



AUGUST 16 - AUGUST 22, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

42

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

84

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a question that sounds simple until you have applied for a job recently: what does the modern hiring process actually feel like for the person living through it? Not the recruiting brochure version, where every interaction is thoughtful and the talent team communicates with telepathic efficiency. The real version. The application. The follow-up. The strange interview. The silence. The midnight rejection that sounds like it was written by a cheerful refrigerator.

I apply, observe and take part in interviews when invited. I examine what companies say they want and compare it with what applicants experience. Readers send me their own messages and stories, too. Sometimes an encounter is funny enough to write itself. Sometimes a stranger tells me something heartbreaking that deserves to be heard. I write about both, because the hiring process is made of human moments, not just systems and statistics.

Humor is how I get the door open. The purpose is bigger than a joke. Applicants deserve clarity, pay that fits the role, reasonable interview expectations, prepared interviewers and the courtesy of an answer. Recruiters deserve realistic workloads and leaders who let them treat people well. Good companies exist, and I want them recognized. The absurd ones keep providing material, occasionally before I have finished my coffee.

August 16 through August 22 brought a sharp mix of experiences and reader stories: age discrimination that hides behind words like “energy,” an older job seeker met over coffee, baffling salary offers, surprise layoffs, a hard-won job offer, bogus resume services, overnight rejections, questions that feel like police interviews and a PowerPoint that practically became a seventh panelist. There were leadership lessons, raccoon logic and a few reminders that people can have a good career without their entire life matching a five-year spreadsheet.

Inside are the complete written posts from my LinkedIn account export for those seven Chicago calendar days, arranged in publication order. Before each is a short interpretation of what inspired it and why the subject mattered. Those notes provide context; the original post wording is left intact. This is The Interview Games: one part observation, one part comedy and one very persistent request that companies remember there are actual people on the other side of the application.

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The week at a glance.

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POST 01 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

AGEISM & HIRING

Experience Is Not a Culture-Fit Problem

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I was thinking about the coded language that turns years of achievement into a supposed hiring disadvantage.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted experienced applicants to see that a vague label does not erase real skills or results.

Ageism is the only workplace policy that everyone pretends is illegal while practicing it like a morning stretch.

One day you're "seasoned leadership." The next day you're "not quite the vibe," because you accidentally used the phrase "circle back" without irony and someone under 27 heard it like a whale song. I'm at the point where hiring managers squint at my resume the way a barista squints at a \$50 bill. "This is... a lot of experience. Are you still hungry?" Sir, I have been hungry since 2008. I have eaten layoffs, mergers, reorgs, and the last donut in the break room that someone touched but didn't take.

Job posts are my favorite genre. "Seeking a high energy self-starter with 12+ years of experience in a tool invented during lunch." Pay: enough to cover your streaming subscriptions and one (1) emotional support sandwich. Benefits: a wellness app that reminds you to breathe while the company forgets to staff your team.

Then the interview questions. They'll watch you describe two decades of results, and then a panelist named Brayden asks, very gently, "How do you handle change?" My friend, I have had five CEOs, seven org charts, and a

software rollout that required three passwords and a prayer. I don't handle change. I host it. I cater it. I send it calendar invites.

The unspoken fear is always the same: we'll ask for money, boundaries, and basic clarity. The horror. A grown adult who knows their market value and doesn't think "fast paced" should mean "we're disorganized but proud."

And don't get me started on "culture fit." Translation: "We want someone who works like they're 22 but accepts pay like they're 16." Culture isn't a playlist and matching sneakers. Culture is whether you treat people like humans when the quarter gets weird.

Here's what experience really is: pattern recognition with receipts. It's knowing which fires are real and which are just someone panicking in a Slack thread. It's making decisions without needing a three hour meeting and a deck titled Vision_FINAL_FINAL2.

So if you're job searching at 40, 50, 60, stop shrinking. Stop sanding off your competence to look "fresh." You don't need to cosplay youth to be valuable. You are the upgrade.

And if you're hiring, try this radical idea:

build teams like you're building a house. Put some people in who know where things collapse. Mix the rookies with the veterans. Innovation doesn't come from everyone being the same age; it comes from someone saying, "We tried that in 2016 and it exploded," and someone else saying, "Cool, what if we don't do the exploding part?"

Ageism is wild. But so are we. We've got skills, stories, and enough lived experience to spot nonsense in 4K. If they call you "overqualified," congratulations: you're just qualified enough to scare the wrong places.

Also, stop letting anyone shame you for knowing things. Knowing is the whole point. If they want "entry level energy," they can buy a Red Bull. If they want results, hire adults. Very real.!

POST 02 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

PAY & VALUE

The \$25-an-Hour Senior Talent Bargain

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman shared a recruiting approach offering roughly \$25 an hour despite her substantial background.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted the compensation conversation to reflect the senior-level judgment an employer expects.

Apparently, somewhere in recruiting, we crossed the line between “competitive compensation” and “would you like to sponsor this company with your labor?”

A woman recently shared that a recruiter contacted her about a contract role paying around \$25 an hour. The recruiter had already looked at her LinkedIn profile. She could see the years of experience. She could see the job titles. She could see that this was not someone fresh out of school trying to collect their first professional email signature. And yet the message still arrived with the confidence of someone presenting a once in a lifetime opportunity. Her response was perfect: “I’m not interested in volunteer work.” Honestly, that belongs in the Job Search Hall of Fame.

Because this is the part that makes candidates feel like they’ve accidentally entered an alternate universe. Companies will write job descriptions asking for ten years of experience, strategic leadership, advanced systems knowledge, project management, executive communication, the ability to solve problems before they exist, and apparently the spiritual gift of being available after hours. Then compensation enters the conversation

and suddenly the budget looks like it was approved at a garage sale. They want Fortune 500 experience on a “please bring your own lunch” budget.

And yes, everyone understands that companies have salary ranges. Budgets exist. Not every role is going to pay what every candidate wants. That’s normal. What’s strange is when recruiters actively approach experienced professionals whose backgrounds clearly suggest they are nowhere near the compensation range, then act surprised when the candidate declines. You found them. You read the profile. You saw the experience. You initiated contact. This wasn’t an accidental swipe right on LinkedIn.

The funniest part of her story was explaining that she lives in the DC area, has a mortgage, and a dog with enough health issues to apparently require its own benefits department. That dog alone probably needs dental, vision, a 401(k), and a dedicated HR representative. Twenty five dollars an hour isn’t going to cover the vet bill, never mind the mortgage. At that point the dog should be included in salary negotiations as a dependent consultant.

Recruiting would become much easier if we stopped treating compensation

like the dramatic reveal at the end of a game show. Put the range in the posting. Look at the candidate’s experience before reaching out. Ask yourself whether the offer makes sense for the person you’re contacting. And if you’re approaching a seasoned professional with a rate that would require them to downgrade their career, refinance the house, cancel Netflix, and ask the dog to pick up a weekend shift, maybe don’t call it an “exciting opportunity.”

Experience has value. If a company wants senior level judgment, it should budget for more than enthusiasm, exposure, and cheap coffee alone.

Call it what it is: community service with Outlook access.

POST 03 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

REAL PEOPLE / REAL STORIES

A Starbucks Coffee and a Year of Searching

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation at Starbucks with an older man who had been searching for work for over a year stayed with me.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how even a small act of recognition matters to someone carrying a long job search.

This morning I went to Starbucks to grab my usual double shot, because one shot of caffeine doesn't even make a dent in 2026.

Behind me was a man in his 60s, neatly dressed, polite, but with that look of quiet exhaustion that you only recognize if you've been through it yourself. I bought him a coffee, small gesture, big caffeine diplomacy and that's when the conversation started.

He told me he'd been job hunting for over a year. Top performer. Decades of experience. Used to lead teams, train managers, hit every goal. Now? He can't even get an interview. He said "I used to hire people. Now I can't get anyone to call me back." He laughed, but not in a funny way, more like the "if I don't laugh, I'll scream into my LinkedIn profile again" kind of way.

He's applied to hundreds of jobs. Rewritten his resume twelve times. Taken online courses just to "stay current." But all he hears is silence or worse, the dreaded "you're overqualified." Overqualified, as if knowing too much disqualifies you from paying your bills.

We joked that modern job hunting feels less like a career path and more like a

reality show where the prize is health insurance. You upload your resume, click submit, and the system eats it like a vending machine that swallowed your dollar. Then you wait. And wait. And eventually, you start wondering if you dreamed your entire professional history because apparently no one else can see it.

He said, "It's weird I used to be the person hiring. I used to think I'd never have to start over." I nodded, because haven't we all thought that at some point? That our experience, our loyalty, our hard work would protect us? But now, the job market's an emotional obstacle course. Everyone's running on caffeine, anxiety, and whatever's left of their optimism.

We talked about the irony of it all, how you can have decades of experience and still get ghosted by someone half your age who hasn't even turned off their Out of Office message. He said, "I just want a chance to contribute again. I'm not done yet." And that line hit me like espresso to the soul. Because that's what so many people feel right now, not entitled, just unseen.

When we finished our coffee, I told him, "Keep showing up." He smiled, said, "Every day. Because one of these

days, someone's going to remember that experience still matters." And that's the thing about people like him, they don't quit. They show up, even when the system forgets how to see them. They dust off their resumes, power up their laptops, and chase hope like it's still hiring.

Modern job hunting is absurd, rejection emails that sound like breakups, AI gatekeepers judging your worth by keywords and jobs wanting decades of experience in apps barely out of beta. But the ones still showing up? Absolute legends.

So if you see someone like him in line, buy them a coffee. You won't fix the system, but for five minutes, you'll remind them they're seen and sometimes, that small kindness is enough to keep someone going.

POST 04 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

OFFICE CULTURE & HUMOR

Corporate Buzzword Bingo Has No Winner

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The never-ending meeting vocabulary of synergy, leverage and circle-back provided a familiar target.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at jargon that takes up meeting time without saying anything useful.

Corporate America has officially turned meetings into a game of Corporate Bingo, except nobody wins, there are no prizes, and somehow the meeting still ends with another meeting.

You know the board. "Synergy." "Leverage." "Move the needle." "Low hanging fruit." "Think outside the box." "New normal." "Due diligence." "Reinvent the wheel." Add "circle back," "take this offline," "put a pin in it," and "let's align," and congratulations: someone in a quarter zip just got Bingo before the first slide of the PowerPoint loaded.

The best part is watching everyone nod like these phrases contain classified business intelligence. Someone says, "We need to leverage our existing strengths to create synergy across teams," and twelve people immediately start typing notes. Notes about what? Nobody knows. But it sounded expensive, so it must be important.

Then comes the person who wants to "move the needle." Which needle? Where is it currently located? Who owns the needle? Is there a Needle Steering Committee? Do we need Finance approval before touching it? Nobody asks because we all understand the first rule of Corporate

Bingo: never interrupt a buzzword while it is migrating naturally into another buzzword.

Eventually somebody announces that we should focus on the "low hanging fruit." This phrase has survived decades despite the fact that most offices contain absolutely no fruit unless you count the three bananas slowly becoming a science experiment in the break room. Still, everyone agrees. Low hanging fruit it is. We will harvest it immediately after we circle back, align stakeholders, and determine whether picking it is within scope.

"Think outside the box" is another personal favorite. Usually said by the person who has rejected every idea that was even slightly outside the box. They don't actually want outside the box thinking. They want you to remain firmly inside the box, but perhaps decorate it with a tasteful PowerPoint transition.

And then there's "let's take this offline," corporate language for, "Please stop talking because this meeting is already 37 minutes over and Karen has asked whether the spreadsheet can be made more blue."

By the time someone says "let's put a

pin in it," I'm mentally collecting my Bingo winnings and wondering whether I can exchange them for PTO.

Somewhere in the room, a brave employee is still waiting for someone to use plain English, but by then Legal has scheduled a follow-up, HR has created a task force, and Operations has renamed the coffee machine a hydration asset.

My proposal is simple: every conference room gets an actual Corporate Bingo card. The moment someone completes a row, the meeting immediately ends. Laptops close. Cameras turn off. Everyone goes home. If someone manages to use "synergy," "leverage," "circle back," "move the needle," and "low hanging fruit" in one sentence, the entire company gets Friday off.

That is the kind of employee engagement initiative I am prepared to fully align behind.

POST 05 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

INTERVIEW CHAOS

The PowerPoint Interview That Would Not End

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panel interview stalled while the team searched for the right version of its company presentation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interview teams to prepare as carefully as they expect candidates to prepare.

Nothing prepares you for a panel interview quite like watching a group of accomplished professionals spend ten minutes trying to figure out which PowerPoint is actually the final PowerPoint.

The other day I was on a panel interview, and they wanted to share a slide about their company. Easy enough, right? One person said, "I have it." Another said, "No, I think I have the updated one." Then someone opened `Company_Overview_Final.pptx`. Wrong version. Next came `Company_Overview_Final2.pptx`. Also wrong. Then `Company_Overview_FINAL_FINAL.pptx` appeared, followed by `Company_Overview_FINAL_FINAL_US E_THIS_ONE.pptx`, which became my favorite because nothing says confidence like shouting instructions at yourself through a filename.

By this point, I had learned more about the company's internal processes than any slide could possibly teach me. One panelist was sharing an empty desktop. Another asked, "Can everyone see this?" while we were all staring at his email inbox. Someone else said, "You need to stop sharing so I can share," and suddenly the interview turned into a hostage negotiation between six adults, Zoom, PowerPoint, and an

offended SharePoint folder. I came prepared to talk about leadership, strategy, culture, results, and how I could contribute. Instead, I was watching an archaeological expedition through corporate file storage.

Eventually someone found the presentation. The filename was `Company_Overview_FINAL_FINAL_FINAL_US E.pptx`. Of course it was. The slide finally appeared, and the first bullet said, "We value efficiency." I nearly had to turn my camera off. The next slide talked about collaboration while two panelists were still debating who had editing rights. Then came "innovation," presented from a deck that looked like it had survived three mergers, four reorganizations, Windows XP, and at least one employee who left in 2014 but apparently still owned the master copy.

That is the funny thing about panel interviews. You are supposedly there so the company can evaluate you, but every once in a while they accidentally give you a front row seat to evaluate them. Candidates notice when nobody knows who is leading. We notice when five people ask the same question because nobody compared notes. We notice when a company says it moves fast but needs a committee vote to

locate Slide 4. And yes, we absolutely notice when the word "final" appears in a filename four times, because that is not a file anymore. That is a cry for help.

At the end they asked if I had any questions. I had several, but most involved whether `Company_Overview_FINAL_FINAL_FINAL_USE` was truly the final version or whether somewhere inside SharePoint there was a sacred file named `Company_Overview_FINAL_FINAL_FINAL_USE_THIS_ONE_v7 REALLY_FINAL`. I kept that question to myself. Some mysteries belong to Corporate America.

If they invite me back, I am bringing popcorn, a flash drive, and an IT specialist. By then, the PowerPoint has earned its own seat on the interview panel.

POST 06 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

SOCIAL MEDIA & HIRING

A Recruiter Asked Me to Be Quieter

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recruiter cautioned that my public commentary might hurt my employment prospects.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain why authenticity and discussing broken hiring processes are worth protecting.

A recruiter just messaged me: “Be careful what you post online. It might hurt your chances of getting hired.”

I stared at that message because it might be the funniest career advice I’ve received all year. What chances are we protecting exactly? The chance to upload my resume into an ATS that sends it to the same place as missing socks? The chance to get rejected at 12:46 a.m. because apparently Dracula works in Talent Acquisition? Or the chance to survive six interviews, meet half the company, and then hear, “We decided to move in another direction”?

I tried being careful online. I did. I tried the polished LinkedIn version where every sentence sounded approved by Legal, HR, and three vice presidents copied unnecessarily. I posted things like, “Excited to connect with innovative leaders driving meaningful transformation through strategic collaboration.” I had no idea what it meant, but it sounded expensive, so I approved. I spent months typing corporate oatmeal and pretending it had seasoning. I was positive, inspirational, and brand safe. And guess what? Still ghosted.

I still received “Dear Candidate” emails from companies that had interviewed

me several times and forgotten my name. I heard, “Your background is incredibly impressive,” followed by the professional equivalent of being escorted to the parking lot. I watched companies advertise “competitive compensation” only to discover they were competing with salaries from 2009.

So now I post the truth, with humor, sarcasm, and enough emotional damage to qualify as professional development. If that makes me risky, perhaps the hiring process needs the background check.

Companies love saying they want authenticity. “Bring your whole self to work,” they say, followed quietly by, “Actually, maybe leave 62% of that self in the parking lot.” Be authentic, but professionally authentic. Speak up, but only if everyone agrees. Challenge the status quo, but submit your challenge by Friday. Authenticity is encouraged until somebody becomes authentic. Then suddenly there is an HR meeting titled “Concerns Regarding Tone.”

I have done polished. I have done careful. I have done buzzword loaded, algorithm friendly professional beige. It did not stop layoffs, prevent ghosting, or convince an ATS that decades of

experience equal seven keywords in a job description. So now I would rather sound human: funny, flawed, sarcastic, experienced, exhausted, and still hopeful. The right employer will not call an emergency board meeting because I joked about panel interviews. If one LinkedIn post destroys my candidacy, imagine when they discover I also have opinions in person.

So yes, recruiter, I’ll be careful. Careful not to become so polished nobody can tell there is a person underneath. Careful not to confuse silence with professionalism. And especially careful not to use “synergy” unless there are witnesses. My chances will be fine. My tolerance for corporate nonsense remains on a performance improvement plan.

POST 07 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

CORPORATE LANGUAGE

Please Retire “Circle Back”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader comment about avoiding jargon reminded me how corporate language often replaces plain answers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to discover that direct, ordinary English is a valuable productivity tool.

At some point, corporate America decided normal English was too dangerous.

You couldn't simply say, "I'll get back to you." No. That was apparently too clear, too efficient, and far too likely to end the conversation. Instead, we got "let's circle back," a phrase that has somehow survived decades of meetings, memos, leadership retreats, and enough PowerPoint decks to qualify as a protected species.

Someone recently commented that she was taught not to use jargon in college back in 2001. Twenty five years later, "circle back" is still wandering through office hallways like an employee nobody remembers hiring but everyone is afraid to fire. At this point, the phrase has tenure, a pension, a reserved parking spot, and three recurring meetings on the calendar to discuss whether it still adds value.

Then she made the most accurate observation of all: every one of those meetings could've been an email. That right there is the full corporate experience. We schedule a 30 minute meeting to discuss a five minute issue. Someone opens with, "I want to be respectful of everyone's time," which is corporate code for, "Prepare to lose the

next hour." Then we align, recalibrate, touch base, drill down, take something offline, put a pin in it, identify low hanging fruit, leverage synergies, and eventually circle back to the exact point Susan made twelve minutes into the meeting.

Nobody knows what was decided, but the action items look fantastic. My favorite part is how these phrases spread. One executive says "let's double click on that" during a meeting, and within 48 hours the entire organization is speaking like a malfunctioning laptop. Suddenly managers are asking teams to "lean in," "move the needle," and "socialize the idea" as if simply saying "tell people about it" would trigger an HR investigation.

And please don't get me started on "touch base." Touch base sounds less like communication and more like we're playing corporate baseball without knowing the score. First we touch base. Then we circle back. Eventually someone needs to explain whether we're conducting business or trying to steal second.

The funniest thing is that jargon is usually meant to make people sound smarter, but clear language almost

always sounds more confident. "I'll send you an update Friday" beats "Let's circle back toward the end of the week and align on next steps." One tells me exactly what's happening. The other sounds like Friday has been assigned a committee.

So yes, I'm officially supporting the retirement of "circle back." Give it a cake. Put up some balloons. Let everyone awkwardly sign a card saying, "Best wishes on your next chapter." Then escort "touch base" out right behind it. And while HR is processing the paperwork, somebody please check on "synergy." I'm pretty sure it has been collecting a paycheck since 1997 without producing a single measurable result.

Maybe then we'll learn plain English was the productivity hack hiding in front of us all along.

POST 08 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

AGEISM & TECHNOLOGY

The Resume Turns Into a Pumpkin at 45

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Reading Jamie Klingler on the hiring barriers women over 45 face sparked a wider reflection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge filtering practices that can mistake a long career for an obsolete one.

Apparently, somewhere around your 45th birthday, your resume quietly turns into a pumpkin.

Nobody sends a warning. There is no HR email saying, "Congratulations on your experience. Unfortunately, experience has now become suspicious." You just wake up with two decades of accomplishments, better judgment, and an algorithm wondering whether you are still "adaptable."

I read Jamie Klingler's piece about women over 45 being pushed to the edges of hiring, and it was the ridiculous advice experienced candidates are given to survive it. Remove graduation dates. Cut older roles. Tone down accomplishments. Make yourself look less experienced so someone might consider you more employable. Career advice now sounds like witness protection.

Jamie is 47, has 25 years of experience across media, publishing and events, and wrote that she applied to more than 140 jobs and received only three interviews. All three came through personal referrals. The strongest feature on your resume may be knowing a human who can drag it past the robots.

Companies say they want leadership, judgment, resilience, creativity and people who can handle difficult situations. Then someone arrives with 20 or 25 years of proof and suddenly the conversation becomes, "Have you considered deleting half of that?"

Apparently experience is valuable right up until you have too much of it. We keep hearing that A.I. will make recruiting more efficient. Maybe. But efficiency is not intelligence. A microwave is efficient too, but I'm not asking it to choose my next vice president. If your hiring process can reject a qualified person before a manager sees the resume, congratulations: you didn't eliminate bias. You gave it a login.

The article points to something bigger. Women over 45 are being encouraged to become consultants or coaches when employment stops opening doors. Nothing against consulting, but an entire generation cannot launch a coaching business because recruiting decided birthdays were suspicious.

The irony is absurd. Companies spend millions talking about diversity of thought, then build systems that reward everyone for looking exactly

the same on paper. Same keywords. Same recent experience. Same optimized resume language. Then leadership meets six months later and asks why nobody is bringing fresh ideas.

Maybe because the fresh ideas were filtered out at 2:13 a.m. by software looking for a 92% keyword match. Experience should not be something candidates are trained to hide. Being 45, 50 or 60 should not turn a resume into a historical document. A person who has spent decades learning how businesses, customers, teams and crises work should not have to pretend they discovered the workforce during the last software update.

Hiring technology should help companies find talent, not teach talented people how to disguise their careers.

If your recruiting system sees 25 years of experience and responds with "not a match," the candidate might not be the outdated part of the process.

POST 09 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

COMMUNITY & LINKEDIN

The Department of Unsolicited LinkedIn Metrics

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone offered an unsolicited audit of my follower growth and engagement.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to bring the focus back to the people who find solidarity and laughter in the stories.

Apparently my LinkedIn growth has been placed under investigation by the Department of Unsolicited Opinions.

Someone messaged me recently to point out that my follower count had “only” increased by about 5,000 and that I wasn’t getting as much engagement as before. I read it twice because I wasn’t sure whether I was being audited or quietly removed from the imaginary Fortune 500 of LinkedIn influencers.

Here’s the funny part: when I started posting, I never had a follower target. I didn’t sit down with a spreadsheet and say, “By Q3 I need 60,000 people and a 7.2% engagement rate.” That kind of math was never why I started posting here. I was frustrated by hiring processes, ghosting, ridiculous interviews, toxic leadership, burnout, and the corporate tradition of pretending everything is fine while half the office is updating resumes during lunch.

Writing became a way to process it. Humor made the hard parts easier to carry. Sarcasm let me say things people were thinking but were afraid to type. Not because a post got thousands of likes, but because a sentence made them feel less alone. That mattered

more.

I’ve had people tell me they laughed for the first time after losing a job. People who thought they were the only ones being ghosted after multiple interviews. People who started believing they were the problem because rejection slowly chips away at your confidence. I’ve heard from people dealing with layoffs, starting over later in life, or simply needing someone to say, “Yes, this whole thing can be ridiculous.”

Those messages don’t show up in an engagement dashboard. LinkedIn can tell me impressions, reactions, comments, followers, and probably someday my average sarcasm per paragraph. What it cannot measure is the person who read something at 2 a.m. and felt understood. It cannot calculate the value of someone laughing during a week when nothing else felt funny. There is no analytics tab for “made a stranger feel seen.”

So yes, maybe my follower count “only” increased by 5,000. Maybe some posts get fewer likes. The algorithm may occasionally look at my content, shrug, and send it into witness protection.

That’s okay. I’m not building a stock price. I’m talking to people. If 50 people

read something and one person feels less alone, that post did its job. If somebody laughs after a terrible interview, it did its job. If someone realizes a rejection doesn’t define them, it did its job. And if a hiring manager removes me because I made fun of seven round interviews, the post may have saved both of us time.

Followers are nice. Engagement is nice. I’m human; of course I notice. But numbers were never the reason I started. I started because I needed somewhere to put the truth, frustration, humor, and stories Corporate America prefers to bury underneath “We appreciate your interest.”

So I’ll keep posting. Not because the graph went up. Because somewhere, someone needs the laugh. And there is no metric I care about more than that.

POST 10 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

AGEISM & INTERVIEWS

I Asked the Panel About Age Bias

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I described asking HR executives and VPs why employers hesitate over later-career candidates.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to examine their assumptions instead of changing the subject when age bias comes up.

The other day I finally asked a Zoom panel of HR execs and VPs the question no one wants to touch, why is hiring someone in the second half of their career so scary?

The reaction was immediate. Cameras froze mid blink. Someone's "unstable internet" magically appeared. A VP suddenly had to "jump to another call." It was like I'd asked them to explain blockchain to their grandparents.

Age in hiring is the last great corporate ghost story. At some point, experience stopped being a strength and turned into a warning label. Overqualified. Too senior. Might not "fit our culture." That last one is usually code for "might ask hard questions and expect reasonable pay."

What's really going on isn't complicated. Companies panic at the idea of paying for proven skill. They worry someone seasoned will walk in and realize that the much touted "AI transformation strategy" is really just a slightly different Excel template. They worry someone who's seen market swings, product failures, and five different "reorgs" might not be dazzled by the kombucha tap and free swag hoodie. They worry a person who's led teams through chaos might not need to

be "mentored" by a manager who still calls PDFs "Adobe files."

And yet, the data point everyone ignores: experienced professionals adapt. Many of us learned new tech, new markets, and new roles long before "reskilling" became a buzzword. We've rebuilt after layoffs, survived bosses who believed "move fast and break things" meant break people, and still found ways to thrive. We know how to deliver under pressure without making it everyone else's crisis.

The irony is that companies talk about wanting "impact players" and "strategic thinkers" and "leaders who can hit the ground running." Then they pass on the very people who have done all that, because a birthdate on a resume makes them nervous. They'll spend six months training someone green rather than hire someone who could start solving problems on Monday.

When I asked the question, the silence said everything. It's easier to talk about "culture add" and "growth potential" than to admit bias against age. But here's the truth, what organizations fear isn't age, it's accountability. A person who has already seen how bad decisions play out won't clap politely for them.

So to anyone job hunting in the second half of their career, take the quiet rooms and dropped Zoom calls as confirmation that you are exactly what some companies aren't ready for. And keep going. Somewhere there's a team that actually wants results more than a trendy office playlist.

We've been the future before, we can build it again. We've already had to reinvent ourselves while learning new tech, new systems, new languages of work. We know how to adapt. The only thing outdated here is the fear itself.

And the next time you get a panel full of leadership blinking at the question, remember, it's not you. It's the lag of an industry still buffering while the rest of us have moved on.

POST 11 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

LEADERSHIP & HUMOR

Leadership Lessons From a Garage Raccoon

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview question about my leadership style brought back a chaotic raccoon-in-the-garage memory.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leadership to mean calm practical judgment, not only polished buzzwords.

There are leadership books, executive retreats, personality assessments, and then there is the time a raccoon taught me more about management than half the leadership meetings I have ever attended.

A while back, during an interview, I was asked to describe my leadership style. I could have said “servant leadership,” “situational leadership,” or whatever phrase was currently winning awards in PowerPoint. Instead, my brain immediately went to a raccoon in a garage.

A raccoon once found its way into my garage and immediately behaved like it had been promoted to regional manager. It inspected everything, ignored every boundary, knocked things over, stared at me like I was the one trespassing, and refused to leave despite several attempts at “alignment.” At first, I did what corporate training teaches us to do. I assessed the situation, created a plan, considered risk, and tried gentle redirection. The raccoon rejected all of it. No follow-up meeting. No action plan. No performance improvement plan. Just pure confidence, disregard for organizational structure, and the kind of executive presence companies claim they are looking for.

Eventually, I realized something important. Leadership is not about having the perfect script when everything goes according to plan. Leadership is what happens when the plan is on the floor, the garage is chaos, everyone is looking at you, and the raccoon has somehow gained control of the room. That is when you stop performing leadership and actually lead.

You adapt. You communicate. You make decisions with incomplete information. You protect the people around you. You solve the immediate problem without pretending you predicted it six months ago in a strategy deck. And sometimes, yes, you grab a broom.

Naturally, the raccoon won. Workplaces are full of raccoon moments. The system crashes. Someone quits without notice. A customer is furious. Payroll is wrong. A manager calls out. The budget changes. Leadership sends an email titled “Exciting Update,” and suddenly everyone is quietly updating their resume before lunch. Nobody needs the leader who says, “According to slide 47...” They need the person who can look at the mess, stay calm, make a

decision, and say, “Okay. Here is what we are doing next.”

That raccoon never gave me a leadership certificate, endorsed me on LinkedIn, or invited me to a webinar about resilience, but it did teach me something useful. Calm is contagious. Resourcefulness matters. Leadership is rarely glamorous, and it is almost never as clean as the books make it sound. Sometimes leadership is simply being the person willing to walk into the garage while everyone else is standing at the door saying, “That seems like an HR issue.”

And if your leadership philosophy cannot survive one angry raccoon, three missed calls, a broken printer, and an “urgent” meeting that absolutely could have been an email, it may need a little more field testing.

No KPI dashboard prepared me for that chaos manager.

POST 12 / MONDAY, AUGUST 17

RECRUITING & ACCOUNTABILITY

The Recruiter Who Wanted My Posts to Stop

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A message accusing my posts of making recruiters look bad prompted a response.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to distinguish criticizing harmful practices from attacking every recruiter doing honest work.

"Hey Alex, you're making recruiters look bad. You need to stop." Oh, Kayla. Sweet, salaried, possibly LinkedIn verified Kayla.

I read your message and had to sit down. Not because I was offended, but because I was laughing so hard I nearly dropped my phone into the rejection email I was crying over. Let me say this gently: I'm not trying to make anyone look bad. I'm trying to survive the emotional obstacle course known as modern job hunting. Apparently, describing what candidates experience is now the dangerous part.

In the last year, I've applied to hundreds of roles. I've rewritten my resume more times than Netflix has canceled shows. I've done virtual interviews with prerecorded questions and no human contact. I've been ghosted after final rounds. I've been told I'm "overqualified," "not quite the fit," "a great candidate, just not right now," and my personal favorite: "We really liked you, but we're moving forward with someone whose name we remembered."

So no, Kayla, I'm not trying to make recruiters look bad. I'm trying to make sense of a process that already makes job seekers feel invisible, disposable,

and somehow both underqualified and overqualified in the same breath. When I post about it, I do it for people who've been told 20 years of experience are a liability, people refreshing their inbox like it holds the meaning of life, and candidates who accidentally say, "I'm emotionally available," in an interview.

I do it because this process is exhausting, absurd, and we need to laugh so we don't lose our minds. If I can make one person feel less alone while being professionally gaslit by a "your application was incomplete" bot, then yes, I'm going to keep posting. And if the recruiting industry's reputation is that fragile, my little LinkedIn joke isn't what cracked it. It's the layoffs without notice, the auto replies after seven interviews, the ghosting, the bait and switch, and systems designed to filter people out instead of bringing the right ones in.

I have nothing against great recruiters. I've met phenomenal ones: the kind who respond, give feedback, advocate for candidates, communicate honestly, and remember there's a person on the other side of that application. Those recruiters? I lift them up every chance I get. But the others? The ones who disappear after promising an update, change the salary halfway through the

process, or send "We've moved on" at 11:59 p.m. on a Friday? Yeah. Not on my inspirational quote board.

So Kayla, if I made you uncomfortable, maybe it's not because I'm making you look bad. Maybe it's because I'm holding up a mirror to a broken process that people are finally willing to call out. And I'm not stopping. Because behind every joke I post is someone crying in silence, questioning their worth, wondering why nobody calls back, and thinking they're alone. They're not. We're not.

And if that makes me "bad for business," then I guess I'll just be over here...still unemployed, but now with a fanbase.

POST 13 / MONDAY, AUGUST 17

APPLICATION SYSTEMS

Your GPA From 1998 Is Apparently Urgent

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader showed me an application asking for grades from every school they had attended.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to value a demonstrated career instead of interrogating old transcripts.

The other day, someone messaged me with a gem straight out of the corporate comedy vault: an application that required GPA entries from every school they'd ever attended.

Not one, not two, every single one. Because apparently, the best way to measure your professional worth in 2026 is still by how well you memorized the periodic table in 1998. Let's be honest, if a company is asking for your GPA at this stage of life, they're not hiring, they're time traveling. Somewhere out there, an HR department is scrolling through resumes like, "Hmm, impressive career achievements, 20 years of leadership experience, but what was their freshman year chemistry grade?"

Newsflash: If you've paid taxes longer than TikTok has existed, your GPA should have expired by now. Nobody needs to know you got a C in Intro to Philosophy when Bill Clinton was still in office. That's not a red flag, that's historical data.

And it's not even subtle. Let's call it what it is, a youth filter. "We're not saying we only want recent grads," they whisper, "we're just going to design an application that makes anyone over 30 question their will to live halfway

through." Because nothing says "inclusive workplace" like forcing someone to dig up their GPA from a college registrar who now communicates exclusively through fax.

Imagine being a hiring manager looking at that section and thinking, "Oh good, her GPA was 3.7 in 2004, clearly she can handle our new CRM software." What exactly are we measuring here? Memory retention? Nostalgia? Ability to locate your old transcript password? If GPA truly mattered in the workplace, half the executives in America would still be in study hall. You think the CEO of any Fortune 500 company remembers their GPA? Please. Their assistant could be writing this post right now.

But here's the kicker, the same companies that ask for your GPA will also post quotes like "We value lifelong learning" and "Experience matters." Oh really? Then why are you asking me to prove my academic worth from a time when "Ask Jeeves" was my search engine? It's laughable, but it's also exhausting. We've reached an era where experience doesn't age well in the job market, only buzzwords do. You can lead teams, drive revenue, save entire departments from collapse, and still be asked for your college GPA like

it's the missing piece of your professional puzzle.

So here's my suggestion: next time a job application asks for GPA, just put "N/A graduated from the school of life with honors." Or better yet, enter 4.0 in Surviving Corporate Nonsense. Because honestly, if you've made it through layoffs, toxic leadership, Zoom fatigue, and three rounds of "we've decided to move forward with other candidates," you deserve extra credit.

So to all my fellow job seekers forced to relive their college years just to prove they can hold a meeting, stay strong. You're not outdated; the system is. And if they ask for your GPA, just say, "It was great, unlike your hiring process."

POST 14 / MONDAY, AUGUST 17

AGEISM & CHANGE

What I Want to Do About Ageism

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone directly asked what action I planned to take about age discrimination.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to move beyond punch lines toward visibility, conversations and meaningful change.

The other day, someone asked me, “Alex, what are you actually going to do about ageism?” And for once, I didn’t have a sarcastic answer ready.

Because this one hits differently. It’s not a buzzword or a trending topic, it’s something I see every day in the messages people send me. People in their 40s, 50s, 60s highly qualified, experienced, loyal professionals, who suddenly feel invisible in a workforce they helped build. These are people with scars, wins, mistakes, and enough experience to see a bad idea coming early.

These aren’t people who “fell behind.” They’re people who trained the ones now rejecting them. They built the systems, the culture, the playbooks. They survived faxes, floppy disks, dial-up, and six different versions of Microsoft Office. And yet here they are, being told they’re “not a culture fit” by someone who still lists “proficient in Excel” as a personality trait.

I’ve seen rejection emails that might as well say, “We’ve decided to move forward with someone younger who will quit in eight months.” I’ve seen Zoom interviews where the second the camera turns on, you can feel the panel’s energy shift, polite smiles,

followed by questions that sound like tests of relevance instead of curiosity. “How do you stay current with technology?” “Are you comfortable with collaboration tools?” Translation: “Please prove you’re not a fossil.”

And that’s when I realized, this isn’t just bias, it’s theft. It’s stealing decades of wisdom and replacing it with buzzwords. It’s pretending that “fresh energy” matters more than proven stability. It’s dressing up discrimination in corporate language so it sounds polite.

So what am I going to do about it? I’m going to keep writing. Loudly. Relentlessly. I’m going to keep showing the world what real experience looks like, not as a punchline, but as power. I’m going to call out every company that preaches “diversity” while quietly filtering resumes by birth year. I’m going to make ageism uncomfortable to ignore.

Because it’s not about pity, it’s about perspective. The best teams aren’t made up of the youngest or the oldest. They’re made of people who’ve lived through enough chaos to know how to fix it. The ones who’ve failed, adapted, and still show up. The ones who remember when “teamwork” didn’t

mean another Zoom breakout room.

So here’s the plan: every post, every article, every laugh I share will carry the same message, you don’t age out of value. You evolve into it. If a company can’t see that, that’s their loss, not yours. And maybe one day, instead of writing about the problem, I’ll write the ending, where every hiring manager finally realizes that experience isn’t a liability, it’s the shortcut everyone’s been looking for.

Until then, I’ll keep doing what I do best: turning frustration into fuel, rejection into reform, and sarcasm into strategy. Because the fight against ageism doesn’t start in HR, it starts with refusing to stay silent when someone tells you your time has passed.

POST 15 / MONDAY, AUGUST 17

AUTOMATED REJECTIONS

Rejected by Count Recruitula at 2:47 A.M.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The absurd timing and wording of overnight rejection emails was impossible to ignore.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiting teams to understand how impersonal automation feels on the receiving end.

At some point, corporate recruiting decided rejection emails should arrive at the exact hour most associated with ghosts, bad decisions.

You know the email. It shows up at 2:47 a.m. with the subject line "Update on Your Application," which is corporate language for, "Good morning, except not really." Then it opens with, "After careful consideration..." Careful consideration? At 2:47 in the morning? Who considered this? Dracula? A raccoon with access to Workday? An ATS that became self-aware and immediately chose violence?

Nothing builds confidence in a hiring process quite like being rejected while every actual human being in the company is asleep. And somehow the wording is always painfully too cheerful. "We were impressed by your background." Were you? Because you rejected me before the coffee maker turned on. "We encourage you to apply for future opportunities." Absolutely. I can't wait to repeat this beautiful experience and receive another heartbreak during the witching hour.

The best part is imagining a recruiter sitting in a dark office at 3:06 a.m., cape flowing dramatically behind them, whispering, "Excellent qualifications...

strong leadership experience... impressive accomplishments..." before slowly clicking REJECT and turning into a bat.

Of course, we know most of these emails are automated. That somehow makes it funnier. We have successfully developed technology advanced enough to review applications, rank candidates, schedule messages, and politely destroy someone's optimism before sunrise. Somewhere, an engineer looked at this system and said, "Perfect. Now make sure the rejection lands while they're vulnerable."

Maybe there should be rules. No rejection emails before breakfast. No "we've decided to move forward" messages after midnight. And absolutely no automated rejection sent three minutes after someone applies unless the email includes an honest explanation like, "Our software saw one keyword it didn't recognize and panicked."

Job seekers already have enough mysteries. Did a person read the resume? Was the position real? Was there already an internal candidate? Did the hiring manager change the requirements halfway through? Did my application disappear into a digital cave

where thousands of resumes are currently living together and forming their own society? We don't need supernatural activity added to the list. If companies genuinely care about candidate experience, maybe start with remembering that candidates are human beings, not notifications waiting to be processed. Timing matters. Communication matters. A little warmth matters. Even rejection can be handled with basic dignity.

Until then, every time my phone lights up at 2:47 a.m. with "Thank you for your interest," I'm going to assume the talent acquisition department operates from a castle in Transylvania.

And if the next email begins with "We regret to inform you," I'm checking the bottom for a signature. Count Recruitula, Senior Talent Acquisition Partner.

POST 16 / MONDAY, AUGUST 17

PANEL INTERVIEW HUMOR

When the Panel Interview Sounds Like Flirting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Unusually personal compliments during a panel interview inspired a playful reading of candidate feedback.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to poke fun at ambiguous interview phrasing while remembering that professionalism still matters.

You ever been sitting in a panel interview and suddenly realized one of the hiring managers might be flirting with you, but in the safest, most HR approved language possible?

The other day, I was in one of those panel interviews where six people are staring at you through little Zoom boxes like you're competing on Corporate America's Got Talent. Everyone had their serious interview face on. Then one hiring manager started asking questions that felt... different.

"So Alex, I really like your energy." Thank you. Is that feedback on my leadership style, or are we about to exchange Spotify playlists? Then came, "You seem like someone people really enjoy being around." Interesting. Are we discussing employee engagement, or did my resume just get upgraded to a dating profile? Meanwhile, the other panelists were asking about strategy, operations, and results. This person was basically conducting a performance review written by Hallmark. Then came, "I can tell you're very passionate." Ma'am, please specify whether this is a competency.

Corporate flirting apparently has its own dialect. Nobody can just say, "I like

you." That would trigger seventeen policies and cause an HR representative to materialize from behind a ficus. Instead, it becomes, "I really appreciate your interpersonal presence." Oh. My interpersonal presence appreciates you too. At one point, another panelist gave us that universal expression for, "Are we still interviewing this guy, or should I leave you two alone?"

I tried to stay professional because what exactly are you supposed to do? You can't lean toward the camera and ask, "Is this still the behavioral portion of the interview?" So I kept answering. Leadership philosophy. Check. Revenue growth. Check. Conflict resolution. Check. Apparently charming one member of the panel while discussing EBITDA. Unexpected bonus competency.

Maybe I completely misread it. Job interviews have damaged all of us enough that basic human kindness now feels suspicious. A hiring manager smiles twice and suddenly I'm thinking, "This is either culture fit or chemistry." We've sanitized workplace vocabulary so thoroughly that even flirting would sound like a quarterly review: "You demonstrate exceptional alignment with my personal stakeholder

expectations." Or, "I'd like to explore opportunities for increased one on one collaboration." Please stop. Compliance is sweating.

I didn't leave with a phone number, a rose, or dinner plans. I left with the standard, "We'll be in touch soon," which is corporate America's most complicated relationship status. It can mean tomorrow, next month, never, or "we hired someone internally but wanted to see how committed you were."

So if you ever find yourself in a panel interview wondering whether somebody is flirting with you, stay calm. Keep answering the questions. Maintain eye contact. Talk about measurable results. And remember: until HR confirms otherwise, it's not flirting. It's enhanced candidate engagement.

POST 17 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The Interview That Felt Like a Crime Drama

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A past interview with relentless questions about each career move felt more like an interrogation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to be conversations about capability rather than trials of a candidate's biography.

I once left a job interview wondering whether I had applied for a leadership role or accidentally become the prime suspect in a corporate crime documentary.

A while back, I walked into an interview expecting a normal conversation about experience, leadership, and whether I could do the job. Ten minutes later, I was checking whether I had the right to remain silent. "Why did you leave that company?" "Why did you take that role?" "Why were you there only that long?" "What would your former boss say about you?" Every answer created questions, every follow-up sounded suspicious, and every person taking notes made me think someone might slide a folder across the table with photos of me leaving an office park in 2019.

At one point, I wanted to ask if I was allowed one phone call. That memory came back when I read a post from a woman describing the opposite experience. She was interviewing for the job, and before meeting the company president, the hiring manager helped her prepare. She explained what mattered, gave her a few tips, and made sure she understood what the president would care about.

Then something scandalous happened. She nailed the interview. She got the job. And somehow the hiring system did not collapse. HR did not rappel through the ceiling. Nobody stormed into the room yelling, "STOP! SHE WAS PREPARED!" The hiring manager gave the candidate enough context to show up at her best.

Apparently, that is allowed. Somewhere along the way, hiring became obsessed with surprise. Candidates are told little, shuffled through rounds, introduced to executives, and expected to answer questions they could never anticipate. Then everyone acts shocked when candidates sound nervous, rehearsed, or exhausted. Maybe because interviewing has turned into professional improv with health insurance hanging in the balance.

Helping a candidate prepare does not lower the bar. Telling someone who they are meeting, what the conversation will focus on, and what matters to the decision maker is not giving them the answers. It is giving them context. If your goal is to understand whether someone can succeed in the role, why make it harder for them to show you?

Tell candidates what to expect. Give them enough information to have a real conversation instead of spending half the interview wondering whether the next question will be about business strategy, childhood trauma, or how many tennis balls fit inside a 747. The hiring manager in that story did something remarkably simple: she helped a candidate succeed. And that candidate became an employee. Meanwhile, somewhere else, another company is scheduling round eight because nobody has asked the only question that matters: Can this person actually do the job?

Interviews should help companies discover talent, not test whether candidates can survive questioning without requesting legal counsel. Less interrogation room. More conversation. And please, somebody turn off that imaginary swinging lightbulb.

POST 18 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

UNREALISTIC JOB REQUIREMENTS

The Job Description Even a Unicorn Rejected

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I encountered a posting demanding an extraordinary mix of departments, experience and abilities.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to distinguish real requirements from fantasy wish lists.

You ever read a job description and realize halfway through that no actual human being could possibly qualify for it?

The other day, I found one that looked like a hiring manager had opened AI, typed, "Create the perfect candidate, but make sure they do not exist," and then pasted the result without reviewing it. This job wanted 15 years of leadership experience, expertise in six departments, finance, sales, operations, marketing, technology, executive presence, hands on execution, strategic thinking, and apparently the ability to repair the office printer through sheer force of personality.

So I asked the hiring manager a simple question: "Does anyone currently working at your company actually meet all of these requirements?" Silence. The kind of silence that happens when someone realizes the unicorn they want also needs an MBA, three certifications, and weekend availability. AI will happily write you an impressive job description. It does not care you are hiring one person. Ask it for a Director of Operations and five seconds later you are recruiting a CFO, COO, VP of Sales, IT administrator, therapist, mechanic, and part-time wizard for one

salary.

Then companies post it and wonder why people do not apply. "Candidates just aren't meeting our expectations." Correct. Your expectations require someone who started working professionally at age nine. My favorite part is when they want someone who can "operate strategically at 30,000 feet while remaining deeply hands on in the details." So basically, fly the airplane and inspect the landing gear at the same time.

And somehow the salary arrives with confidence: "We are seeking an industry transforming visionary who can build teams, increase revenue, redesign operations, implement AI, manage a P&L, negotiate contracts, and transform the business. Compensation: competitive." Competitive with what? A hostage negotiation? AI is useful. But somebody still has to ask, "Is this reasonable for an actual human?"

Otherwise, we are going to keep seeing job descriptions requiring eight software platforms, seven leadership competencies, five degrees, four languages, three decades of experience, two Nobel Prizes, and a partridge in a quarterly performance review. Then comes the hiring process:

eight interviews, two assessments, a personality test, a case study, a presentation, and a final conversation with someone who wants to "start from the beginning."

Three weeks later, the company reposts the job because it cannot find talent. Maybe the talent shortage is not actually a talent shortage. Maybe qualified candidates are reading these AI generated fantasy lists and deciding they have better things to do than spend six weeks proving they can satisfy requirements nobody inside the company meets.

Maybe the unicorn read the job description too. It looked at the qualifications, looked at the salary, slowly closed the laptop, and said, "Wow. They're asking for way too much."

Even the unicorn knows its worth.

POST 19 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

LAYOFFS & HUMAN IMPACT

Michelle Opened a Review and Lost Her Job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Michelle shared how an expected performance conversation turned into a sudden termination.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to understand the human impact of delivering life-changing decisions through a screen.

Nobody wakes up thinking, “Today feels like a great day to have my entire life rearranged by a Zoom invite.”

Michelle certainly didn’t. She logged in expecting her annual performance review, the kind of meeting where someone says “great job” and everybody pretends the rating system makes sense. Instead, she heard four words that changed everything: “Today is your last day.” No warning. No chance to prepare. Just a camera, a meeting invite, and one sentence that turned an ordinary workday into a different life.

What makes it harder is that her review had already been completed by the manager who hired her and signed off by another senior leader. She was doing well. Then both leaders left the company. Before Michelle ever received that review, someone altered it. A situation from February 2024 was added to a review covering her 2023 performance. Her offense? Asking why a vendor had been removed from an approved list. Apparently asking a question had become a violation of “core values.” Nothing says integrity quite like changing the paperwork and then suggesting the employee asking for clarification is the problem.

Then came the layoff call. The person delivering the news disappeared from Zoom and left HR to read the legal script, corporate America’s version of setting your kitchen on fire and leaving a brochure titled “Understanding Heat.” Eight weeks earlier, Michelle’s brother had died. The company sent flowers. They told her, “Let us know if there’s anything we can do.” Apparently “anything” included eliminating her income eight weeks later over Zoom.

Michelle accepted the severance because she believed she would find another job quickly. She had experience, a strong record, and confidence. Then she met the modern job market. More than 400 resumes. Interview after interview. Almost hired. Almost chosen. Almost there. For 15 months. Eventually, she had to sell her townhouse and move to another state where she could afford to live. That also meant moving farther away from her daughter.

That is the part layoff announcements never include. The spreadsheet says “headcount reduction.” The employee hears, “Sell your house.” The executive deck says “organizational efficiency.” The employee hears, “Move away from your family.” The HR document says

“business decision.” The employee spends the next year wondering what they did wrong, replaying a Zoom call that everyone else involved probably forgot before lunch.

Michelle told me she still cries when she thinks about it. Not because one job defined her, but because the way it happened made her feel disposable. Companies can restructure, reorganize, and eliminate positions. But they can also choose how they treat people while doing it. Long after the Zoom window closes, the employee is still living with the decision.

Michelle, thank you for trusting me with your story. And to every company proudly advertising its “people first culture,” maybe remember the people part before you click “End Meeting.”

POST 20 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

JOB-SEEKER WINS

Josh Finally Got the Offer He Deserved

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Josh updated me on the outcome of a long search and a genuine offer after months of setbacks.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to celebrate a good hiring outcome and remind discouraged readers that progress can arrive unexpectedly.

Sometimes the job search doesn't end with fireworks. Sometimes it ends with a phone call, a verbal offer, and the shocking discovery that a company can actually pay you what you're worth without making you enter a corporate cage match, complete seven interviews and a personality test.

Josh sent me an update that genuinely made me smile. Fifteen months ago, he started what he politely called a "delightful journey." Anyone who has been job hunting lately knows "delightful journey" is the professional version of saying, "I have stared into the abyss, and the abyss sent me an automated rejection at 2:14 a.m."

Last week, Josh applied for an entry level role just to get a paycheck coming in. He didn't get it. Normally, that is where the story ends with, "We were impressed by your background, but we decided to move forward with another candidate who apparently owns the Infinity Stones."

But the hiring manager called him. Not an automated email. Not a chatbot. An actual human being called and said he wanted to work with Josh and asked whether he would consider a limited duration position. Josh said yes. Then he followed up and thanked the

manager for the conversation. Later, the manager called again and asked if he was still interested. Reference checks started. Josh kept applying because after 15 months in the job market, you learn not to emotionally move into the building just because someone says, "We'll be in touch."

Then came the update. He received a verbal offer for a state role starting September 1. And here is the part that may spill some coffee: they came in at full scale. No negotiation. No "What are your salary expectations?" followed by everyone pretending the posted range was decorative. No offer at the bottom of the range with a speech about "growth opportunities." No request to accept less because the company has free coffee. They simply offered him the money.

Imagine that. Fifteen months of applications, waiting, rejection, uncertainty, interviews, follow-ups, and enough "we regret to inform you" emails to wallpaper a condo, and suddenly one employer looked at his experience and said, essentially, "Yes. That. We'll pay for that."

Job searches can make talented people question themselves. After enough silence and rejection, you start

wondering whether your experience somehow expired overnight or whether somewhere inside an ATS there is a bouncer saying, "Not tonight, buddy."

It didn't expire. Sometimes the process is painfully slow. Sometimes the right person has not seen you yet. Sometimes the job you apply for is not the job that gets you in the door. And sometimes, after 15 months of corporate obstacle courses, ghosting, automated emails, interviews, and refreshing your inbox like it owes you money, the finish line finally appears without another personality assessment attached to it.

Congratulations, Josh. You survived the hiring circus. And somebody finally remembered the part where jobs are supposed to come with paychecks.

POST 21 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

JOB POSTINGS

Highland Holdings and the Recruiting Superhero

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Chicago Talent Acquisition Manager posting piled a long list of demands onto the position.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters and employers to read their own job descriptions as critically as they read candidates.

I knew we were in trouble the moment a Talent Acquisition Manager description started sounding less like recruiting and more like the entrance exam for a secret government agency.

Highland Holdings is hiring a Talent Acquisition Manager in Chicago, and somewhere around paragraph three, recruiting stopped being the job and “corporate superhero with excellent ATS hygiene” quietly took over. Recruit people. Build pipelines. Partner with leaders. Keep the ATS from becoming a digital junk drawer. Then I kept reading, and suddenly this person also needs executive presence, confidence to push back, comfort with ambiguity, the judgment to hold their own in the room, and enough strategy to deliver a perspective instead of “just a slate.”

So Highland Holdings would like a recruiter who can source passive candidates at 9:00, challenge a VP at 10:00, redesign the interview process at 11:00, interpret hiring data at noon, coach a hiring manager at 1:00, manage recruiters at 2:00, learn several AI tools at 3:00, and I was waiting for the next bullet point to say, “Must also be proficient in NASA mission control software and able to repair the office printer without calling IT.”

They want 5 to 8 years of full cycle recruiting experience, passive sourcing skills, ATS discipline, leadership experience, and comfort working with AI recruiting technology. The expectation that you be comfortable with ambiguity, because corporate ambiguity usually means, “We may not know exactly what we want, but we need you to confidently explain why the candidate you found is wrong.” Then there is “executive presence and the confidence to push back.” Translation: disagree with leadership, but do it in a way that makes leadership feel like they came up with your disagreement. And then we get “hold your own in the room.” Which room? The conference room? A locked escape room where three executives keep changing the job requirements while someone whispers “culture fit” through the ventilation system?

To be fair, the salary range is \$115,000 to \$145,000, so at least Highland Holdings is not asking for this recruiting creature in exchange for free office snacks and unlimited coffee. Once upon a time, the job was simple: find talented people and help the company hire them. Now it is: be a strategist, psychologist, negotiator, analyst, technologist, marketer, project

manager, executive coach, brand ambassador, process designer, and human lie detector who can identify whether “urgent hiring need” means urgent or “we might revisit this position in Q4.”

I’m not criticizing Highland Holdings. I’m thanking them. Somewhere out there, a recruiter is reading this description, Googling “how to develop executive presence by Monday,” and wondering whether “comfortable with ambiguity” includes not knowing what half the job description means.

That recruiter may already be qualified. They just need to remember one final requirement: hold your own in the room. Preferably while updating the ATS.

POST 22 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

When “How Can I Help?” Was a Trap

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A past boss invited honest feedback and then treated the honest answer as a problem.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to understand that openness only counts when employees feel safe using it.

The most dangerous sentence in a toxic workplace is delivered with a smile: “What can I help you with?”

A while back, I worked for a boss who loved asking that question. It sounded supportive. It sounded like leadership. It sounded like one of those rare workplace moments where honesty was actually welcome. One day, I answered honestly. I said the workload was getting heavy. I said communication had been inconsistent. I said expectations kept changing, and priorities kept shifting. Nothing dramatic. I did not flip a desk, storm out, or send a 47 slide presentation titled “Reasons This Place Is Slowly Eating My Soul.” I simply gave a truthful answer to a question I had been directly asked.

My boss nodded thoughtfully and said, “Thank you for being open with me.” That sentence should have come with thunder, flickering lights, and a lawyer entering the room. Because apparently, I had not participated in a supportive conversation. I had submitted evidence.

A few weeks later, the same concerns I had shared privately started showing up in different forms. My concern about changing expectations became “difficulty adapting.” My workload

concern became “struggling with priorities.” My frustration with inconsistent communication somehow evolved into “resistance to leadership.” It was impressive. I watched my own words enter corporate witness protection and return wearing fake mustaches.

That was when I learned what “What can I help you with?” sometimes means in a toxic workplace. It is not always an invitation. Sometimes it is discovery.

Toxic bosses love creating the appearance of psychological safety. Their door is always open. They tell you to speak freely. They say they value transparency. Then they remember every sentence you said during the one moment you believed them. Eventually, employees learn the rules. They stop raising concerns. They stop offering ideas. They smile, nod, say everything is great, and save their real opinions for the parking lot. Then leadership looks around confused and asks, “Why doesn’t anyone bring problems to me?”

Because last time Kevin brought a problem to you, Kevin became the problem. The team did not suddenly lose its voice. It learned that speaking had consequences.

That experience taught me there is a massive difference between a boss who asks questions and a leader who has earned honest answers. Good leaders do not collect vulnerability like ammunition. They do not invite employees to open up and then save those words for a future performance review. They listen, ask questions, help, and even when they disagree, they protect the trust that made the conversation possible.

So now whenever someone in leadership asks, “What can I help you with?” I appreciate the question, but I pay closer attention to what happens after someone answers it.

Because workplace culture is not measured by how supportive leadership sounds when the door is open. It is measured by whether employees still feel safe after they walk out.

POST 23 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19

EXTREME HIRING

Four Hundred Candidates, One Job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I read a story describing nearly 400 candidates and extraordinary persistence for one sales job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to ask when an intense hiring process stops measuring fit and starts rewarding an endurance stunt.

I thought modern hiring had already used every possible plot twist. Then I read a post today about a company that interviewed nearly 400 people for one Founding AE role, and suddenly seven round interviews suddenly felt like coffee chats.

The person who got the job didn't just apply, interview, send a thank you note, and wait. No. He sent a connection request, followed up repeatedly, cold called, called again, left messages, texted, texted again, showed up at the office at 9 PM, stayed until midnight, then went through several more interviews.

At that point, I stopped reading it as a hiring success story and started reading it as the plot of a corporate survival movie. Four hundred interviews. I'm imagining the onboarding packet now: laptop, email login, benefits guide, and a tiny trophy that says, "Congratulations on surviving the audition process." HR probably hands it over while candidate 398 is still in the lobby.

Think about that for a second. Four hundred people walked into that process believing they had a shot. Somewhere, candidate number 287 was probably on interview six thinking,

"I really feel like we connected," while candidate 399 was updating LinkedIn with "Excited for what's next."

Meanwhile, Jake Lundberg was apparently operating like Liam Neeson with a CRM. Call. Follow up. Text. Follow up again. Show up at 9 PM. Stay until midnight. Probably rappel through the conference room ceiling if necessary.

And yes, persistence matters. Sales requires resilience, creativity, follow through, and the willingness to hear "no" without becoming one with the couch. I understand the point of the post. But I also couldn't stop laughing at the accidental lesson hiding underneath it. If the winning candidate had to chase the company harder than most people chase an insurance claim, what exactly were the other 399 supposed to do?

Send a carrier pigeon? Camp in the parking lot? Hire a skywriter that says, "JUST CIRCLING BACK"? At some point, "going the extra mile" becomes "we moved the finish line to another county." The post said 99.9% of people fail to go the extra mile. Maybe. Or maybe some people saw the 9 PM meeting request and thought, "I currently have a job, a family, and a functioning relationship with sleep."

That doesn't make them lazy. It makes them unavailable at 9 PM.

And that's what makes modern hiring so fascinating. Companies tell candidates to respect boundaries, communicate professionally, avoid being too aggressive, and trust the process. Then every once in a while we celebrate the person who ignored the entire social contract and followed up like the recruiter owed him money.

Good for Jake. He clearly wanted it, proved himself, and got the role. I hope he absolutely crushes it. But after reading that post, I'm also thinking about candidates 1 through 399. Somewhere out there, one of them is still waiting for the automated rejection email.

And candidate 214 just whispered, "Wait... we were allowed to text the CEO?"

POST 24 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

RECRUITER DOUBLE STANDARDS

Ghosting: Apparently the Rules Only Go One Way

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A debate with a recruiter centered on why candidates must communicate but employers can disappear.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted basic courtesy to apply on both sides of the interview table.

I had a debate the other day with a recruiter about ghosting, and somewhere around minute ten I realized we were no longer talking about professionalism.

We were apparently negotiating the Geneva Convention of job searching. His position was simple: candidates should never ghost companies because companies remember. There are notes, records, applicant tracking systems.

And listen, I agree with part of that. If you accept an interview, show up. If you change your mind, send a message. If you accept a job and decide not to take it, tell them. Basic courtesy should not require a leadership seminar. But then I asked the forbidden question: what happens when the company ghosts the candidate? Suddenly the rules became less clear.

Apparently when a candidate disappears, it is "unprofessional." When a company disappears after four interviews, a personality assessment, a case study, two references, and a recruiter saying, "We'll definitely have an answer by Friday," that is called "an evolving business need." Candidate stops responding: burned bridge. Company stops responding: priorities shifted. Candidate cancels once:

unreliable. Company reschedules three times: busy leadership team. Candidate declines after accepting: reputation damaged. Company rescinds the offer: difficult business decision.

I'm beginning to think professionalism has surge pricing. My favorite warning for candidates is simple: "companies keep records." Great. Candidates keep records too. We have inboxes, screenshots, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, group chats, and enough caffeine and frustration to write a 3,000 character post before breakfast. Companies still seem shocked that candidates remember how they were treated.

The point is not that candidates should start ghosting employers for revenge. That solves nothing. The point is that respect cannot be a one way performance where applicants are expected to communicate perfectly while employers get unlimited disappearing privileges. If you expect candidates to answer emails, answer theirs. If you expect them to respect your time, respect theirs. If you expect two weeks' notice, maybe stop giving people two minutes' notice that the role was "put on hold" after round seven.

Professionalism is not a loyalty program

where only one side earns points. I told the recruiter I will always encourage candidates to communicate because it is the right thing to do. But I will also remind companies that candidates are not inventory sitting inside an ATS waiting to be selected. They are people with bills, families, schedules, nerves, and other opportunities. They rearrange workdays, prepare for interviews, research companies, write thank you notes, chase updates, and sometimes wait weeks for an answer that never comes.

So yes, candidates, don't ghost companies. Communicate. Be professional. Protect your reputation. And companies, before giving that speech, maybe check your own inbox.

There might be 47 candidates in there still waiting for "Friday."

POST 25 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

INTERVIEWER PREPARATION

The Interviewer Who Barely Showed Up

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Allison Goldberg described a frustrating interview and a long delay before a rejection.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind companies that an interviewer's preparation and attention also signal professionalism.

I knew we had officially entered a new level of hiring madness when I read Allison Goldberg's post and realized the candidate was apparently the only person in the interview who had actually shown up for the interview.

Allison waited more than four weeks to learn she wasn't being considered for a role she wanted. Frustrating? Absolutely. Surprising? Not really. During the interview, the person on the other side of the screen seemed distracted, barely asked questions, and kept yawning like they had accidentally joined a Zoom call titled "Quarterly Synergy Review: Director's Cut."

This is the part of job searching nobody puts in the career advice articles. Candidates are told to research the company, memorize the job description, prepare STAR examples, test the camera, rehearse answers, prepare thoughtful questions, smile naturally, show enthusiasm, demonstrate confidence, and somehow appear relaxed. Somehow the candidate is expected to deliver championship enthusiasm while the interviewer auditions for a mattress commercial. Meanwhile, the interviewer may be checking baseball scores, reading emails, ordering lunch,

"Tell me about yourself." Sure. Would you like the professional version, or should I wait until whatever is happening on your second monitor finishes buffering? Allison even wondered whether she should have said, "If you're too tired to continue respectfully, we can call it." And I respect that because most candidates are thinking something similar while their internal survival system is screaming, "SMILE. NOD. DO NOT UPSET THE PERSON WHO MAY CONTROL YOUR PAYCHECK." So we keep going, explaining our accomplishments and results while the person across the screen performs another yawn like they are trying to inhale the entire virtual background.

At some point, you stop wondering whether you're getting the job and start wondering whether you should send them a pillow, coffee, or a calendar invitation for a nap. Then four weeks later, the rejection email arrives: "After careful consideration..." Careful? I'm not convinced there was casual consideration.

And that's what companies forget: interviews work both ways. Candidates are evaluating the company too. The interviewer is representing the culture,

leadership, and how people are treated before they ever get an employee badge. If a candidate is expected to spend hours preparing, rearrange their schedule, research the organization, and potentially survive multiple rounds, giving them 30 focused minutes does not seem unreasonable.

Maybe Allison didn't lose an opportunity. Maybe she received the fastest employee review imaginable without ever getting hired. Because rejection is disappointing, but sometimes the interview itself gives you more information than the offer ever could.

When the person interviewing you looks bored before you finish your second answer, the universe may not be closing a door. It may simply be holding it open and quietly saying, "You might want to keep walking."

POST 26 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

JOB-SEARCH EMOTIONS

Fifteen Minutes Can Change Someone's Life

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on how much preparation and hope can hang on a short recruiter phone call.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters to appreciate that a routine call may be pivotal for the person answering it.

There is a special kind of emotional gymnastics involved in job hunting that nobody warns you about.

You can spend three hours preparing for a 15 minute recruiter call. You research the company, study the job description, rehearse your answers, and convince yourself this could finally be the one. Then the phone rings, the recruiter says hello in a tone that sounds like you personally ruined their Thursday, and suddenly your carefully prepared brain files for early retirement.

Now you are trying to answer "Tell me about yourself" while also wondering if the recruiter is interviewing you from the DMV. Job seekers notice tone. We notice when someone sounds interested and when our resume apparently interrupted their lunch. Candidates are expected to be polished, upbeat, confident, enthusiastic, and somehow act like this is the first interview we have ever had, even if we have already survived two this week.

Meanwhile, behind that professional smile, someone may have been unemployed for months. They may have applied to hundreds of jobs, rewritten their resume endlessly,

followed up with recruiters, and refreshed their inbox so often Gmail should pay rent. But then someone casually asks, "So what have you been doing this whole time?"

Oh, nothing, Becky. Just starring in The Hunger Games: LinkedIn Edition. I have been customizing resumes, filling out applications that ask me to upload my resume and then manually type the entire thing again, preparing for interviews, networking, following up, getting ghosted, recovering from being ghosted, and developing enough emotional resilience to qualify as structural steel. But yes, please tell me more about the "employment gap."

The truth is, candidates carry far more into interviews than most people can see. Nobody expects recruiters to become therapists. But kindness costs absolutely nothing. Say hello like you are happy a person answered the phone. Sound interested. Give someone a chance to settle in before firing questions at them like they are being cross examined on a courtroom drama.

A little warmth can completely change how someone performs. A little coldness can make a prepared person suddenly question everything they

know about themselves. The interview may last fifteen minutes, but the emotional preparation can take days. The rejection can linger for weeks. And somehow candidates are expected to show up to the next interview smiling like they just returned from a wellness retreat in Bali.

So to every job seeker who has finished an interview, stared at the wall, and immediately started conducting a forensic investigation of every sentence they said: keep showing up. Keep laughing when you can. One awkward conversation does not erase your experience, your value, or everything you did to get there.

And to everyone sitting on the other side of that interview, remember this: you may only be having a 15 minute conversation. For the person hoping that call changes their life, it can mean everything.

POST 27 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

AGEISM RED FLAGS

Ageism Hides Inside “High Energy”

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation with a hiring manager brought coded comments about pace and youth into focus.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted candidates and hiring teams to recognize phrases that can conceal unfair assumptions.

Let's talk about red flags of ageism in the job market. The other day I challenged a hiring manager, and the conversation stuck with me.

They didn't come out and say “we don't hire older workers,” of course not, it's never that obvious. Instead, it was all the little hints, the coded phrases, the “dog whistles” of corporate hiring. And once you notice them, you can't unhear them.

It started when they said, “We're looking for someone who's really energetic, you know, someone who can keep up with the fast pace.” Translation: we'd prefer someone under 30 who hasn't yet discovered back pain. Then came, “We're hoping to build a young, dynamic culture.” Translation: don't bother applying if you've ever used a fax machine. And my personal favorite: “We need someone who's a digital native.” Translation: if your first computer wasn't an iPad, thanks for playing, but no.

So I asked them point blank, “Do you realize how that sounds?” And of course, they backpedaled. “Oh no, no, we just want the right fit.” But let's be honest, too often “fit” means “someone young enough to post TikToks about

team building.” Meanwhile, the people with decades of experience, battle scars, and actual wisdom are left standing on the sidelines, overqualified but somehow “not a culture match.”

Here's the funny part though, when companies avoid hiring experienced workers because of age stereotypes, they shoot themselves in the foot. They complain about talent shortages while turning away people who could actually solve their problems. It's like refusing to hire a pilot because they've flown too many planes. “Sorry, Captain, we're looking for someone who's only crashed a few times. We want fresh energy!”

And the emotional part? It's exhausting. People spend years, decades building skills, leading teams, navigating crises, and then get told they're “too experienced.” Too experienced? That's like telling a surgeon, “Sorry, you've done too many successful surgeries. We'd prefer someone who's just watched a few YouTube tutorials.”

The truth is, ageism isn't just a red flag, it's a neon billboard flashing, “We value image over substance.” And those companies end up losing out, because sooner or later they realize that “fresh energy” without experience is like

handing car keys to someone who's only played Mario Kart. Exciting at first, but sooner or later, somebody's hitting a wall.

So to my employed and unemployed legends: don't let those red flags convince you that your value has an expiration date. Experience isn't a liability, it's leverage. It's the reason projects get finished, fires get put out, and customers come back. If a company can't see that, that's not your red flag to ignore, it's your signal to walk away.

Stay legendary. And the next time someone says, “We're looking for a young, dynamic culture,” just smile and remind them, “Nothing's more dynamic than someone who already knows how to fix the problems you haven't even discovered yet.”

POST 28 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

BOOK NEWS

Corporate Chaos Reaches the Bookstore

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My book *Laughing in Business Casual* became available through Barnes & Noble.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to share a quick, humorous milestone with readers who follow the corporate comedy.

Corporate chaos finally made it to Barnes & Noble, Inc. Grab your copy of *Laughing in Business Casual* before someone schedules a meeting about it.

My Inbox Is the Corporate Nonsense Doorbell

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone asked why I seem to have so many hiring-manager arguments and unusual stories.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain that people send their experiences because they recognize something familiar in the writing.

I knew LinkedIn had become a sitcom when someone asked me, “How do you get into all these arguments with hiring managers?” Like I’m waking up, putting on armor, grabbing coffee, and heading into battle with someone named Todd from Talent Acquisition because he asked a candidate where they see themselves in five years.

I promise, I don’t go looking for these stories. They arrive in my inbox like Amazon packages I forgot I ordered: constantly, occasionally looking like they were drop kicked from a moving van. Recruiters send them. Candidates send them. Hiring managers send them. Current employees send them from the break room. At this point, I don’t find the material. The material finds me.

And the modern hiring process is starting to look suspiciously like Amazon tracking. First you apply and immediately receive, “Your application has been received.” Great. That’s basically “Label created.” Nobody has touched anything. Then a recruiter calls and suddenly your career is “Out for delivery.” You research the company, prepare examples, survive three interviews, an assessment, a panel, and a vice president asking what animal represents your leadership style.

Then silence. You check your email the same way you refresh Amazon tracking. “Still in transit.” Where? Nobody knows. Amazon will eventually admit they lost your package. Corporate recruiting will leave your application “under consideration” long enough for archaeologists to classify it as an ancient artifact.

Some companies now want seven rounds for jobs paying enough to finance one family meal at the airport. They ask you to upload your resume, then make you manually type every job into 47 tiny boxes. That is the employment version of Amazon asking for your address after the driver is already standing on your porch.

And Amazon, since we’re here, we need to talk. Remember when Prime meant two day delivery? Now it means, “We have received your order and spiritually intend to deliver it.” The tracking says “eight stops away” at 11:00 a.m. At 4:30 p.m. it says “six stops away.” At 9:47 p.m. Amazon updates it to “Running late.” Running late? My package apparently stopped for dinner, changed careers, and started a family. Then you get the delivery photo and discover your purchase sitting beside a garage door you have

never seen. Amazon proudly sends the picture like, “Delivered!” Yes. To someone. Somewhere. Congratulations to whoever received my phone charger and dog treats.

That’s basically recruiting now. “We loved your background.” Delivered. “We’re excited to move you forward.” Delivered. “We’ll have an update Friday.” Package missing.

So when people wonder why I always seem to have another ridiculous hiring story, understand that I’m not spending my days arguing with hiring managers. I’m basically the neighborhood Ring camera for corporate nonsense. I open my inbox, see what showed up on the porch, and report the footage. Unfortunately, corporate America keeps offering same day delivery!!

POST 30 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

AGEISM & EXPERIENCE

Over 50 and Suddenly Invisible

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I was thinking about the strange gap between employers praising experience and avoiding older applicants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted later-career professionals to recognize the enduring value of their judgment and resilience.

You know what nobody tells you about turning 50+ in the job market? You don't suddenly lose your skills, you just gain a new superpower: invisibility.

It's wild. One minute you're the go to person, the firefighter who can put out any corporate blaze, the mentor who trains rookies, the steady voice when everyone else is panicking. The next minute, HR is acting like your resume needs to be carbon dated by archaeologists.

The rejection phrases are always the same, "Too experienced." Translation: You actually know what you're doing, but we're afraid to pay you. "Not a culture fit." Translation: We think you won't enjoy our TikTok team building dance offs and ironic Slack emojis. "Overqualified." Translation: We're worried you'll want more than free pizza on Fridays as compensation.

Let's be honest, it's not about "fresh energy" or "adaptability." Because who is more adaptable? The 25 year old who panics when Teams crashes, or the 55 year old who has survived dial-up internet, Y2K panic, Blackberry keyboards, Palm Pilots, and Windows Vista? Who has more stamina? The 28 year old who needs a nap after two back to back Zooms, or the 52 year old

who drinks four cups of coffee before 9 a.m. and still finds time to manage work, family, a mortgage, aging parents, and being everyone's free tech support?

And yet, in corporate bingo, "seasoned" is now code for "outdated." Suddenly, knowing how to solve a problem without Googling it is a liability. Meanwhile, companies are shocked, shocked! that their teams of "fresh energy" keep hitting the same walls that a seasoned pro would've seen coming from a mile away.

Here's the irony. The same HR departments that ghost candidates over 50 are the ones 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 let's get real, 50+ candidates aren't asking for yachts, private jets, or a corner office with a personal barista. They're asking for fair pay, respect, and maybe a vacation that doesn't involve crashing in their cousin's basement. That's not "too much." That's called adulthood in 2026. And when the Wi-Fi goes down or the system crashes, who

do they call? Not Chad, the 24 year old "culture fit" who thinks fax machines are an urban legend. They call the person who's been through enough chaos to have five backup plans in their back pocket. That's not outdated. That's called value.

So, to my legends over 50, you're not too old, too slow, or too expensive. You're the storm tested ship in a sea of inflatable pool floats. You're the reason things don't collapse when the unexpected happens. You are not a risk, you are the insurance policy.

Fresh energy without experience is like giving car keys to someone who only watched a tutorial, it ends at the curb. 50+ isn't a weakness. It's the upgrade everyone's pretending they don't need, until the storm hits. Remember that.

POST 31 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

MY VOICE & LINKEDIN

I Finally Stopped Posting Like Corporate HR

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I looked back at how carefully polished my online voice used to be, and why that changed.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to know why I keep discussing the uncomfortable parts of work even when employers notice.

When I joined LinkedIn, I was polished. Very polished. Corporate headshot polished. I was looking for a job, so every post sounded like it had been approved by HR, Legal, Communications, and at least one motivational poster hanging crooked in a conference room.

Then I got a job, and suddenly came the corporate reminder: watch what you post, protect the brand, promote the positive culture, make the company look good, and whatever you do, do not accidentally develop a personality online.

So naturally, I developed one. I started speaking up about layoffs, ghosting, ridiculous interview processes, impossible job descriptions, and recruiters disappearing faster than free donuts in a break room. I started sharing stories from people who had been unemployed for months and were beginning to wonder if the hiring process had been designed by people who had never actually needed a job.

And I used humor because sometimes people do not need another leadership quote pasted over a mountain at sunrise. Sometimes they need somebody to say, "Yes, this is ridiculous. No, you are not imagining it.

And yes, uploading your resume and then typing the entire thing again into 47 little boxes should qualify as community service." At first, I was told I was being too negative. Funny how "negative" often means "you said the quiet part where executives could hear it."

Then something happened. The people messaging me were not unemployed forever. They got jobs. They rebuilt their confidence. They became recruiters, managers, directors, HR leaders, and hiring managers. The people who once sat staring at rejection emails are now sitting on the other side of the table making decisions, and that matters more than any post I could ever write. They remember what ghosting felt like. They remember preparing for an interview only to discover the interviewer had not read their resume. They remember hearing, "We will circle back," and realizing the circle was apparently the size of Saturn.

And because they remember, many of them are changing the experience for the next person. They are sending updates, giving feedback, shortening interview processes, looking past gaps, calling candidates back, and treating people with dignity. Some of them even

tell candidates the salary before interview number six, which frankly should earn them a parade.

That is why I kept posting. Not because I wanted followers. Not because I wanted to make companies angry. I kept posting because people needed to know they were not alone. Now the best part is watching those same people become the leaders they once needed.

That is how change happens. Not through another corporate webinar called "Humanizing the Candidate Journey." It happens when people who remember being ignored finally get a seat at the table and decide they will not ignore the next person.

Turns out the unemployed job seekers everyone overlooked were never the problem. They were the future hiring managers. And they remembered everything.

The Fully Assembled Candidate Myth

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Recruiting requirements increasingly sounded like a request for someone who already knows every internal system.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to make room for capable people to learn rather than demand impossible exact matches.

Somewhere along the way, hiring turned into a game of corporate bingo where your resume has to match the job description so perfectly that I'm surprised companies don't ask candidates to submit themselves in PDF format.

You can have 15 years of leadership experience, build teams, grow revenue, solve problems nobody else wanted to touch, survive restructures, train half the department, and get the printer working without calling IT. But if job description says "five years of experience with Spreadsheet Wizard Pro 7.4" and you only used 7.2, suddenly everyone gets nervous. Never mind that you could probably learn the update during lunch. "We're looking for someone whose experience more closely aligns with our needs." Translation: We need someone who has already done this exact job, using this exact software.

Then companies wonder why the position has been open for four months. They say they want curious people, adaptable people, problem solvers, innovators, candidates who can "think outside the box." Then they build a hiring box so specific nobody can fit inside it.

Candidate says, "I've used five similar systems and taught myself three." Impressive. "I've led a team twice this size." "I increased revenue 32%." Fantastic. "I haven't used your exact scheduling software." Unfortunately, we have decided to pursue other candidates. Apparently adaptability is a core value, as long as nobody ever has to adapt.

The funniest part comes when a company finally takes a chance on somebody whose resume wasn't a perfect keyword casserole. Three months later the manager is saying, "Wow, they picked this up incredibly fast." Yes, Karen. That would be the "fast learner" part of the resume you nearly ignored. A resume is a snapshot. It can show experience and skills, but it cannot fully capture judgment, curiosity, resilience, leadership, work ethic, common sense, or the ability to walk into chaos on Monday morning and somehow have everyone functioning by Wednesday.

Standards matter. Qualifications matter. Relevant experience matters. Nobody is suggesting we hire an accountant because they once balanced a restaurant check or make someone a surgeon because they

watched Grey's Anatomy. But there is a massive difference between hiring for capability and hiring for keyword compliance. Sometimes the candidate with every buzzword is the right person. Sometimes the candidate missing three is the person who transforms the department because they know how to learn, lead, think, and figure things out.

So if your company says it values growth, learning, curiosity, innovation, and a "growth mindset," occasionally you may have to hire someone who still has something left to learn.

Otherwise, rewrite the posting honestly: "Seeking fully assembled employee. Batteries included. Must arrive preloaded with every system we use, require no training, know where we keep the stapler on day one, and somehow bring fresh ideas despite having already done everything exactly our way."

The Fake Recruiter's \$399 Resume Cure

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A laid-off reader shared suspicious recruiter messages and pressure to buy resume services.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted job seekers to question anyone who turns their vulnerability into a sales funnel.

Apparently being unemployed in 2026 is not expensive enough, so the internet has introduced a premium upgrade: fake recruiters who appear the second you turn on "Open to Work" and immediately try to sell you a resume consultant.

Losing your income and applying to hundreds of jobs apparently was not enough character development.

A woman told me she had been laid off, received severance, took a couple of weeks to regroup, and then did everything job seekers are told to do. She spent months applying only to jobs she matched almost perfectly. She rewrote resumes for ATS systems, mirrored keywords, customized cover letters, tracked applications, and treated unemployment like an unpaid full time job. Over 150 applications later, she had received nothing. Not interviews. Not meaningful responses. Just silence. Eventually she started applying lower. Account manager? Sure. Inside sales? Fine. Costco? ANY POSITION. Still nothing.

So she pieced together consulting work, tried reviving a struggling business, started doing live selling on TikTok, and kept trying to stay afloat. After more than two years of this, she

turned on the public "Open to Work" banner on LinkedIn. Suddenly her inbox started exploding. Recruiters! Opportunities! Six figure jobs!

Nope. The "recruiters" all seemed to have mysterious high paying positions at private companies that were hard to verify. They asked where she was in the interview process and then, by an astonishing coincidence, arrived at the same conclusion: her resume needed an ACRW certified specialist with enough acronyms after their name to qualify as a pharmaceutical warning label. Naturally, the specialist cost money. Because apparently unemployment now requires paying somebody so a computer can understand that you know how to work.

Then came my favorite part. By the next morning, most of these recruiters had vanished, along with their messages, like LinkedIn raccoons caught digging through the career trash. The whole thing looked suspiciously like a referral funnel: pose as a recruiter, dangle a shiny job, create urgency, then funnel a desperate job seeker toward a paid resume service. That is not recruiting. That is unemployment with in app purchases.

There are scams everywhere, but targeting people already scared about rent, debt, and keeping their homes is a special kind of garbage. Job seekers are already being ghosted by legitimate companies. Now apparently they also have to investigate whether the person ghosting them ever had a job to offer.

So if you turn on "Open to Work" and suddenly receive a message about a confidential \$140,000 role from Global Strategic Synergy Talent Partners International LLC, stay alert. Especially if five minutes later they diagnose your resume with "CVViz quantum optimization misalignment" and prescribe a \$399 consultant.

At this point, I am convinced the modern job search is not a hiring process. It is an escape room. And apparently the first clue is your credit card.

POST 34 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

PAY TRANSPARENCY

Salary Transparency Should Not Be a Mystery

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post about a Virginia salary-disclosure law prompted thoughts about employers hiding pay ranges.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring conversations to begin with practical transparency instead of negotiating in the dark.

I saw a post saying Virginia has passed a law requiring employers to tell applicants the salary up front, and somewhere a hiring manager just dropped their coffee and whispered, “But how will we know who is willing to work for the least?”

For years, job seekers have been playing one of the strangest games in professional life. A company creates a position, approves a budget, knows exactly what it can pay, posts the job, interviews you three times, studies your resume like it is evidence in a federal investigation, and then looks you in the face and asks, “So, what are your salary expectations?” Sir, you called me. You have the spreadsheet. I have rent.

And if you dare ask what the position pays, suddenly everyone becomes mysterious. “We offer a competitive compensation package.” Competitive with what? Groceries? A studio apartment? The salary I made in 2014? Apparently “competitive” can mean anything from six figures to a free polo shirt and the opportunity to participate in Friday pizza.

Then comes my favorite move: “We don’t want compensation to be the main reason someone joins us.” Of

course not. Personally, I was hoping to commute 45 minutes each way because I’m passionate about quarterly reporting and really believe in the break room microwave.

Imagine the chaos now that companies may actually have to reveal the number before candidates spend six weeks auditioning for employment. No more completing a personality assessment, recording a one way video interview, meeting the recruiter, meeting the manager, meeting the manager’s manager, preparing a presentation, interviewing with a panel of seven people, providing references from everyone you have known since middle school, and finally discovering the salary is \$38,000 plus “unlimited growth potential.”

Salary transparency should not feel revolutionary. If you’re selling a house, you list the price. If you’re selling a car, you list the price. If I walk into Target, nobody makes me carry a television to the register before saying, “Before we tell you what it costs, what were you hoping to spend?”

But hiring somehow decided money needed to be a surprise ending. And yes, companies will probably find creative ways to keep the circus alive. I

expect ranges like \$42,000 to \$287,000 depending on experience, planetary alignment, department budget, coffee consumption, and whether Mercury is in retrograde. Then after six interviews they’ll explain that the role is “budgeted toward the lower end of the range.”

Still, progress is progress. Job seekers are not asking for state secrets. They want to know whether the opportunity can pay their bills before investing hours preparing for it. Employers want candidates to respect their time, show up prepared, communicate clearly, and be transparent.

Seems reasonable that transparency should occasionally travel in both directions. So congratulations, Virginia. Somewhere today, the phrase “salary based on experience” is nervously updating its resume.

POST 35 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

LINKEDIN CULTURE

LinkedIn: Now Apparently a Dating App

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A story about finding love on LinkedIn made the platform's bizarre mix of content hard to resist.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at an online space where career advice, layoffs and romance share the same feed.

At some point, LinkedIn stopped being a professional networking site and became the internet's strangest neighborhood.

One minute you're reading about layoffs. The next someone is explaining how getting stuck at an airport taught them seven lessons about leadership. And now CNN is looking for people who found love on LinkedIn.

Yes, LinkedIn. The same place where people announce layoffs with "I'm excited for my next chapter," celebrate promotions like they won an Oscar, and turn lunch into leadership lessons is becoming Tinder with endorsements. Somewhere, a recruiter is looking at a profile thinking, "Great background, strong communication skills... but is he emotionally available?"

I can already see the new features coming. "Alex viewed your profile." "Someone endorsed you for Excel." That is basically foreplay in corporate America. "Congratulations on your work anniversary!" Nothing says romance like an automated notification reminding your crush that you survived another year of Teams meetings. Imagine the dating bios. "Results driven professional seeking a strategic partnership with long term growth

potential. Must communicate well and tolerate networking events."

"So, tell me about yourself." "Well, as you can see from my profile, I increased revenue 27 percent and I'm wondering why you left me on read after viewing my profile three times." Then comes the breakup. "After careful consideration, we have decided to move forward with another candidate. We selected someone whose experience more closely aligns with our relationship needs." Beautiful. Even heartbreak gets an HR template.

LinkedIn already gave us Easy Apply, which requires uploading a resume and then manually typing the entire resume into 147 boxes. Now apparently we may also need Easy Date. Click "Interested," answer whether you're willing to relocate, disclose salary expectations, complete a personality assessment, and wait six to eight weeks to find out they decided to date internally.

And because this is LinkedIn, people will turn relationships into thought leadership. "My partner forgot our anniversary. Here are seven lessons it taught me about resilience, accountability, and B2B sales." CNN asking about LinkedIn love stories

means this has apparently become enough of a thing to investigate, which feels like where this platform has been heading. We started with jobs."

"Then motivational speeches. Then selfies. Then personal trauma. Then airport lounge photos with leadership captions. Dating was inevitable.

Of course it was. At this rate LinkedIn will soon ask, "Are you open to work, open to network, or open to a serious relationship with someone who has Premium?" And if people really are finding love here, good for them.

The job market has already taught us rejection, ghosting, vague communication, multiple rounds, unreasonable expectations, and people disappearing after saying, "We'll be in touch." Turns out "professional networking" was just a long onboarding process.

POST 36 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

OFFER AND LAYOFF SHOCK

A New Job That Lasted Two Days

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I read about someone who completed hiring and started work before the position vanished two days later.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to recognize the damage caused when a hire is reversed almost immediately.

I thought I had seen every possible way corporate America could end a job, and then I read about a man whose position lasted two days. Not two weeks. Not two months. Two days.

He started a remote role on August 3rd after doing everything job seekers are told to do: apply, interview, follow up, accept the offer, complete the paperwork, and prepare for the sacred first week ritual of waiting for system access while pretending the benefits portal makes sense. By August 5th, he got the call. The position was being outsourced. He barely had enough time to forget his temporary password before the company looked at the org chart and said, "Actually, never mind."

That is not onboarding. That is a free trial with automatic cancellation. Imagine spending months proving your value to strangers on Zoom, sitting through multiple rounds, waiting for approvals, and finally hearing, "We'd like to offer you the position." You think the search is over. Then 48 hours later corporate America hits Ctrl+Z and you are right back online reading job descriptions that require eight years of experience with software invented last Thursday.

What struck me most was how he

handled it. He did not pretend everything was fine. He admitted the day was heavy, sat with the disappointment, and reminded himself of something people forget when companies make sudden decisions: his skills did not disappear between August 3rd and August 5th. His experience did not evaporate because somebody changed a budget. His value did not drop because outsourcing looked better on a spreadsheet. A restructuring decision is not a performance review, and being erased from an organizational chart does not mean you were the wrong person.

Still, job seekers are expected to turn every rejection, layoff, restructuring, ghosting, rescinded offer, and surprise corporate trapdoor into a motivational speech before dinner. "Stay positive." "Everything happens for a reason." "Use this as fuel." Sometimes you do not need fuel. Sometimes you need to stare at the wall and say, "What in the Microsoft Teams just happened?" Losing a job before you have even learned everybody's names sounds absurd until you are living it. You survived the applications, interviews, waiting, paperwork, excitement, and relief. You thought you crossed the finish line. Instead, your employment had the lifespan of a grocery store

avocado.

And to anyone who has accepted an offer, celebrated, announced the news, and then discovered the company had different plans, I see you. The hiring process already has enough plot twists without companies introducing the season finale during orientation.

Every offer letter should probably include: "Congratulations and welcome aboard. Employment may be affected by restructuring, outsourcing, budget changes, leadership changes, Mercury retrograde, or whatever Finance decides after lunch." To the guy whose new job lasted two days, keep going. You did not fail onboarding. Onboarding failed to survive you.

POST 37 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

TOXIC MANAGEMENT

Some Bosses Can Turn a Win Into a Warning

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a leader who focused on one missed detail even when the team delivered important results.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted managers to recognize effort and success while still holding people accountable.

You ever worked for a leader who could turn a victory into a performance improvement plan before you even finished celebrating it?

I remember working for someone like that. You could hit the sales target, fix problems nobody else wanted, calm down a customer, keep the team together during chaos, and somehow the conversation still started with, "Okay, but what happened here?" Not "great job." Not "thank you." Just a scavenger hunt for the one thing you missed. I swear, I could have walked into the office carrying record numbers in one hand and a rescued puppy in the other, and this leader would have looked at me and said, "Interesting. But why is the puppy not wearing a name badge?"

At first you work harder because you think maybe the problem is you. Maybe if you improve a little more, deliver faster, fix one more thing, stay later, answer one more email, they'll notice. So you chase approval like it's a quarterly bonus. Then the goalpost moves. You hit 100 percent, they ask why it wasn't 110. You solve ten problems, they want to discuss number eleven. Your team improves, the benchmark changes. You have your best month, and somehow the meeting

becomes an investigation into the one Tuesday that wasn't perfect.

Eventually you realize you're not working for a leader. You're trapped in an escape room where the final clue is "be better," the clock never stops, and nobody actually hid a key. The funny part is leaders like this often think they're "driving excellence." They call it high standards. Meanwhile the person with all that potential is sitting in the parking lot wondering how getting praised became harder than getting a mortgage.

There is a huge difference between accountability and making people feel permanently inadequate. Good leaders challenge you. They give feedback. They expect results. But they also recognize progress, because people need to know when they got something right. Constantly moving the finish line eventually teaches people that finishing doesn't matter. Once people believe nothing they do will ever be enough, they stop bringing ideas. They stop volunteering. They stop caring about the extra details. Then eventually, they update their resume.

That's usually when the leader looks shocked. "We had no idea they were unhappy." Of course not. You were too

busy finding the one typo in the report they stayed until 9:00 p.m. to finish.

I learned something from that experience: people can handle high expectations, pressure, and being challenged. What wears people down is feeling invisible while they're succeeding. If someone on your team is carrying a heavy load, fixing problems, improving, showing up, and making things better, tell them. Not after they resign. Not during the exit interview. Not in the LinkedIn recommendation you write after they leave. Tell them while they're still there.

Sometimes "good job" is not lowering the standard. Sometimes it's the reason someone still has enough energy to reach it again tomorrow.

The So-Called Retirement Flight Risk

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I considered how employers call experienced candidates flight risks while younger staff may leave quickly too.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to assess people as individuals rather than predict loyalty from age.

One of the funniest things about ageism in hiring is the logic companies use to convince themselves it makes sense.

Apparently, a 55 year old candidate with decades of experience is a “flight risk” because they might retire in few years. Meanwhile, Tyler, 26, has been at the company for nine business days, changed his LinkedIn headline to “Open to Work,” and is already wondering how soon is too soon to start interviewing. Somehow the person who stayed 15 years at one company is considered risky, while the person who treats employment like a free trial is viewed as the future.

Companies will look at someone who survived restructures, trained half the department, worked through software migrations, mentored younger employees and say, “We’re concerned you may not stay long term.” Meanwhile, half the workforce treats three years like a prison sentence. Recruiters tell people that moving around can increase salary and accelerate careers. Then the same company sees a 58 year old applicant and suddenly turns into a retirement actuary. “What if he leaves in four years?” You should be throwing him a parade. Your last three hires combined

didn’t make it four years.

One left after eight months for a remote job. One disappeared after lunch on a Wednesday. The third updated LinkedIn during onboarding and was mentally gone before IT finished setting up the laptop. And somehow the experienced candidate is the risky one. Older workers are often exactly the people who understand commitment. They remember when leaving meant giving proper notice, documenting work, saying goodbye, and making sure someone knew where everything was. Now people leave by changing their Slack status to “offline” permanently.

And companies know turnover is expensive. Recruiting costs money. Training costs money. Lost productivity costs money. Constantly rebuilding teams costs money. Managers spending six months teaching someone the job only to receive a “Hey, quick chat?” message costs everyone a small piece of their soul. Yet we still act like age automatically equals instability, as if every worker over 50 has a retirement countdown clock floating above their head.

Maybe instead of asking, “How long until this person retires?” companies

should ask, “How long did our last five hires actually stay?” That answer might get awkward fast. Because the person rejected for being “too experienced” may be the one most likely to show up, do the work, mentor others, solve problems, and stay longer than the person hired because they had “great energy.”

Experience is not a countdown clock. Age is not a resignation letter. Hiring someone over 50 is not investing in a company about to go out of business. Sometimes the biggest flight risk in the building is the employee whose badge is still warm from the printer.

So if your hiring strategy rejects experienced people because you’re afraid they might leave someday, congratulations. You may already be replacing someone younger who left yesterday.

Six Figures Does Not Buy My Dignity

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I was thinking about workplaces that equate a high salary with unlimited availability and surrendered boundaries.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to distinguish demanding work from unreasonable ownership of their private lives.

A salary over \$100,000 does not come with a deed to my soul. Some companies seem to get confused about this.

They see six figures on a payroll report and suddenly act like they purchased the deluxe employee package: unlimited availability, weekend access, after hours replies, canceled vacations, instant responses, and the premium feature where you smile politely while being treated like a malfunctioning printer. Yes, \$100K is good money. But a strong salary is compensation for experience, judgment, responsibility, and results. It is not an all access pass to someone's nervous system.

We started acting like a decent paycheck means a person has forfeited the right to be tired, frustrated, respected, or occasionally unavailable. It doesn't. Paying someone well should mean you value what they bring to the table. It should not mean you get to flip the table over, set it on fire, and then ask why they are not being more positive about the smoke. I have seen people stay because they kept repeating: "But the money is good." The money was good. The sleep was gone. The confidence was fading. Every Sunday evening felt like the opening credits to a horror movie.

A high salary can become golden handcuffs quickly. You tell yourself you should be grateful. You look at the mortgage, the kids, the benefits, the title, and the number on your W-2, and convince yourself that being miserable is simply the membership fee for success. Meanwhile, your boss is sending "quick questions" at 10:47 p.m., calling during vacation, and scheduling a 7:00 a.m. meeting to discuss work life balance.

You can be highly compensated and still deserve boundaries. You can be an executive, director, manager, engineer, salesperson, or whatever impressive title LinkedIn has stapled underneath your name and still say, "This is not okay." Money doesn't make disrespect more respectful. A bonus does not make humiliation motivational. A company car does not make burnout a leadership development program. And health insurance does not mean the company should be the reason you need therapy.

Good people do not leave only because of money. Sometimes they leave because they are tired of being spoken down to. Sometimes they leave because their calendar belongs to

everyone except them. Sometimes they leave because they are expected to absorb chaos, smile through dysfunction, and call it "being a team player." Sometimes they leave because the person they were before taking the job is becoming harder to recognize.

Walking away from a large paycheck can be terrifying. But staying somewhere that slowly drains everything from you has a cost too. It just does not appear neatly on a pay stub.

So if a company pays you \$100K, \$150K, \$200K, or more, do the work. Deliver results. Be accountable. Respect the opportunity. But never confuse gratitude with surrender.

Your salary pays for your skills, judgment, effort, and time. It does not purchase your dignity. No matter how many zeros are on the check.

POST 40 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 22

TOXIC BOSS STORIES

An Open Door and a Closed Mind

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a leader whose invitation to raise issues never resulted in real support.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted managers to notice when employees withdraw because they no longer trust the conversation.

Some bosses lead teams. Toxic bosses conduct psychological escape rooms and then act surprised when everyone is looking for the exit.

A while back when I worked for a company, I had one of those bosses who loved to say, "My door is always open." Technically, that was true. The door was open. The mind, however, was closed for renovations. Every conversation started with, "Tell me what you need from me." You'd answer honestly. You'd explain where the team needed support or where a process made no sense. They would nod, take notes, and two weeks later your exact words would appear in a performance discussion as evidence that you "struggle with alignment."

That was when I learned toxic leadership has its own translation guide. "Be honest with me" means "Give me material." "I value feedback" means "Compliments may be submitted Monday through Friday." "I want you to challenge me" means "Please do not actually challenge me." And my favorite, "We're a family here," usually means someone is about to ask you to cancel plans with your actual family because apparently the company clearly depends on you keeping the lights on.

No matter what you accomplished, the scoreboard reset overnight. You could fix a broken location, improve sales, train the team, cover three open positions, answer calls on your day off, solve a customer issue, and rebuild morale. By Monday morning the conversation would still begin with, "So, where do you think you could be doing more?" More? I became convinced the only acceptable answer was, "I have begun cloning myself. The first two copies start Tuesday."

Toxic bosses can turn high performers into exhausted people who suddenly question skills they have used successfully for years. They don't coach you. They keep moving the finish line, then criticize you for not arriving. Their favorite move is taking your commitment and quietly turning it into the minimum expectation. Stay late once, and now you're "usually available." Answer an email on vacation, and suddenly vacation is just working with different scenery. Fix somebody else's problem, and congratulations, you have adopted it permanently.

Then one day you stop doing the extra 37 things nobody ever acknowledged,

and suddenly everybody notices. That's when you hear, "You seem different lately." Correct. I discovered boundaries. Good leaders make you want to do more because you believe in what you're building. Toxic leaders make you do more because you're terrified of what happens if you don't. There is a massive difference, and no pizza lunch or "open door policy" speech can hide it forever.

If every talented person who works for you eventually becomes "difficult," "disengaged," "not a team player," or "not the same person we hired," maybe the common denominator is not the hiring process. Maybe it's the person holding the meeting.

And if your employees need a recovery period after every one on one with you, you are not developing leaders. You are creating LinkedIn content.

Searching for Work After 50 Takes Courage

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on the additional discouragement that can accompany a midlife job search.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to recognize the strength it takes to keep applying while their expertise is questioned.

Some people think job hunting at 50+ is like job hunting at 30 just with a better resume. It's not. At 50+, the resume may be stronger, but somehow the process has found entirely new ways to make experience feel like something you have to defend.

It's walking into a race you've already run three times... only to find they've moved the finish line, changed the rules, and handed you a heavier backpack while telling you to "keep up." It's updating your LinkedIn profile until it sparkles, learning new software just to prove you can, cutting your resume down to one page (because apparently decades of experience should be summarized like a summer internship), and still getting ghosted after round three of interviews.

It's smiling through the "you're overqualified" speech, nodding when they say they're looking for "fresh perspectives," and resisting the urge to reply, "My perspective is fresh, it just comes with 25 years of receipts to prove it works."

You start to notice the coded language. "Too experienced." "Not the right culture fit." "Your salary expectations might be high." Experience matters. Hiring just became more complicated.

And you realize what they're really saying: "We think someone younger will cost less, stay longer, and be easier to mold."

But here's what they forget at 50+, you've been through recessions, layoffs, leadership changes, and industry shifts. You've solved problems that didn't have Googleable answers. You've navigated impossible deadlines without AI, survived bosses who made The Office look like a documentary, and kept teams afloat when budgets were slashed.

You're not stuck in the past. You're standing on a foundation that took decades to build, one that makes you adaptable, not outdated. Still, job hunting at this age is humbling. You go from leading strategy meetings to sitting in your kitchen at 2 a.m., rewriting cover letters for companies that may never respond. You start to question yourself. Maybe you are asking for too much. Maybe you aren't as sharp as you used to be. Maybe the world has moved on without you.

But then you remember, you've rebuilt before. From broken roles. From bad bosses. From entire industries changing overnight. You've picked yourself up when no one else thought you could.

This season is no different.

So if you're 50+ and in the middle of the search right now, hear this: you are not done. You are not obsolete. You are not asking for too much when you're simply asking to be paid what you're worth. The right opportunity will not look at your age and see a risk, it will see a return on investment. It will see steadiness in chaos, clarity in complexity, and a work ethic that doesn't need to be managed every minute of the day.

And when that role comes? You'll walk in knowing you didn't just survive the process, you defied it. Because you're not just hunting for a job." "You're proving, yet again, that experience is not a liability. It's the advantage that will make you unforgettable.

POST 42 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 22

CAREER & LIFE

My Five-Year Plan Had Other Plans

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Looking back at the certainty I had at 29 reminded me how unpredictable careers and adulthood become.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give readers permission to revise their timeline without confusing a detour with failure.

When I was 29, I had a very detailed five year plan for my life. Which is adorable, because apparently life had its own plan and mine was being used as a coaster somewhere.

Apparently, adulthood was less a destination and more a subscription plan. At 29, I thought by now I would have everything figured out. Career locked in. Money stacked up. Stress under control. Maybe even one of those people who wakes up at 5 a.m. voluntarily, drinks something green, journals about gratitude, and somehow has matching storage containers.

Instead, I was mostly trying to figure out why every “great opportunity” came with a salary that required three roommates and a motivational quote. I thought success was supposed to happen in a straight line. Get the job. Work hard. Get promoted. Make more money. Buy the house. Become the person younger me assumed adults magically turned into once they hit a certain age. Nobody tells you the straight line was apparently designed by someone who had never met a recession, a bad boss, corporate restructuring, layoffs, burnout, or an HR department that says “we’re like family” five minutes before eliminating your position.

At 29, I still believed loyalty at work worked both ways. I thought if you worked harder, stayed later, solved problems nobody else wanted, and answered emails during dinner, eventually someone in leadership would notice and reward you. They noticed. They rewarded me with more work. That was my first introduction to the corporate loyalty program. Earn 10,000 points and receive a complimentary meeting about why there’s no budget for raises this year.

I also thought job interviews were simple. You applied, talked to a manager, shook hands, and eventually somebody told you yes or no. I had no idea we were headed toward seven round interview marathons, personality tests, case studies, AI screenings, panel interviews, and assignments asking candidates to create an entire business strategy for free. Twenty nine year old me would have assumed that was satire. Current me knows it’s Tuesday.

But here’s the funny part: I wouldn’t go back and hand my 29 year old self all the answers. Okay, maybe I’d whisper, “Save more money, stop trying to impress people who can’t remember your last name, and when a boss says

‘we need to talk,’ do not schedule it for Friday at 4:30.” But the rest? I needed the mistakes. I needed the jobs that looked perfect and weren’t. I needed the bosses who taught me exactly how not to lead. I needed the career detours, uncomfortable conversations, missed opportunities, and moments when the plan completely fell apart.

Because somewhere along the way, I stopped measuring success by whether my life looked the way I thought it should at 29. The timeline changed. The goals changed. I changed. And that might be the best part. At 29, I thought having your life figured out meant you had succeeded. Now I realize nobody has it figured out.

Some people just have better LinkedIn headlines. Better optics.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE RESUME IS NOT THE PERSON

Seven days. Forty-two posts. More variations of the same strange lesson than any reasonable person should have to collect: somewhere along the way, we started treating the people looking for work as though they were defective products waiting for inspection. Too experienced. Not enough exact software. Wrong vocabulary. Wrong graduation decade. Too ambitious. Not quite the vibe. I have heard enough variations that I am considering making a bingo card. The prize is an actual interview in which somebody has read the resume first.

This week I wrote about a person whose experience apparently deserved a \$25-an-hour offer. I wrote about job descriptions assembled from every department in the building, as though the ideal employee must be a finance director, marketing strategist, sales executive, systems administrator and printer technician before lunch. I wrote about application forms that ask for school GPAs years after a candidate has already led teams, solved crises and paid enough taxes to sponsor a small municipality. If you want people with expertise, do not be surprised when they expect you to recognize what expertise costs.

And then there is ageism, a subject that keeps returning because the stories keep arriving. Some people have been working longer than the software currently screening them has existed. They trained colleagues, built departments, fixed mistakes and carried organizations through circumstances that made the last leadership retreat look like a spa day. Yet an interviewer may suddenly become concerned about their “energy.” That would be funny if it were not affecting mortgages, retirement plans and the confidence of people who have earned the right to be taken seriously.

I am not asking companies to hire someone solely because they have been around a long time. I am asking them to evaluate the abilities actually required for the role. Ask about results. Ask about judgment. Ask how somebody learns. Challenge their thinking fairly. But do not pretend a birthday is a competency test. If the person in front of you knows how to fix the problem, perhaps consider hiring the person rather than asking whether they remember floppy disks. For the record, surviving floppy disks should count as resilience training.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

SOMEONE IS WAITING FOR THAT CALL

One of the messages that stayed with me came from an older gentleman at Starbucks. I bought a coffee and heard about a year spent trying to find work. That is the part of hiring dashboards I wish we talked about more. A year is not a little number in a colorful executive report. It is birthdays, holidays, anxious mornings, cancelled plans and all the moments when somebody must explain to people they love that they are still trying. Sometimes a cup of coffee is just coffee. Sometimes it tells a person they have not become invisible.

Michelle's story was another reminder of how quickly a workplace decision can tear through an ordinary day. She expected a performance conversation and was told it was her last day. Somewhere a calendar invitation may have made that meeting look routine. On the other side of the screen was a life being rearranged in real time. A company can make hard decisions. It can have difficult financial realities. What it cannot do, without leaving a mark, is forget the dignity of the person receiving the news.

Then there was Josh, whose long search finally brought an offer worth celebrating. Good news deserves room in a newsletter filled with corporate absurdity. Not every recruiter disappears. Not every hiring manager uses a seven-part assessment to learn what a conversation could reveal. Some employers listen, recognize a person's value and make an offer. When that happens, I want to celebrate it loudly. The point of this work is not to keep everybody miserable. The point is to make the kind of experience Josh had less unusual.

To anyone employed and scrolling between meetings: the person sending you a message may have spent all morning gathering the courage to ask. You may not have a vacancy. You may not have an introduction. You might only have two minutes. But two minutes of kindness can matter more than a thousand polished posts about empathy. Answer when you can. Share a lead when you have one. And if you are leading interviews, remember that what feels like your routine Tuesday may be somebody else's biggest opportunity in months. Treat it accordingly.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE COMPANY ALSO HAS AN INTERVIEW

This week produced a PowerPoint presentation that, by the sound of it, needed its own project manager. I entered an interview and watched professionals struggle to identify which document was final, final-final or final-final-please-use-this-one. Somewhere in a shared drive, another file was probably preparing a counteroffer. I laughed because I recognized it. Most candidates recognize it too. They have spent hours preparing while the people asking the questions discover their materials during the call.

I also wrote about an interview that felt like an interrogation and another in which the questions sounded suspiciously like compliments from an online dating app. Add the yawning interviewer described in a reader's post, a recruiter call where the tone implies the candidate has ruined lunch, and a debate about ghosting in which courtesy apparently has a strict one-way policy. Taken together, the message is not that interviews should be comedy-free. It is that professionalism is mutual. An employer is being evaluated just as surely as the applicant.

Candidates should show up on time. They should prepare, communicate honestly and tell the company if they need to withdraw. Employers should also show up prepared, give accurate expectations and close the loop. I have never understood why the candidate's failure to respond is recorded forever in the applicant tracking system while an employer's months of silence is described as "the process." Respect is not a feature unlocked only after onboarding. It should be part of the first interaction.

Here is a simple experiment for every company that claims to care about candidates: ask a senior executive to apply anonymously for one of your own jobs. Not with an internal referral. Not with HR quietly clearing the path. The public portal. The duplicated resume entry. The personality test. The automated messages. The same wait everybody else receives. Then sit down together and ask whether you are proud of that experience. If the executive is still trying to reset a password three weeks later, congratulations: the company has found an improvement project. This time the project is real.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

A LEADER IS NOT A MOTIVATIONAL POSTER

I wrote about bosses who ask “What can I help you with?” and then punish the person who answers honestly. That sentence can be an invitation to trust or the opening line of an elaborate trap. The difference is what happens after the answer. Does the leader listen and act? Or does the employee's perfectly reasonable concern become evidence that they are negative, difficult or no longer aligned with the culture? If people have to rehearse a safe answer before a one-on-one meeting, the open-door policy may need more than a fresh coat of paint.

I also thought about leaders who refuse to celebrate a win. Sales target achieved? Where is the one missed detail? Team survived a difficult week? Why was the report late? Customer issue solved? Why was there an issue in the first place? Standards are important. Accountability matters. But if people know that success will immediately be followed by a search for something to criticize, eventually they stop feeling proud of the work. They simply feel relieved that they survived another day. That is not high performance. That is exhaustion with a dashboard.

The raccoon story is funny because actual leadership is rarely tidy. Someone must remain calm when the unexpected happens, protect the people involved, work through the practical mess and avoid turning every emergency into an opportunity for a dramatic speech. A title cannot do that by itself. Neither can a glossy leadership quote posted at 6 a.m. Real leadership is the difficult, everyday habit of treating people fairly when things are inconvenient.

A strong paycheck does not change these rules. A salary of six figures can come with serious responsibility, tough goals and demanding work. It does not come with ownership of a person's weekends, family, health or dignity. People can be grateful for their jobs and still have boundaries. They can deliver outstanding work without being available every moment. And managers can demand excellence without creating fear. If the only way your team meets a goal is by being terrified of you, something in the leadership model is broken. A better KPI might be whether your employees can tell you the truth and still sleep that night.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

WHY THE JOKES KEEP COMING

Somebody asked why I always seem to end up in arguments with hiring managers. I do not wake up searching for a new executive to annoy. I wake up, drink coffee, check messages and discover that the modern workplace has delivered another package of material overnight. A candidate was rejected while the office slept. A recruiter offered resume help that came with a suspicious price tag. A job posting asked for the qualifications of a whole leadership team while offering the budget for one employee. At this point I should probably put a doorbell camera on my inbox.

The jokes are real jokes. I enjoy them. Corporate language is a gift to comedy writers, particularly when a meeting about improving efficiency takes an hour and produces three follow-up meetings. But behind the laughter there is often somebody asking a quieter question: Is it just me? Am I the only person being treated this way? Does this mean my career is over? Those are not punch lines. Those are people trying to make sense of discouraging experiences while keeping a little pride intact. If a sarcastic post helps them feel less alone, that is worth more than a perfect engagement chart.

I keep coming back to the people who choose to tell me their stories. They do not owe me that trust. Some are embarrassed. Some are angry. Some are trying to make it through one more week of applications. Others have found something better and want to show the people still searching that there can be another chapter. I try to write so the frustration has somewhere to go and the hope has somewhere to live. I also want the good employers to be impossible to ignore. Hiring should not be a competition to see who can tolerate the most nonsense. It should be an opportunity for two sides to decide whether they can do meaningful work together.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHY THE JOKES KEEP COMING / CONTINUED

If you are looking for a job this week, please remember the work you did before the rejection email arrived. Remember the teams you helped, the customers you served, the problems you solved and the ordinary days when somebody relied on you. A job title can change overnight. Your accomplishments do not evaporate because an automated system failed to connect the dots. Keep learning, keep reaching out and keep protecting your sense of humor where you can. And if you are one of the people with power to hire, consider what your next email will feel like when it lands. There is a human being on the receiving end.

That is what The Interview Games is about. A little laughter. A little accountability. A reminder that the people walking into these interviews have lives much bigger than a job requisition number. Thank you for reading, for sharing, for celebrating each other and for trusting me with the stories that are too important to bury under “We appreciate your interest.” I will see you next week. Unless the ATS needs my high-school GPA. In that case, I am taking a personal day to look for the report card.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS

Behind every application is somebody's real life.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES