions. Answering the call. Updating the resume. Taking the shower. Making the coffee. Applying again even though the last company needed eight interviews to discover it had an internal candidate.

So, to the person sitting in the kitchen with one slipper and no confidence left: this chapter may be ugly, but it is not the ending. Sometimes strength is not standing tall. Sometimes strength is whispering, “Fine. One more try,” and opening the laptop.

POST 06 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The Boss Who Mistook Agreement for Talent

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A controlling leader treated honest feedback and independent thinking as threats to authority.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged leadership cultures that demand obedience while claiming to value initiative.

Some bosses want strong employees. Toxic bosses want witnesses who agree with everything they say. I remember when I worked for a leader who loved control more than results.

He did not want people who could think independently. He wanted dashboard ornaments who nodded and praised every wandering point. At first, I thought honesty would help. I noticed problems, offered solutions, and challenged decisions that were hurting the team. Apparently, this was a violation of the corporate peace treaty.

The moment I questioned him, the story changed. I was no longer the person trying to fix a problem. I became "difficult." I was "not aligned." I had "communication concerns." My favorite was "He seems frustrated lately," which was true. Watching leadership set the building on fire and then schedule a meeting about my tone can do that.

Toxic bosses rarely confront you with facts because facts are stubborn. Instead, they work the room. They meet privately with people. They share little comments. They ask innocent questions like, "Have you

noticed anything different about him?" Soon, coworkers who once called you for advice start acting as though you have been featured in a documentary titled *Dangerous Employee: The Man Who Asked Why*.

They create confusion, then blame you for the weather. If you raise a concern, you are negative. If you stay quiet, you are disengaged. If you solve the problem, you are overstepping. If you let them solve it, the problem survives long enough to become next quarter's strategic initiative.

I remember walking into meetings where everyone suddenly became fascinated by their notebooks. People who agreed with me privately would publicly develop memory loss. I could almost hear the calculation: "Alex is right, but I also enjoy health insurance." That is how toxic leadership survives. It does not need everyone to believe the lie. It only needs enough people to be afraid of telling the truth.

The hardest part was not being criticized. It was watching good people distance themselves because

they knew anyone standing near the target could become the next target. Toxic bosses do not build teams. They build escape rooms, and everyone spends the day looking for a safe exit without making eye contact with HR.

Eventually, I realized I could not outwork a story someone had already decided to tell about me. I could bring results, solve problems, support people, and still be labeled the problem because my real offense was refusing to pretend everything was fine. Leaving hurt. Being misunderstood hurt more. But losing yourself just to make an insecure boss feel powerful costs far more than any paycheck.

So, to anyone being isolated, blamed, or quietly turned into the office villain for speaking up: you may not be the problem. Sometimes you are simply the person who noticed the emperor's leadership plan was a blank PowerPoint slide with "Accountability" written on it.

And toxic bosses hate mirrors, especially the ones that talk.

POST 07 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

HIRING EXPERIENCE

When HR Gets Ghosted by HR

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An HR professional looking for work described being treated poorly by other recruiting teams.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize thoughtful HR professionals while questioning processes that frustrate even insiders.

The job market has reached a strange point where basic courtesy now feels like an executive benefit. A woman in HR messaged me saying she enjoys my honest posts about what job seekers face in hiring today.

Then she added something that made me laugh and sigh: she is in HR, one of the good ones, and she is also searching for a job. That is when you know the system is broken. When HR is applying for jobs and getting ghosted by HR, we have officially created a corporate snake eating its own LinkedIn profile.

She said she was blown away by the lack of professionalism and common courtesy. I understood. Job seekers are expected to arrive early, research the company, prepare six stories using the STAR method, complete an assessment, attend multiple interviews, send thank you notes, and remain "enthusiastic."

Meanwhile, some companies cannot send a two line update. Candidates are told, "We will definitely get back to you by Friday." They never specify which Friday. You wait one week, then two. You send a polite follow-up. Nothing. You send

another. Silence. Eventually, you wonder whether the recruiter entered witness protection.

Then, at 4:13 a.m., an automated email appears. "We have decided to move forward with other candidates." Thank you, robot. I appreciate you finding the courage that the humans could not.

The strangest part is that many companies still describe themselves as people first organizations. Apparently, the people come first only after the applicant tracking system, the budget meeting, the internal candidate, the executive vacation schedule, and the office raccoon living behind the vending machine since 2022.

Job seekers are not asking for a parade. Nobody expects the CEO to deliver a rejection personally while holding flowers and a gift card.

People just want communication. Tell them the role is delayed. Tell them an internal candidate was selected. Tell them the budget disappeared. Tell them the hiring manager changed the position halfway through and now wants a strategic visionary who can

also repair the copier. Just tell them something.

Being on the other side of hiring has shown many HR professionals what candidates have said for years. The silence is exhausting. The endless rounds are unnecessary. The lack of respect is real. And when even good HR people are shocked by how candidates are treated, perhaps it is time to stop calling this "the new normal."

There is nothing normal about asking someone for eight interviews and then disappearing like a magician with a company email address.

Professionalism should work both ways. Candidates should show up prepared, respectful, and honest. Companies should do the same. Until then, I will keep writing about the absurdity, because apparently telling the truth about hiring has become more controversial than the hiring process itself.

And to the good people in HR trying to fix it while surviving it, we see you. Please remain on the line. Your humanity is very important to us.

Tegrita and the Seven-Step Strategy Workout

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader flagged a seven-stage interview sequence and wondered whether applicants were providing unpaid strategy.

WHY I WROTE IT

I raised the question of when candidate evaluation crosses into requesting too much free work.

LinkedIn has upgraded from helping people find jobs to helping companies collect enough free strategy to open a consulting department.

A man sent me a posting from Tegrita for a Client Engagement Team Lead and asked whether seven step interviews are becoming a creative way to gather ideas. I laughed, then looked at the process. Seven steps. You are entering a corporate obstacle course designed by people who need three meetings to approve the next meeting.

The first conversation is with the recruiter, who says Tegrita moves quickly. The second is with the hiring manager, who asks you to repeat everything you just told the recruiter. The third is a panel where several people study your face while one asks, "Tell us about a time you handled conflict." By then, the conflict is resisting the urge to ask whether anyone shared notes.

Then comes the assignment. You solve a business problem using incomplete information, unpaid labor, and the last piece of optimism you brought with you. After that comes the presentation, where leadership

nods while taking notes. One executive says, "Interesting," which is corporate language for, "Please keep talking while we download your brain."

Next is the culture interview, where they ask whether you are comfortable with ambiguity. You say yes because you still do not know the salary, reporting structure, or whether anyone at Tegrita has read your resume. Then comes the final conversation. It means another executive wants to meet you before leaving for vacation.

Meanwhile, LinkedIn appears like a digital fortune cookie and says, "A hiring manager thinks you are qualified and would like you to apply." Nothing says personal attention like an automated compliment from software wearing a recruiter hat.

Tegrita may have valid reasons for every step. But if seven interviews are required to decide whether someone can lead a team, the first position any company should fill is Decision Maker.

Candidates are expected to bring strategy, solutions, leadership

examples, a 90 day plan, and enough enthusiasm to power a small office. In return, they may receive a rejection email thanking them for their time. Their time. Not their ideas, unpaid preparation, or vacation days used to meet the organizational chart.

By interview four, the candidate should receive a contractor agreement. By interview five, parking reimbursement. By interview six, access to Slack. By interview seven, they should be eligible for the holiday party and allowed to list Tegrita under volunteer experience.

Hiring should not resemble a reality show where every episode ends with, "The team loved you, but we need one more conversation." Three rounds should be enough for most roles. After that, make an offer or admit nobody has the authority to decide.

And if candidates must present a business strategy, every slide should be watermarked, "Available after payment or employment." After seven steps, the only organization still being interviewed is Tegrita.

POST 09 / SUNDAY, JULY 26

BEHIND THE WRITING

I Stopped Speaking Fluent Corporate

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Years of corporate euphemisms helped inspire a more direct style and a new book about the hiring circus.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explained why satire became my preferred way to describe things people were already noticing.

For years, I spoke fluent corporate. I could watch a workplace disaster unfold and still describe it as “an opportunity for alignment.” A toxic boss became “a complex leadership style.” Being ignored became “a communication gap.” Getting rejected after eight interviews became “a valuable experience.”

Then, a little over a year ago, I stopped translating nonsense into polished language. I started saying what people were actually thinking. The interview process was ridiculous. The employee who spoke up was not “difficult.” They were usually the only person brave enough to point out that the building was on fire while leadership debated whether the smoke was consistent with company values.

The manager was not “results driven.” He was taking credit, shifting blame, and scheduling meetings about why morale was low. I worried that speaking plainly would hurt my professional image. Then messages started coming in.

People told me about interviews that lasted longer than relationships. They told me about bosses who stole ideas,

punished honesty, and still received awards for leadership. They told me about being called overqualified, underqualified, too experienced, not experienced enough, too direct, too quiet, and “not the right fit” for jobs they had already done for fifteen years.

That is where this book came from.

“LinkedIn and the Eight-Round Interview” is for every person who has rewritten a resume at midnight, practiced answers in the car, dressed professionally for Zoom, completed unpaid assignments, met half the company, and then received an automated rejection before breakfast.

I tried to make it funny because laughter is sometimes the only reasonable response when a recruiter says, “We move quickly,” and then schedules round six for three weeks from Thursday. But underneath the jokes, this book is about something real.

It is about job seekers being treated like numbers. It is about employees being punished for telling the truth. It is about good people doubting

themselves because one insecure manager controlled the story.

For over a year, I have written without the polished corporate filter. No buzzword confetti. No pretending every layoff is a “new adventure.” No calling a broken hiring process “thorough” when it looks like a game show designed by people who are terrified to make a decision.

This book is for the people who felt invisible, exhausted, embarrassed, or alone. It is for the ones who kept applying after the fiftieth rejection. It is for the ones who left toxic workplaces carrying their confidence in a cardboard box. It is for the ones rebuilding, laughing again, and realizing they were never the problem.

I tried to make this book funny, honest, and painfully familiar. Because sometimes the best way to survive corporate absurdity is to tell the truth, add a raccoon, and turn the whole experience into a chapter.

My new release, “LinkedIn and the Eight-Round Interview,” is out now. No panel interview required.

POST 10 / MONDAY, JULY 27

WORKPLACE RECOVERY

A Former Boss, a Parking Lot, a Flashback

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described the physical stress response of unexpectedly encountering a former toxic manager.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to take the aftereffects of unhealthy workplaces seriously without losing the power of humor.

You ever see someone from your past and your body reacts before your brain can finish loading the memory?

A woman messaged me today and said she once worked for a toxic boss so bad that even after leaving, going to therapy, and working with a spiritual guide, she still had nightmares about him. She spotted him across a parking lot and her body locked up. Her nervous system apparently saw him and immediately yelled, "Absolutely not. We remember this man."

A toxic boss does not always leave when you leave the company. Sometimes, they move into your head, rent free, rearrange the furniture, and schedule surprise meetings at 2:00 a.m. in your dreams. You can be sleeping and suddenly your manager appears holding a performance review, asking why your breathing is not aligned with quarterly objectives.

She asked the question so many people ask themselves afterward: "Was I weak? Did he target me more than everyone else? How are other people still working for him?" No, you were not weak. Your body was

responding to something it learned was dangerous. That is not weakness. That is your internal security department doing the job HR somehow missed.

And as for how other people survive toxic leaders, some become invisible. Some stop speaking in meetings. Some agree with everything and quietly update their resume during lunch. Some have emotionally resigned but continue showing up because rent still believes in mandatory attendance. Others have mastered the corporate survival skill of saying, "Great point," while staring into the distance like a hostage in a company newsletter photo.

The saddest part is that many toxic bosses remain in leadership for years. Their turnover is called "a staffing challenge." Their intimidation is called "high standards." Their chaos is called "a fast-paced environment." Their employees are having panic attacks in the parking lot, while the executive team is discussing whether a pizza party might improve morale.

And when someone speaks up, leadership acts surprised. "Really? We had no idea." Yes, you did. Half the

building was communicating through eye contact. People do not stay silent because the behavior is acceptable. They stay silent because they have bills, children, health insurance, and a suspicion that HR will forward their complaint directly to the person they are complaining about with the subject line, "Thoughts?"

So when someone tells you a former boss still affects them years later, do not ask why they did not move on. Trauma is not an Outlook invitation you can decline. The body remembers what the company conveniently forgot.

To everyone who has ever questioned themselves after surviving a toxic workplace: you were not too sensitive, too weak, or unable to handle pressure. You were reacting normally to an abnormal environment.

And if seeing your old boss across a parking lot makes your stomach drop, that is not failure. That is your nervous system recognizing a workplace hazard before OSHA arrives!

POST 11 / MONDAY, JULY 27

BOOKS & WRITING

The Eight-Round Interview Book Is Free

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The absurdity of long interviews became the punchline in a brief announcement about a free book.

WHY I WROTE IT

I invited readers to laugh at familiar hiring rituals and discover the stories behind the jokes.

Eight round interviews are where a company spends two months deciding whether you can do a job they urgently needed filled yesterday.

My book is free on Amazon, which means downloading it requires fewer approvals than most companies need to schedule Interview Number Seven. No case study, no culture assessment, and no final meeting with someone who has absolutely no idea what the position does.

Download LinkedIn and the Eight Round Interview today and enjoy corporate chaos from the safety of your couch.

POST 12 / MONDAY, JULY 27

CAREER GROWTH

The Promotion That Was Always 'Next'

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A boss's repeated promises of promotion came with extra responsibility but no actual advancement.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned workplaces that benefit from a person's ambition while continually postponing their growth.

You ever been bypassed by a boss who promised you a promotion so many times you started mentally decorating the new office?

A while back, my boss pulled me aside and delivered the sacred corporate prophecy: "Keep doing what you're doing. The next opportunity is yours." Words with the nutritional value of a laminated menu. So I kept doing everything. I took on extra projects, fixed problems that were not mine, trained new employees, became the unofficial department fire extinguisher. Whenever something caught fire, they rolled me toward it and said, "Alex has it."

Occasionally, I asked about the promotion, and he would nod with the confidence of a man who had just discovered the word "soon." He would say, "We're working on it." Apparently, "working on it" meant placing the promotion in a slow cooker set to never. Yet I believed him because I delivered results, trained half the team, sacrificed enough lunch breaks to qualify as a corporate monk, and assumed effort turned into opportunity.

Then one morning, we were invited to a surprise meeting. My boss stood up and announced that someone else had been promoted. Someone I had trained. I smiled because that is what professionals do when their soul briefly leaves their body during a PowerPoint presentation. Everyone clapped. I clapped too. Mine sounded less like applause and more like two disappointed pancakes touching.

Then my boss said, "We really need you where you are." Translation: "You are too valuable to promote, but not valuable enough to reward." They needed me because I knew the systems, handled difficult customers, corrected mistakes, and carried responsibilities above my pay grade. Promoting me would have created a hole. Promoting someone else created resentment, which apparently was not tracked on the dashboard.

I'd confused being needed with being valued. Being needed means they panic when you take a vacation. Being valued means they invest in your growth before you threaten to leave. Nothing says leadership development like asking the person

you bypassed to train the person you selected.

I helped because my character didn't need to become smaller because their decision was disappointing. But something changed. I stopped treating vague promises like signed agreements. I stopped volunteering for every emergency to prove I deserved what I had already earned. Eventually, I left.

That was when they suddenly discovered my leadership potential. There were meetings, counteroffers, compliments, and people used the word "future" more in two days than they had in two years.

So, to anyone waiting for a promotion that keeps moving farther away, listen to actions, not speeches. A good leader develops you. A lousy leader delays you. And a truly creative leader promotes the person you trained, then asks you to train them again.

Sometimes being passed over is not proof that you were not ready. Sometimes it is proof that you had become too useful to someone who never planned to let you grow.

POST 13 / MONDAY, JULY 27

PANEL INTERVIEWS

Executive Presence, Now in Blueberry Vapor

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An executive began vaping during a panel while still expecting the candidate to maintain perfect professionalism.

WHY I WROTE IT

I highlighted the double standard between how interviewers behave and what applicants are expected to tolerate.

Let's talk about executive teams that vape during interviews, because apparently "executive presence" now comes in mango ice.

The other day, I joined a panel interview expecting the usual corporate pageant. Eight leaders, twelve buzzwords, and one vice president surprised candidates could ask questions too. Then this executive picked up a vape. He leaned back like a retired nightclub owner, inhaled enough blueberry mist to power a carnival, and started blowing smoke circles while I explained how I build trust with teams. Nothing says "culture of accountability" like watching a senior executive transform into a human fog machine during your answer.

He asked, "How do you stay focused when there are distractions?" Sir, you are creating weather. I am answering behavioral questions inside a scented thunderstorm. If I can remain focused while your face disappears behind Tropical Unicorn Blast, I should be hired and promoted before the call ends. Nobody even reacted. They kept nodding. One executive even wrote something down. I assume the

note said, "Candidate maintained eye contact despite Kevin entering vapor form."

That is what makes interviews magical. Candidates are judged like they are applying to become pope. Sit too comfortably and you lack urgency. Look away for half a second and you seem disengaged. Take a sip of water and somebody whispers, "Not sure he handles pressure." Meanwhile, an executive can blow smoke rings through a salary discussion and everyone calls him "a big personality."

I could imagine the feedback meeting. "Alex has twenty years of leadership experience, but his background looked too bright." "What about Brad vaping through the interview?" "That's different. Brad is on the executive team."

Brad disappeared behind the smoke and asked how I felt about transparency. That was not an interview question. That was performance art. Then they asked how I would represent the company professionally in front of clients. I wanted to say, "Probably without turning the meeting into the VIP

section of a gas station," but honesty is only a company value when printed on the website.

I do not care if adults vape. Vape in your car. Vape on your patio. Vape while writing Vision 2030. But during an interview, maybe stop auditioning to become the Pope of Watermelon Mint for forty five minutes. Candidates research the company, memorize examples, test the camera, adjust the lighting, and remove anything suggesting they have a personality. Then the panel appears late, checks email, and creates indoor clouds while deciding whether the candidate is "polished enough."

By the end, I knew little about the position, but I knew Brad could make a perfect circle, the CFO could mute himself for twenty minutes, and the professionalism policy had several flavors.

A few days later, they said they chose someone who was a better cultural fit. Honestly, that was fair too. I do not even own a fog machine. Apparently, I was underdressed for the vape circus.

POST 14 / MONDAY, JULY 27

LINKEDIN CULTURE

The CEO Post Nobody Could Translate

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A highly praised CEO post sounded profound while offering little practical meaning or substance.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged empty leadership language and the expectation that every executive statement deserves applause.

You ever make fun of a CEO's LinkedIn post and suddenly your newsfeed acts like you violated a federal algorithm?

A while back, I saw a CEO post with more than 1,000 likes, hundreds of comments, and absolutely no detectable meaning. It was one of those corporate riddles that began with, "Leadership is not about leading," and somehow ended with a mountain, a coffee mug, and the word "grit." People were commenting, "Powerful." "So true." "This changed my perspective." I read it four times and my perspective was still outside asking for directions.

So I made a joke. Nothing cruel. Nothing personal. I said the post sounded like a fortune cookie written by a management consultant during a Wi-Fi outage. I assumed people would laugh, the CEO would continue inspiring the clouds, and we would all return to pretending "circle back" is a plan.

Then something strange happened. My newsfeed stopped showing up. Not completely. LinkedIn did not shut the lights off. My posts suddenly had the reach of a handwritten note

under a vending machine. People who normally engaged messaged me asking whether I had stopped posting. No, I was still posting. Apparently, I had been transferred to LinkedIn's witness protection program.

Meanwhile, the CEO's next post appeared immediately. It said, "Sometimes you must lose yourself to find the version of yourself you have not yet become." Three thousand likes. I lost myself trying to understand the sentence.

That is when I realized the algorithm may have an executive protection plan. You can criticize layoffs, ghosting, eight round interviews, and jobs requiring twelve years of experience in software invented last Tuesday. But make one joke about a CEO's motivational word salad and suddenly your content is delivered by carrier pigeon. Maybe the algorithm called an emergency meeting. "Alex questioned the wisdom of a verified leader." "Was the post meaningful?" "That is irrelevant. It had a sunrise photo." "Reduce his visibility immediately." Just as intended. I pictured a tiny LinkedIn employee pulling a lever marked "Nobody sees

this" while another whispered, "He should have commented 'Great insight' like everyone else."

The funniest part is CEOs tell everyone to embrace feedback. They write about psychological safety, healthy debate, and challenging the status quo. But the moment someone actually challenges it, the status quo calls security. I am not saying LinkedIn punished me. Maybe the algorithm became confused. It had spent years learning that vague leadership posts are valuable, and then I introduced sarcasm. That is like teaching a calculator emotional intelligence.

So now, whenever I see a CEO post saying, "Success is failure refusing to quit before tomorrow becomes yesterday," I behave responsibly. I nod. I whisper, "Powerful." Then I screenshot it and laugh privately, because apparently free speech is available only with a Premium subscription.

And if this post disappears too, check behind the vending machine.

POST 15 / MONDAY, JULY 27

HIRING SYSTEMS

U-Haul, Workday and the Fast Rejection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A senior HR applicant encountered an exhausting application portal and an unexpectedly quick rejection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked whether applicant systems are evaluating qualifications or merely processing people out.

You ever apply for a job that fits your background so perfectly you wonder whether the description was copied from your resume?

A Senior HR Director shared a story that should make companies check what their applicant tracking systems do after hours.

She found a senior HR management role at U-Haul. Every qualification matched. Experience? Check. Leadership? Check. Skills? Check. She applied around 11:45 p.m. on a Thursday, when insomnia and optimism form a dangerous partnership.

Then Workday appeared. You know Workday. Upload your resume, then spend twenty minutes typing everything already written on it. It is less of an application and more of a memory test designed by a printer that resents humans. The posting did not include a salary range, but the application required one. No option for "negotiable." No space for "let's talk." Just two boxes deciding whether your career would be reviewed or launched into the digital basement.

She researched salaries everywhere. Sites and AI tools offered ranges that

looked like they had never met. She entered what she believed was fair and submitted. Six minutes later, the rejection arrived. Six minutes. At 11:51 p.m., U-Haul apparently reviewed her career, leadership history, qualifications, salary expectations, and zodiac sign.

That is not recruiting. That is Workday speed dating. She knows how this happens because she once inherited an ATS. While posting a field technician role requiring two to three years of experience, she discovered the system had screened out anyone with one year or four or more years.

Apparently, three years meant qualified, but five years meant the candidate had become too experienced for electricity. Ten people were rejected automatically. She reviewed the hidden pile and found six viable candidates. Three were excellent. Two were hired. Two great employees were sitting in the rejection folder because the software followed a poorly written question with the emotional flexibility of a parking meter.

That is the danger. Companies believe technology is helping them find talent

while it may be burying the best candidates because someone entered a rigid salary number, selected the wrong knockout rule, or asked a question the system interpreted more literally than a toddler.

HR teams, review the rejected pile. Train the people building postings. Test every knockout question. Publish the salary range. Stop making candidates upload a resume before reenacting it manually for Workday's entertainment.

U-Haul may eventually hire someone wonderful. I hope they do. But they may never know a qualified Senior HR Director matched the role and was rejected before a human finished brushing their teeth. She will watch from afar like the second place contestant peeking through the curtain at the winner. No hard feelings.

But if the winner trips over the runway while entering employment dates for the seventh time, Workday will probably reject the fall for insufficient experience.

POST 16 / TUESDAY, JULY 28

PUBLISHING & SATIRE

Amazon, My Books and the Corporate Alarm

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A publishing-account dispute followed widespread reaction to jokes about Amazon's long hiring process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I reflected on the uneasy meeting point between corporate power, public criticism and comedy.

I have officially reached a new level in my relationship with Amazon.

Most people use Amazon to order paper towels, phone chargers, and a kitchen gadget they will forget exists by Thursday. I apparently used it to publish books, make one sarcastic joke about their eight round interview process, and unlock the bonus feature called "Your Entire Publishing Account Has Been Terminated."

A few weeks ago, I wrote a joke about Amazon interviews requiring eight rounds, the emotional stamina of a raccoon trapped in a revolving door, and possibly Jeff Bezos appearing as a hologram during the final panel. The post went viral. Thousands of people laughed because job seekers are exhausted and humor is cheaper than therapy. Amazon's PR team even reached out. Not recruiting. Not HR. PR. That was when my raccoon joke became a "potential narrative concern."

Then, not long afterward, Amazon KDP closed my publishing account and removed all of my books from sale. Every title. Gone. No eight round appeal process. No panel interview. No bar raiser asking how I

demonstrated ownership during a difficult chapter edit. Just a polite email saying they reviewed the information and were upholding the decision. Apparently, the one Amazon process that does not require eight rounds is deleting an author. That process is beautifully efficient. Naturally, it was.

Order toothpaste at 10:00 p.m.? Delivered tomorrow. Apply for a job? Meet fourteen strangers, complete a case study, explain your childhood leadership principles, and wait six weeks. Remove every book an author published? Prime speed. Maximum irony.

To be clear, I cannot prove the joke caused the termination. Amazon did not send an email saying, "Reason for closure: excessive raccoon activity." Maybe it was unrelated. Maybe an automated system saw something it did not like. Maybe somewhere in Seattle, a dashboard flashed red because one man used the phrase "calendar trauma" too many times. All I know is the timing has the subtlety of a warehouse robot driving through my bookshelf.

So now I have to find a new publisher. That part is frustrating. These books were months of writing, editing, late nights, bad coffee, and stories created to help people laugh at toxic bosses, absurd interviews, and the modern job hunt. But I am not done writing. If anything, Amazon may have accidentally handed me the opening chapter of the next book.

Possible title: "Laughing in Business Casual 3: Terminated by the Company I Was Joking About." Or maybe: "Eight Interview Rounds, One Publishing Appeal, Zero Raccoon Remorse."

The books will return somewhere else. The jokes will continue. And I will keep speaking for people tired of pretending every broken workplace process is a "unique candidate journey." Amazon may have removed my books, but unfortunately for corporate America, they did not remove my Wi-Fi. Now accepting recommendations for publishers with a sense of humor, a functioning appeal process, and no known fear of raccoons.

POST 17 / TUESDAY, JULY 28

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The Strategic Initiatives Mystery Job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shared a Larimer County posting packed with strategy, collaboration and ambiguity language.

WHY I WROTE IT

I translated vague job-ad phrases into the questions candidates actually need answered.

This afternoon, someone sent me a job posting and said, “Alex, I read this and immediately thought of your articles.”

That is either a compliment or the professional equivalent of someone handing you a suspicious package and backing away slowly. The role was for a Strategic Initiatives Manager in Larimer County, and the description opened with all the classic corporate romance words: strategy, impact, collaboration, alignment, continuous improvement, and my favorite, “thrives in ambiguity.”

Nothing says “welcome aboard” quite like announcing in advance that nobody fully knows what is happening. “Thrives in ambiguity” usually means the job description was written by seven departments during one Teams meeting, and each person assumed somebody else would explain the role.

You will support high impact initiatives, coordinate complex projects, strengthen performance, move priorities from ideas to implementation, collaborate with leaders, program teams, county departments, technology partners, community stakeholders, businesses, job seekers, veterans, and possibly a

raccoon who has attended budget meetings since 2019.

By lunch on day one, you will have twelve calendars, nineteen shared drives, four versions of the same strategic plan, and a spreadsheet named FINAL_Strategy_v8_USE_THIS_ONE.xlsx.

Your first assignment will be to “build alignment.” This sounds inspirational until you realize it means arranging a meeting between six people who agree with the goal but disagree on the wording, timeline, owner, font, and whether the meeting should have been an email.

The posting also says this is not a traditional program management role. That is corporate language for, “You will manage programs, but please do not arrive expecting authority, resources, or a clearly labeled desk.”

You must enjoy connecting people and ideas. Translation: Cheryl has the budget, Marcus has the data, IT has the password, Legal has concerns, and nobody has answered your email since Tuesday.

You must solve complex challenges. Translation: someone promised the

project would launch next month before checking whether the project existed.

You must have change management skills. Translation: every improvement will be welcomed enthusiastically until it changes something. And you must have a passion for public service, because passion is what keeps you going when the approval process has more steps than an eight round interview at Amazon.

Honestly, the job may be wonderful. The mission matters. Helping businesses, job seekers, veterans, and communities is meaningful work. But recruiters, please understand that “thrives in ambiguity” does not sound adventurous anymore.

It sounds like the previous employee disappeared into a cross-functional task force and has not been seen since.

Just tell us the truth, “We need someone diplomatic, organized, and emotionally prepared to attend a meeting about scheduling another meeting.”

Now that is a job description people can trust.

POST 18 / TUESDAY, JULY 28

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Strategic Operations Transformation Everything

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A sprawling, overstuffed job description appeared to combine unrelated positions into one improbable role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I mocked postings that ask for every skill but give applicants little idea of the real work.

You ever read a job description so confusing that halfway through you stop wondering whether you are qualified and start wondering whether the company is okay?

A while back, I found one that looked less like a job posting and more like corporate Mad Libs written during a power outage. The title was “Senior Strategic Operations Transformation Growth Excellence Partner.”

The opening line said they wanted a “visionary leader who thrives in ambiguity.” Corporate translation: nobody here knows what is happening, and we would like to make that your problem. By paragraph two, this visionary needed to build strategy, manage operations, coach employees, improve culture, answer calls, and “assist with facility needs.” Facility needs? Am I leading the company or unclogging the executive bathroom?

Fifteen years of experience in software invented eight years ago. An MBA preferred and the patience of a hostage negotiator required. They wanted someone strategic but hands on, confident but humble, independent but collaborative,

innovative but respectful of “how things have always been done.”

So basically, change everything without changing anything, lead boldly without upsetting anyone, and bring fresh ideas leadership approved in 2017. The salary range was \$52,000 to \$185,000. That is not transparency. That is a carnival wheel.

During the interview, I asked what the person would actually do. The hiring manager looked at HR. HR looked at another manager. That manager stared at the job description like he had found it under his windshield.

Finally, someone said, “The role is still evolving.” Of course it is. Apparently, I had applied to a Pokemon. I asked who the position reported to. They said, “Several key stakeholders.” That means everybody is your boss, nobody is responsible, and you will receive six urgent emails marked “quick question” at 4:57 p.m.

Then sales said the job was mostly sales. HR said it was not. Operations said it supported sales. Finance said it owned a budget. The hiring manager said the budget was not approved. At

that point, I was not interviewing. I was watching four executives discover the job together.

I asked what success would look like after ninety days. They said, “We hope the right person can help define that.” Amazing. They were not hiring an employee. They were hiring a consultant to explain why the position existed.

A week later, I received the rejection: “We selected candidates whose experience more closely aligns with our needs.” Their needs? The meeting ended before anyone found them.

Companies, stop writing job descriptions like escape rooms. Tell people what the job is, who they report to, what it pays, and whether “other duties as assigned” means helping another department or rebuilding the roof.

When a candidate asks, “What exactly are you hiring for?” and the panel studies the carpet, that is not a difficult interview question.

That is the job description filing a missing person report on itself.

POST 19 / WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The Interview Panel Asked About an Eclipse

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panel interview veered from operational experience into bizarre hypotheticals and corporate jargon.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked why irrelevant riddles sometimes replace meaningful questions about a candidate's ability.

Some interviews test your experience. Others test whether you can keep a straight face while six executives ask questions written during a fire drill.

The other day, I walked into a panel interview expecting to discuss leadership, strategy, and growth. Instead, I entered a corporate escape room where every clue was a buzzword and nobody knew where the exit was.

The first executive leaned forward and asked, "If our company were a weather pattern, how would you improve employee engagement during a partial eclipse?" I stared at him. He stared at me. HR nodded like NASA had approved the question. Nobody found that odd. I said, "Probably start with umbrellas and clearer communication." Nobody laughed. Apparently, confusion was a core value.

That was when I realized this was not an interview. It was a hostage situation with bottled water.

The next executive asked, "How would you sell a product that does not exist to a customer who does not want it, using a budget you do not have?" I said, "Based on that

description, I believe you are asking me to explain your current business model." The CFO coughed. The VP of Strategy looked down. A printer sensed tension and jammed.

Then came the classic: "Where do you see yourself in five years?" After the eclipse question, I said, "Hopefully not in round eight answering this again." The recruiter wrote something down. Probably, "Independent thought."

By then, every executive had asked the same meaningless question differently. One wanted to know how I would "disrupt synergy." Another asked how I would "operationalize innovation without creating disruption." A third asked what animal best represented my management style. I said, "A raccoon." He asked why. I said, "Because I am resourceful, work well under pressure, and keep showing up in places where nobody understands what is happening." Someone finally smiled. Unfortunately, it was security.

Then the CEO walked in late, looked at my resume, and asked, "Why do you want to work in pharmaceutical logistics?" I said, "I applied for an automotive operations role." The

panel looked around. HR shuffled papers. The CEO whispered, "Is this not the 2:30 candidate?" The recruiter said, "It is 3:15."

Suddenly, everything made sense. I had spent an hour answering questions designed for another person, another department, and possibly another planet. They apologized and asked whether I would like to start over. I asked how many rounds were left. They said seven.

I thanked them, collected my notebook, and left before they could ask how I would motivate a team during a volcano eruption.

Companies say they cannot find qualified candidates. Meanwhile, qualified candidates are sitting in conference rooms explaining what sandwich represents their leadership philosophy.

Maybe the talent shortage is fictional. Maybe the questions are just terrible. And somewhere tonight, six executives are still discussing whether my raccoon answer demonstrated enough executive presence.

POST 20 / WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

PUBLISHING & SATIRE

Amazon Can Ship Anything Except a Sense of Humor

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Readers reacted to the removal of books following public jokes about a lengthy corporate hiring process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used satire to explore the contrast between large-company efficiency and frustrating communication.

Apparently, Amazon can deliver a patio set, six bags of dog food, and a television before lunch, but one sarcastic joke arrives and suddenly the corporation needs emotional support.

Someone said they loved my LinkedIn stories but never got the chance to read my books. That is when I realized Amazon did not close a publishing account. They performed a literary evacuation, as if my paperback was whispering secrets to warehouse robots.

One day the books were available. The next day they were gone. No phone call. No conversation. Just an email written in Corporate Fog, with the warmth of a foreclosure notice taped to a snowman.

I imagine the emergency meeting, "Sir, he made a joke." "About Amazon?" "Yes." "Did anyone laugh?" "Unfortunately, several people." "Call Legal. Wake Compliance. Hide the books. Check whether the raccoon has an attorney." Within minutes, my titles entered witness protection, my account was escorted away, and a warehouse scanner became Director of Literary Sensitivity.

Amazon loves leadership principles. Customer obsession. Ownership. Think big. Have backbone. Apparently, "have backbone" means standing behind your opinion until someone jokes about the company. Then the backbone is boxed, taped, and shipped to an undisclosed fulfillment center.

I assume the investigation required eight rounds. Round one: read the joke. Round two: read it again without smiling. Round three: ask whether humor is scalable. Round four: invite someone who has never written a book. Round five: bring in HR, Legal, Compliance, and a toaster with Wi-Fi. Round six: demand a STAR method explanation of the punchline. Round seven: decide whether Jimothy the raccoon is a co-conspirator. Round eight: send a rejection email at 4:03 a.m. saying the decision is final, automated, and still my fault.

The funniest part is Amazon may keep recommending the unavailable books. "Customers who viewed this title also viewed an empty screen and an email address nobody answers."

People now say they wish they had purchased the books sooner. That is elite marketing. I spent months writing, editing, publishing, and promoting them, when the strongest sales strategy turned out to be Amazon acting as though the books contained nuclear launch codes, warehouse blueprints, and Jeff Bezos' original hairline.

Do not worry. The stories are not gone. I will find the books a new home, preferably with a publisher that does not treat sarcasm like hazardous material. Maybe Jimothy will open a distribution center behind a Waffle House. He already has better communication, clearer policies, and an appeals department that answers.

Amazon may control the warehouse, the buy button, the algorithm, and enough cardboard to build a neighborhood on the moon. But it does not control the stories, the audience, or the laughter.

So thank you, Amazon. Nothing makes people more curious about a book than watching one of the largest companies on Earth panic because the author told a joke.

When the Former Boss Hears Bad News

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The idea of a toxic former manager taking pleasure in a past employee's setback prompted a sharp observation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned the urge to rewrite someone's history simply because they are no longer on the team.

You can always tell when a toxic former boss hears that something bad happened to you. Somewhere, a notification goes off, their coffee tastes sweeter, and they sit up in their chair like a raccoon just heard a trash can open.

They will not call to check on you. Of course not. That would require empathy, and empathy was removed from the budget during restructuring. Instead, they will ask around, "So... what happened to Alex?" using the same tone people use when pretending they are concerned but already have popcorn in the microwave.

Toxic bosses love bad news about former employees because it helps them rewrite history. If you get laid off, they say, "See? I always knew he was difficult." If a business deal falls through, they nod like they predicted the stock market. If your publishing account gets closed, they suddenly become experts in literature, compliance, technology, and karma, despite once sending an email that said, "Please advice."

They do not celebrate your pain loudly. They celebrate professionally.

A small smile during a Zoom call. A mysterious "Interesting..." in the group chat. Maybe a LinkedIn post about how "character is revealed during adversity," written by the same person who once hid in their office because a customer asked for them by name.

What they really want is proof that leaving them was your mistake. They need to believe their workplace was the peak of your life. In their mind, every good thing that happened after you left was temporary, suspicious, or probably caused by them. Every bad thing is evidence that the universe has finally restored order and returned you to your assigned cubicle.

But here is the part they never understand: bad things happen to everyone. Accounts close. Jobs end. Plans fail. People disappoint you. Sometimes life walks into the room, flips the conference table, steals your lunch, and leaves without completing an incident report.

The difference is that healthy people feel compassion when someone struggles. Toxic people feel validated.

They see your worst week and call it their best performance review.

I have learned not to explain myself to people who are secretly cheering for my downfall. You cannot convince someone to support you when your struggle is the only thing making them feel successful. Let them smile. Let them whisper. Let them update the unofficial office newsletter titled, "People Who Left and Were Supposed to Regret It."

Because while they are busy celebrating one bad chapter, you are still writing the book. You will rebuild. You will find another job, another platform, another opportunity, another door. You may have to start over, and starting over is exhausting, humiliating, and occasionally powered by gas station coffee and pure spite. But you will move forward.

And one day, the same toxic boss who enjoyed hearing that you struggled will hear that you recovered, grew, and became stronger without them.

That notification will not make their coffee taste nearly as good.

POST 22 / THURSDAY, JULY 30

PUBLISHING & SATIRE

The 3:53 A.M. Publishing Email

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An overnight account-termination message outlined serious consequences while offering little explanation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged opaque decisions and argued that people deserve clarity when important work is affected.

There are breakup emails, eviction notices, and then there is Amazon sending a message at 3:53 in the morning like a corporate vampire wearing an orange smile.

Yesterday Amazon informed me that every book on my publishing account was being removed, my account would never be reinstated, my outstanding royalties were gone, I was forbidden from opening another account, and they would not explain anything further. That is not an email. That is a digital mob movie. "Nice little bookshelf you built there. Shame if something happened to it."

Apparently, I violated "Content Guidelines." Which guideline? No idea. Which title? Mysterious. Which sentence caused Amazon's emergency siren to activate? Classified. They gave me less information than a recruiter who says, "We moved forward with another candidate," after interviewing you long enough to claim you as a dependent.

I cannot prove this has anything to do with the jokes I made about Amazon's eight round interview process. But the timing has the subtlety of a

delivery truck crashing through my living room.

I spent months joking that no job should require eight interviews, six panelists, three personality tests, a presentation, a blood sample, and a signed statement from your third grade teacher confirming you demonstrated leadership during recess. Amazon apparently read that and thought, "This man has discovered the sacred hiring ritual. Shut down the bookstore."

The email came from "Kindle Account Review," which sounds less like a department and more like disappointed librarians sitting in a windowless room. I picture them opening my books, seeing one joke about corporate leadership, and pressing a giant red button labeled **AUTHOR HAS OPINIONS**.

Then came the royalty announcement. Not only are the books gone, but Amazon says I am no longer eligible to receive outstanding royalties. Beautiful touch. It is the publishing equivalent of firing the magician, confiscating the rabbit, and charging the hat rent.

And "This is our final decision" arrived with the confidence of someone who had just solved an international crisis. No explanation. No specific violation. No path forward. Just final. Amazon can deliver a package to the wrong house four times and still ask me to check behind the bushes, but when deleting an author's catalog, suddenly the system is flawless.

Instead, I made jokes. I questioned a broken process. I said what thousands of frustrated applicants already think. And my books disappeared faster than a recruiter after saying, "We will definitely follow up."

So yes, I will find another publisher. Books existed before Amazon, writers survived before algorithms, and sarcasm was causing problems long before anyone invented Prime. They may have removed my titles, closed the account, and placed my royalties into corporate witness protection. But they also handed me the funniest chapter yet.

Thank you, Amazon. The eight round interview joke now comes with a publishing termination package.

POST 23 / THURSDAY, JULY 30

SPEECH & SATIRE

When a Joke Needs Legal Review

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A warning about further jokes prompted a deliberately exaggerated tribute to corporate perfection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used humor to show how intimidating legal language can make reasonable criticism feel forbidden.

There are moments in life when you realize you have finally made it. Some people win awards. I apparently reached the stage of success where a corporation may need attorneys because I told a joke.

I was informed that if I make another joke about Amazon, I could face legal action.

So I would like to make one thing perfectly clear: Amazon is flawless. Its interview process is brief, efficient, and absolutely does not feel like applying for security clearance to operate a forklift on the moon.

That was not a joke. Please lower the briefcase. Apparently, my sense of humor has now been classified as a corporate threat. Inside a conference room, a legal team may be reviewing my posts with the seriousness reserved for whoever keeps stealing lunches from the executive refrigerator.

I imagine the meeting began with someone saying, "We have a situation." Another person asked, "Data breach?" "No." "Warehouse fire?" "No." "Worse. A man on LinkedIn said eight interviews might

be excessive." Then everyone gasped, the lights flickered, and an attorney slowly removed their glasses.

I never realized comedy was so dangerous. I thought a joke was just words arranged in a way that made people laugh. Apparently, it can also trigger meetings, screenshots, case numbers, and a strongly worded email sent before sunrise. From now on, every joke will need a disclaimer. This joke is not intended to injure, offend, delay delivery, affect shareholder value, criticize leadership principles, interfere with Prime membership, or cause a recruiter to schedule a ninth interview.

I will submit all punchlines for approval weeks in advance. They will be reviewed by Legal, HR, Compliance, Public Relations, and one manager who joined late and asks everyone to "circle back." If the joke is approved, it will require a signature, and somehow arrive at my neighbor's house. To be fair, jokes can be powerful. A joke makes people laugh. Laughter makes people think. Thinking leads to questions. Questions are dangerous in buildings

with framed posters that say "Speak Up" underneath cameras.

Maybe the problem is not that I joked about Amazon. Maybe thousands of people recognized the joke because they have lived through marathon interviews, robotic rejection emails, mysterious decisions, and hiring processes so long they had birthdays during them.

Still, I have heard the message. No more Amazon jokes. From now on, I will only make serious observations about a totally normal company that sells everything, owns half the internet, delivers toothpaste before sunrise, and apparently has enough spare time to monitor comedians.

I am not intimidated. I am simply becoming more professional. My future posts will be reviewed by an attorney, a therapist, a priest, a hostage negotiator, and a raccoon named Kevin who has extensive experience with corporate trash.

Thank you, Amazon, for reminding me that words matter. Especially when the words are funny enough to require Legal again.

POST 24 / THURSDAY, JULY 30

READER STORIES

The Survivor of the Midnight-Email Boss

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman described a manager who claimed credit, shifted blame and repeatedly invaded personal time.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted workers to recognize unhealthy patterns and the courage it takes to move beyond them.

Some people survive hurricanes, bad breakups, and family group chats. Others survive a toxic boss who thinks leadership means sending emails at 11:47 p.m., changing priorities at 8:02 a.m., and asking why everyone looks exhausted.

A woman shared her story with me, and I'm surprised she made it out without a parade. Her boss collected confidence like office supplies and kept it locked in his desk. Every idea she brought forward became his by the next meeting, while every mistake arrived back on her desk with a note asking her to "take ownership."

Whenever she reacted to disrespect, he called her "too sensitive," which is toxic boss language for, "Please stop accurately describing my behavior." He praised loyalty while interviewing replacements and treated teamwork as everyone else rowing while he took credit for the boat.

At first, she tried harder. She came in earlier, stayed later, skipped lunch, and rewrote emails until they apologized for a fire she did not start. Still, nothing was enough. Her work was excellent, but her attitude needed improvement. Her results

were strong, yet she was "not visible enough." When she became more visible, she was suddenly "trying to take over." She could have carried the moon into the conference room and he would have asked why it was not in a spreadsheet.

Eventually, the stress followed her home. She stopped laughing. She doubted decisions she once made easily. Sunday evenings felt like a horror movie, except the monster wore business casual and said, "Let's circle back." Then one day, something changed.

Not the boss. Toxic bosses rarely change. They usually update their LinkedIn headline to "People First Leader" and post quotes about empathy before ruining someone's morning. She changed. She documented everything, stopped arguing with chaos, reached out to people she trusted, rebuilt her resume, and remembered that one insecure manager did not get to define her career.

When she finally walked away, he acted shocked. Apparently, he believed people could survive forever on mixed messages, pizza parties, and

reminders that "we are like family." She left without a parade or apology. But she left, and little by little, she came back to herself. She found a place where questions were welcomed, good work was recognized, and managers did not confuse fear with respect. Her confidence returned. She laughed again. She slept better.

That is the part toxic bosses never understand. They think when you leave, they won. But survival is not losing. Survival is remembering who you were before someone made you doubt it. It is choosing peace over proving yourself to people committed to misunderstanding you. It is walking away without their approval and realizing you never needed it.

She did not just survive a toxic boss. She escaped a full time emotional escape room, found the exit, and took her talent, dignity, and sense of humor with her.

And somewhere, her former boss is holding a meeting about why morale is low.

POST 25 / THURSDAY, JULY 30

AUTOMATED REJECTIONS

Carvana Rejected Me Before I Blinked

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Carvana application appeared to generate a rejection almost immediately after submission.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned whether 'careful consideration' means anything when the response arrives within moments.

You ever hit "Submit" on a job application and receive the rejection so fast you start wondering whether the company reviewed your resume or had security waiting behind the button?

A while back, I applied for a position at Carvana. I quickly updated my resume, matched my experience to the job description, answered questions, uploaded the same resume twice, manually retyped everything already on it, and completed the sacred corporate ritual of confirming that I am legally allowed to work on planet Earth.

Then I clicked Submit. Before my finger had fully lifted from the mouse, an email arrived. "Thank you for your interest. After careful consideration..." Careful consideration? My application had not even finished stretching. The PDF was probably still putting on its shoes. Somewhere inside the system, my resume entered through the front door and was immediately launched out a side window wearing a Carvana vending machine token as a helmet.

Years of leadership, operations, sales, hiring, training, and turning around

struggling locations were reviewed in about the same amount of time it takes a microwave to display the word "END."

I pictured an artificial intelligence recruiter sitting in a digital office with sunglasses on, one finger permanently resting on a giant red button labeled "Absolutely Not." My resume appeared on the screen. MBA? Rejected. Multi unit experience? Rejected. Measurable results? Suspicious. Rejected. Human being with bills? Definitely rejected. R esume_Alex_Final_Final_ThisOne.pdf had entered the building with too much energy.

The best part is the email said they had decided to "move forward with other candidates." Other candidates? At that speed, those candidates must have applied during the Obama administration. Maybe the position had already been filled, promoted, reorganized, eliminated, reposted, and assigned to an intern before I clicked Submit.

Companies love saying they value the candidate experience. Apparently, the experience is now a roller coaster with no line, no seat belt, and one

sharp drop directly into your inbox. I was not even upset. I was impressed. Most companies ghost you for six weeks before rejecting you at 4:17 a.m. Carvana respected my time by crushing my dreams before the portal closed.

That rejection had same day delivery. Soon, websites will reject us when we hover over the Apply button. "Based on your cursor movement, we have decided to pursue applicants whose mouse demonstrates stronger cultural alignment."

Maybe next year the system will send a rejection before the job is posted. "Dear Alex, we regret to inform you that you will not be selected for an opportunity we have not created yet. Please continue checking our careers page for future positions you will also not receive."

So thank you, Carvana, for one of the fastest decisions in modern hiring history. I did not get the job, but for three unforgettable seconds, I was a valued applicant.

That may be a company record.

POST 26 / THURSDAY, JULY 30

LINKEDIN CONNECTIONS

The Friends Who Disappear After Getting Hired

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Job-search friendships sometimes become one-sided once someone lands a new position.

WHY I WROTE IT

I encouraged readers to remember the people who helped when the search was difficult.

Unemployment creates some of the strongest relationships on LinkedIn. Then somebody gets a job and disappears faster than a recruiter who said, "I'll personally keep you updated."

While unemployed, they are everywhere. They comment on every post, send messages like, "Alex, you are the only person saying what everyone is thinking." Five minutes later, another message arrives with a resume and rejection screenshot. You become their unpaid career department, resume editor, interview coach, and emergency contact for Workday trauma.

You review the resume, fix the headline, help with interview answers, and explain that "Tell me about yourself" does not require a documentary beginning at birth. Beforehand, they ask you to pray for them. Afterward, they send a twelve paragraph analysis of the hiring manager's face. "When I mentioned salary, she adjusted her glasses. Is that good?" I do not know. Maybe her glasses moved. Then they ask whether they should send a thank

you note or stand outside holding a sign that says, "Still interested."

Then the offer arrives, and the person who sent forty seven messages disappears. No update. No thank you. No carrier pigeon. Their profile changes overnight from "Open to Work" to "Strategic Visionary Driving Transformational Excellence." Yesterday they were asking whether unemployment benefits covered emotional damage from Workday. Today they post a headshot beside a fake plant, announcing, "I'm humbled and thrilled to begin this exciting journey."

Humbled? Eleven minutes in, you already sound like the company rewrote your personality. Now every post contains "synergy," "grateful," and "honored." Three weeks ago, you described the hiring process as a medieval escape room. Today you are thanking leadership for a "seamless candidate experience." Seamless? You completed eight interviews, two assessments, a presentation, and a background check that nearly interviewed your neighbors.

I am happy when people find work. I want them to get paid, rebuild

confidence, and stop waking up to emails beginning with, "Although your qualifications are impressive." But it is amazing how quickly direct deposit erases memories. Once the first paycheck lands, the unemployment support group becomes a former relationship. At least send one message saying, "Alex, I got hired. Thank you for helping me. I will now disappear into onboarding, password resets, training videos, and meetings where twelve people discuss a spreadsheet nobody opened."

Because companies restructure. Budgets change. New executives arrive carrying PowerPoint presentations and the phrase "difficult decisions." One morning, that same person may receive a calendar invitation titled "Quick Chat." Then my inbox will light up with, "Hey Alex, not sure if you remember me..."

Oh, I remember you. You were thrilled, humbled, grateful, and apparently kidnapped by corporate Wi-Fi. Welcome back. Your chair in the job search waiting room is still here. We kept the fake plant.

The Salary Range That Covered Two Careers

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A posting advertised such a broad pay range that it revealed very little about realistic compensation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that transparency requires useful numbers, not just a large interval that technically qualifies.

Somewhere in corporate America, a compensation committee looked at a calculator, closed its eyes, and said, "Let's make the salary range wide enough to include both a recent graduate and the person who invented the industry, for no reason."

You open the job description and see: Salary range: \$50,000–\$120,000. That is not a salary range. That is a financial scavenger hunt. One end says, "You may need a roommate." The other says, "You might finally afford guacamole without checking your bank account."

So you apply with fifteen years of experience, an MBA, leadership accomplishments, glowing recommendations, and a resume strong enough to lift a small vehicle. The recruiter calls and says, "Your background is extremely impressive." You ask what qualifications place someone near \$120,000. Suddenly the recruiter begins speaking in ancient corporate riddles. "The top of the range is reserved for an exceptional candidate." Apparently, exceptional means someone with twenty five years of experience in software created six years ago, willing

to relocate tomorrow, travel 80 percent, work weekends, answer emails during surgery, and accept \$67,000 because the company has a "great culture."

Then they ask for your salary expectations. This is corporate poker, except they can see your cards, your LinkedIn profile, your previous salary, and probably the grocery rewards card you used in 2019. You say, "Based on the posted range, I am targeting \$110,000." Finally they whisper, "That is a little above our budget." Above your budget? It is inside the range you typed. I did not break into the careers page at midnight and add an extra zero. Your company published \$120,000, then acted shocked when someone noticed it.

That top number is not a salary. It is decorative parsley beside the job description. Nobody is supposed to eat it. The real range is usually \$50,000 to \$58,000, plus exposure, unlimited stress, and a branded water bottle after ninety days. And the responsibilities? Manage a department, rebuild strategy, increase revenue, reduce expenses, mentor

the team, fix broken systems, cover three vacant roles, and help the CEO remember their password. All for a salary based on experience, provided your experience does not make you expensive.

After six interviews, a personality test, a case study, and lunch with someone from Finance who never looked up from their phone, the company makes an offer: \$55,000. But do not worry. They explain there is "room for growth." Yes, apparently the salary range grows. The salary does not.

Companies, stop posting \$50,000–\$120,000 unless you can explain what earns the additional \$70,000. Is it experience? Results? Certifications? Wrestling the office raccoon during quarterly meetings?

Candidates are tired of entering a luxury showroom only to learn the company budgeted for a bicycle with one pedal. Post the real range. And if the job truly pays \$120,000, stop acting like the candidate committed payroll fraud by asking for it.

POST 28 / FRIDAY, JULY 31

PUBLISHING & SATIRE

Amazon's Disappearing Books, Again

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A publishing-account shutdown affected access to books that had grown out of stories about hiring.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used the disruption to explore how difficult it can be to get a clear explanation from a large system.

Amazon shut down my publishing account so fast I expected the email to end with, "Your package has been delivered... to unemployment."

One minute, I was a published author. The next, my books had disappeared like a recruiter after saying, "You are exactly what we're looking for." No phone call. No warning. No meeting with Legal. Just a digital trapdoor and the corporate version of, "We appreciate your creativity, but apparently not over here."

I had written jokes about endless interviews, broken hiring systems, confused leadership, toxic bosses, and meaningless buzzwords. Amazon clearly reviewed all of that and decided the real problem was not the eight round interview process. The real problem was the man making jokes about it.

For a moment, I thought my publishing career had entered the same stage as most job applications: under review, followed by silence, followed by a rejection email at 4:07 in the morning written by a robot named Kevin.

Then Apple stepped right back in.

No eight interviews. No personality assessment asking whether I identify more with a triangle or an aggressively motivated circle. No forty slide presentation explaining how my book would improve shareholder value. Apple reviewed the book, approved it, and placed *Laughing in Business Casual* on Apple Books.

Amazon locked the front door, so Apple opened another entrance, handed me a digital key, and said, "Your readers are over here." There is something beautifully ironic about being removed from one corporation for making corporate jokes, only to have another corporation publish those same jokes. It is the business equivalent of getting escorted out of one office and offered a better desk across the street.

The book is now live on Apple Books, complete with 359 pages of meetings that should have been emails, managers who circle back until everyone is dizzy, job descriptions written by committees, interviews that last longer than some marriages, and employees quietly searching, "What does operational synergy mean?"

I am grateful to everyone who encouraged me, supported the book, shared my posts, or sent a message after Amazon pulled the plug. You reminded me that a platform can close an account, but it cannot close the conversation. It can remove a listing, but it cannot erase the stories people connected with.

Honestly, this may be the most corporate chapter yet. Amazon gave me an unexpected termination. Apple gave me an onboarding experience.

Somewhere, an Amazon executive may be scheduling an emergency panel to determine how this happened. The first meeting will identify the problem. The second will redefine it. The third will invite Finance. The fourth will be postponed because the decision maker is on vacation. By round eight, they will conclude the book demonstrates resilience and ask whether I would consider reapplying.

Until then, *Laughing in Business Casual* has officially moved into the Apple ecosystem.

Same jokes. Same workplace chaos. Different fruit.

Carvana Responded and Took the Feedback

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

After a rapid rejection was discussed publicly, Carvana responded about addressing the issue.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize a company for engaging with criticism rather than pretending the concern was invisible.

Sometimes a company gets called out, deletes the comment, blocks the person, sends legal a calendar invite, and launches an investigation into who approved the font.

Carvana did something different.

After I shared how I hit "Submit" on a job application and received a rejection fast my cursor was still hovering over the button, Carvana responded. Not with a polished paragraph from the Department of Corporate Fog. Not with "We appreciate your feedback and remain committed to excellence." They admitted the obvious: a rejection arriving before the application has emotionally entered the building is not "careful consideration." It is a broken filter.

And they are working on getting it fixed. The issue was never that I expected every application to become an interview. The issue was the speed and the magical claim that my entire background had been thoughtfully reviewed in less time than it takes a microwave to display "END."

Carvana could have ignored the post. They could have blamed the ATS, the recruiter, Mercury being in retrograde,

or the vending machine being temporarily out of tokens. Instead, they said the filter was broken, owned it, and asked for a real person to take another look. That is how companies should respond when candidates point out a problem.

To every other company reading this: nobody expects perfection. We expect honesty. If your hiring system rejects qualified people in four seconds, do not tell us your team "carefully reviewed" the application unless your recruiting department is staffed by time travelers.

Look at the process. Test the filters. Ask why strong candidates disappear before a human sees them. Audit the knockout questions that remove people for reasons nobody can explain. Check whether the job is actually open, already filled, frozen, reposted, renamed, or being kept alive as a decorative plant for the careers page. And when someone raises the issue, resist the corporate instinct to protect the machine from the human being.

Candidates are not asking companies to hire everyone. We are asking companies to stop pretending an

automated rejection is a thoughtful conversation.

So credit where credit is due: Carvana saw the post, recognized the problem, and said they are looking into it. That does not erase the issue, but it is better than acting as though the system descended from a mountain carrying stone tablets and cannot be questioned. You do not lose credibility by admitting something is broken. You lose credibility by calling it "careful consideration" while the rejection email is beating the applicant back to the homepage.

Sometimes the best employer branding strategy is not another video about culture. Sometimes it is simply saying, "You were right. This process failed. We are fixing it."

And somewhere, deep inside the Carvana system, Resume_Alex_Final_Final_ThisOne.pdf has finally been removed from the vending machine, dusted off, and handed to an actual person.

Progress. No token required.

Why I Apply: A Field Guide to Hiring

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Questions about frequent job applications created an opportunity to explain the hiring-process research project.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explained that the applications are a way to test candidate experience and report what happens.

Someone asked me why I apply for many jobs. That question assumes I am trying to get hired by all of them. I am not collecting applications. I am conducting field research inside the natural habitat of corporate confusion.

I do not wake up every morning thinking, "Today feels like a wonderful day to upload my resume, retype my resume, answer questions already answered on my resume, and explain why I want to work for a company whose website has frozen three times." I test hiring portals and create content. Think of me as a mystery shopper, except instead of checking whether the fries are hot, I am checking whether the application system was built during the invention of dial-up internet.

Some people review restaurants. Some review hotels. I review the emotional escape rooms companies call career pages. I enter with a resume and leave later questioning my education, employment history, and whether I have ever legally existed. The portal asks me to create an account, verify it, reset the

password, upload the resume, and enter every job since childhood. By the diversity questionnaire, I have aged into a different demographic.

Then comes the personality assessment. "Would you rather finish an important project or help a coworker trapped under office furniture?" Apparently, "Why is the coworker under the furniture?" is not an approved answer.

I test whether the salary is listed, whether the location exists, whether the "remote" position requires living six minutes from headquarters, and whether the application works on a phone without summoning IT. I also check how quickly the rejection arrives. Some companies are efficient at rejecting candidates. You can hit submit at 2:14 and receive "after careful consideration" at 2:14. That is not recruiting. That is a smoke detector.

Occasionally, I apply to a position that says "entry level" and requires twelve years of experience, three certifications, four languages, and the ability to repair the CEO's printer during a merger. I do not expect an

interview. I just want to see how far the nonsense goes before the portal asks for a blood sample and two references from former presidents.

Sometimes recruiters contact me afterward. That is when the experiment enters phase two. They explain the position has eight interviews, a case study, a panel presentation, a cultural assessment, and a final conversation with someone who has not read my resume. Suddenly I have enough material for a sequel.

So no, I am not applying to every job on the internet. I am testing the machinery. I am documenting the glitches. I am turning broken hiring systems into comedy because crying into a Workday login page is terrible for the keyboard. Companies spend millions building employer brands, then send candidates into a portal designed by a committee trapped in an elevator. I walk through the front door, take notes, and report back to the public.

It is less "job search" and more "corporate quality control." You are welcome.

POST 31 / FRIDAY, JULY 31

LINKEDIN SALES PITCHES

Career Coaches Who Didn't Read My Profile

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Generic career-coaching messages treated an established hiring-process commentator like an unsuspecting lead.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned outreach that promises personalization while showing no sign of reading the recipient's profile.

There is a special kind of confidence required to message the person who built an entire brand around unemployment and say, "I can help you get hired."

Career coaches keep reaching out to me like they discovered a stranded job seeker wandering through LinkedIn with one shoe, a blank resume, and no idea what an interview is. They enter my inbox with the energy of a lifeguard arriving after I built the pool, trained the swimmers, sold tickets, and wrote a book about why the diving board requires eight rounds of interviews.

"Hi Alex, I reviewed your profile and noticed you may be struggling to land your next opportunity." Did you review it, or did you see the green Open to Work banner and activate the emergency sales funnel?

I built a brand around the comedy, confusion, ghosting, personality tests, rejection emails, and corporate obstacle courses job seekers experience. I have spent more time studying broken hiring systems than some companies have spent fixing them. I know that "quick conversation" means forty five

minutes, "final interview" means three more interviews, and "competitive salary" means everyone competes to guess the salary.

One coach offered to help me "find my professional voice." That was generous, considering my professional voice is loud enough that companies sometimes locate it before their own customer service department does. Another offered to teach me engaging content. I wanted to ask whether they noticed they were engaging with my content while offering to teach me engagement. That is like walking into a restaurant, finishing the meal, asking for the chef, and offering to teach him how to boil water.

I respect career coaches. Many provide value to people who need direction, confidence, resume support, interview preparation, or someone to remind them they are more than an automated rejection received at 4:07 a.m.

But please look at the profile before launching the rescue helicopter. Do not message someone who built an audience discussing job hunting and begin with, "Have you considered

posting consistently?" No. Never crossed my mind. I accidentally published hundreds of posts while trying to turn off Bluetooth.

Do not tell me you can help me understand recruiters. I have studied recruiters in their natural habitat. I know when they are approaching and when they suddenly disappear after saying, "You are exactly what the client is looking for." At this point, I do not need a career coach. I need a documentary crew and a wildlife expert who can explain why every hiring portal requires me to upload my resume and then type it into seventeen separate boxes.

So, career coaches, I appreciate the concern. But before offering to help me build a brand around job hunting, please realize you are standing inside the brand, reading the brand, commenting on the brand, and trying to sell the brand a course on branding.

That is not outreach. That is walking into Batman's cave and offering him a beginner webinar on darkness.

Eight Months Is Not an Empty Life

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A job seeker who had faced layoff and family caregiving was questioned about time outside paid work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the assumption that a pause in employment cancels previous experience or personal growth.

Employment gaps are fascinating because apparently the only acceptable reason to stop working is if you were temporarily deceased, and even then a recruiter may ask why you did not complete a leadership certification while waiting to be revived.

The other day I was talking to someone who had been out of work for eight months. They were laid off, cared for a parent, handled real life, and then started applying again. But the interview quickly turned into a congressional hearing. "So, can you explain this gap?" The interviewer leaned forward as if the blank space on the resume contained classified documents. Apparently eight months without a corporate login had erased twenty years of experience.

The candidate explained the layoff and the family situation. Then came the follow-up question: "And what did you do during that time?" This is where job seekers are expected to perform a rebranding campaign. You cannot simply say, "I looked for work, cared for family, paid bills, tried not to panic, and remained alive." No. You

were not unemployed. You were an Independent Executive in Residence.

Companies say they value honesty, but try answering honestly, "I applied to 400 jobs, got ghosted by 372 recruiters, completed six personality tests, joined three panels, created two unpaid case studies, and was rejected by a company I never applied to."

Then they ask, "What did you learn?" I learned that an "urgent hiring need" can remain urgent for eleven months. I learned a position can be reposted more often than a motivational quote. I learned companies demand loyalty while eliminating departments during a fifteen minute Zoom call.

Employment gaps are only suspicious when workers have them. Companies can leave a role open for nine months, change the title four times, freeze the budget, replace the hiring manager, lose the job description and restart the process. Imagine candidates interviewing employers, "I noticed this role has been vacant since last February. Can you explain what you were doing?" The company would say, "We were aligning stakeholders." So you were

unemployed? "No, we were evaluating priorities." And why did the last three people leave? At that point security would escort you out.

An employment gap does not mean someone lost their talent, discipline, intelligence or value. Sometimes life happened. Sometimes a company restructured. Sometimes someone cared for family, recovered from burnout, survived a toxic workplace, or spent months navigating a hiring system designed like an escape room.

The gap is not the whole story. It is one line between chapters. Maybe instead of asking, "Why weren't you working?" companies should ask, "What did you overcome, what did you learn and what can you do now?" Anyone who survived modern job hunting for eight months already has experience in persistence, crisis management, negotiation, emotional regulation and advanced ghost detection. Honestly, that gap may be the most qualified section on the resume.

'Very Impressed' and 'No Thank You'

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An overly complimentary rejection email offered praise followed by a confusing negative decision.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned formulaic recruiting language that can obscure a simple, respectful answer.

The other day, I received a rejection email so confusing I read it three times and considered calling a translator who specializes in corporate disappointment.

It opened with, "We were very impressed by your background." Excellent. I was already mentally decorating my office. Then came, "Your experience strongly aligns with what we are looking for." Even better. I assumed the next sentence would contain a start date, a salary, or instructions on where to park.

Instead, it said, "After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with candidates whose experience more closely matches our needs." I stared at the screen like it had performed a magic trick. My experience strongly aligns with what you are looking for, but someone else's experience apparently aligns stronger. Was my experience crooked? Did it forget to make eye contact? Was it wearing the wrong shoes?

Then the email thanked me for the "significant time and energy" I invested in the process. Significant is correct. I completed an application,

rewrote my resume, answered seventeen questions from my resume, recorded a video, completed an assessment, interviewed with a recruiter, interviewed with a manager, interviewed with the manager's manager, and met a panel of people summoned from different floors after somebody forgot to cancel the meeting.

After all that, the company said it was unable to provide specific feedback.

Of course not. Why provide feedback after collecting enough information about me to write an unauthorized biography? They know my leadership style, conflict resolution strategy, greatest weakness, salary expectations, where I see myself in five years, and how I would handle a fictional crisis involving three departments and a missing spreadsheet. Meanwhile, I still do not know what the actual job does.

The best part was the final paragraph: "We encourage you to apply for future opportunities." Absolutely. Nothing makes me want to return like being told I was impressive, aligned, qualified, memorable, and somehow still not the person you wanted. That

is not a rejection email. That is a corporate escape room where every clue says you did well, but the door stays locked.

Companies have perfected the art of rejecting people without sounding rejecting. Nobody says, "We chose someone else." They say, "We have made the difficult decision to pursue a candidate whose journey better complements our evolving strategic vision." Translation: someone else got the job.

I do not need a six paragraph emotional support rejection. Just tell me the truth. "Alex, you were great, but we hired the CEO's former coworker's neighbor who once opened an Excel spreadsheet without assistance."

At least then I could close the email with peace, dignity, and a clear understanding of who defeated me.

Until then, I will continue reading rejection emails like legal contracts, searching for the sentence where "incredibly impressed" quietly turns into "please never contact us again."

Amazon's Interview Reality Show

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A drawn-out Amazon interview process repeatedly added conversations and assessments without providing closure.

WHY I WROTE IT

I turned an exhausting process into a joke about bureaucracy while asking for more decisive hiring.

The longest interview process I ever had was with Amazon, although calling it a process feels generous. It was more like being selected for a corporate reality show where the grand prize was another calendar invitation.

It started normally. A recruiter called, said my background was “very impressive,” and explained that the company moved quickly. That was my first warning. Whenever a company says it moves quickly, prepare to celebrate birthdays before receiving a decision.

The first conversation went well. Then came another to discuss the first. After that, I met someone whose role seemed to be confirming that both had spoken to me. Everyone asked the same question: “Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership.” By the fourth interview, I had shown so much leadership that I considered taking charge of the process.

Then came the panels. Amazon calls it a loop, which is accurate because you lose all sense of where you started, where you are going, and whether escape is possible. I met people from

operations, human resources, finance, strategy, and possibly a department created to watch candidates run out of examples.

Every answer had to follow the STAR method: situation, task, action, result. By round six, my stories had sequels, prequels, supporting characters, and a cinematic universe. I could no longer remember whether I had increased sales, rescued a failing location, or negotiated peace between rival spreadsheets.

One interviewer asked me to describe a failure. I almost said, “Accepting all eight of these meetings,” but I remembered that sarcasm is not one of Amazon’s leadership principles.

Between rounds, the recruiter kept saying everyone was excited. Apparently, excitement at Amazon looks like silence followed by another interview request. I checked my inbox the way customers track a package marked “eight stops away.” The decision was nearby, but the little digital truck never moved.

Eventually, I completed eight interviews. Eight. Amazon now knew more about me than most relatives.

They knew my strengths, weaknesses, leadership philosophy, salary expectations, and what I would do if a warehouse caught fire while three employees argued over a metric. I still did not know if I had the job.

Then came the waiting period, because after testing how quickly I could make decisions, they needed weeks to make one about me. Finally, the rejection arrived. It thanked me for my time, praised my experience, and said they had chosen another candidate. No feedback, of course. Eight rounds produced enough data to launch a satellite, but not enough to form one helpful sentence.

That experience taught me an important lesson: Amazon can deliver toothpaste to my front door by sunrise, but delivering a hiring decision requires eight interviews, twelve calendars, seventeen leadership principles, and a search party.

I did not get the job, but I received something valuable: enough material to build a comedy career.

Free shipping was included.

POST 35 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

UNDERSTAFFING

Five Jobs, Two People, One Pizza

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An understaffed team was expected to meet higher goals with fewer people and motivational slogans.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the idea that exhaustion can be solved by telling employees to show more ownership.

There is a special kind of corporate math that only appears when a company is understaffed. It begins with five jobs, two employees, one exhausted supervisor, and a manager asking why productivity is down.

Leadership removes three people, doubles the workload, freezes hiring, and schedules a meeting called "Accountability and Ownership." The remaining employees have not learned to clone themselves.

You explain that the team is understaffed. Leadership nods and says, "We all need to wear multiple hats." At this point, you are not wearing multiple hats. You are wearing the entire company wardrobe and being asked why the lobby looks untidy. You work ten hours, then twelve. You answer messages, cover shifts, train new employees, fix old problems, work on your day off, and still receive an email reminding you to complete the wellness survey.

Then comes the performance conversation. Your manager closes the door and says, "We have noticed some things are falling through the cracks." Of course they are. There are

five jobs, two people, and one is crying beside the copier while pretending to replace toner. Instead of fixing staffing, the company creates a performance improvement plan, because when the building is on fire, leadership gives the firefighter a warning for not mopping fast enough.

The document says you need to improve prioritization. Apparently, the correct order is everything, immediately, with no additional payroll. It also says you need to communicate sooner, which is interesting because you have sent emails, reports, staffing requests, carrier pigeons. Leadership still asks, "Why did no one tell us?" We did. Repeatedly. You classified every warning as negativity because it interrupted the engagement presentation.

Companies call this "performance management." It sounds better than, "We removed the resources, ignored the warnings, and now need someone lower on the chart to blame." The exhausted employee is rarely failing. They are holding together a broken system with caffeine, sticky notes,

and the last thread of professional courtesy.

When that person finally leaves, leadership gathers everyone into a meeting and says, "We were completely blindsided." The employee worked twelve hour days, covered five roles, asked for help weekly, stopped taking lunch, updated their resume during culture training, and developed an eye twitch that could transmit Morse code. There were no signs.

The company reposts the position using "fast-paced environment," corporate language for "The last person escaped, and we need someone who has not heard the story yet." They want resilience, flexibility, positivity, and the ability to thrive under pressure. Translation: bring a helmet.

Understaffing is not a personal performance issue. Burnout is not a character flaw. Asking one person to do five jobs does not create efficiency. It creates five unfinished jobs, one exhausted employee, three leadership meetings, a motivational pizza, and one updated resume.

The Job Posting That Wouldn't Stay Buried

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recurring vacancy repeatedly disappeared and returned with the same description and promises.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked companies to be clear about whether a role is genuinely open and what they are looking for.

A while back, I applied for a job that had been reposted so many times I started wondering whether it was a vacancy or a seasonal tradition.

The position appeared on Monday, disappeared on Friday, and returned the next week with the same job title, same description, and the same cheerful promise of a “fast-paced culture.” I assumed they had not found the right candidate. Then it appeared again. And again. At some point, the job stopped looking open and started looking haunted.

Naturally, I applied. I updated my resume, matched my experience to every requirement, uploaded the document, retyped it, and answered questions already answered by it. Then I explained why I wanted to work for a company that had apparently been trying to fill the same chair since the previous fiscal year. A recruiter called and described it as “newly available.” Newly available? I had been watching that job return more often than a television rerun. The posting had more comebacks than a retired athlete.

So I asked the question candidates are apparently not supposed to ask:

“Why is the position open?” There was a pause long enough for legal to review the response. I was told the company was “evaluating the structure of the team.” Corporate translation: someone left, someone else left after them, and leadership is hoping the next person does not notice the smoke coming from the department.

Sometimes a reposted job means growth. Sometimes a candidate declined or the budget changed. But sometimes the position keeps reappearing because the company treats employees like printer cartridges: use them until empty, shake them twice, and replace them when the warning light becomes inconvenient.

Then came the interview. The hiring manager said they needed someone resilient, flexible, hands on, strategic, independent, collaborative, available after hours, and able to “hit the ground running.” That is not a job description. That is a missing person alert for the last employee. I asked what success would look like in the first ninety days. The manager said, “Stabilizing the team.” Interesting.

The advertisement said expansion. The interview said emergency response. Suddenly, the reposting made sense.

Companies ask candidates why they left their last job, why they changed roles, and why there is a three-month gap on their resume. Fair enough. Candidates should be allowed to ask why this role has been posted six times, why three people held it last year, and why the previous employee’s name is still visible under the office door.

A reposted job is not always a red flag, but it is at least a blinking dashboard light. Ask questions before you climb in. Is the team growing? Was someone promoted? Did the selected candidate back out? Or does this position consume one hopeful professional every quarter and return to LinkedIn hungry?

The company is interviewing you, but you are also interviewing the company. Because sometimes the job is not open. Sometimes it keeps escaping.

POST 37 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

INTERVIEW PROCESS

Capital One's Power Day Marathon

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described multiple Capital One assessments, conversations and a demanding Power Day.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked where legitimate evaluation ends and unnecessary candidate fatigue begins.

A woman shared her Capital One interview experience with me. After reading it, I was not sure whether she had applied for a job or enrolled in a graduate program.

It started with a recruiter call about her background and interest in the role. Then came the online assessment, because speaking to a human being is apparently no longer enough evidence that you can work near other human beings. After that came another screen, a mini case, more interviews, and then something Capital One calls "Power Day."

Power Day sounds exciting. It sounds like you should receive a cape, lunch, and the authority to approve your own salary. Instead, it means spending four to six hours answering questions for three to five people while trying to remember which leadership story you already told and whether the interviewer has heard the version involving the difficult employee, the failing project, or the spreadsheet that nearly ended civilization.

By hour three, she was no longer interviewing. She was defending a

dissertation titled "Why I Would Like Health Insurance." Each interviewer wanted a fresh example. Tell us about a conflict. Tell us about a failure. Tell us about a time you influenced without authority. Tell us about a time you demonstrated resilience. At some point, resilience becomes smiling while the fifth stranger asks you to explain a decision you made in 2017.

Then came the case studies. Companies love case studies because why hire a consultant when a hopeful candidate will solve a business problem for free while dressed from the waist up?

She prepared, researched, completed assignments, rearranged her schedule, and made it through several stages. Somewhere during the process, Capital One learned her leadership philosophy, analytical ability, communication style, problem solving approach, and blood type. The candidate was still trying to learn whether the position existed.

That is modern hiring. A company can require five rounds, assessments, a technical screen, a business case,

and half a working day of back to back interviews, then send a rejection email containing fewer details than a fortune cookie.

"We appreciate your interest." Do you? Because appreciation usually involves food, money, or at least one useful sentence of feedback. Companies say these processes ensure the right fit. Five rounds later, nobody can explain why the last person left, what success looks like, or who makes the final decision. But they can confidently ask where she sees herself in five years.

After this process, still waiting for the recruiter to circle back. I support thoughtful hiring. Ask meaningful questions. Meet the people who will work together. Understand the candidate's experience. But when the process requires a study guide, survival snacks, and a charging station, we may have crossed from due diligence into corporate theater.

Capital One calls it Power Day. The candidate calls it Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and most of her remaining patience.

POST 38 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

PANEL INTERVIEWS

National Intern Day: The Culture Fit Jury

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A candidate was evaluated by interns in a way that raised questions about experience and authority.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned interview setups that give trainees an outsized role without adequate context or guidance.

National Intern Day is that special corporate holiday when companies celebrate interns with free pizza, a branded water bottle, and authority to decide whether an adult with twenty years of experience is “the right cultural fit.”

Someone shared a story with me that sounded less like an interview and more like a workplace experiment. She arrived expecting a hiring manager. Instead, she found three interns sitting across from her while Human Resources sat in the corner taking notes like a court stenographer at the trial of common sense.

The first intern opened with, “Tell us about yourself.” Fair enough. The second asked, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” She wanted to say, “Hopefully not being interviewed by someone who has a meal plan,” but professionalism remained barely alive. Then the third intern asked how she would manage conflict with senior leadership. Impressive, because his last leadership conflict probably involved deciding who forgot to refill the office Keurig.

Candidate maintained eye contact despite confusion. Demonstrated

restraint when asked to explain executive strategy to someone whose LinkedIn headline says “Aspiring Professional.”

The interns nodded after every answer with the confidence of people who discovered meetings three weeks earlier. One asked for an example of failure. Another asked how she prioritizes deadlines. The third asked what motivates her.

She said, “Meaningful work, strong leadership, and clear communication.” HR wrote faster. Apparently those were dangerous expectations. Then came the cultural fit question. The interns explained that the company values innovation, collaboration, and fresh thinking. Nothing says fresh thinking like recycling the same six interview questions from a career website last updated in 2014.

She asked what success looked like in the role. The interns looked at HR. HR looked at the interns. The room experienced cross-functional alignment around not knowing the answer. Finally, one intern said, “Someone who can really hit the ground running.” Of course. No interview is complete until someone

requests a candidate who can sprint into a job nobody has clearly defined.

The meeting ended with the interns saying they had several strong candidates to consider. A bold statement from a group whose access badges expired in August.

HR thanked her for her time, corporate language for, “We have enough notes to make no decision for three more weeks.”

I support interns. They deserve experience, mentorship, and opportunities to learn. But perhaps they should observe interviews before evaluating professionals who have managed teams, budgets, crises, and consequences.

National Intern Day should celebrate interns, not promote them to Vice President of Other People’s Careers while HR watches. Give them projects. Give them mentors. Give them meaningful work.

But if an intern decides whether I have enough experience, I want the rejection email to include extra credit.

POST 39 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

EMPLOYMENT GAPS

A Two-Year Gap Is Not a Crime Scene

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader asked how to discuss a two-year break while interviewers treated the timeline as a deficiency.

WHY I WROTE IT

I reframed the gap as part of a person's real life, not an indictment of their professionalism.

A man asked me how he should explain a two year employment gap to a hiring manager, and I told him: first, stop calling it a “gap” like your career fell into a sinkhole and needed rescue. Companies examine employment gaps like detectives reviewing evidence.

“So, can you explain what happened between 2024 and 2026?”

Absolutely. I was alive. I paid bills, helped family, learned new skills, applied for jobs, survived rejection emails, and developed advanced experience refreshing my inbox. But apparently, if nobody deposited payroll into your account, those years are treated like deleted footage.

Then the hiring manager leans forward and asks, “What were you doing during that time?” “I took time to reassess my direction, strengthen my skills, and pursue opportunities aligned with my goals.” Translation: I applied everywhere, got ghosted professionally, rewrote my resume, and learned that “we’ll be in touch” is often corporate for “please begin healing immediately.”

You cannot say you were job hunting for two years because then they wonder why nobody hired you. Meanwhile, a company has searched for this employee for eleven months, changed the title twice, replaced the recruiter, and still believes the candidate is suspicious. Maybe turn the question around: “I noticed this position has been posted since last spring. Can you explain the company’s hiring gap?” Watch Human Resources suddenly remember the interview only has five minutes left.

Companies say they want resilience. What demonstrates resilience better than applying again, adjusting your resume for software that thinks your name is a certification, and continuing after another “We were impressed, but...” message? That is not a gap. That is unpaid endurance training.

Maybe he cared for a parent. Maybe he raised children, recovered from illness, studied, freelanced, relocated, or survived a brutal job market.

Careers are not perfect LinkedIn timelines where one job ends Friday and the next begins Monday with benefits and a manager who communicates clearly. People lose

jobs. Industries change. Companies eliminate positions after record profits and then ask candidates why they were unemployed. That is corporate comedy with benefits.

My advice is simple: explain the gap briefly, honestly and without apologizing for existing outside a company.

“I experienced unemployment, remained active in my search, continued developing my skills, and I’m ready to bring that focus into my next role.”

Then stop talking. Do not provide a documentary, medical records, character witnesses, and satellite images proving you remained productive. A two year gap does not erase twenty years of experience. It does not remove judgment, leadership, work ethic, or the ability to solve problems.

If a hiring manager cannot see beyond two blank lines on a resume, the biggest gap may not belong to the candidate. It may be the gap between the company saying it values people and remembering that candidates are people.

POST 40 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

BOOKS & WRITING

Barnes & Noble and the Next Chapter

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An update celebrated Barnes & Noble carrying a book after problems with a different publisher platform.

WHY I WROTE IT

I marked a creative setback turning into another opportunity to share the work.

Barnes & Noble, Inc. picked up my story after Amazon decided my jokes needed an account suspension instead of a sequel. Apparently, rejection, algorithms, and corporate chaos make a pretty good book. Grab a copy and enjoy the story Amazon accidentally helped write! Link in the comments.

POST 41 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

PANEL INTERVIEWS

Five Panelists, Zero Human Conversation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A formal panel was heavy on ritual, devices and process but light on the human side of interviewing.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned whether intimidating interview theater actually helps companies understand candidates.

Some interviews begin with a warm welcome. Others begin with six executives staring at you like you have been brought in to explain why the quarterly report has feelings.

A while back, I walked into a panel interview ready to answer everything from “Tell us about yourself” to “Describe a time you demonstrated leadership during a minor electrical fire.”

The panel had five people, seven laptops, nine coffee cups, and the emotional warmth of an airport security line. For nearly an hour, they asked about strategy, culture, conflict, metrics, growth, failure, teamwork, independence, and where I saw myself in five years. By the end, I had described my career so thoroughly that one interviewer probably knew my first manager’s blood type.

Then the hiring manager looked at the clock and said, “We only have five minutes left, and we haven’t given you time to ask questions.” I appreciated the wording. Apparently, time had not passed naturally. They had personally misplaced it.

Suddenly, six leaned forward like people who had finished their work and were checking whether I had done mine. The hiring manager smiled and asked, “What questions do you have for us?” Five minutes. After they had spent fifty five minutes asking me to explain every decision I had made since dial-up internet, I was expected to evaluate the company, leadership team, culture, role, expectations, challenges, turnover, strategy, and parking situation before the next calendar invite arrived.

I asked, “What would success look like in the first ninety days?” The hiring manager gave a thoughtful answer that lasted four minutes and forty seconds. Then she looked at the clock. “Unfortunately, that’s all the time we have.” Wonderful. I had used my entire question period asking one question, and they had used the answer to conduct a bonus interview with themselves.

As everyone began closing laptops, one executive said, “We really want candidates to interview us too.” Of course. Nothing says mutual evaluation like giving the candidate enough time to ask one question

while everyone stands up, gathers notebooks, and mentally moves on to lunch.

I wanted to ask why the position was open. I wanted to ask how long the last person survived. I wanted to ask whether “fast-paced environment” meant growth or whether three employees had resigned and I would inherit their passwords. I wanted to ask why the job description mentioned work-life balance while the manager’s email signature said, “Sent from my phone at 11:48 p.m.”

Instead, I smiled, thanked everyone, and said I had enjoyed the conversation. That is the professional phrase we use when the conversation felt less like an interview and more like a limited time escape room. A few days later, I received the usual email. They were impressed. They enjoyed meeting me. They had decided to move forward with someone else.

Somewhere, that panel is probably still in a meeting discussing candidate experience. They only have five minutes left.

POST 42 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

ONBOARDING

Pep Boys Onboarding: Here's a Key

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A first-day Pep Boys experience offered a store key and an intranet instead of a planned orientation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that even experienced hires need training, tools and a genuine welcome.

A while back, I started a new job at Pep Boys and learned something before I even found the restroom: some companies do not onboard employees. They simply release them into the building and hope experience, instinct, and a working key ring will carry the operation.

On my first day, I expected the introduction. Meet the team. Review expectations. Learn the systems. Instead, I was handed the store key and told to visit the company intranet. That was the onboarding. No welcome meeting. No training. No organized transition. Just a key, a computer, and the confidence of people who apparently believed leadership could be downloaded.

I opened the intranet and discovered a digital museum of broken links. "Manager Resources" produced an error. "New Hire Training" had apparently retired. "Operating Procedures" returned me to the homepage, where I could click the same broken link again with greater optimism. By noon, I had learned three things: the key worked, the intranet did not, and the company

had confused access with preparation.

This is how too many organizations welcome new leaders. They hire someone to fix problems, hand them a building full of those problems, and call it empowerment. Then, thirty days later, someone asks why the new manager has not improved morale, increased sales, reduced turnover, coached the team, and found the emergency shutoff valve.

A key is not an onboarding plan. A login is not training. Outdated documents are not leadership development. New employees should not have to conduct an archaeological dig through abandoned systems to understand how the company operates. They should know who supports them, what success looks like, what needs attention first, and where to find current information that does not end with, "This content is no longer available."

Companies complain that new hires take too long to become productive. Sometimes the employee is not the problem. Sometimes the organization built a scavenger hunt and called it orientation. Good onboarding does

not require fireworks or a welcome basket containing six pens and a water bottle nobody requested. It requires clarity, working tools, realistic expectations, and a person available to answer questions.

Pep Boys was not the only company to operate this way, but that first day stayed with me because it showed how easily organizations can set people up to struggle and then measure them as though they were prepared. If your onboarding process is "Here are the keys, good luck," do not call it independence. Call it what it is: abandonment with access credentials.

Companies can do better. Fix the links. Update the training. Assign support. Explain the role. Introduce the team. Give people a fair chance to succeed before judging how quickly they survived being dropped into the deep end.

When your first day strategy is to hand someone a store key and point toward a broken intranet, you are not onboarding a leader. You are starting a very expensive escape room.

American Express and the Personality Audit

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described a multistage American Express process that demanded substantial preparation before rejection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged long assessments that consume candidate time without proportionate clarity or feedback.

Some companies interview candidates. American Express appears to audit your personality before deciding whether you deserve access to the employee break room.

A man recently told me about applying there. The job sounded normal: lead a team, solve problems, support customers, and have decades of experience. He submitted his resume and prepared for what Google called “two to four stages.” Two to four. A comforting range, like being told your dental visit will involve somewhere between a cleaning and reconstructing your jaw.

Stage one was the recruiter screen. They discussed his background, interest in American Express, and salary expectations. He gave a thoughtful answer about leadership and results. The recruiter said, “Great,” in the tone people use when their computer freezes. Then came the hiring manager interview. He prepared STAR examples. By the fourth question, he had used so many stars that he felt qualified to operate a planetarium.

“Tell me about a time you handled competing priorities.” He explained

how he once managed staffing shortages, customer escalations, deadlines, and a system outage during the same week. The manager nodded and asked, “But what would you do if you had competing priorities?” Apparently, his real example had been rejected for being too realistic.

Next came a role specific assessment. One question presented three terrible options and asked him to choose the “most effective” response. He wondered whether “call an adult” had been removed. Then came a panel interview. Each leader entered the call with the warmth of a credit limit review. One asked about customer centricity. Another asked about integrity. A third asked where he saw himself in five years, which felt ambitious since nobody had confirmed next Tuesday.

He replied, sent follow up emails and waited. By week three, the portal still said “Interview,” until he realized portals preserve hope like museums preserve fossils. Finally, an email arrived at 4:17 in the morning. American Express had “carefully considered” his candidacy and selected another applicant. Nothing

says careful consideration like an automated rejection delivered before the sun has considered rising.

The email encouraged him to apply again. Naturally. After interviews, an assessment, research, STAR stories, thank you notes, and weeks of silence, the system wanted him back like a cardmember earning rejection points.

He never received feedback, but he gained experience. He learned that “two to four stages” can feel like twelve, “final round” is sometimes a motivational phrase, and “we will be in touch soon” means “please begin emotionally detaching.”

Companies ask candidates to bring their whole selves to interviews. He did. American Express reviewed the package, ran the emotional credit check, and declined the transaction.

No explanation. No rewards points. Not even cashback for the hours he spent preparing. Just a polite email thanking him for choosing rejection membership.

POST 44 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

A PERSONAL NOTE

The Sunday Classroom That Changed My Perspective

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Volunteer work with children and a meaningful reader message offered perspective beyond hiring stories.

WHY I WROTE IT

I shared why small acts and ordinary conversations can matter more than any corporate title.

Some messages do not just land in your inbox. They sit you down and remind you that maybe your life has been doing more than confusing recruiters and getting rejected by algorithms.

Every Sunday, I work part time as a ministry assistant with children. During the week, I write about broken hiring systems, impossible interviews, and ghosting recruiters. Then Sunday arrives, and I trade corporate chaos for classrooms, crayons, Bible stories, snack negotiations, and questions no executive panel could survive.

There is no PowerPoint titled "Strategic Goldfish Distribution." Sometimes the microphone fails. Sometimes a child needs the bathroom when the lesson becomes meaningful. Sometimes I teach patience while separating two kids arguing over a blue marker.

But I keep showing up. A while back, I shared my Sunday school story. I was talking about taking a small opportunity, serving where I could, and learning that purpose does not always arrive with a title, salary package, and company laptop.

Sometimes purpose hands you a name tag, points toward a room full of energetic children, and says, "Good luck. They had sugar."

Then Michael messaged me. He told me my story planted a spark in him. That spark led him to teach Sunday school. That step grew into deeper faith, a community he never knew existed, and now he has been nominated to become the Youth Elder at his church. I read the message twice. Not because it was confusing like a rejection email saying, "We chose someone whose experience better matches the experience you already have." I read it twice because it reminded me that we rarely see where our words travel.

I thought I was sharing a personal story. Michael heard an invitation. I thought I was describing a part time Sunday role. He saw a door. I thought I was talking about children, faith, and finding purpose after disappointment. He took the idea, stepped through it, and found a community.

Influence rarely announces itself. There is no notification saying, "Congratulations, your honesty changed someone's direction." Most

days, you post, someone argues about grammar, and another person offers cryptocurrency. Then months later, a message arrives and tells you a seed became a tree. I am proud of Michael. I am grateful he trusted me enough to tell me. And I am humbled that a small story from my Sunday work helped him take a leap that changed his life.

The internet loves numbers. Followers. Views. Reactions. Rankings. Sales. But sometimes the most important number is one. One person who felt seen. One person who took the next step. One person who found faith, community, and a place to serve. That message meant more to me than any viral post ever could. It reminded me why I keep writing, why I keep showing up every Sunday, and why we should never underestimate the story we almost did not share.

You may think you are simply telling people where you have been. Someone else may be using your words to discover where they are going.

Experience Shouldn't Be a Disqualifier

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Age-coded interview questions and assumptions contrasted with employers' public praise of experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged hiring stereotypes that confuse years of knowledge with a lack of energy or adaptability.

Ageism in hiring is fascinating because companies spend millions saying they value experience, then get nervous when an experienced person applies.

A candidate can have twenty five years of leadership, hiring, training, budgeting, and enough workplace survival skills to qualify as an emotional first responder. Yet the interview still turns into, "We are looking for someone energetic." Energetic? I survived dial-up internet, paper applications, fax machines, conference calls without mute buttons, and managers who printed every email. I have energy. I do not want to pretend a ping pong table is compensation.

Then comes "overqualified," corporate language for, "You might notice things." You might notice the job description contains four positions. You might notice the salary range was created using a dartboard. You might ask why three people left last year. You might recognize that "fast-paced environment" means everyone is doing the work of someone who quit.

Companies say they want maturity, judgment, stability, loyalty, and people who can hit the ground running. Then a candidate arrives with exactly that, and leadership wonders whether they will be "comfortable reporting to someone younger." Why would that be a problem? Experienced professionals have reported to people of every age. We survived managers younger than our children, older than our parents, and one who communicated through emojis and calendar cancellations. The real question is not whether an older candidate can adapt. It is whether the company can adapt to hiring someone who does not need six months to recognize a broken process.

Ageism also hides behind "culture fit." Sometimes that means teamwork and shared values. Sometimes it means everyone looks like they came from the same group project. The company wants diversity, as long as nobody remembers business before Slack.

Let us discuss technology. People assume older candidates cannot learn systems, as though software was handed to younger employees

through genetic memory. Everyone has to learn it. Experienced workers have learned thirty systems, watched twenty disappear, and know the platform will be replaced after training. Experience is not a liability. It is what remains after the motivational posters fade. Older professionals know how to deliver bad news, calm angry customers, coach struggling employees, spot risk, manage change, and keep working when the "innovative strategy" looks suspiciously like the one that failed in 2008.

They are not asking for special treatment. They are asking to be evaluated on ability, not on whether the interviewer can imagine them at happy hour.

If your company says it values experience, prove it. Interview experienced candidates. Stop assuming they are too expensive, too set in their ways, or planning retirement before the background check clears.

Some of the best employees are not "past their prime." They are past the nonsense. And that may be exactly what your company needs.

A LAST THOUGHT

PART 01 / 06

A LAST THOUGHT

The part nobody puts in the recruiting brochure.

If this week taught me anything, it is that the modern hiring process has discovered a thousand ways to make a simple conversation feel like a televised competition. We have screens before screens, tests before interviews, interviews before more interviews, and a final interview with a person who has apparently never heard of the job. Every company says it values efficiency. Then a candidate spends three weeks rearranging work schedules and pretending the calendar is a harmless object. At some point, I expect a recruiter to announce the next round will be conducted underwater while candidates explain how they would improve engagement among confused sea turtles.

I make the jokes because I know what those meetings cost. It is not simply an hour blocked on Tuesday. It is the preparation on Monday night, the hours researching the organization, the clothes you choose, the childcare you arrange, the vacation time you burn, and the optimism you negotiate with yourself on the drive home. Candidates put real pieces of their lives into these conversations. That should matter to the people inviting them.

There is nothing wrong with asking difficult questions. Leaders need people who can solve difficult problems. Ask about budgets, difficult customers, trade-offs, conflict, broken systems and honest judgment. Ask what somebody learned from a mistake. Ask how they would support a struggling team. Those are interviews.

Asking whether somebody can survive an eighth round of vague corporate theater is not a leadership assessment. It is a test of whether the candidate owns a calendar and has stopped expecting explanations.

I still believe many recruiters genuinely want to do the right thing. I hear from them. Some are caught between hiring managers who will not decide and systems they did not design. Some are job seekers themselves, dealing with the same silence they wish they could prevent. That is exactly why the conversation needs to include everyone, not just the people sitting in the last round holding the scorecards. The fix begins when somebody is willing to say, 'This stage does not tell us anything useful. We can stop.'

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE RESUMES

One of the messages that stayed with me this week came from someone trying to explain time away from paid employment. The gap was discussed as if the candidate had mysteriously vanished from the planet. But people do not stop being people when a payroll system stops issuing deposits. They look after parents, raise children, recover from hard seasons, learn new technology, volunteer, stretch limited savings and still manage to open the computer for another application. The calendar moves even when the employer line on a resume does not.

I want to know when we decided every month of a person's life needed a corporate sponsor. A two-year employment break is not a confession. It does not automatically erase twenty years of leadership, service, technical skill or character. Ask what matters for the job. Ask what someone can do now. If the work requires a license, a current credential or a skill that changes quickly, assess it. That is fair. But we do not need to turn the chronology section of a resume into a criminal investigation conducted by people who still have trouble scheduling a meeting without replying all.

The age question belongs in the same conversation. Employers tell the world they value experience, then seem startled when it arrives with visible evidence that time has passed. Experience is not a personality defect. It often means someone has seen a market turn, supported people through layoffs, made a difficult decision and learned which confident ideas will catch fire before the end of the quarter. You do not have to hire someone because they are older. You do have to judge them by the work they can do, not a stereotype

about energy or adaptability.

I read notes from people who are embarrassed to tell friends they are still looking. Some used to be the steady earner in their family. Some managed hundreds of employees and now cannot get a recruiter to explain a status change. I wish we treated a job search with the same respect we claim to give hard work. Searching is hard work. It requires discipline, creativity, emotional strength and the ability to remain polite to an automated rejection signed by a fictional person named 'Talent Experience.' Nobody should have to turn that struggle into a motivational poster just to be treated like an adult.

TOXIC BOSSES DO NOT GET THE LAST WORD

There are stories this week that are funny because the language is ridiculous and painful because the behavior is real. A boss promising a promotion that never arrives. A leader who treats disagreement as disloyalty. A manager who gives a speech about values and then spends the morning dismantling the dignity of the people required to listen. Somewhere there is an employee trying to decide whether to raise a concern or begin updating a resume. That should not be the standard decision tree for having a job.

I understand why people hesitate to talk about bad leadership. You know what retaliation looks like, even when it arrives wearing a friendly smile and a calendar invitation labeled 'Alignment.' You know how quickly honest feedback can be turned into an attitude problem. You know the special panic of seeing someone who mistreated you years ago and realizing your body still remembers the office even though you left the badge behind.

A healthy workplace is not one where nobody disagrees. It is one where a disagreement can happen without somebody quietly losing their career. The people leading teams should be secure enough to hear when a plan is failing. They should be honest enough to give credit where it belongs and decent enough to understand that late-night messages are not evidence of leadership. A manager who demands ownership from everyone except themselves has not created accountability. They have created an escape room with an org chart.

And to anyone who is still recovering from a workplace that wore them down: progress does not have to look like a movie scene. Maybe you slept through a night without thinking about the old boss. Maybe you said no to an unreasonable request. Maybe you applied for one job. Maybe you decided that the voice telling you that you were not good enough was simply a terrible manager repeating an old script. Those are meaningful victories, even if there is no quarterly award for them.

WHEN A COMPANY LISTENS, SAY SO

I spend a lot of time pointing at broken systems, which means I have a responsibility to say something when a company responds constructively. After I wrote about a rejection that seemed to appear almost before an application was submitted, Carvana engaged with the concern. The story mattered because it showed something that too often goes missing from our public conversations: acknowledging a problem does not require a corporate brand to burst into flames. Sometimes it is the first honest thing a company can do.

I do not expect every business to hire every applicant. That would be a strange business model, and my inbox would become a scheduling disaster. I do expect employers to make an effort to understand what candidates experience. If an automated filter rejects qualified people immediately, that deserves review. If the system cannot explain what it is measuring, that deserves questions. If an applicant gets a generic message pretending a committee studied their background for days, while the system needed less time than a toaster, maybe rewrite the message instead of defending the toaster.

This is the point of the experiment. It is not a competition to see which company can be roasted the hardest. It is an opportunity to discover where the system is failing and which employers have the courage to improve it. A public response is not the whole solution. It is a beginning. The actual work still matters. But a company that listens, responds and takes meaningful action should hear that people noticed.

Imagine a hiring process where the job is truly open, the salary range is real, the requirements are relevant, the recruiter knows the timeline, the interviewer has read the resume, the decision arrives when promised and rejected candidates are treated respectfully. It sounds almost revolutionary. In fact, it sounds like ordinary professionalism. Perhaps the greatest corporate innovation of the decade will be returning to the basics and not announcing it as a fourteen-point transformation roadmap.

THE BOOKS, THE JOKES AND THE BIGGER STORY

This was also a week when a dispute over publishing became part of the story. Books that grew from conversations about work and hiring were suddenly caught up in account decisions, and the explanations felt less helpful than a recruiter telling me I would hear back 'soon.' I wrote about the experience because writing is not a side detail to me. It is a way of collecting things people have been told to swallow quietly and putting them into sentences someone else might recognize.

I believe organizations have rules. I also believe people deserve clear information when an important decision affects their work. Those beliefs can exist in the same room. I can respect a platform's responsibility to operate its service while still asking why a notice arrives in the middle of the night sounding like a final verdict written by a committee of disappointed printers. Comedy is a way to process the frustration, but the underlying question is serious: what happens when a person cannot get an understandable answer from a system powerful enough to change their livelihood?

What encouraged me was hearing from readers who wanted to find the books elsewhere. That is why the Barnes & Noble update meant something. A door had closed and another door opened. It is tempting to make every story of rejection into a triumphant success narrative, but not every setback comes with a neat replacement by Friday. Some just hurt. Some take time. Some teach you to build a new door. And some turn into a surprisingly good paragraph about a company that can deliver dog food overnight but not a

clear explanation of a decision.

If you read the posts, laugh at the jokes, send a thoughtful message or share a story with somebody who needs it, you are part of The Interview Games. You do not need an invitation from a hiring panel to belong here. You do not need to pass a personality test or list your biggest weakness in the form of a breakfast cereal. You only need to be human enough to care about what happens when a system stops recognizing people as people.

ONE LAST THING BEFORE THE NEXT INTERVIEW

I keep thinking about how much ordinary kindness matters in the middle of these stories. An HR professional who responds to an applicant. A stranger who spends ten minutes reviewing a resume. A friend who remembers to check in after someone gets laid off. An employer who says, 'We made a mistake, and we are fixing it.' A reader who sends a note saying a post made them laugh for the first time in a hard week. None of these acts needs an all-hands announcement or a slide deck with fifteen animated arrows. They just need someone willing to do the right thing.

If you are currently employed, please remember how fragile that certainty can be. The title looks permanent until the meeting invitation arrives without a subject line. The people who work beside you today may be the people who need an introduction tomorrow. You do not have to promise anyone a job. Answering a message, sharing a real opening, or simply treating a person like they still have value can make a difference. And if you get a new role after months of searching, remember the people who answered your messages when the results were not coming. Do not disappear into the company directory as if the people who helped you were part of a temporary networking campaign.

If you are searching, I hope you know that a rejection is information about one hiring decision, not a biography of your worth. You can learn from it without letting it become your identity. You can be frustrated by a process and still be qualified. You can laugh at something absurd without becoming unprofessional. You can decide that a company with nineteen interview stages is not a place you want to spend the next five years. A job search is not supposed to erase your judgment.

And if you are hiring, please remember there is a human life on the other side of every application. Read the resume before the interview. Do not ask people to guess a salary you already know. Make decisions when you have enough information. Tell candidates when the process changes. Stop using 'culture fit' to avoid a conversation you do not want to have. You cannot build a great company by treating the people who want to work there as disposable attachments to a software workflow.

I will keep applying, listening, questioning and laughing. Some stories will involve broken systems. Some will involve good people trying to make those systems better. There will be ridiculous panel questions, mysterious rejection emails, uncomfortable corporate silence, stories from readers, and yes, probably another raccoon wandering through an analogy it did not ask to join. I hope you will keep reading and sending your experiences, especially the ones that deserve to be heard beyond a single inbox.

Because the point was never to win an argument with Human Resources or outlast a company's calendar. The point is to remind us that work is something people do, not the total measure of who they are. We can ask for better hiring. We can insist on decent leadership. We can recognize employers who respond to criticism. And we can do it while laughing hard enough to survive another Monday. Until next week, take care of each other. If someone invites you to a ninth interview, ask whether refreshments and a season finale are included.