



AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 6, 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 started with a fairly simple question: what actually happens when an experienced person enters the modern hiring process? Not the polished employer-branding version with the smiling stock photo. The real version, where you upload a resume, type it all in again, rehearse a conversation, meet three committees and wait for an automated email that may or may not arrive.

I do not write about hiring exclusively from the sidelines. I apply, observe, talk with recruiters and hiring teams when invited, compare promises with actual experiences, and listen carefully to readers who send me their own stories. Some posts come from an interview I attended. Others come from a direct message, a conversation, a company announcement or an encounter with a workplace behavior too absurd to ignore. The experiment is personal; the questions it raises apply to everyone.

I use comedy because a joke can get through the corporate armor that a dozen management presentations cannot. The sarcasm is not a claim that every recruiter or employer is terrible. Good people are trying to do the right thing every day. The point is to ask whether hiring can be more human: clearer roles, meaningful questions, realistic pay, respectful decisions and actual follow-through.

August 31 through September 6 brought a remarkable mix of stories: executive jobs with bargain-basement salaries; interviewers treating a quick online lookup like academic cheating; a rescinded offer after the laptop had already arrived; hiring feedback that sounded suspiciously like age bias; career moves that looked promising from the outside; and managers who apparently confuse intimidation with motivation. Readers also wrote about job repostings, long silence, sudden exits and the courage it takes to rebuild.

This issue collects the written LinkedIn commentary from that week as it appears in my account export, organized by Chicago publication dates. Before each original post you will find two separately written notes: what appears to have triggered the story, and the reason I wanted to put the subject into words. The behind-the-post notes are interpretations, not quotations from the original publication. The posts themselves are presented without rewriting. Welcome to The Interview Games. Bring your resume. Somebody is almost certainly going to ask you to upload it again.

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The week at a glance.

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POST 01 / MONDAY, AUGUST 31

SALARY & VALUE

Executive Expectations, Garage-Sale Pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept seeing senior leadership roles demanding extensive skills and responsibility while offering strikingly low pay.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to connect executive-level expectations with compensation that reflects the work.

Corporate America has discovered a fascinating new business model: shop for executive experience, negotiate like it is a garage sale, then act offended when the candidate knows what they are worth.

I keep seeing the same job descriptions. They want 15 years of experience, leadership across teams, strategic planning, budgeting, operations, hiring, training, crisis management, and probably the ability to repair the office printer while presenting a five year growth plan. Then you scroll down to compensation and suddenly the role pays like they are hiring someone to watch the front desk during lunch.

And, somehow the candidate is the problem. The company says it needs someone seasoned. Someone proven. Someone who can hit the ground running. Someone who has made mistakes, fixed them, learned from them, built teams, grown revenue, cut costs, handled difficult customers, survived reorganizations.

Then the offer arrives. Congratulations. We were extremely impressed with your background and believe you would bring tremendous value to our organization. We would like to offer you a salary last seen during the

administration of a completely different president. But do not worry. There is unlimited growth potential. Of course there is. The salary has nowhere else to go. Then comes the greatest corporate plot twist of all. The experienced candidate politely declines, and leadership gathers in a conference room to investigate the mystery.

Nobody wants to work anymore. No, plenty of people want to work. They just do not want to provide senior level expertise at clearance aisle pricing. You cannot ask for a Ferrari and show up with bus fare. You cannot write a job description that sounds like you are replacing three directors, two managers, an analyst, and a therapist, then offer compensation that makes the candidate wonder whether direct deposit includes coupons.

And please stop calling it a competitive salary when the only competition is between rent, groceries, and the electric bill.

Experience has value. The years matter. The failures matter. The lessons matter. The judgment that comes from knowing what not to do matters. A senior professional is valuable because they may save you from making the same expensive mistakes your

company is about to proudly call innovation. If your budget is entry level, hire entry level and train them. There is nothing wrong with that. But if you want someone who can walk in Monday, fix the operation by Wednesday, coach the team Thursday, and explain the numbers to the CEO Friday, then Friday afternoon is probably not the time to discover you budgeted for an assistant manager.

Companies are free to offer whatever salary they want. Candidates are equally free to laugh quietly, close the email, and continue driving past the dealership.

Because the problem is not that nobody wants to work. The problem is that everybody wants senior level results, but far too many companies still want to pay junior level prices.

Interview Bingo: Retire the Greatest Weakness Question

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered an interviewer reading familiar questions that revealed very little about how I actually work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to ask about real decisions, leadership and problem-solving instead of recycled scripts.

Let's talk about recycled interview questions, because apparently some of them have been passed down through corporate America like family heirlooms.

A while back, I sat through an interview where I became convinced the hiring manager had opened a dusty binder titled Questions We Have Been Asking Since Fax Machines Were Impressive. I sat there mentally playing Interview Bingo.

First came Tell me about yourself. I had already submitted a resume, uploaded it again, and retyped half my work history into their portal. At that point, if you still need me to tell you about myself, I am wondering what all that paperwork was for. Then came the timeless classic: What is your greatest weakness? Ah yes, the corporate confession booth, where honesty gets carefully edited. You cannot say your real weakness. You have to say I care too much, I work too hard, or I struggle to delegate because excellence means so much to me. Meanwhile, my actual weakness after six interviews is developing opinions about the process.

Next up was Where do you see

yourself in five years? Sir, five years ago none of us predicted half of what happened next. I am trying to determine whether this is the final interview or merely the interview before the final interview. Let us survive Thursday before we start planning 2031. Then came Why do you want to work here? Apparently Because you posted a job and I possess the qualifications lacks the emotional depth they want. They want a love story. Apparently, I have dreamed of optimizing regional operations since childhood. I used to stare at the stars and whisper, One day, I too shall improve EBITDA.

And of course, Why should we hire you? Maybe because you reviewed my background, invited me to interview, and decided there was enough evidence for this conversation. Apparently I had arrived at my own sales presentation. Then came Tell me about a time you had conflict with a coworker. Suddenly everyone becomes a diplomat. Brenda and I disagreed about a spreadsheet, so I demonstrated empathy, aligned around shared objectives, and improved communication. Nobody says the real answer. Brenda kept changing the

formulas, so I locked the cells and went to lunch.

Companies keep saying they want authentic candidates while asking questions that almost come with approved answers. Interviewers know the answers are rehearsed. Yet we continue performing this corporate stage play like nobody has seen the script. Maybe interviews would be more useful if we retired a few museum pieces and asked about the actual job. What problems would you solve first? How do you lead when a team is struggling? Tell me about a decision you got wrong and what you changed afterward. Now we are learning something.

If the goal is to understand how someone thinks, leads, adapts, and solves problems, maybe we can finally retire the greatest weakness question. At this point, my greatest weakness is hearing What is your greatest weakness and successfully keeping a straight face.

POST 03 / MONDAY, AUGUST 31

JOB-SEARCH RESILIENCE

Rejection Is Not a Personality Assessment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A story I read about a discouraged job seeker made the endless application-and-rejection cycle feel especially personal.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted someone receiving another rejection to remember that it does not define their worth.

At some point, job searching stops feeling like a career move and starts feeling like a subscription service you forgot to cancel.

You apply, rewrite the resume, tailor the cover letter, update LinkedIn, research the company, practice your stories, smile at the right moments, and somehow still end up hearing, We loved you, but... Rejection starts to sting.

I read a story today from someone who has done everything we tell job seekers to do. Strong reputation. Real results. Major companies. Awards. Executive references. Built teams. Stayed hopeful. Then came the numbers: 1,232 applications, 21 resume versions, 66 interviews, 12 panel interviews, 7 projects, 7 final interviews, and five of those final interviews ending in silence. At that point LinkedIn should stop sending job alerts and start mailing you a jacket that says, I survived modern recruiting and all I got was another automated rejection.

Then came the feedback. You smile too much. You look too kind. Your resume is too rich. And somehow, somebody decided they did not like her eyebrows. Her eyebrows. Imagine building a career, winning awards, leading teams,

and sitting through dozens of interviews only to discover the final obstacle was apparently your facial landscaping. This is where hiring stops being a business process and becomes experimental theater.

We tell experienced professionals to bring their whole selves to work, then reject them for being too experienced. We want confidence, but not too much. Leadership, but not enough to make anyone uncomfortable. Experience, but only the exact amount that fits inside the salary band. We want someone who can hit the ground running, but apparently not someone who has already been running successfully for years.

After months or years of this, people start wondering if something is wrong with them. Rejection has a sneaky way of rewriting your story. Enough companies pass and suddenly you forget the wins that came before them. You forget the teams you built, the problems you solved, and all the times your experience was exactly what the room needed.

You are not suddenly less valuable because an interview panel could not agree on you. Overqualified does not always mean too much experience.

Sometimes it means, we know you are good, but we are afraid you will notice the circus too quickly.

So to everyone still applying, interviewing, waiting, refreshing the inbox, and trying to stay optimistic while another recruiter says they are moving quickly and then disappears, keep going. Laugh when you can. Be frustrated when you need to. Take a day off from pretending every rejection is an exciting learning opportunity.

And please, whatever happens, do not let anyone convince you that your entire career came down to your eyebrows. The right place will not ask you to become smaller so they can feel bigger. They will recognize the results, resilience, humor, and value you bring. When that door finally opens, you will not have to beg them to see it.

POST 04 / MONDAY, AUGUST 31

INTERVIEW EXPECTATIONS

Since When Is Looking Something Up Cheating?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post about four remote candidates being rejected after looking up information during interviews caught my attention.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to distinguish sensible use of resources from dishonesty during an assessment.

I came across a post from Calee Fussell now that made me realize we have entered the forensic science era of job interviews.

Four people interviewed for a full remote role, all four looked up information during the call, and none moved forward. Looking something up was treated like cheating. Somewhere between “Tell me about yourself” and “Do you have any questions for us?” we apparently turned Zoom into an academic testing center with invisible proctors watching your pupils.

And this is where modern hiring becomes comedy. We tell candidates we want resourceful people. Curious people. Problem solvers. People who can find information, use technology, adapt, and admit they do not know everything. Then the interview starts and suddenly Google becomes contraband. Do not look away from the camera. Do not type. Do not glance at another screen. Apparently the recruiter has evolved a gaze detection mechanism capable of determining whether you are researching an answer, checking a note, or wondering why your Wi-Fi froze the hiring manager’s face.

Meanwhile, the candidate is expected

to answer each question from memory like they are competing on Jeopardy: Corporate Edition. Then someone asks a question you answered three minutes earlier because they were responding to Slack. Another interviewer disappears with the camera off. Someone else says, “Sorry, can you repeat that?” while typing aggressively enough to sound like they are filing your rejection letter. But candidates? Eyes forward. Apparently looking toward your second monitor is enough to trigger an internal investigation.

The funniest part is that once you actually get the job, looking things up becomes part of the job. Your manager asks you to research something and find an answer. Leadership wants data, options, and a recommendation by noon. Suddenly using every available resource is called initiative. But six weeks earlier, the same behavior was apparently dishonesty because your eyes moved left during a question.

I understand the concern. If someone is secretly feeding every question into an outside tool and reading answers word for word, that is worth noticing. But seeing someone type or glance away and automatically deciding they are cheating feels like we skipped the conversation and went straight to CSI:

Zoom Interview. Maybe ask them. What are you looking up? Are you taking notes? Would you like a minute to think? Interviews should test how people think, communicate, solve problems, and handle uncertainty. They should not become a staring contest where the first person to look toward a second monitor loses dental benefits.

Because if using available resources is a disqualifier during the interview, we may need to remove Google, Teams, Slack, calculators, manuals, coworkers, and probably the entire IT department once onboarding begins. At that point, just hand every candidate a pencil and ask them to rebuild the internet from memory. At least the expectations would finally be clear.

POST 05 / MONDAY, AUGUST 31

LINKEDIN CULTURE

My LinkedIn Comments Are Not an IRS Audit

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

People began demanding explanations about my work, finances and profile as if my comment section required financial disclosures.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind readers that sharing work stories does not obligate anyone to publish their personal finances.

I knew LinkedIn had changed, but I apparently missed the update where the comment section became a branch office of the IRS.

One minute you are sharing stories, making people laugh, talking about work, leadership, hiring, and the everyday circus of corporate America. The next minute, someone is studying your profile like they have been assigned to your case. How do you make your money? Are you looking for a job? Why did this role disappear? Why did that company get added? Can your book really support you? At this rate, I am expecting someone to ask for three months of bank statements before they hit Like.

I recently saw a comment asking essentially all of that, and I had to laugh. I had no idea posting satire on LinkedIn came with shareholder reporting requirements. Good evening, everyone. Revenue remains stable. Sarcasm continues to outperform projections. Automotive operations are holding strong. Book sales remain classified. Questions from analysts will be taken.

I love curiosity. Ask me about leadership. Ask me about hiring. Ask me why companies need seven interviews

to select someone they claimed they needed yesterday. We can talk about bad bosses, great employees, interviews, layoffs, and career changes.

But asking a stranger how they make their money because you enjoy their LinkedIn posts is a fascinating level of confidence. Imagine meeting someone at a networking event and saying, Great writing. Really enjoyed your story. Quick question though, how exactly are you paying your mortgage? That is not networking. That is an audit with appetizers.

The funniest part is the assumption that if someone writes online, writing must be the only thing they do. Apparently humans are limited to one activity now. If you post recipes, you must own a restaurant. If you share pictures of your dog, clearly you work for PetSmart. If you write a book, someone immediately pulls out an imaginary calculator and starts estimating whether the royalties covered your electric bill.

For the record, I have spent years working in automotive operations and leadership. I write because I enjoy writing. I post because people relate to the stories, and corporate America keeps supplying enough material to

keep an entire comedy department employed. Sometimes the stories are serious. Sometimes they are satire. Sometimes they are both. None of that means LinkedIn gets my tax return. Nobody owes the internet a detailed explanation of their income, bank account, mortgage, career timeline, side projects, grocery budget, or whether their latest book paid for dinner on Tuesday.

So yes, I will continue working, writing, posting, changing roles when life changes, updating my profile, and occasionally confusing anyone who believes LinkedIn should function like a federal disclosure form.

And if anyone urgently needs a detailed breakdown of my income sources, please contact my accountant. He has been waiting his entire career for LinkedIn comments to become billable hours.

POST 06 / MONDAY, AUGUST 31

OFFER WITHDRAWALS

The Offer That Vanished After the Laptop Arrived

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described a signed offer disappearing after notice had been given and work equipment delivered.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to recognize the serious personal cost of reversing commitments at the last minute.

Imagine surviving 15 months of job searching, finally getting the offer, signing it, giving notice at your current job, receiving the company equipment at your house, and then finding out the job disappeared before you ever logged in. That is not a hiring inconvenience. That is an emotional hit and run with a laptop included.

Someone shared this story with me, and I had to read it twice because it makes you wonder how a signed offer can feel less secure than an Amazon delivery notification. She had been searching for 15 months. Fifteen months of applications, interviews, rejection emails, silence, optimism, disappointment. Then it finally happened. She received an offer for a QA Engineer role, accepted it, gave notice, worked her final two weeks, and prepared for the next chapter. The company even shipped the equipment to her house. At that point, you are not thinking maybe anymore. You are thinking Monday!!!

Then Friday arrived. The company put the start date on hold. Five professional references were requested. All five were contacted. More waiting. More uncertainty. More staring at the company laptop sitting in the house like the world's most expensive emotional

support animal. Then the offer was withdrawn.

I do not care how many motivational quotes you have saved or how many people tell you everything happens for a reason. In that moment, it hurts. A rescinded offer is not simply a job disappearing. By then, someone has made real decisions based on the company's decision. They may have quit another job, canceled interviews, changed their budget, told their family.

Companies love reminding people that business decisions are business decisions. Fair enough. But candidates are human beings making human decisions based on those business decisions. There is a real person on the other side of that email. Someone who may have spent months hearing they were too experienced, not experienced enough, missing one qualification, or somehow not the right culture fit after five interviews and a personality assessment that determined they enjoy teamwork only on alternate Tuesdays. Circumstances change. Budgets freeze. Leadership changes direction. Things happen. But once an offer is signed and someone has already left another job, communication and compassion should not suddenly become optional features buried between the PTO policy and

password reset instructions.

If you are going through something like this, be angry. Be disappointed. Eat the ice cream. Say a few words that would make HR schedule an emergency policy review. Then get back up, because receiving that offer proved something important. You were not imagining your value. Someone saw it. Someone chose you. This company may have closed the door at the worst possible moment, but that does not mean every door will.

Sometimes the comeback story begins with a company mailing you a laptop for a job you never got to start. Corporate America really does know how to send mixed signals, once again.

POST 07 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

A Long-Term Relationship With Broken Hiring

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Years of speaking publicly about confusing hiring processes inspired a look at why the same problems keep recurring.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to keep the pressure on the process while reminding candidates that rejection is not a verdict.

For years, I've been speaking up about the broken hiring process, and somehow the hiring process keeps responding by saying, "Thank you for your feedback. We've decided to move forward with other candidates."

At this point, I'm not even sure I'm criticizing hiring anymore. I think we're in a long term relationship. I complain about it, it ignores me, disappears for three weeks, comes back with a vague email, and then asks me to create another password. Somewhere along the way, we accepted that applying for a job should feel like entering a game show where nobody explains the rules, the prize keeps changing, and the host leaves halfway through the episode. Candidates upload a resume and then retype the entire thing into little boxes. People sit through five, seven, sometimes ten interviews, only to receive a rejection email from an address that does not accept replies. Recruiters say, "You're exactly what we're looking for," and then vanish like they entered witness protection. Companies call an eighth interview the "final conversation." Then comes my favorite: "We move quickly." Of course you do. Quickly toward what? Thanksgiving?

But underneath all the jokes, there's a

reason I keep talking about it. Behind every ridiculous process is a real person checking their email before they even get out of bed. Someone refreshing an application portal even though it still says "Under Review." Someone with twenty years of experience suddenly feeling like they have to prove they deserve a thirty minute conversation. A parent trying to keep the lights on. Someone laid off after giving a company everything. Someone who has sent hundreds of applications and is starting to wonder whether the silence means they are the problem. That part isn't funny.

People deserve better than being ghosted after giving hours of their time. They deserve transparency when a role is paused, canceled, or filled. They deserve interview processes designed to discover talent, not test endurance. They deserve to be evaluated for what they can contribute, not how well they can survive corporate obstacle courses.

Companies deserve better too, because a broken hiring process does not only hurt candidates. It drives away great people, damages reputations, wastes managers' time, and creates an awful first impression before someone even gets through the door. And somehow, we call all this progress. That's why I'll

keep talking about it. I'll keep joking about the absurdity, calling out the nonsense, sharing the stories people are afraid to tell, and reminding candidates that being rejected by a broken process does not define their value. Maybe one day hiring will become simpler, faster, more respectful, and more human. Until then, I'll be right here, watching another company repost the same job for the sixth time while announcing they "haven't found the right candidate yet."

Apparently the right candidate is hiding somewhere between Interview Number Nine and the password reset email.

POST 08 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Thirty Years of Experience, Rejected for Energy

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A 60-year-old tech-sales professional shared that glowing interview feedback ended in concerns about her energy.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted the coded language of age bias examined rather than quietly accepted.

Nothing says modern hiring quite like being told, “Your experience is incredible, your work is excellent, and everyone was impressed”... followed by a rejection that somehow turns into a discussion about your “energy.”

A woman shared a story with me that captures this perfectly. She just turned 60. She has 30 years of experience in tech sales and has managed multimillion dollar enterprise deals. Earlier this year, she interviewed with a startup and was rejected. A few months later, the same hiring manager came back because the person they hired had moved into another role, so they asked if she would reengage. Unemployment has a funny way of turning pride into flexibility, so she went back.

Three more interviews followed, with senior leadership. Then, because interviewing is apparently no longer enough, they asked her to prepare a detailed strategy presentation for free. She did it. They loved it. They praised how thoughtful and professional it was. And then came the rejection. The message basically said: your enterprise experience is obvious, your executive selling skills are impressive, and you understand complex deals.

But...We move fast. We need high

energy. We need conviction. We weren't confident enough about the team fit. Ah yes. The magical hiring vocabulary. Energy. Fast paced. Team dynamics. Stage alignment. Perfectly respectable words until they appear after a paragraph explaining how qualified you are. Apparently 30 years of closing complex enterprise business is not evidence of energy. Surviving multiple rounds after already being rejected once is not conviction. Creating an unpaid strategy deck after they called you back is apparently not enthusiasm.

I'm not sure what they wanted. Maybe she was supposed to enter the final interview doing cartwheels while cold calling a Fortune 500 CEO. Perhaps the role required someone who could scream “LET'S GOOOOO” every 14 minutes while drinking an energy drink. And this is the part that stops being funny. She told me the message felt like, “You're old,” without actually using the word. Maybe that was not their intention. Maybe they truly believed it was about culture, pace, chemistry, or some polished phrase.

But imagine being 60, unemployed, carrying 30 years of proven success, doing everything asked of you, being praised for your work, and still walking

away wondering whether your birth year quietly became the deciding qualification. Companies say they want wisdom, maturity, judgment, relationships, leadership, and people who have been there before. Then someone shows up who actually has all of that and suddenly the conversation becomes about energy.

Experience should not become suspicious just because it comes with gray hair. If a candidate is strong enough to interview twice, impress senior leadership, and build your strategy for free, maybe the problem was never whether she could keep up.

Maybe modern hiring still has a strange definition of what “energy” is supposed to look like.

POST 09 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

WORKPLACE REALITIES

The Greener Grass Was Painted for Orientation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered leaving one organization for what looked like a better culture and learning the promise did not match reality.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted job seekers to investigate leadership and culture beyond the polished recruitment pitch.

One of the most expensive lessons in corporate life is realizing the grass was not greener. It was just freshly painted for orientation.

I remember leaving a company because I was convinced the next opportunity was going to be different. Better culture. Better leadership. More support. More growth. All those corporate phrases recruiters sprinkle into conversations like parmesan cheese. They made it sound like I was entering a professionally enlightened kingdom where communication was healthy and leaders developed people.

And for the first few weeks, it really did feel beautiful. That's the honeymoon stage. Everybody was nice. People answered emails. Leadership smiled. Someone said, "We're so glad you're here," and I believed them like a man who had never been emotionally injured by an org chart before. The meetings were positive and every problem was an "opportunity." The dysfunction was "rapid growth." The lack of process was "entrepreneurial." Nobody raised their voice yet because I was still new enough to be exciting.

I thought I had made the best career decision of my life. Then the honeymoon ended, and suddenly the

role I accepted started growing extra limbs. The expectations doubled. The resources disappeared. The "supportive leadership team" became a group chat where everyone read the message and nobody responded. Processes I was told existed turned out to be legends from former employees. Training became, "You'll figure it out." Work life balance became, "Can you jump on something real quick?" And "We trust our leaders" transformed into, "Can you send us an update every 14 minutes?"

Funny how the place you were desperate to escape suddenly starts looking like an ex you may have judged too harshly. You remember the predictable problems, the coworkers you trusted, the systems you understood, and the people who knew your value without needing a 90 day PowerPoint to prove it. Then comes the thought nobody wants to admit: Did I make a terrible decision? You may have traded familiar frustration for premium, enterprise level chaos.

But I learned something from those decisions. Sometimes leaving is still the right move, even when the next place turns out to be wrong. Staying somewhere solely because the next step might fail is not loyalty. It is fear wearing a company polo. Bad career

moves teach you things good ones never will. They sharpen your instincts and make you ask better questions. They teach you that culture is not what a company says during interviews. Culture is what happens after the welcome lunch and the shiny new company smell wears off.

The real test comes when the balloons come down, the swag gets shoved into a drawer, and you finally meet the company you joined. Sometimes you find a great place. Sometimes you find a circus with dental insurance. And sometimes the shiny new door you were excited to walk through leads directly into another dumpster fire.

At least now you know to check for smoke before signing the offer.

POST 10 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Leaving a Toxic Boss Is Not an Exit Interrogation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A past resignation conversation felt more like a courtroom than a respectful goodbye.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to know they can leave unhealthy management without needing permission to reclaim their peace.

The strangest thing about leaving a toxic boss is that the final conversation usually sounds less like closure and more like a hostage negotiator trying to understand why you escaped.

I remember sitting down with a boss after I had made the decision to leave. I expected the usual corporate script: thank you for your contributions, we wish you well, good luck in your next chapter. Instead, I got something closer to a courtroom drama written by someone who had never once considered the possibility they might be the problem. The conversation started with, "I'm just surprised." That sentence alone should have won an award. Surprised? Seriously? We had spent months having the same conversations about communication, support, impossible expectations, shifting priorities, and the fact that every emergency somehow became my personal personality test. Nothing was ever enough. If I solved ten problems, we discussed the eleventh. If I stayed late, nobody noticed. If I missed one detail, suddenly we were conducting a federal investigation.

Then came my favorite line: "I wish you would have told me you were unhappy." Boss, I did. Repeatedly. In meetings. In emails. In conversations

direct enough for highway signs. At some point I was no longer raising concerns, I was issuing weather alerts. But toxic bosses have an incredible ability to confuse hearing with listening.

Then the guilt campaign started. "We invested a lot in you." "We had big plans for you." "The team depends on you." Interesting how valuable you become the moment you stop accepting being treated as replaceable. For months, appreciation came in the form of more work. Recognition came disguised as additional responsibility. Support meant being told to "figure it out." But the second I decided to leave, suddenly I was apparently the structural beam holding up the entire organization.

Then came the subtle threat wrapped in concern: "You know, the grass isn't always greener." I almost laughed. Maybe not. But sometimes the grass does not need to be greener. Sometimes you just need grass that is not actively on fire. That was the moment everything clicked for me. I had spent so much time questioning whether I was overreacting, being too sensitive, expecting too much, or somehow failing to adapt. And there I was, hearing why leaving was a mistake while getting a live demonstration of

why leaving was necessary.

That is the strange emotional part of walking away from a toxic boss. You can feel relieved and guilty at the same time. You can know you made the right decision and still mourn the time, energy, and effort you poured into trying to make something work. I did not leave because the job was hard. Hard work has never scared me. I left because constantly proving your worth to someone committed to misunderstanding it eventually costs more than the paycheck is worth.

Sometimes the best exit interview is simply realizing you no longer need their approval to walk out the door. And that felt right.

POST 11 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

INTERVIEW FAIRNESS

Interviewing Is Not Amateur Psychology

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader suggested I address assumptions made about neurodivergent candidates by interviewers with no clinical expertise.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to evaluate job-relevant capability instead of forcing everyone into one social style.

Somewhere along the way, the hiring process picked up a side hustle: amateur psychology.

A message landed in my inbox suggesting I talk about neurodivergence and the growing habit of some HR professionals deciding they can diagnose people because they read a few Reddit threads and now feel qualified to explain why a candidate “just doesn’t seem like a fit.” You can spend twenty years building expertise in science, technology, operations, finance, or biotech, then sit across from someone who has known you for twenty seven minutes and suddenly they’re studying your eye contact like they’re preparing a case for the Mayo Clinic.

“Interesting. You paused before answering.” Yes, Karen. I was thinking. “Your communication style is very direct.” Correct. You asked me a direct question. “You seem highly detail oriented.” Thank you. That was literally in the job description. Then comes my favorite corporate magic trick: turning ordinary personality differences into suspicious behavior. Too quiet? Not collaborative. Too enthusiastic? Difficult to manage. Too analytical? Could struggle with ambiguity. Too confident? Culture concern. Nervous

during an interview? Red flag. Apparently the ideal candidate is now a human thermostat: warm but not too warm, confident but humble, energetic but calm, intelligent but never intimidating, experienced but inexpensive, unique but somehow exactly like everyone already on the team.

And this is where hiring gets dangerous, because an interview is not a medical exam. A recruiter is not a neurologist. A hiring manager is not a clinical psychologist because they once read a Reddit post about neurodivergence. People communicate differently. People process questions differently. Some need time to think. Some avoid eye contact. Some are brilliant in ways that do not translate into a polished corporate personality pageant. None of that gives anyone permission to diagnose them from across a conference table.

Yet modern hiring sometimes feels like a talent show where nobody is evaluating whether you can actually do the work. Instead, everyone analyzes your facial expressions, tone, pauses, handshake, camera angle, and whether you smiled the correct number of times. Meanwhile, the candidate is thinking, “Can we please discuss the

job?” Look at the person’s experience, ask relevant questions, evaluate their skills, give them a fair chance to explain how they work, and stop treating every personality difference like evidence in a psychological crime documentary.

Because hiring should identify talent, not reward whoever is best at impersonating the interviewer’s definition of normal. If someone is qualified, capable, and able to do the job, that should matter more than whether they performed the exact social choreography expected in a thirty minute conversation.

And if your entire psychological evaluation came from Reddit, maybe put the clipboard down. The internet already has enough doctors. What a fascinating little circus.

POST 12 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The Boss Who Did Not Like His Own Medicine

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled a manager whose condescension made every workplace challenge personal.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how a leader's behavior can become the clearest lesson about what leadership should never be.

A toxic boss will teach you a lot about leadership, mostly by giving you a front row seat to everything you should never become.

I once worked for a guy who talked to me like the paycheck meant he owned the volume knob on my dignity. Every conversation came with condescension, interruptions, and enough arrogance to fill the building. If sales were down, apparently I had personally failed capitalism. If someone called off, I should have predicted it through telepathy. If a customer complained, somehow it became evidence that I had disappointed the entire organization and possibly his ancestors. Because I worked there, I stayed professional. That was the part he never understood. He thought professionalism was fear, patience was weakness, and the fact that I did not match his tone meant he had won. In reality, I was doing what adults do when someone in leadership throws a corporate tantrum in dress shoes.

Then one day, I made a decision he did not expect. I left. Not fired. Not pushed out. Not escorted out with a cardboard box. I left on my terms, with my head up and no interest in negotiating self-respect with someone who had been treating it like a company owned

asset. Leaving a toxic boss is funny because the power dynamic expires quickly. Suddenly, the person who once spoke to you like you needed permission to breathe no longer controls your paycheck, future, or mood. His title stayed exactly the same, but the magical powers attached to it disappeared the second I was no longer on the payroll.

And eventually, we spoke again. Only this time, I was not his employee. The tone was different. Mine was too. I did not yell, insult him, or become the person he had been. I simply returned the same level of directness he had spent years handing out when he thought there would never be consequences. Funny how uncomfortable certain people become when their own communication style shows up at the front door with return postage. Suddenly, he was very interested in respect. Very interested in professionalism. Very interested in how adults should speak to each other. I almost applauded the character development. Apparently, respect matters once the organizational chart can no longer be used as a shield.

That experience taught me something I will never forget: toxic bosses often confuse authority with immunity. They

think because you report to them, they can speak however they want, dismiss whoever they want, and still expect loyalty wrapped neatly in a work polo. But jobs end. Titles change. People leave. And eventually, the person you treated like they had no voice may be standing across from you with no paycheck to protect, no title to fear, and no reason to absorb your disrespect anymore. I did not leave angry. I left free.

And when the opportunity came to return the favor, I did not need revenge. I just let him experience the same version of himself he had been giving everyone else for years. Turns out, he did not like working for that guy either.

POST 13 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

HIRING CRITERIA

Do I Need Pickleball to Get Hired at Clay?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A detailed hiring post by Davide Grieco about the Clay growth team caught my attention for its unusual signals.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted requirements to remain connected to the work instead of rewarding a perfectly curated origin story.

Every once in a while, LinkedIn hands you a hiring post so complicated that you stop reading it as career advice and start wondering if you accidentally opened the instructions for joining a secret society.

Davide Grieco recently explained what he looks for when hiring for his Growth team at Clay, and by the end I was checking my resume, childhood hobbies, layoff history?! Apparently, the formula includes starting in a quantitative role at a strong brand, leaving structure for chaos, surviving layoffs, and having an intense hobby. Simple enough. Apparently we now need experience, resilience, and a hobby dramatic enough to earn an interview.

Start at a respected company, but later a big company logo can become an anti signal. Have experience, but do not specialize too much. Work somewhere chaotic, solve problems alone, survive restructuring, and spend your evenings becoming unusually good at golf, chess, rock climbing, competitive knitting, or rebuilding transmissions blindfolded. Meanwhile, somewhere a qualified applicant is updating their resume thinking, I knew I should have taken fencing more seriously.

The layoff piece is where things get interesting. Davide described surviving layoffs as a positive signal because a struggling business chose to keep you over peers, and later clarified that he does not automatically reject people who were laid off. Fair clarification. But anyone who has watched layoffs happen knows the process is not exactly the Corporate Hunger Games where the highest performer gets a trophy. Sometimes the decision is geography, salary, timing, or an entire department disappearing because finance found a spreadsheet tab it did not like.

I have watched exceptional people get eliminated while mediocre people survived because their role or project landed on the right side of a budget decision. Being laid off does not mean you lost, and surviving one does not mean you were selected by the gods of performance.

That is what makes hiring in 2026 so entertaining. Companies say they want diverse backgrounds, unconventional thinkers, resilience, curiosity, and adaptability. Then five minutes later we build a brand new box with seventeen oddly specific dimensions and ask candidates why they do not fit inside it.

Maybe someone worked at a famous company. Maybe they did not. Maybe they have an MBA. Maybe they learned everything the hard way. Maybe they survived six layoffs and got caught in the seventh. Maybe their biggest hobby is raising three kids while working full time, which demonstrates more endurance than most ultramarathons.

Hiring does not need another treasure map. Sometimes the best candidate can do the work, learn what they do not know, treat people well, adapt when things change, and show up without needing a career story that resembles a Marvel origin movie.

But if anyone needs me, I will be adding “survived corporate chaos” under Skills and trying to become exceptional at pickleball before my next interview.

The Chapter That Did Not Get to Write My Ending

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a stretch of life that looked fine externally but felt uncertain and exhausting on the inside.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers in a difficult season to see that the next chapter can still change direction.

I remember when I hit one of those points in life where everything looked fine from the outside, but inside I was wondering how I had managed to take so many wrong turns without seeing a road sign.

I was working, smiling, answering emails, showing up, doing all the things adults are supposed to do while feeling like I was one inconvenient phone call away from disappearing into the woods and starting a small business that sold firewood and ignored Microsoft Teams. Nobody around me knew how tired I was because I had gotten good at functioning while exhausted. That is a dangerous talent. People see you moving and assume you are okay. Sometimes you are just moving because standing still would force you to admit how heavy everything has become.

I remember sitting alone one day and thinking, How did I let my life get this far away from what I wanted? Not in a movie scene with rain hitting the window and sad piano music playing. It was more like staring at nothing, drinking terrible coffee, and realizing I had spent too much energy surviving situations I should have walked away

from sooner. Jobs, people, expectations, opinions, all these things I had allowed to rent space in my head without paying utilities.

The funny part is that when you are in the middle of a hard chapter, you assume it is the entire book. You cannot see the comeback because you are still arguing with the plot. You think this is who you are now. Tired. Frustrated. Disappointed. Maybe embarrassed that you stayed too long, trusted the wrong person, made the wrong decision, or kept giving chances to something that had already shown you what it was.

Looking back, I do not romanticize those years. Some chapters were awful. Zero stars. The supporting cast was questionable, the leadership was missing, and apparently the budget for common sense had been eliminated. I would not voluntarily repeat them just because they made me stronger. I would have preferred strength through a nice vacation and eight hours of sleep.

But those chapters changed me. They made me notice people differently. They made me understand that the

person cracking jokes at work might be carrying something heavy. They made me less impressed by titles, polished speeches, and people who act like they have never struggled. Most importantly, they taught me that surviving something does not mean you have to stay attached to it forever.

Eventually, I stopped asking why everything had happened and started deciding what I wanted the next chapter to look like. That was when things changed. You cannot rewrite yesterday, but you can stop giving it editorial control over tomorrow. You can laugh again. You can leave. You can rebuild. You can tell the story and maybe help somebody who is currently sitting somewhere thinking their life has gone completely off the rails.

Your worst chapter does not get to write your ending. Sometimes the person you thought was falling apart was actually becoming someone much harder to break.

POST 15 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job Descriptions Have Become Fantasy Novels

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I kept reading postings that piled unrelated duties and impossible requirements into one job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to describe real responsibilities, clear reporting lines and compensation honestly.

At some point, job descriptions stopped describing jobs and became corporate fantasy novels written by people who have never done the job themselves.

You open the posting expecting a normal job description, and five minutes later you're reading a wish list for a human Swiss Army knife with leadership experience, technical expertise, emotional intelligence, Excel skills, weekend availability, and the ability to "move at the speed of business." They need three departments in one person but still take six weeks to schedule interview two.

It starts innocently. "We're looking for a dynamic, passionate, results driven leader." Then the responsibilities multiply. Manage operations. Grow revenue. Develop people. Recruit talent. Improve culture. Analyze data. Support sales. Fix broken processes. And, of course, "other duties as assigned," which means anything that goes wrong nearby is now your problem. You could be hired as Director of Operations and by Thursday someone is asking why the breakroom refrigerator smells weird or whether you can reset the printer.

Then we reach the qualifications: Ten years of experience. Bachelor's degree

required. MBA preferred. Six software platforms. Three certifications. Must thrive in ambiguity. "Thrives in ambiguity" usually means nobody can explain the process, the org chart is ancient, and the person training you quit two weeks ago. They want an independent self-starter who collaborates, challenges the status quo, follows established processes, makes confident decisions, and gets approval first. Be bold, but ask permission.

Then comes my favorite phrase: "Must be willing to wear many hats." How many? If I need the manager hat, recruiter hat, salesperson hat, accountant hat, IT hat, therapist hat, and maintenance hat, I'm going to need a company issued hat rack. Then comes "We work hard and play hard," which is comforting because I was hoping my next career move would feel like pledging a fraternity.

Finally, after describing a role requiring a COO, therapist, magician, mechanic, and hostage negotiator, they reveal the compensation: \$55,000 to \$160,000. Nothing says transparency like a \$105,000 guessing game. I would respect the company more if the description simply said, "We lost three people. Karen has the passwords. Nobody understands the spreadsheet.

Our best employee is exhausted. The printer is making a noise. We need an adult. Please start Monday."

Good candidates aren't afraid of hard work. They're tired of companies hiding chaos behind inspirational vocabulary. Tell people what the job really is, what success looks like, who they report to, and what it pays. A job description should explain an opportunity, not read like a hostage note assembled by six departments.

And if your entry level candidate needs five years of experience, an MBA, three certifications, and the emotional resilience of a bomb technician, congratulations. You are not hiring. You are shopping for a unicorn with a LinkedIn profile.

POST 16 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

CORPORATE TRAINING

The HR Seminar That Needed Its Own HR Seminar

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A friend invited me to an HR seminar where the exercises and corporate language became a story of their own.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted training to solve actual workplace problems instead of creating more jargon and breakout rooms.

You ever been invited to one of those HR training seminars where the title sounds like it was created by a committee that has never met an actual employee?

The other day, a friend asked me to join one. He said, "Come on, it'll be interesting." That should have been my first warning. Nobody has ever used the word interesting before an HR seminar and meant it. But I joined anyway, because apparently I enjoy watching PowerPoint drain the life from a room.

The session opened with a slide that said, "Building a Culture of Trust, Accountability, and Psychological Safety." Beautiful. Ten minutes later, we were discussing how managers should document conversations, save emails, recap meetings, and make sure there is a witness if someone looks irritated near the breakroom. Nothing says trust like preparing Exhibit A before lunch. Then came the role playing exercises. One person plays the manager. One plays the employee. Somehow, I always end up playing the employee with "performance concerns," which feels less like training and more like corporate typecasting.

The instructor asks, "Your employee has been late three times. How would you start the conversation?" Apparently, "Good morning, champion of flexible scheduling" was not approved.

Then we moved into conflict resolution. We were told to use phrases like, "Help me understand your perspective," and "What support do you need to be successful?" Everyone who has worked in corporate America knows the real conversation usually starts with, "Do you have a minute?" which is workplace language for ominous music. Next came employee engagement. The facilitator explained that employees want recognition, growth, communication, purpose, feedback, and leaders who listen. After decades of research, we have confirmed employees enjoy being treated like human beings. Then they introduced the anonymous survey. Anonymous, of course, except for your department, title, tenure, manager, location, and shift.

My friend whispered, "You're enjoying this way too much." He was right. I was treating the seminar like live comedy with mandatory attendance. By the end, we proudly received a certificate.

HR training has value. Good managers should listen, communicate, document, coach fairly, and handle difficult situations. But sometimes these seminars feel like teaching firefighters how to organize the supply closet while the building is burning. Workplace problems rarely happen because somebody forgot Slide 47. They happen because bad behavior gets ignored, good employees stop being heard, weak managers get promoted, and leadership acts shocked when the engagement survey looks like a cry for help.

So I learned something important that day: never accept a casual invitation from a friend who says, "Come to this HR seminar with me." There will be worksheets. There will be breakout rooms. Someone will say, "Let's circle back." Eventually someone will ask how the exercise made you feel. My answer? Engaged. Please document that.

POST 17 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

HIRING TRANSPARENCY

Michael, the Final Interview and a Mystery Invoice

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Michael sent me a puzzling story about repeated interviews and an unexpected payment-related complication.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to communicate clearly about hiring decisions and avoid imposing unclear costs on applicants.

I swear modern hiring has reached the point where you need a lawyer, an accountant, and a paranormal investigator just to figure out what happened after the final interview.

Michael sent me this story, and it is one of those situations where you read it once, laugh because it sounds ridiculous, then read it again and realize the ridiculous part actually happened. He made it through multiple rounds, reached the final stage, and was asked to prepare a mock presentation and sales call for the Founder and CEO. The job description clearly stated that anyone who made it to that final round and completed the presentation would receive \$400 for their time, whether they got the job or not.

Then the corporate magic happened. Michael completed the presentation. No offer. Fine. Not every interview ends with a job. But there was also no rejection, no update, no \$400, Gone. He was told he would hear back in three or four days. Three or four days became weeks. Weeks became a month. He followed up and was greeted by the warm, comforting sound of absolutely nothing.

At this point, I am convinced the \$400 entered the same dimension where recruiter follow-up emails and “urgent hiring needs” go to disappear. Maybe the payment is still interviewing. Round one: Does the \$400 align with company values? Round two: Can the \$400 thrive in a fast paced environment? Final round: “We really enjoyed meeting the \$400, but we decided to move forward with another candidate.”

Michael finally sent an email asking if somebody could please explain what happened. Completely unreasonable, obviously. Candidates should know better than to expect communication from companies that spent weeks evaluating their communication skills.

Companies ask candidates to be responsive, punctual, prepared, enthusiastic, flexible, patient, professional, and endlessly available. Miss one interview email for twelve hours and suddenly there are concerns about your interest. But when the company disappears for a month after promising payment, apparently everyone was just very busy.

And forget the job for a second. If you write in the job description that completing the final presentation pays \$400, that is not employer branding. It is not a suggestion. Pay the person. You cannot spend half the interview talking about integrity and then treat your own written commitment like the terms and conditions on a free trial.

The funniest part is that companies spend enormous amounts of money trying to improve their reputation as an employer. Consultants. Surveys. Career site videos. Culture campaigns. Then somebody decides not to send one email and not to pay \$400, and suddenly the candidate experience team has accidentally produced a LinkedIn case study.

Michael may not have gotten the job, but the company definitely earned something: a starring role in Corporate Hiring Theater, where the interviews are real, the promises are optional, and apparently the invoice is still waiting for its final interview.

POST 18 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

REPOSTED JOBS

Why Is the Same Job Reposted Every Two Weeks?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A job seeker asked why a vacancy kept reappearing after applicants had already invested time in it.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to explain what is actually happening rather than leaving people to guess.

The other day I had a conversation with someone who has been job hunting for weeks, and they asked me a question that deserves its own congressional hearing: "Why does the same job keep getting reposted every two weeks?"

Excellent question. Apparently modern hiring discovered recycling, and the only thing being recycled is your hope. You know the job. You applied in May. You customized your resume, answered questions already answered on your resume, and uploaded it so the website could ask you to type the whole thing back in. Then silence.

A few weeks later, you receive the sacred corporate blessing: "We've decided to move forward with other candidates." The exact same job. Same company. Same title. Same responsibilities. Same salary range. Did they disappear? Was there a rapture? Did the finalist pool collectively become goat farmers? Because according to the rejection email, the company found people whose experience "more closely aligned with the role." Yet three weeks later, the role is back online waving at you like an ex who said they needed space and immediately downloaded Tinder.

And sometimes it gets better: you apply again, get rejected again, and watch it get reposted again. At this point, you're not applying for employment. You're participating in a seasonal tradition. Spring: apply. Summer: rejection. Fall: repost. Winter: "We're still evaluating our hiring needs." Happy holidays.

I'm convinced certain job postings are no longer vacancies. They're corporate decorations. HR hangs them on LinkedIn like wreaths on doors. Nobody knows why they're there, but taking them down would make the building look empty. Yes, postings renew. Budgets change. Candidates decline. Positions reopen. Systems refresh listings. All of that happens. But when a company reposts the same role for six months while rejecting qualified people every three weeks, candidates are allowed to notice the comedy. Especially when the company is also posting about a "talent shortage."

A talent shortage? You've had hundreds of applicants, rejected nearly everyone, ghosted the rest, reposted the job four times, and somehow concluded there are no qualified

humans left. Maybe the talent isn't missing. Maybe the hiring process misplaced it. Peak corporate hiring.

Job seekers are told to improve resumes, polish LinkedIn, practice interviewing, learn new skills, network harder, follow up, remain patient, and stay positive. Meanwhile, companies can post the same opening for months and nobody asks them to explain themselves.

So if that familiar job appears for the fifth time, don't immediately assume you weren't good enough. Maybe they hired someone who left. Maybe the budget changed. Maybe the posting renewed automatically. Or maybe nobody inside the company knows what they want, but they're absolutely certain you should complete another personality assessment while they figure it out.

Either way, congratulations. The job may not remember you. But LinkedIn certainly does.

POST 19 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

OFFICE POLITICS

Communication Training Without Communication

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed workplace meetings promising open communication while employees learned to decode careful corporate phrases.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to speak plainly and make room for genuine discussion.

Corporate life is fascinating because nowhere else can adults spend forty five minutes discussing “communication” while refusing to say what they actually mean.

You start a job believing you were hired for your experience. Cute. Within a month, you realize half the role is doing your work and the other half is learning which personalities require subtitles. There’s the toxic boss who says, “My door is always open,” which means the door is physically open while their empathy remains closed. They value honesty until somebody uses it.

Then come the coworkers. Some are great people. Others will smile at you, ask about your weekend, borrow your charger, compliment your idea, and then present that same idea in a meeting like it was delivered by Harvard Business Review. You just think, “Wow. At least change the font before you steal it.”

Corporate teamwork is fun. Everyone is “one team” until a mistake happens. Then the team becomes a wildlife documentary. People scatter. Emails get forwarded. Screenshots appear. Someone who hasn’t spoken to you in

months magically remembers when you said something questionable in a Tuesday meeting. And never underestimate the performance review. You can save the company money, train half the department, cover three vacancies, fix problems nobody else wanted, and somehow the review will center around the one afternoon in March when your “tone felt slightly disengaged.” Congratulations on twelve months of results. Karen sensed an energy shift at 2:17 p.m.

Then there are meetings. Meetings to prepare for meetings. Follow-up meetings about the meeting. Recaps of the follow-up. A calendar invite titled “Quick Touch Base” that consumes 90 minutes. Half the people are muted, one is answering emails, and someone says, “Let’s take this offline,” which is corporate language for “Please make this problem disappear somewhere I don’t have to hear it.”

Of course, companies love the word family. “We’re a family here.” Fantastic. Which kind? Some families are loving and supportive, and some argue at Thanksgiving, borrow money, and stop speaking for seven years over a casserole dish. The funniest part is

loyalty. Employees are told to be committed, stay positive, go above and beyond, protect the culture, and think long term. Then one slow quarter arrives and suddenly your ten years of dedication are summarized in a twelve-minute Zoom call with HR staring at the floor.

Corporate life teaches you important lessons. Do good work. Keep receipts. Be kind, but don’t be naive. Help people, but notice who only appears when they need something. Respect your boss, but don’t confuse a title with character. And remember that “we’re all in this together” usually lasts right up until someone needs a scapegoat.

So smile in the meeting. Update the spreadsheet. Circle back. Leverage synergies. Protect your peace. And if your coworker says, “Don’t worry, I’ve got your back,” maybe just confirm whether they mean support or target practice.

POST 20 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

READER STORIES

Mary Reminded Me Why Laughter Matters

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader I call Mary wrote after a period of unemployment and difficult circumstances.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people dealing with real hardship to find understanding, encouragement and a moment of relief.

Every once in a while, someone sends you a message that reminds you why humor matters when life is doing its best impression of a dumpster fire with Wi-Fi.

A woman I'll call Mary wrote to me after reading one of my posts. She has been unemployed for nearly a year. I mean the full time unpaid job of job hunting: applications, interviews, rejection emails, ghosting, refreshing inboxes, questioning your professional existence, and making hand gestures at your laptop that would concern HR. She tried several times to return to a company where she had worked for years. Same software. Same job. She left professionally, gave notice, and moved on because commuting five hours a day made it almost impossible to see her children before bedtime.

Five hours. At that point, you are not commuting. You are entering transportation based witness protection. She described dark bus stops in Tacoma, strangers asking to borrow her phone, passengers discussing crimes near the courthouse, sleeping strangers on her shoulder, greasy bus windows, and Candy Crush becoming her emotional support system. That commute alone should earn "advanced crisis management" on

your resume.

And somehow, her former employer still decided they did not want her back. She could have walked in Monday, logged into the same system, and trained half the department by Tuesday. But modern hiring sometimes looks at someone who already knows the job and says, "Interesting. But have we considered someone who needs six months of training and three meetings to find the printer?" That part made me laugh. The rest did not. Because underneath the jokes was someone who was tired. Someone who had spent almost a year doing everything people tell job seekers to do: applying, networking, following up, staying positive, being patient, selling things she values just to keep going, and trying not to take rejection personally while companies make rejection feel incredibly personal.

She told me my post made her laugh on a day when she was about to cry. That stayed with me. We joke about hiring because sometimes laughter is the only reasonable response to an unreasonable system. But behind every funny job search story is a real person wondering why experience suddenly seems invisible, why loyalty gets forgotten, and why being "plug and

play" somehow still is not enough.

So if you are searching, remember this: a company not choosing you does not erase what you have done. A recruiter disappearing does not reduce your value. A former employer refusing to bring you back does not rewrite the years when you showed up, worked hard, trained others, solved problems, stayed late, and carried more than your title reflected. The job market takes enough time. Do not let it take your confidence too.

Mary, keep going. And tell the cats I apologize for making you laugh loudly enough to scare them. Although after a year of job hunting, I suspect those cats have heard things that would get the household banned from LinkedIn.

POST 21 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

LINKEDIN SATIRE

A Staircase Quote From My Former Boss

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A motivational LinkedIn post from a former boss made me think about the difference between slogans and behavior.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to satirize inspirational posting that is not matched by how people are actually treated.

Corporate LinkedIn is the only place where a man can post a blurry photo of a staircase, write "Success happens one step at a time," and receive 1,000 likes from people acting like he just discovered gravity.

The other day, my former boss posted one of those inspirational messages that sounded profound until you read it twice. By the third reading, I was fairly certain it had been assembled by shaking a bag containing leadership clichés, fortune cookies, and rejected slogans from a motivational calendar. It said something about embracing storms, building bridges, planting seeds, and becoming an eagle. I still have no idea whether employees were supposed to grow, fly, garden, or report to work wearing waterproof shoes.

Naturally, the post had more than 1,000 likes. Executives commented, "Powerful." Managers wrote, "This really resonates." One person called it "the leadership reminder we all needed today." Needed for what? Were we under attack by coherent thoughts? I read the entire thing and came away less inspired than before, but apparently everyone else had experienced a spiritual awakening beside the office Keurig.

This was fascinating because I actually worked for the man. Online, he wrote about compassion, accountability, listening, and treating people with respect. In real life, his leadership style was mostly dramatic emails, selective memory, and appearing five minutes before closing with a "quick question" requiring three spreadsheets and the sacrifice of your evening. He believed work life balance meant work was one side of the scale and more work was the other.

I considered leaving a comment. Nothing disrespectful, just something helpful like, "Great message. Will the real life version be released this quarter?" Unfortunately, I could not. He blocked me.

Apparently, my presence was interfering with the inspirational ecosystem. You cannot build an online reputation as a fearless champion of transparency while a former employee is wandering around with memories. The fastest way to promote open dialogue is to remove everyone who remembers how you actually behaved.

And that is the miracle of professional social media. A leader can ignore employees all week, post about

empathy on Friday, and spend the weekend collecting applause from strangers. The people who experienced the leadership get silence. The people who saw a stock photo of a lighthouse get a life lesson.

Maybe the post made perfect sense to those 1,000 people. Maybe they understood how the eagle was supposed to plant seeds on a bridge during a storm. Or maybe everyone was participating in the ancient corporate ritual of liking whatever the boss posts because careers have been built on less and performance reviews are always lurking.

Either way, I wish him continued success inspiring people who have never worked for him. As for blocking me, I understand. Sometimes inspiration needs shade especially when the truth keeps showing up carrying receipts and a working memory.

POST 22 / FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

CAREER CHOICES

I Resigned. That Is Not a Conspiracy.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Questions about my departure showed how suspicious some people become when someone leaves a job voluntarily.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to remember that choosing to leave is a valid decision, not evidence of a hidden scandal.

Nothing makes workplace detectives more suspicious than watching someone leave voluntarily. People can accept a firing, a layoff, or an alien abduction, but choosing peace on your own terms? Impossible.

I did not get fired. I did not get pushed out. Nobody from human resources chased me through the lobby carrying a cardboard box. I simply looked around and realized I was working inside a corporate escape room where every clue led to another meeting, nobody knew the password, and leadership kept insisting the locked door was an exciting growth opportunity.

Eventually, I saw enough. My nervous system submitted its resignation before I did. I handed in my notice politely, completed my responsibilities, and walked away with my dignity, my experience and my patience.

But apparently, people who had always wanted to be me were unprepared for the possibility that I no longer wanted to be there. The moment I left, they transformed into workplace detectives. People who never knew what I did suddenly knew exactly why I left. By lunchtime, they had sources. By dinner, they had a documentary. By the next morning, I had apparently been fired,

escorted out, banished from the industry, and launched into the parking lot by a conference room catapult.

They had spent months studying how I spoke, how I led, how I solved problems, and how I handled pressure. They wanted my title, my responsibilities, and probably my chair. But when I voluntarily walked away from everything they wanted, they needed to believe the company had rejected me. Otherwise, they would have to consider the horrifying possibility that their dream job came with anxiety and a weekly calendar that looked like a losing game of Tetris.

So they told people I was fired. I found this hilarious because I was already gone, already happier, and no longer required to attend meetings where twelve adults debated the color of a dashboard while sales were on fire. Meanwhile, the people celebrating my “removal” were inheriting my workload one mysterious folder at a time.

That is the strange thing about leaving a dysfunctional company. The people who stay often need to rewrite your exit because your freedom makes them uncomfortable. If you chose to leave, then maybe the company was not the prize. Maybe the title was not worth

the stress. Maybe the red flags they keep calling “challenges” are actually red flags wearing company polo shirts.

And this is for anyone who walked away to protect your peace: you owe no explanation to spectators determined to rewrite it. Let them just talk.

Leaving on your terms is not failure. Recognizing red flags is not weakness, and choosing yourself requires no defense. People who wanted your chair may pretend you were removed because admitting you left willingly would make them question why they are still fighting to sit in it. Let them inherit the title, the chaos, and the 9:47 p.m. “quick questions.” You keep your freedom. It has better benefits and no conference calls.

POST 23 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

SOCIAL MEDIA SATIRE

LinkedIn Dating, Now With Career Networking

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An unexpected connection request blurred the line between professional networking and personal invitations.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh about the odd social expectations that have migrated into LinkedIn.

LinkedIn used to be where people searched for jobs. Now it is where people search for jobs, validation, investors, soulmates, and apparently someone to split mozzarella sticks with on Thursday night.

The other day, a woman sent me a connection request. Her profile looked professional: polished headshot, impressive career, thoughtful posts, and enough leadership language to make a boardroom applaud. I accepted because that is what LinkedIn is for. You connect, exchange ideas, discuss business, and occasionally pretend you understood an article about artificial intelligence written entirely by artificial intelligence.

Within minutes, she messaged me. No introduction. No mention of work. No polite "I came across your profile and enjoyed your content." She went directly to asking whether I was single. I stared at the screen like LinkedIn had accidentally merged with Tinder during an update. I checked the logo twice. Still blue. Still professional. Still filled with people announcing certifications nobody asked about. Yet somehow I had entered the dating portion of the quarterly meeting.

I tried to keep things professional,

because nothing says romance like emotional boundaries and a resume. I replied that I mainly use LinkedIn for business connections. She responded with a heart emoji. Apparently my boundary had been reviewed by management and declined. Then came a compliment about my smile, followed by a question about what I enjoy outside of work. Ma'am, outside of work I enjoy not conducting surprise romantic interviews between posts about employee retention.

This is where LinkedIn dating becomes confusing. On Tinder, everyone understands the assignment. On LinkedIn, you do not know whether someone wants to recruit you, sell you software, invite you to a webinar, or introduce you to their mother. "I'd love to learn more about you" could mean your experience, your relationship status, or your willingness to purchase a leadership course for \$799 before midnight.

Even the flirting sounds corporate. "You have an impressive background" means nice pictures. "I think we have a lot in common" means we both clicked accept. "Perhaps we could continue this over coffee" means the networking agenda has been canceled and replaced with appetizers. Soon people will send

romantic follow-ups: "Just circling back on my previous affection. Please let me know if your feelings have availability this quarter." Soon LinkedIn Premium will offer crush requests, romantic InMail, and verified romance badges.

I am not judging anyone who finds love on LinkedIn. In this economy, happiness should be accepted wherever it appears. But maybe begin with hello. Build rapport. Read the room. At least pretend you admired my leadership philosophy before asking whether I am free Saturday.

LinkedIn is officially Tinder with resumes: everyone looks accomplished, nobody mentions their red flags, and every connection begins with someone pretending they only stopped by to network.

POST 24 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

LINKEDIN CULTURE

An Honest LinkedIn Post That Made Me Look Twice

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An unusually candid post by Alli Rizacos about a client session caught my attention.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make room for honest professional conversations instead of polished, empty performance.

The other day I saw a LinkedIn post so unexpectedly honest that I checked twice to make sure I had not opened Facebook after midnight.

Alli Rizacos walked into an all day client intensive ready to discuss ideal customers, DMs, and all the polished language we use to convince people we know what we are doing. One small complication: Alli had forgotten she was wearing a hickey on the front of her neck like a newlywed name badge. Not beside her collar. Not hidden behind her hair. Right there in the executive viewing area, where every client could admire it while pretending to study the whiteboard.

Naturally, panic arrived first. Alli had no makeup, no scarf, and apparently no emergency corporate turtleneck. She texted her business partner, probably hoping for a crisis plan involving concealer or an evacuation. Her partner told her to own it. And own it she did. When the clients walked in, Alli addressed the romantic elephant in the room. Yes, it was a hickey, but she was a newlywed. The clients laughed, everyone relaxed, and soon they felt like best friends.

Authenticity won. Trust was built. Business was secured. Somewhere, HR quietly closed its laptop and decided this was above its pay grade. But Alli left out the one detail LinkedIn truly needed: Who gave her the hickey?

We received the backstory, client reaction, business lesson, workshop recap, and reminder that the world needs the real us. Beautiful. Inspiring. But this investigation has a missing suspect. Was it her husband? Presumably. Was it married life enthusiastically saying congratulations? Probably. Was it a networking event where someone misunderstood “warm lead”? We cannot rule anything out until Alli releases a statement.

LinkedIn used to be where people announced promotions and pretended to enjoy Mondays. Now Alli is entering meetings with visible evidence that her work life balance is doing fine, possibly the strongest leadership metric all quarter. Forget revenue and engagement rates. The real KPI is arriving at a strategy session looking like your honeymoon submitted a performance review.

Because this is LinkedIn, the hickey became a sales lesson. Spill coffee? Resilience. Miss a flight? Adaptability. Get locked out? Overcoming barriers. Show up with a hickey? Relationship based selling with measurable neck level engagement. I respect Alli for sharing it. Most people would hold a legal pad against their throat and blame aggressive air conditioning. She said it, made everyone laugh, delivered the workshop, and got invited back. That takes confidence.

Still, everyone deserves answers. Alli, congratulations on the marriage, the client session, and a literal example of leaving an impression on LinkedIn. Tag the responsible party. Someone worked hard on that deliverable, and letting them remain anonymous feels unfair.

Until then, I will assume the husband exceeded expectations, demonstrated strong attention to detail, and completed the assignment ahead of schedule.

POST 25 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

WORKPLACE WARNING SIGNS

When the Office Becomes a Firing Mystery Movie

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone asked me how to recognize whether a company may be preparing to fire an employee.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to recognize troubling patterns while protecting their careers and dignity.

Someone asked me, "How can you tell when a company is getting ready to fire you?" Easy. The office becomes a mystery movie where everyone has read the script except you, and Human Resources is holding the ending.

The first red flag is when your boss becomes deeply interested in documenting everything. For three years, nobody cared where the files were, what time you arrived, or whether your weekly report used Arial or Calibri. Now every conversation ends with an email saying, "Just to recap." That is not a recap. That is your manager building a scrapbook for Human Resources, and unfortunately, you are the featured attraction.

Then meetings begin disappearing from your calendar. You used to be invited to strategy calls, planning sessions, and meetings about meetings. Suddenly, everyone is discussing the future without the person who apparently will not be part of it. You ask why you were left out, and your boss says, "We are just trying to streamline communication." Congratulations. You have been streamlined directly into the hallway.

Watch for the mysterious performance concerns that arrive without a history. Yesterday you were a valued contributor. Today your communication style lacks alignment, your energy feels inconsistent and leadership has concerns about your ability to navigate ambiguity. They cannot explain what that means, but they can schedule seven meetings to discuss it. When criticism becomes vague enough to fit anyone yet somehow applies only to you, start updating your resume.

Then comes the sudden request for passwords, vendor contacts, project notes, and a detailed list of everything you do. They will call it cross training. Cross training is useful, but when nobody is teaching you anyone else's job, you are not crossing anywhere. You are training your replacement while management smiles like this is an exciting development opportunity. The biggest red flag is the surprise calendar invitation titled "Quick Check-In" with your boss and someone from HR whom you have never met. There is nothing quick or casual about an unfamiliar HR representative joining at 9:00 Friday morning. If the invitation has no

agenda, your agenda should include removing personal files from your computer and locating the box where you left your dignity.

None of this means you should panic every time your manager says hello differently. But patterns matter. Document your work, save copies of positive reviews, understand company policies, refresh your resume, reconnect with your network, and start exploring options before the company explores them for you.

Red flags do not always mean you are getting fired tomorrow. Sometimes they mean leadership is disorganized, communication is broken, or your boss recently discovered a new management podcast. But when the clues begin forming a parade, stop pretending it is office decoration. Your career deserves more than waiting for HR to send the meeting invitation that everyone except you already understands.

POST 26 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

BOOKS & WRITING

The Great American Hiring Circus: The Book

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I shared that my book *The Great American Hiring Circus* was available through Barnes & Noble.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to find the book and continue the conversation about hiring through comedy.

My book, *The Great American Hiring Circus*, is available on Barnes & Noble, Inc. Grab your copy before they schedule eight interviews, lose your order, repost the book, and announce they've decided to move forward with another reader.

POST 27 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

CAREER COMEBACKS

The Employee Who Came Back to Buy the Company

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shared a story of being mistreated by a boss and later experiencing an extraordinary reversal of fortunes.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people dismissed by poor leaders to remember that one employer does not decide their future.

Someone shared a career story with me that started like a workplace horror movie and ended like a corporate plot twist Hollywood would reject for being too satisfying.

Years ago she worked for a toxic boss who treated leadership like a license to humiliate people. He interrupted her, dismissed her ideas, questioned her abilities, and made every meeting feel like a hostage negotiation with PowerPoint. If something went wrong, it was her fault. If something went right, it was somehow his vision. He managed through fear, communicated through sarcasm, and probably believed employee morale was a subscription the company had canceled to save money. Then he fired her.

She walked out hurt and wondering whether everything he said about her was true. That is the part people skip in comeback stories. Before the applause, there is usually a quiet season where someone questions their value because one insecure manager confused authority with accuracy. But she did not stay there.

She joined another company. She rebuilt her confidence, learned from

better leaders, took on bigger responsibilities, and kept growing. No dramatic revenge plan. No secret wall covered in photographs and red string. She simply became so good that the future eventually put her in a position the old boss could never have imagined. She became CEO. And then her company purchased the company that had fired her.

Imagine that announcement landing in the toxic boss's inbox. "We are excited to share that we have been acquired." Excited was doing heavy lifting that morning. He opened the announcement, saw her photograph, and experienced every emotion in the Microsoft Office suite. The woman he once treated as disposable was now sitting at the head of the table. The employee he believed was not good enough had become the person reviewing whether he was good enough. Somewhere in the room, karma adjusted its glasses, opened a notebook, and asked everyone to circle back. She fired him.

She did not enjoy ending his employment, but keeping him would let the same behavior damage more people. That is the difference between

revenge and responsibility. Revenge wants someone to hurt. Leadership stops them from hurting others. Still let us appreciate the poetry. He fired an employee and accidentally released a future CEO into the marketplace. He thought he was closing a chapter, but he was actually mailing the book to a publisher. Years later, she returned not asking for her job back, but owning the building where the job used to be.

So if a toxic boss has ever made you feel small, remember this story. Being rejected by someone with poor judgment is not proof that you lack value. Sometimes getting fired is not the end of your career. Sometimes it is the company unknowingly funding the opening scene of its own sequel.

And sometimes the person they escort out eventually returns through the front door, shakes hands with the board, buys the company, and schedules one final performance review.

POST 28 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

CANDIDATE GHOSTING

Ten Months of Silence. Same Job, Again.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Oneida Hernandez described an interview followed by silence as the vacancy kept being advertised.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to understand how much needless confusion a basic update could prevent.

Nothing says “we value people” quite like interviewing someone, disappearing for ten months, and then repeatedly advertising the same job as though the first group of candidates vanished during a company picnic.

Oneida Hernandez shared that she applied for a position ten months ago, interviewed, and was ghosted. No update. No rejection. No polite message saying the team had moved forward. Just silence so complete it could have been professionally recorded and sold as a meditation soundtrack for exhausted job seekers.

Then the same job appeared again. And again. Each promoted post helpfully reminded her that she had already applied, which is a beautiful feature if the goal is to let candidates revisit their disappointment without having to search for it manually.

Imagine opening LinkedIn, seeing the position you interviewed for almost a year ago, and receiving that cheerful little notice: “You already applied.” Thank you, LinkedIn. I had nearly healed. Please also remind me about every unanswered email, awkward interview, and recruiter who said, “We will definitely be in touch by Friday,” without specifying which year. At this

point, that job posting is not an opening. It is a seasonal decoration. The company takes it down occasionally, dusts it off, changes two adjectives in the description, and puts it back online so a new group of hopeful applicants can upload a resume and then type the entire resume into twelve separate boxes.

Maybe they hired someone who left. Maybe the budget vanished or priorities changed. Those things happen. But after a candidate prepares, interviews, rearranges and shows up for your process, a two sentence update is not a burden. It is basic respect. Then they wait. They check their inbox. They check spam. They reread the recruiter’s last message for clues like it is an ancient prophecy. A week passes, then another, and eventually they have to accept that the company known for “transparent communication” has apparently entered witness protection.

Oneida’s experience is not unusual, and that is exactly the problem. We have normalized treating people as disposable during hiring and then act surprised when employees no longer believe speeches about culture, loyalty, and trust. To every person who has watched the same position return more

often than a movie franchise nobody requested: the repost is not proof that you were not good enough. Sometimes it is proof that the company does not know what it wants, cannot make a decision, or believes hiring should operate like an endless audition where nobody wins but the job board.

Keep moving. Protect your confidence. Apply elsewhere. Let them continue searching for the imaginary candidate who checks every box, accepts half the salary, and can start yesterday. And if that job appears for a fourth time, do not feel rejected. You are clearly not watching a hiring process anymore. You are watching a corporate rerun with the same cast, the same script, and absolutely no ending.

POST 29 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

AGE DISCRIMINATION

The Applicant Who Apparently Came With a Fax Machine

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A question about how serious age bias is prompted me to revisit the stereotypes aimed at candidates over 50.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to evaluate judgment, adaptability and results rather than assumptions about age.

Someone recently asked me whether ageism in hiring is really that bad, and I almost called them on a rotary phone so we could discuss it while waiting for the evening news.

Apparently, the moment you turn 50, corporate America assumes you arrive at interviews carrying a fax machine, a paper map, and memories of dial-up internet. Never mind that you have led teams, survived recessions, trained people now rejecting you, and adapted to more software updates than the hiring manager has had performance reviews. You mentioned using Excel in 1998, so naturally they picture you typing with one finger while asking where the internet lives.

Then comes the 27 year old recruiter who says the company needs someone "comfortable with technology." This is said over Zoom while their microphone is muted, their camera points at the ceiling, and they spend six minutes trying to share the correct screen. You explain that you use LinkedIn, Instagram, Teams, Slack, AI, and systems the company has not finished implementing. But because you did not perform the answer as a TikTok dance beside a ring light, concern remains.

They want "seasoned leadership," but only if the seasoning was manufactured after 2001. They want 20 years of experience inside a candidate who looks 32, requests entry level pay, never gets tired, and says "absolutely" to a mandatory culture building escape room on Saturday. They are searching for a senior executive with the salary expectations of an intern and the knees of a teenager.

Ageism rarely enters wearing a name tag. It arrives disguised as "culture fit," "energy," "long term potential," or my favorite, "We're looking for someone who can grow with us." Grow where? The candidate already grew. That is why they recognize problems before they become a quarterly emergency.

Older candidates are not afraid of innovation. They are exhausted by companies renaming common sense and presenting it in PowerPoint as a revolutionary framework. They understand TikTok. They simply remember when attention spans lasted longer than a video of someone pointing at floating words. They learn new systems, lead across generations,

and can have a conversation without scheduling a "Quick Sync." The funniest part is that companies reject experienced people for being "overqualified," then pay consultants three times as much to explain why the inexperienced hire failed. Suddenly, wisdom is valuable again, provided it arrives with an invoice and a slide deck.

Age does not make someone obsolete. Refusing to learn does, and that problem has never checked a birth certificate. Some people have 30 years of growth. Others have one year of experience repeated 30 times with increasingly confident job titles.

Hire the person who can do the work, strengthen the team, and recognize a bad decision before it becomes a company wide email. And if they remember dial-up, show some respect. They survived the internet screaming at them before connecting, they might even survive HR.

POST 30 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

Why I Do Not Always Name the Companies

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader asked why I did not publicly identify every company involved in a troubling hiring story.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain why I focus on behavior and often protect the privacy of people who share stories.

Someone sent me a thoughtful message recently and asked a fair question: Why don't I name the companies that treat candidates badly? Why not drag the hiring managers into the sunlight, tag the HR department, ring the corporate bell?

Trust me, the temptation is real!!! There are days I want to turn one of my posts into a corporate wanted poster. I want to name the company that scheduled eight interviews, requested an unpaid strategy project, disappeared for six weeks, and then sent a rejection email addressed to the wrong person. I want to tag the recruiter who promised an update by Friday but apparently never specified which Friday, which month, or which calendar system. I want to identify the executive who lectured a candidate about professionalism while arriving late, unprepared, and visibly reading the resume for the first time.

But behind nearly every ridiculous story I share is a real person who trusted me with it. Someone who is unemployed, worried, embarrassed, angry, or simply exhausted from pretending another automated rejection did not hurt. Many still need work in the same industry. Some signed agreements. Some fear retaliation. Others just do not want their worst

professional moment becoming searchable forever because a post went viral while they were trying to pay their mortgage.

So I change details. I leave out names. I protect the person who shared the story, even when the company involved deserves to be placed in a folding chair under fluorescent lighting and forced to complete its own application portal. This page was never built to sacrifice people for engagement. It exists to make them laugh, remind them they are not alone, and say out loud what many are afraid to say because their next paycheck may depend on remaining politely silent.

Besides, anonymity has its own special magic. When I describe a company ghosting candidates after seven interviews, dozens of leaders read it and quietly wonder, "Is this about us?" If you have to ask, please enjoy this complimentary moment of self reflection. My post may not include your logo, but your nervous marketing department already recognized the plot.

The emotional truth is that people do not send me these stories because they want revenge. Most want to be heard. They want confirmation that they were

not crazy, weak, too old, too experienced, or somehow unworthy because a broken hiring process treated them like an application number with inconvenient feelings. They want someone to turn humiliation into humor and frustration into a reminder that their value did not disappear because a recruiter did.

So I will keep telling the stories. I will keep protecting the people. I will keep aiming the sarcasm directly at the behavior, where it belongs. The companies may remain unnamed, but the lesson will not.

And if a hiring manager reads one of my posts and feels personally attacked, I have wonderful news: no one mentioned your name. Your conscience apparently tagged you all by itself.

POST 31 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

WORKPLACE REALITIES

Working to Pay the Bills Is Not Giving Up

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A friend described returning to a difficult job because mortgages, bills and family responsibilities did not disappear.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize the people who stay employed under pressure while trying to protect themselves.

I was talking with a friend recently, and somewhere between “How are you holding up?” and “I’m back at work because apparently mortgages and medical bills have formed a strategic partnership,” we accidentally summarized modern corporate life better than any leadership conference ever has.

She had gone back to a job that had already shown her exactly what it was. Nothing had magically improved. The meetings were still meetings, the nonsense was still arriving on schedule, and the same people who created the chaos were still asking everyone else to be more resilient. The only thing that changed was her, and that might be the most valuable promotion nobody can put on LinkedIn. Once you stop expecting dysfunctional workplaces to suddenly discover self-awareness, corporate life gets easier to decode.

Team meeting? “Everything is great.” Smile. Nod. One on one with the boss? “Never better.” Meanwhile your soul is sitting in the parking lot with the engine running, wondering if a cabin has Wi-Fi. Then comes the brainstorming meeting, which in some companies is less “brainstorming” and more twelve adults staring at a PowerPoint while one person says, “Let’s circle back,” until

everyone loses the will to circle anywhere. Eventually you learn that not every thought requires airtime, not every ridiculous idea deserves a debate, and sometimes the healthiest response to “We need to leverage cross functional synergies” is a slow nod and the understanding that nobody in the room knows what that means either.

You stop volunteering your nervous system for unpaid overtime. You stop treating every chaotic email like a national emergency. You stop believing that “we’re a family” means anything more than somebody is about to ask you to do three jobs before lunch. Plenty of people stay because they need the paycheck, insurance, the mortgage payment, or enough stability to take care of the people they love.

That will never make a motivational poster with a mountain on it, but it is real. There is a special kind of maturity in realizing, “I do not need this place to validate me. I just need direct deposit to arrive on time.” You do your work, protect your peace, document everything, smile when appropriate, nod when necessary, and when someone announces another “transformational initiative,” you resist asking what happened to the previous seven.

My friend called it “navigating the fuckery to pay the mortgage,” and I think that may be the most accurate corporate mission statement ever written. Sometimes success is not loving your job. Sometimes success is knowing exactly what it is, refusing to let it consume you, collecting the benefits, paying your bills, protecting your family, and keeping enough of yourself intact to laugh about it afterward.

So here’s to everyone sitting in a meeting saying, “Absolutely, great point,” while internally calculating how many business days remain until payday. You are not disengaged. You are professionally navigating the fuckery.

Corporate Nonsense Has Reached Facebook Too

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I decided to let LinkedIn readers know they could also follow my posts on Facebook.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted this community to keep sharing laughs and hiring stories on another platform.

Apparently one social media platform wasn't enough bad decision making, so yes, I'm on Facebook too. Same sarcasm. Same corporate nonsense. Same commentary that probably keeps HR awake at night. Follow me there too before Facebook starts recommending me to you anyway.

<https://lnkd.in/gW-yMwix>

"

The Boss Who Followed a Resignation With Revenge

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A man shared concerns about what happened after he left a toxic manager for a different job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to document inappropriate conduct and keep records when leaving a hostile workplace.

Some bosses accept your resignation, wish you well, and move on. Others treat it like the opening scene of a revenge thriller.

A man reached out to me with a story that sounds less like employment and more like corporate fiction. He had worked under a program manager in a toxic environment and eventually did what people are told to do when a workplace becomes unhealthy: he resigned, moved on, and found another opportunity. He resigned. You know, that normal adult process where you send notice, return the laptop, shake a few hands, and move on.

Except apparently his former manager was not ready for the season finale. After he landed another contract, he discovered there was a problem getting access. That is when he says he learned his previous leadership had reported that he had been terminated for cause, even though he had resigned. Read that again. He left voluntarily, moved forward, secured another opportunity, and somehow the previous workplace allegedly decided to rewrite the ending after the movie had already been released. Most toxic bosses are satisfied with ruining your Monday.

This one apparently purchased the lifetime subscription.

Imagine moving forward and then discovering your old manager has followed you into the sequel like a villain whose contract mysteriously got renewed. Managers need to understand that employees leaving is not a declaration of war. People resign. People find better opportunities. People decide the environment is no longer healthy. You are allowed to be disappointed. You may even stare out the conference room window and whisper, "We had such potential." What you are not supposed to do is turn someone's departure into a creative writing assignment.

And this is why documentation matters. Save the resignation email. Keep the confirmation. Keep performance reviews, relevant messages, and anything that shows what happened. Because apparently "I resigned" and "we terminated him" can become two different corporate documentaries depending on who gets the microphone. The funniest part about toxic leadership is how often the same people preach professionalism while behaving like rejected contestants from

a reality show.

A good leader understands that when someone resigns, the employment relationship ends. You wish them well, learn what you can, and move forward. A toxic leader apparently hears, "I resign," and thinks, "Wonderful. I have notes." That is not leadership. That is a grudge with an Outlook account.

So here is the reminder: if you are leaving a difficult workplace, be professional, document everything, keep copies, and never assume that because you walked out the door, everyone inside suddenly discovered maturity. Sometimes the most important part of quitting is making sure your resignation has receipts. Apparently, moving on now requires receipts too.

Because apparently some managers do not just burn bridges. They try to follow you across the bridge carrying gasoline, paperwork, and a company laptop.

POST 34 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

GHOSTING & NETWORKS

Ghosted by Someone Who Used to Know You

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman described being ignored after an interview by someone with whom she already had a personal connection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to see why a simple, respectful follow-up matters even more when people know each other.

There is a special kind of silence in hiring that hits differently when it comes from someone who used to know your lunch order, your habits at work.

A woman reached out to me today with a story that captures how strange hiring has become when the person across the table is not a stranger, but someone who actually knows you. She had made it to a second interview. So far, so normal. She prepared, showed up, answered the questions, and did the song and dance we all know by heart. "Tell me about yourself." "Why are you interested in this role?" "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Probably somewhere not answering this question again. Then came the twist: the person interviewing her was a former coworker. Even worse, someone she considered a friend.

You would think that might make the process more human. This person already knew her work ethic, personality, background, and knew she could do the job. But instead, familiarity made the disappearing act more impressive. After the interview came silence. Not a quick "Hey, they went another direction." Not a "I can't share much, but I wanted you to know." Nothing. She texted. Still nothing. At

that point, ghosting officially left recruiting and became a personal hobby.

Getting ignored by a recruiter you met for 27 minutes on Zoom is annoying, but you can tell yourself they are buried under 400 applicants and a calendar held together by caffeine. But a former coworker? A friend? Now I am not asking about the job. I am wondering whether we still wave if we see each other at Target or suddenly become fascinated by the cereal aisle. Imagine sitting across from someone who once knew your coffee order, your old boss, your work stories, maybe joined you at happy hour, only to suddenly transform into "Thank you for your interest. Please continue to monitor our careers page." Corporate amnesia is incredible. Yesterday: "We should definitely stay in touch!" Today: witness protection.

And this is exactly why candidates are exhausted. People keep saying applicants need to be more professional, more patient, more understanding, and more grateful for the opportunity. Fine. But communication is a two way street. If someone gives you their time, especially through multiple interviews, sending a short update should not

require legal counsel, executive approval, and a six week communication strategy.

Hiring managers talk endlessly about candidate experience. Here is a revolutionary idea: treat candidates like people. You do not owe everyone a 14 page performance review. You do not need to explain every internal discussion. Sometimes all it takes is one message saying, "I wanted to let you know we moved forward with someone else." Thirty seconds. No webinar required.

Because rejection may sting, but silence from someone who knows you hits differently. At that point, the candidate is not wondering why they did not get the job. They are wondering whether the friendship was also moved forward with another candidate.

Marshmallows at the Corporate Dumpster Fire

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The repeated gap between leadership slogans and employees' daily experiences made the comedy feel unavoidable.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to know the jokes are a way of challenging patterns that should no longer feel normal.

Somewhere in corporate America, right now, a meeting is happening about employee engagement, and the person leading it has ignored three emails, canceled two one on ones, while reminding everyone to be grateful for the pizza.

And that, my friends, is why I keep writing. I might not be able to fix corporate America, but if the dumpster fire is going to keep burning, I'm at least going to bring marshmallows and write about it. Somebody has to document the madness. Because apparently we have entered an era where job descriptions require ten years of experience in software invented Tuesday, while "we'll get back to you by Friday" has become a fictional genre.

Modern hiring. People sometimes ask me, "Do you really think posting about this stuff is going to change anything?" Probably not overnight. I'm not expecting a CEO to read one of my posts, stand up during a board meeting, throw the employee handbook into the air, and announce, "My God... Alexander was right. Cancel the personality tests and give everyone a raise." But silence certainly hasn't fixed anything either.

For years, candidates have been

ghosted after interviews, employees have been told they're "family" five minutes before being escorted out with a cardboard box, and experienced people have become "overqualified" for jobs they could do half asleep.

Then there are the unpaid assignments. My personal favorite. Nothing says "we value your time" like asking a candidate to build a twelve page strategy presentation, redesign half the company, solve three revenue problems, and possibly cure seasonal allergies before being told, "We decided to move forward with someone whose experience more closely aligns."

And let's not forget toxic bosses. The motivational posting, culture preaching, "my door is always open" executives whose door is technically open because they removed it after too many employees tried to resign through it. They'll post about empathy at 7:00 a.m., destroy someone's confidence at 9:15, and by lunch they're liking a quote about servant leadership.

Beautiful. Will writing about any of this magically repair the workplace? No. But sometimes people just need to know they're not the only person sitting at home wondering whether an interview

really needed six rounds, a case study, a blood sample, and references from three former presidents. That matters. Humor matters too. Because if we don't laugh at some of this nonsense, we're going to end up screaming into the company issued laptop, and apparently IT wants those returned in "good working condition."

So I'll keep writing about the ghosting, fake urgency, corporate buzzwords, inspirational posts from people who inspire resignations, and the magical hiring process where everyone is "moving quickly" for four months. Maybe I won't fix corporate America.

But as long as the dumpster fire keeps burning, I'll be standing nearby with marshmallows, a notebook, and absolutely no intention of pretending I don't smell smoke.

My Five-Year Plan: Never Answer This Again

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interviewer asked me where I saw myself in five years, reviving a question that rarely reveals much.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to ask about real work and readiness rather than reward rehearsed predictions.

The other day I was sitting in an interview thinking about how strange the whole process has become. Two adults in a room, pretending this is a normal conversation, while one person asks questions from a list and the other tries to answer without sounding unemployed.

Everything was going fine until the interviewer looked down at his notes and said, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Sir, based on the last five years, I'm just hoping to see myself with affordable health insurance and a laptop charger that hasn't disappeared.

Interview questions have become their own corporate escape room. Nobody is escaping, but everyone pretends the answer to "What is your greatest weakness?" will unlock employment. Apparently "I care too much" is acceptable, while "meetings should be emails" is considered a culture concern. Then comes, "Tell me about yourself." You have my resume, LinkedIn, application, assessments, and probably my blood type. But sure, let me summarize my career in ninety seconds while you nod like a judge on a talent show.

Next: "Why do you want to work here?" Because I have admired your

quarterly earnings since childhood. The role fits my background, the company seems interesting, and I remain passionate about receiving money for labor. Then we get behavioral questions. "Tell me about a time you had conflict with a coworker." Wonderful. Would you like the professional version, or the director's cut where Kevin replied-all to 184 people and blamed Outlook?

"Describe a time you failed." Easy. I once accepted a meeting invitation titled "Quick Sync." I was young. I trusted people. "What would your previous boss say about you?" Depends which boss. One would say dependable. Another would say I asked too many questions, which is corporate language for "he noticed things." One probably still thinks morale can be repaired with pizza.

And no interview is complete without "Do you have any questions for us?" Yes. Who had this job before me? Why did they leave? Why has this position been posted six times? Is "fast paced environment" code for understaffed? When you say "we're like family," are we talking supportive family or Thanksgiving dinner where two uncles haven't spoken since 2009?

The strange part is companies keep saying they want authenticity, then hand candidates questions that require theater. Applicants rehearse weaknesses that sound like strengths, employers rehearse culture statements nobody believes, and everyone pretends "competitive compensation" means something. Maybe interviews would improve if we asked simpler questions. Can you do the job? Can you learn what you don't know? Can you work with people without turning every Tuesday into an HR investigation? Will you communicate, solve problems, and survive a spreadsheet?

That tells us more than asking where someone sees themselves in five years. Because after enough interviews, the only honest answer is, "Hopefully not sitting here answering this question again."

POST 37 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

INTERNAL HIRING

Mark Deserved a Conversation, Not a Portal Status

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Mark shared that he interned with a company, received praise and then learned about his application through a portal.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted teams to show direct respect to people who have already worked alongside them.

A guy named Mark sent me a message that perfectly summarizes modern hiring, and I swear some companies are treating basic human communication like it is a premium subscription feature.

Mark interned with a company all summer. His manager told him he was doing a great job. Naturally, Mark did what anyone in that position would do: he applied for a full time role in the same group. That is when the corporate magic show began. He was told to be patient, which in hiring language usually means, "Please keep refreshing a portal while we make decisions behind a curtain." So Mark waited. Two weeks. Three weeks. No email. No conversation. No call. Nothing. Then one day he checked the internal job portal and discovered he had been rejected. Let me repeat that part: he was still working there. The company had an intern showing up, doing the job, getting praised, interacting with the manager, and somehow the communication strategy was, "Eh, he'll find it eventually."

That is not recruiting. That is an Easter egg hunt with emotional damage. So Mark went to his manager and asked

what happened. The answer? They were looking for a very specific skill. Interesting. Was that skill listed in the job description? Of course not. Apparently the position came with a secret menu. Maybe job descriptions should include a disclaimer:

"Requirements listed below are for entertainment purposes only. Additional qualifications may appear after rejection." And here is the part that gets me. Odds are, somebody knew this skill mattered before Mark applied. Somebody could have said, "You're doing great, but this role requires X." That would have taken thirty seconds. Instead, the company chose mystery, suspense, and a corporate scavenger hunt.

Companies love talking about transparency, employee experience, culture, engagement, internal mobility, and developing young talent. They will build a 42 slide PowerPoint about retaining employees and then make an intern discover his rejection like he is checking whether a delayed package finally shipped.

And Mark told me something else: he cannot publicly talk about it. That is why I do. Because for every person

commenting publicly, there are hundreds quietly going through the same nonsense while trying not to upset a recruiter, manager, former employer, future employer, algorithm, networking contact, or somebody's cousin in HR.

This is not about demanding that every applicant get the job. Rejection happens. Companies make choices. Candidates move on. But humanity should not disappear just because somebody clicked "apply." If someone has spent an entire summer working for you, contributing to your team, receiving positive feedback, and applying internally, maybe they deserve more than discovering "Not Selected" in a portal between lunch and their next assignment.

A conversation costs nothing. Respect costs nothing. Clarity costs nothing. But apparently some companies still have all three listed as "preferred qualifications."

POST 38 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

A Toxic Manager Can Ruin a Tuesday Before 9 AM

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a manager who blamed employees for everything and turned ordinary work into an anxiety test.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to understand that intimidation is not loyalty, and silence is not contentment.

I remember when I worked for a manager who could turn a perfectly normal Tuesday into a hostage negotiation before 9:00 a.m.

You could walk in with coffee, ready for the day, and five minutes later wonder whether you had somehow ruined the company and the economy. Toxic managers have a gift for making every problem feel personal. Sales are down? Your fault. Someone called off? Somehow your fault. A customer is upset about something that happened before you got there? Congratulations, still your fault. Meanwhile, if the team had a great week, suddenly it was because of "leadership."

I remember watching people change around him. Good employees stopped speaking up. Confident people started second guessing themselves. Meetings became less about solving problems and more about figuring out which boss had shown up. Was it Motivational Monday Guy? Silent Treatment Tuesday? Public Humiliation Wednesday? Or my personal favorite, "I never said that" Thursday, sponsored by selective memory.

The strangest part is how normal it

starts to feel. You begin preparing for conversations like you are entering a courtroom. You save emails. You screenshot messages. You rehearse sentences because one wrong word might trigger a lecture about accountability. Eventually, you stop asking, "Is this normal?" and start asking, "How do I survive until Friday?"

Sometimes we laugh later because humor is cheaper than therapy. But underneath the jokes, there is something serious. A bad manager can make talented people believe they are failing. They can make someone dread Sunday night. They can turn an employee who volunteered for everything into someone who just wants to make it through the day unnoticed. That is the part companies often miss. People do not always leave jobs because of money. Sometimes they leave because they are tired of being talked down to. Tired of walking on eggshells. Tired of being blamed for everything and thanked for nothing. Tired of being told they are "too sensitive" by someone who explodes because a spreadsheet has the wrong font.

I remember the day I finally stopped

taking it personally. I realized his behavior said far more about him than it ever did about me. I did not become less capable because someone with a title had poor emotional control. I did not lose my value because he failed to recognize it.

Eventually, I left. And something funny happened. The sky did not fall. My career did not end. I did not miss being criticized before breakfast. In fact, I started remembering who I was before I spent so much energy managing someone else's moods. That is what toxic managers never understand. They think fear creates loyalty. They think silence means respect. They think people staying means people are happy.

Sometimes people are quietly updating their resumes. And one day, the employee they kept treating like they were replaceable finally discovers the door. The manager calls it "unexpected turnover." Everyone else calls it Tuesday.

Sometimes Opportunity Knows a Guy Named Kevin

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how relationships sometimes open doors that qualifications alone seem unable to unlock.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to value genuine connections without abandoning skill-building or merit.

At some point in your career, you realize the workplace has two separate instruction manuals. One says, "Work hard, build your skills, get experience, and earn your opportunity." The other one, apparently handed out at a secret breakfast meeting, says, "Or just know Kevin."

We love telling people that success is about qualifications. Get the degree. Get the certification. Learn the software. Build the resume. Gain ten years of experience for an entry level position. Become fluent in Excel, PowerPoint, budgeting, public speaking. Then you apply for the job and find out the position went to the vice president's neighbor's cousin who once "helped with a project." Suddenly, your seventeen years of experience are competing against someone whose primary qualification is that they played golf with the hiring manager in 2018.

I have watched talented people prepare for interviews like they were defending a doctoral dissertation. They research the company, prepare examples, practice answers, update their resume. Then they hear, "We decided to go in another direction." That direction has a first name, and apparently the hiring

manager already had their phone number.

This is where networking becomes the corporate version of having the secret password. You can know the business, understand the customer, have the results, and bring receipts from every job you have ever held. But somewhere inside the building, someone says, "I know a guy," and suddenly your carefully formatted resume becomes decorative wallpaper in an applicant tracking system.

Now, relationships matter. Of course they do. People trust people they know. Referrals can be valuable. A recommendation can tell you things a resume cannot. The problem is when "networking" becomes a polite word for deciding who gets the opportunity before everyone else finishes filling out page seven of the application.

Imagine spending three weeks interviewing, meeting six people, completing an assessment, preparing a presentation, answering "Where do you see yourself in five years?" for the 400th time, and then learning the winning candidate used the advanced hiring strategy known as "went to

college with Steve." Beautiful. Maybe job postings should become more transparent. "Bachelor's degree preferred. Ten years of experience required. Strong leadership skills. Excellent communication. Must know somebody named Greg." At least, then we could plan accordingly.

Because talent matters. Experience matters. Results matter. But anyone who has spent enough time in corporate America has watched the mysterious power of familiarity beat qualifications at least once. So build your skills. Do excellent work. Keep learning. But also build genuine relationships, help people without expecting something back, stay connected, and treat people well.

Because sometimes the person who remembers how you treated them five years ago is the person who opens a door today. And if none of that works, start looking for Kevin.

POST 40 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

WORKPLACE DIGNITY

Constructive Termination: The Corporate Euphemism

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A message introduced me to the phrase constructive termination and the practice it can describe.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to communicate decisions honestly instead of making work unbearable to force an exit.

Someone messaged me today and introduced me to a corporate phrase that sounds like it was invented by HR during a very long meeting: constructive termination.

For anyone unfamiliar, constructive termination is basically when a company does not officially fire you, but makes your job so miserable or impossible that leaving starts to feel less like a career choice and more like escaping a building with the fire alarm going off. They don't hand you a termination letter. That would be too straightforward. Instead, they may cut your responsibilities, change your schedule, pile on impossible expectations, exclude you from meetings, move the goalposts, strip away support, document every breath you take, and then act surprised when you finally say, "I can't do this anymore."

Corporate America loves a technicality. Apparently firing someone directly is old fashioned. Why do that when you can turn their workday into an obstacle course and then announce, "They chose to leave"? Yes, technically. In the same way someone "chooses" to jump out of a window because the room is

on fire.

And this is where it gets ridiculous. People in these situations often cannot simply quit. They may need unemployment benefits. They may have a mortgage, kids, bills, groceries, or that outrageous luxury known as electricity. So they keep showing up while management puts their desk on a tiny island and waits for the tide to come in.

Then comes the performance review. Suddenly the employee who was "doing great" six months ago has developed seventeen mysterious deficiencies. Communication needs improvement. Attitude has changed. Leadership presence is questionable. Collaboration is lacking. Translation: "You have started noticing what we are doing, and frankly, that is making this awkward."

The corporate theater is impressive. Everyone knows something is happening, but nobody says it out loud. Your boss stops making eye contact. HR sends emails that sound like they were written by a hostage negotiator. Meetings appear on your calendar with titles like "Quick Touch Base," which is

corporate for "Please bring emotional body armor." Coworkers become fascinated with the floor because they have seen enough nature documentaries to avoid the wounded gazelle.

Constructive termination can have legal implications depending on the facts and where you live, so document what is happening and consider professional advice before making a major decision. But culturally, we should call this what it often feels like: firing someone without wanting to admit you fired them. If a company wants someone gone, have the courage to make the decision. Stop turning the workplace into Survivor: Conference Room Edition and waiting for the employee to vote themselves off the island.

People deserve clarity, dignity and honesty. And if your management strategy requires making someone miserable enough to resign, congratulations. You did not avoid bad leadership. You just gave it a nicer corporate name.

The Interviewer With the Influencer Ring Light

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A video interview turned into an unexpected lesson in professional lighting and presentation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at modern interview theater while calling for a little more seriousness and preparation.

There are moments in an interview when you realize this is not going the way you imagined. Maybe the hiring manager is late. Maybe they have not read your resume. Mine happened the second the camera turned on. At that point, I knew professionalism had officially entered its influencer era.

There he was behind a ring light, glowing like the CEO of YouTube. I was wondering if I had accidentally joined an interview or a livestream called "Watch Me Reject Qualified People in 4K." He smiled and said, "Thanks for taking the time to meet with me." I had researched the company, studied the job description, prepared examples, checked my internet. He prepared by making sure his cheekbones had executive presence.

Then the questions started. "Tell me about yourself." Sir, you have a ring light large enough to guide airplanes onto a runway. I have questions about YOU. But I stayed professional. I walked through my experience while the glowing circle reflected in his glasses. I could not tell if he was evaluating my background or checking his good side.

Then came the classics. "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Hopefully

not buying lighting equipment to conduct interviews. "What is your greatest weakness?" Apparently expecting interviews to look less like influencer auditions. "Why do you want to work here?" At this point? Curiosity. I needed to know whether round two came with a makeup artist.

Then he explained that the company was looking for someone "authentic." Authentic. Coming from a man illuminated like he was filming a sponsored apology video. He told me culture was extremely important and they wanted people who could "bring their whole selves to work." Judging by the setup, he had brought his whole production studio.

The interview ended with the traditional corporate promise: "We'll circle back very soon." And suddenly the ring light made sense. Because modern hiring is theater. Candidates need optimized resumes, rehearsed answers, personality tests, unpaid assignments, and seven interviews. Hiring managers apparently need cinematic lighting.

Three days later, I received the rejection email. "After careful consideration, we've decided to move forward with candidates whose

experience more closely aligns with our needs." Fair enough. Maybe they found someone with better experience. Maybe stronger qualifications. Or maybe someone who brought their own softbox.

Either way, I learned something valuable: prepare for the interview you think you're having, but be prepared to accidentally guest star on someone's corporate podcast. Hiring keeps getting stranger. We used to walk into an office, shake hands, talk about experience, and decide whether there was a fit. Now you log into Zoom and wonder whether the hiring manager is about to ask about leadership, recommend a moisturizer, or tell you to smash that subscribe button.

I still want companies to take hiring seriously. I just did not realize "seriously" now came with professional lighting.

POST 42 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

AGE & EMPLOYMENT

Terminated, Rehired, and Left Carrying the Doubt

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described being terminated after requesting remote work during COVID and later asked to return.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people mistreated at work to remember that poor treatment does not erase their capability.

Someone shared a story with me that made me laugh for about three seconds, then made me angry for the next twenty minutes.

She worked for a company for years. During COVID, after asking to work from home because she was older, she was terminated. Not “restructured.” Not “position eliminated.” Terminated. Then, a few weeks later, they suddenly wanted her back. Apparently corporate forgiveness moves quickly when money enters the chat. She returned because unemployment rules did not exactly come with a button that said, “No thanks, these people are awful.” She worked remotely for months, then was ordered back into the office. Her longtime supervisor had already been fired, the furniture she was given caused physical pain, and the environment became so miserable that she documented everything.

That decision may have saved her. She had journals. Emails. Dates. Instructions in writing. Records. While the company developed a sudden case of selective corporate amnesia, she had receipts. Then came the unemployment fight. They argued she had quit. She argued that she had been pushed into an impossible situation. What should have been one hearing turned into hearings,

an attorney, an appeal, months of stress, and the possibility that she might have to repay a year of benefits. Eventually she won. But winning did not undo what the experience had taken from her.

She told me that after years of being criticized, pushed around, questioned, and forced to defend herself, she lost confidence in her competence. She was older, tried for years to find another job, and eventually stopped looking. Now she is worried about losing her home. That is the part companies never put in the employee handbook. There is no section called “What happens when we spend years convincing a good employee that they are the problem.” There is no leadership seminar called “How to destroy someone’s confidence and still make the quarterly meeting by 2:00.” And there is no HR form labeled “Please describe the emotional damage in three bullet points or fewer.”

This is why I keep telling people to document everything. Save the emails. Keep notes. Write down dates. Follow up verbal conversations in writing. If something feels wrong, do not rely on your memory six months later while someone across the table suddenly remembers it very differently. Documentation is not being difficult. It

is not being paranoid. It is protecting yourself in a world where “We never said that” remains one of corporate America’s favorite magic tricks.

And if you have ever left a toxic workplace questioning your intelligence, your value, or your ability, remember this: being treated badly for a long time can make even capable people doubt themselves. That doubt is not proof they were right. Sometimes surviving the workplace was the achievement. Sometimes keeping your dignity was the promotion.

And sometimes the strongest thing you can do is walk away, keep the receipts, and slowly learn to trust yourself again.

POST 43 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

CAREER RECOVERY

The Toxic Boss Who Thought Firing You Was Winning

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation about a boss feeling triumphant after pushing someone out sparked a broader reflection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to focus on rebuilding their lives instead of seeking a former boss's approval.

The other day, someone said to me “Isn’t it funny how a toxic boss always looks relieved when they finally push someone out the door?”

And it’s true. The smirk. The fake sigh of relief. The “We wish you the best in your future endeavors” email that reads like a Hallmark card written by a robot. They convince themselves the problem is solved, the budget saved and life will run smoother without you. Except here’s the twist nobody tells you, the relief is temporary. Like a cheap candle from the clearance bin, it burns bright for about five minutes before the smoke alarm goes off.

Because here’s what really happens. The toxic boss replaces you with someone younger, cheaper, or simply less experienced. At first, they pat themselves on the back. “We saved \$20K a year and got someone eager!” But fast forward a few months and suddenly deadlines are slipping, customers are complaining, and the “eager” replacement is googling “how to make Excel pivot tables” while sweating through their third panic attack.

Meanwhile, you? You’ve moved on.

You’ve found a better job, or a healthier team, or at the very least a place where your ideas aren’t stolen and your weekends aren’t spent answering “urgent” texts about printer jams. You’re smiling again. You’ve got energy. Maybe you even got a raise. And here’s the kicker, the very boss who thought you were replaceable is now lurking on LinkedIn, watching your updates like an ex scrolling through Instagram at 2 am. It eats them alive. They thought you’d struggle. They thought you’d beg to come back. Instead you leveled up and now they’re stuck cleaning up the mess they created. That “budget friendly” hire didn’t last. The turnover is embarrassing. And the higher ups are asking uncomfortable questions like, “Why did we lose someone with 20 years of experience?”

But toxic bosses never admit fault. No, no—they spin the story. “Oh, they weren’t the right cultural fit. They weren’t passionate enough. They had unrealistic expectations.” Translation: They refused to work 60 hours for free and still smile about it. And the irony? These bosses start to hate from the sidelines. Suddenly, your name pops up in meetings as the gold standard for the very things they once criticized. “We

need someone like Alex, remember how they always kept projects moving?” Or, “We could use someone with their experience on this client account.” The same traits that were once “a problem” are now sorely missed.

Here’s the funny part though, you don’t even care anymore. You’re too busy thriving. You’re too busy doing work that values you, being paid what you’re worth, and actually enjoying your weekends. Their bitterness is background noise at this point, like elevator music you forgot was playing.

So yes, it’s funny when a toxic boss fires you thinking they’ve won. For a moment, they feel relieved. But time flips the script, you move on, level up, and they’re left with regret, turnover, and the sinking truth: you were the best thing they had.

POST 44 / SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Graduation Dates Are Not Carbon Dating

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed employers treating graduation years on resumes as clues about someone's competence with technology.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to judge skills and adaptability without age-coded shortcuts.

Let's talk about graduation dates. Apparently, in 2026, employers aren't just screening resumes for skills anymore. Nope. They're digging through resumes like archaeologists, dusting off your college graduation year and treating it like a carbon dating experiment.

"Hmm... graduated in 1995? Ah yes, this fossil must have roamed the Earth during the great dial-up era. Probably can't handle Microsoft Teams." And the kicker? Some folks are convinced companies are literally sorting candidates by graduation dates. Forget skills, forget results, forget the fact that you've survived more office chaos than most recruiters have been alive for, the date next to your degree is apparently the scarlet letter of the modern resume.

Is it legal? Questionable. Is it happening? You bet. The job market has basically turned into high school cafeteria politics "Oh, you sat at the Class of 2002 table? Sorry, we only hire from the Class of 2018 clique. They're more fun at karaoke." The rejection phrases, of course, are dressed up nicely, "Not the right culture fit." Translation: You remember when fax machines still roamed the Earth. "Too experienced." Translation: We think you might ask for health insurance and

weekends off. "Overqualified." Translation: You know more than our boss, and that scares us.

But let's get real for a second. Who's more adaptable the 24 year old who panics when Outlook freezes or the 54 year old who survived Y2K, Blackberry keyboards, Palm Pilots, Windows Vista, and three separate CEOs who all said "we're like a family here"?

Who has more stamina: the new grad who needs a nap after back to back Zoom calls, or the veteran who's downed four cups of coffee before 9 am., balanced a mortgage, raised kids, helped aging parents, AND still finds time to be everyone's free IT support? And yet, resumes with older graduation dates get filtered out like they're spam mail. The irony? These are the same companies posting on LinkedIn about how "nobody wants to work anymore." Nobody wants to work? Or nobody wants to work for companies that treat wisdom like wasted potential and loyalty like a liability?

Because the truth is, candidates over 40, 50, 60 aren't asking for yachts, private chefs, or offices with personal assistants. They're asking for fair pay, respect, and maybe enough vacation time to sit on an actual beach instead of

their cousin's basement futon. That's not "too much." That's just being an adult. If companies sort resumes by graduation dates, let's be honest, it's not about "fit." It's fear. Fear of experience, fear of paying for value, fear of hiring someone who actually knows how to fix things without Googling it.

The good news? Every time they pass on a "seasoned" candidate, another company wins because when the Wi-Fi dies or Slack melts down, it's not Chad the intern who saves the day. It's the one with the graduation date HR ignored. Your value isn't the year you graduated, it's the storms you've survived. That's priceless.

Fired and Dumped by Text in the Same Week

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A social post described losing a job and a relationship through text messages within days of each other.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to bring humor and encouragement to an experience that deserves more human care.

I just saw a post on my feed that said: "What do you do when you get let go from your job and dumped by a guy BOTH through a text message in the same week?"

And honestly if that's not the modern definition of a double elimination, I don't know what is. First off, the audacity of both HR and "Jason from Bumble" to deliver life changing news with the same level of effort as canceling a dentist appointment. A text. Not a phone call. Not even an awkward coffee meeting. Just a ping on your screen that ruins your entire week. Corporate America and modern dating really are cousins, equally lazy, equally ruthless, equally emoji filled.

Think about it. The company text probably read: "We regret to inform you..." The boyfriend text? "It's not you, it's me." Different fonts, same rejection energy. Both are the professional version of ghosting with a paper trail. Apparently heartbreak now comes with convenient contactless delivery too.

So what do you do? You laugh. Because the alternative is crying into a pint of ice cream while updating your resume and your Hinge profile at the same time. (Pro tip: don't get the two mixed up. Accidentally listing "team player,

strong Excel skills" under dating interests sends the wrong signal.) Here's the thing, being dumped and being laid off in the same week isn't a failure, it's efficiency. It's the universe saying, "Why drag this out? Let's get all your heartbreak done by Friday so you can start fresh on Monday." That's time management. That's synergy. Somewhere an MBA professor is applauding.

And let's not forget the comedy of timing. You're unemployed and single simultaneously, which technically makes you more "available" than you've ever been in your life. Unlimited bandwidth. No meetings. No date nights. Just you, Wi-Fi, and the opportunity to reinvent yourself without asking anyone's permission.

So what should you really do? Throw yourself a party. Invite your friends. Call it the "Dodged a Bullet Bash." Make a playlist, "Take This Job and Shove It," followed by "Since U Been Gone." Toast to the fact that both your boss and your boyfriend were too cowardly to face you in person. That's not a reflection on you, that's a reflection on their character (or lack thereof). Because the truth is, you don't need a company that cuts you loose via text. And you definitely don't need a

partner who thinks breakups belong in the same category as Uber notifications. You deserve better than both.

So, whether it's a job, a relationship, or both, remember this, rejection by text is not the end of your story. It's the beginning of your comedy special. Survive it, laugh at it, and keep moving forward. Because the best revenge isn't a reply text, it's building a life so good they'll wish they hadn't hit send.

And if you ever do get both dumped and fired in the same week? Order some shots, post the story, and wait. Because trust me, you'll get more support from strangers online than you ever did from HR or "Jason."

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PORTALS

Another week of The Interview Games, another collection of stories that would be hard to invent without someone accusing me of making the corporate world look ridiculous. A senior leadership posting wants a person who can run operations, lead people, fix budgets, handle chaos, develop teams and probably repair the copier. Then the salary arrives and suddenly the employer is asking for a chief executive at a price usually reserved for the folding chairs. I believe companies are entitled to manage their budgets. I also believe experienced people are entitled to say no when the numbers do not match the responsibility.

This week, one reader shared a story I cannot shrug off: months spent job hunting, an offer finally signed, notice given, equipment delivered — and then the job disappeared. Think about what happens between those corporate milestones. Someone may have told their family the search was over. They may have declined another opportunity, stopped interviewing, or let themselves feel hopeful for the first time in months. To an organization, reversing an offer may look like an unfortunate administrative decision. To the person who made life decisions around it, it can change everything. A laptop delivered to the door does not replace the paycheck that never comes.

There was another story about a woman with decades of tech-sales experience whose work impressed the interviewers, until the conversation turned to her “energy.” And there was the familiar obsession with graduation dates, which some employers seem to treat as archeological evidence. I have news for anyone who believes a candidate stops learning once a few candles appear on the cake: people who survived fax machines and dial-up also helped build the systems you are now trying to explain to them. If an employer wants adaptability, judgment, resilience and the ability to lead through a crisis, it would help to recognize those qualities when they show up with a few years of experience attached.

Age is not a job skill. A graduation date is not a leadership assessment. Neither should be a substitute for asking whether somebody can actually perform the work. We keep talking about shortages of talent while inventing increasingly imaginative ways to ignore talent already standing at the door. That is not a shortage. That is a filtering problem dressed up in a respectable job title.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE

The hiring theater was busy this week. Candidates were judged for looking something up during a remote interview. Another person asked why the same vacancy kept appearing again and again after applications had disappeared into silence. An applicant described months without an update while the company continued to advertise the role. Somewhere inside those systems, there may be reasonable explanations. Budgets change. People leave. Positions are paused. Plans fall apart. The problem is that companies can explain every one of those things to themselves while explaining none of them to the person waiting.

Imagine how little it takes to handle a candidate with respect. Read the resume before the interview. Be honest about pay. Tell people which skills matter. If the role changes, say so. If you are not moving forward, send a clear answer. None of that requires a twelve-month transformation program, a new vendor or another town hall about the candidate experience. It requires remembering that the person on the other end of the portal has bills, responsibilities, expectations and a clock that continues to run after your meeting ends.

The interview questions deserve a little attention too. I listened to another version of “Where do you see yourself in five years?” and found myself wondering whether the interviewer had also been asked where the company would be in five years. Business conditions change quickly. Families change. Teams change. The job market changes. I would rather talk about how somebody handles difficult decisions today than ask them to deliver a five-year prophecy with a straight face. And if the greatest weakness question ever officially retires, I will attend the farewell party. I may even bring cake.

There was also the urge to turn a job interview into an amateur psychology clinic. A person's conversational style, body language or neurological differences should not invite unqualified diagnosis. Hiring can evaluate communication and collaboration when those skills matter to the role. But we should be very careful about confusing “this person does not perform the interview the way I expected” with “this person cannot do the job.” Corporate America already has enough unlicensed experts in the comment section. The actual interview should be better than that.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

THE WORST BOSSES ARE TEACHERS

Several stories this week returned to toxic leadership because the damage rarely stops when the workday ends. I remembered managers who could turn an ordinary Tuesday into a courtroom. Readers described bosses who became hostile after a resignation, ignored employees when convenient, or acted triumphant when somebody finally left. Then comes the company speech about employee engagement, culture and being a family. Apparently the family motto is “Please report to Conference Room B for your disappointment.”

I do not believe every unpleasant conversation makes a boss toxic. Leading people can be hard. Decisions are sometimes unpopular. Expectations should be clear and accountability is important. But there is a difference between demanding good work and making a person afraid to ask a reasonable question. There is a difference between giving constructive feedback and turning an employee into a convenient explanation for every problem. A company cannot build loyalty from fear and then act shocked when employees quietly open LinkedIn on their lunch breaks.

A reader also introduced the phrase “constructive termination.” The phrase may sound polished enough for a legal department, but the underlying experience is not pretty: work made so difficult that a person feels pushed toward leaving. If a relationship is no longer working, leaders should address it fairly and directly. Turning someone's work life into an escape room so they resign on their own is not clever management. It is a failure to be straightforward with another human being.

And I want to say something to the people who are still in jobs they dislike: I understand that leaving is not always an available answer. A mortgage does not disappear because your manager is obnoxious. Medical bills do not take a vacation because morale is low. Sometimes the brave decision is to stay temporarily, do the work, protect your boundaries and make a plan. Staying does not mean you approve of the culture. It may simply mean you are doing what your family needs right now. Please do not let anyone turn that practical choice into a judgment about your courage.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHY I KEEP WRITING

A few moments from this week deserve to end on a different note. One person described finding hope after a painful career stretch. Another talked about discovering a way forward after being underestimated at work. Someone else shared a story so personal that the joke was only the invitation to a larger conversation. Those messages matter to me more than numbers on a post. Behind the reactions, views and comments are people reading during lunch, between interviews, after a layoff, or at the kitchen table after everybody else has gone to bed.

Sometimes a reader asks why I do not identify every company that handles a candidate badly. Part of the answer is simple: the point is the behavior, and people who trusted me with a private story should not be exposed to satisfy the internet's appetite for a villain. Sometimes the company is obvious from the circumstances; sometimes it is not. What matters is whether the reader recognizes the problem and whether somebody with the authority to fix it pays attention. If a manager reads one of my posts and feels singled out without being named, perhaps that is an excellent opportunity for self-reflection. No task force required.

If you are currently employed, please look around. That former colleague who sends you a message may be doing everything right and still hearing nothing. You may not be able to hire them, but you can make an introduction, offer a useful recommendation or simply answer with kindness. If you are a hiring leader, consider applying for one of your own vacancies. Use the same forms. Wait for the same updates. Answer the same screening questions. Ask yourself whether this process would make you proud if somebody you loved had to depend on it.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHAT TO REMEMBER

I will keep applying, listening and writing. I will keep finding the ridiculous details because humor lets people talk about things that otherwise feel too heavy. I will keep celebrating the employers who get it right and questioning the processes that fail. I will also keep reminding candidates that an automated rejection does not erase a career, a bad boss does not define their future, and a confusing hiring process is not an accurate measurement of their human worth.

So here is the thought I want to leave with you: somebody's biggest career moment may be sitting quietly in your inbox right now. It may look like a resume attachment, a follow-up note, a request for an update, or a message asking for help. Before you send another template or leave it unanswered, remember the person. The joke is how we start the conversation. Respect is why the conversation matters.

See you next week. Unless the ATS needs another copy of my resume. In that case, see you after the password reset.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS

Behind every application is somebody's real life.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES