



AUGUST 2 - AUGUST 8, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

40

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

80

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games started with a simple idea: what happens when somebody stops taking the corporate hiring playbook at face value and starts experiencing it? Not the version in the recruiting brochure, where everybody smiles beneath a sign that says PEOPLE FIRST. I mean the actual version, where a resume enters a portal, a candidate prepares for a conversation, and an email written by software delivers an answer that may or may not mention the correct job. I wanted to see it, write about it, and make people laugh without pretending it is harmless.

I apply for roles, talk to hiring teams, pay attention to the details and share what the experience reveals. Readers send me their own stories, too. Sometimes the situations are so absurd that a joke almost writes itself. Sometimes there is nothing funny about a parent sitting in a car before an interview, or somebody waiting years for a paycheck, or an experienced professional being asked whether they are too experienced. Those stories belong here alongside the raccoons, Zoom panels and corporate acronyms. Humor opens a door; it should not close our eyes.

The mission is not to announce that every recruiter is terrible or that no employer knows how to hire. I have seen thoughtful people do hard work with care. I want more of that. I also want companies to notice what their processes feel like from the other side: when an interview becomes an endurance test, when a rejection arrives in minutes, when pay is treated as confidential even though the candidate needs to pay rent, and when public promises about culture evaporate the moment an employee asks a difficult question.

This issue covers August 2 through August 8, 2026. You will find a CEO announcement that sounded like both congratulations and a layoff warning; interviews about high-school grades, tennis balls and mysterious 'unicorn ninja' qualifications; an FBI veteran rejected in a few hours; an AI recruiting duo named Jack and Jill; and the awkward moment I accidentally liked an inspirational post from a toxic former boss. The week also brought reader stories about ageism, long job searches, resignation, courage and the difference between a leadership quote and leadership itself.

Every story appears in the original wording from my LinkedIn export, organized by its Chicago publication date. Before each post, I have added short editorial reflections on the experience that prompted the subject and the bigger point behind it. Those reflections are interpretive context; the posts themselves remain mine, word for word. If this project works, readers laugh, feel less alone, and perhaps a few companies stop scheduling a sixth interview just to ask whether somebody can use Microsoft Teams. That would be a meaningful start.

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POST 01 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 2

CORPORATE CULTURE

The CEO announcement nobody could decode

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A celebratory CEO post blends employee praise with restructuring language, leaving readers unsure what happened.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned why executives wrap difficult changes in applause instead of giving workers clarity and dignity.

This morning, I saw a CEO post with more than 1,000 likes, and after reading it twice, I still could not tell whether it was employee recognition or a corporate warning.

Corporate announcements have become emotional escape rooms. You enter expecting appreciation, follow the applause emojis, and discover the people being celebrated are being shown the exit. The post was glowing. Employees were “the heartbeat of the organization.” Teams had shown “extraordinary resilience.” Staff were praised for their loyalty, passion, sacrifice, and flexibility. There were enough applause emojis to make you think bonuses were about to fall from the ceiling.

Then came paragraph four. “After careful consideration, we have made the difficult decision to restructure.” Nothing says “we see you” quite like seeing your job disappear while reading the recognition message. The transition was incredible. One sentence said, “We could not have achieved this success without you.” The next basically said, “We will now attempt to achieve future success without several of you.”

The CEO thanked everyone for “going above and beyond,” which is corporate

language for working late, covering three vacant roles, and pretending the new software made things easier. Then the company announced it would be “realigning resources.” Resources, of course, being people with mortgages, families, and passwords IT would disable before lunch.

I admire the efficiency. Why schedule separate appreciation and layoff announcements when you can combine them into one emotional ambush?

Congratulations, Susan, on ten years of outstanding service. Please see security for your plaque and a box. The restructure was necessary to “position the company for long term growth.” Employees are always positioned for growth right before they are repositioned into unemployment. Executives call it transformation. Workers call it Tuesday. The post ended with language about moving forward together. Together is flexible. Sometimes it means shoulder to shoulder. Sometimes it means leadership moving forward while everyone else updates LinkedIn.

Businesses change. Markets shift. Costs rise. Painful decisions happen. But perhaps do not place a parade and a funeral in the same announcement. Do

not call employees family, celebrate their commitment, praise their sacrifice, and then introduce a restructure like it is the final slide in a quarterly presentation.

Recognition should make people feel valued, not warn them to remove personal items from their desks. When a CEO begins a post with “We are incredibly proud of our people,” employees should not need to scroll while holding their breath.

If the company wants to recognize employees, try honesty. Say what is happening. Explain why. Treat people like adults. Give them time, dignity, support, and more than a paragraph written by legal.

Nothing destroys trust faster than being called the heartbeat of the company at 7:00 a.m. and an operational adjustment by noon.

Where the story ends and the joke begins

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Commenters assume that every hiring-process story I share happened to me in exactly the way described.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explained the distinction between a reader's real experience and the sarcasm I use to tell its story.

The other day, I shared a story about a company's interview process, and by the time the comments started rolling in, people assumed I had personally survived every round, every recruiter call, every personality test, and every "quick conversation" that somehow required a calendar invite, a panel, and three follow-ups.

I did not. The story was sent to me by someone who actually lived it. I simply added the punchline, cleaned up the timeline, and translated the corporate language into something humans could understand.

That has become part of what I do. People send me stories from companies across different industries. Some are funny. Some are painful. Some are so confusing I have to read them twice just to confirm the candidate was applying for a job and not being recruited into a secret government program.

One person had six interviews and never met the hiring manager. Another completed a case study, a personality test, and a presentation, only to receive a rejection email addressed to someone else. Someone else was told the company wanted a "disruptive thinker," then got rejected for asking too many

questions.

You cannot make this up. Well, technically, I can make the punchline up. But the process itself arrives fully assembled. My contribution is usually small. I add a little sarcasm, remove the names, protect the person who shared it, and point out the part everyone in corporate was hoping we would politely ignore.

That is the funny part about these stories. The comedy is already there. I am just holding up a flashlight. I gave the chaos a microphone and its caption. Companies sometimes act shocked when people laugh at their hiring process. They call it "a misunderstanding." They say the candidate did not have the full context. Apparently, the missing context is why eight interviews were necessary for a role that had been reposted for seven months.

I do not wake up and randomly choose a company to roast. I open my messages and find enough material to produce a full season.

Candidates are not complaining because interviews exist. They are frustrated because some processes have become longer than the actual

jobs people are applying for. By the time the final decision arrives, the candidate has learned the company values, met half the leadership team, completed unpaid work, and emotionally retired.

Then comes the email. "We were impressed by your background." That sentence has ended more dreams than bad Wi-Fi. The reason I share these stories is not to embarrass people. It is to remind companies that candidates remember how they were treated. A hiring process is not just a system. It is a reputation being built in real time.

So when you read one of my stories and think, "There is no way that happened," please understand that I probably removed the most unbelievable part because I wanted the post to sound realistic.

The story came from a real person. The punchline came from me. The confusion came directly from the company.

Too experienced for the decade

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A long resume becomes a source of anxiety because applicants fear being judged for the length of their careers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that decades of useful work should count as evidence of ability, not a reason to screen people out.

There's anxiety that comes with sending a resume with years of experience. You are not worried you are unqualified. You are worried that you are qualified in the wrong decade.

You update the document, remove proof you remember fax machines, shorten twenty years of accomplishments into three polite bullets, and pray nobody does the math. Your career history feels less like proof of value and more like evidence at trial.

Hiring teams say they want someone experienced, but apparently experience must arrive fresh, wrinkle free, and have the original packaging. They want five years of experience, but not enough years to make them wonder whether you have opinions. They want maturity, but preferably with a graduation date from last Thursday.

Candidates are told to "bring their whole selves to work," while deleting half their lives from the resume. Remove the early roles. Hide the dates. Skip the year you earned the degree. Do not mention the software that built the company before the current software existed. Keep the wisdom, but erase the timeline.

Then comes the rejection email. "We were impressed with your background." That sentence has become the corporate version of "you seem nice." They were impressed, just not enough to speak to you, interview you, or acknowledge that your background might help solve the problems listed in the job description.

And let us talk about the obsession with the "new face." Companies say they need fresh energy, which can mean they want someone young enough to accept three jobs under one title and call burnout "growth." Meanwhile, the experienced candidate knows how to prevent the fire, manage the crisis, calm the customer, coach the team, and still finish the report before lunch. Apparently that is suspicious.

The funniest part is watching companies complain that nobody wants to work while quietly filtering out people who have been working for decades. They want loyalty, resilience, judgment, leadership, and proven results, but become nervous when those qualities come with visible dates attached.

No candidate should feel terrified that a timeline will disqualify them before

their talent gets a chance to speak. Experience is not a defect. It is not outdated inventory. It is not something to hide in the basement beside the old printer cartridges. A career is not a carton of milk. It does not spoil because the date makes someone uncomfortable.

To every person editing a resume tonight and wondering whether to delete another chapter of their life just to look "current," remember this: the right employer will not ask you to shrink your story so they can feel younger. They will recognize that you have already climbed hills they are still scheduling meetings to discuss.

Keep applying. Keep showing up. Keep telling the truth about what you can do. And if a company rejects you because your experience has too much experience, wish them luck training the "new face" to solve the same problem you fixed fifteen years ago.

POST 04 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 2

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The empathy influencer who ruins morale

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A boss's inspiring online message about kindness contrasts with the way employees are treated at work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the distance between leadership branding and the behavior workers experience every day.

Toxic bosses love giving advice because apparently surviving the damage they caused qualifies them to teach leadership.

They will write a LinkedIn post at 6:12 a.m. about empathy, psychological safety, and "leading with heart," then spend the day making three employees cry. By lunch, the post has 900 likes, 147 comments calling them "an incredible human," and one former employee staring like, "Is this the same person who scheduled my breakdown as a performance issue?"

Toxic bosses love phrases like, "My door is always open." The problem is what happens after you walk through it. You bring a concern and leave with a warning. You ask for support, and suddenly the conversation becomes about your attitude. You call it impossible, and they recommend a podcast about resilience.

Then they post, "Check on your people. You never know what someone is going through." Sir, they are going through you. They tell everyone to protect their peace while operating like a leaf blower inside the nervous system. They post about work-life balance while messaging the team at midnight. They celebrate "mental health awareness" by

adding a heart emoji to the same email that says vacations are frozen.

And the advice never stops. "Be accountable," says the boss who blamed the department for a decision they made alone. "Communicate openly," says the boss who shares information after it becomes a crisis. "Never stop learning," says the boss who has received the same feedback for six years and treats every suggestion like an assassination attempt.

The painful part is that good employees believe them at first. They work harder. They stay later. They keep trying to prove they are dependable, adaptable, grateful, and worthy of respect. They start carrying the stress home. They become quieter around family. Sunday evening feels like a threat. Monday morning feels like punishment.

Eventually, they stop recognizing themselves. That is what toxic leadership steals first: not productivity, not engagement, but confidence. It makes talented people question skills they had before they met that boss. It turns strong employees into anxious versions of themselves who apologize before speaking and rehearse simple emails five times.

Then, when those employees finally leave, the boss posts another lesson, "Sometimes people outgrow the mission." No. Sometimes people get tired of being emotionally mugged in a conference room.

To anyone working under a leader whose online wisdom does not match their offline behavior, remember this: you are not weak because the environment is wearing you down. You are not difficult because you asked for clarity. You are not disloyal because you chose your health over their title.

A real leader does not need a viral post to prove they care. Their employees already know. And if your boss writes about kindness after ruining your week, do not argue in the comments. Just react with "Insightful."

Sometimes sarcasm is the only employee benefit left.

POST 05 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Your high-school GPA and a \$50K job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview for a roughly \$50,000 role veers into old school records and strange hypothetical questions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I mocked interviews that test irrelevant trivia rather than whether a candidate can do the actual job.

Some job interviews are no longer conversations. They are archaeological digs designed to discover whether teenage you deserved a \$50,000 salary.

I recently interviewed for a job paying around \$50,000, and somewhere between “Tell me about yourself” and “Where do you see yourself in five years?” the hiring manager asked about my high school GPA.

My high school GPA. Not college. Not graduate school. Not my MBA. Not the years of leadership experience, teams managed, revenue grown, stores improved, or problems solved. Apparently, the missing piece was how seriously teenage me took algebra. For a moment, I thought I had misunderstood the question. Maybe GPA stood for “Growth, Performance, and Accountability.” That would have made sense. But no. He wanted to know whether I completed geometry homework when phones were attached to walls and the internet made a noise before connecting.

Sir, I have employees younger than my high school diploma. At this stage in my career, asking about my high school GPA is like inspecting the receipt for my first bicycle before approving me to drive a company car. Whatever

happened in tenth grade has been replaced by decades of work, budgets, customer complaints, staffing shortages, broken systems, and meetings that could have been emails.

But hiring managers love turning a normal interview into an academic investigation. The position pays \$50,000, yet the questions make it sound like I am being selected to negotiate international peace while performing emergency surgery on a spreadsheet.

“What was your GPA?” “Describe a time you failed.” “What would your childhood teachers say about you?” “How many tennis balls fit inside a school bus?” I do not know, but for \$50,000 I hope the bus comes with dental insurance. Then comes the serious note taking. The hiring manager writes something down and looks concerned, as though my answer revealed a dangerous pattern. Yes, I got a B in chemistry. That explains why I increased sales, developed managers, and survived restructures. Clearly, the periodic table has been holding me back.

Companies say they want experience, but some interviews are designed as if experience expires every time the

interviewer opens a new page in the question guide. You can spend twenty years solving real business problems, but suddenly everyone is worried about whether you made honor roll before social media existed.

Here is a better question: Can the person do the job? Can they lead? Can they learn? Can they communicate? Can they make decisions without scheduling six meetings and forming a committee called the Decision Alignment Task Force? Those answers matter. My high school GPA does not.

If it matters that much, please send me your company's high school report card too. I would like to see what grade the organization received in communication, onboarding, retention, and responding to candidates after interviews.

Something tells me several companies are currently failing Ghosting 101.

Rejected because I took the call in my car

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A prepared candidate completes a panel interview from a quiet parked car and is criticized for the location.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked why an interview background can outweigh preparation, qualifications and respectful participation.

Some interviews test your qualifications. Others test whether your vehicle has been approved by corporate as an acceptable conference room.

A while ago, I had a panel interview scheduled in the middle of a workday. I couldn't take it from the office. So I found a parking lot, shut off the engine, adjusted the seat, balanced my phone at a flattering angle, and converted my car into a temporary executive suite.

The lighting was better than most office fluorescents. The background was clean unless you consider a headrest or seat belt to be unprofessional. I wore a suit, checked the camera, and joined early. From the waist up, I looked like an executive. From the waist down, I hoped nobody asked me to stand.

Then the panel appeared in polished offices with framed mission statements and enough plants to suggest the company employed a Director of Indoor Landscaping. They asked about leadership, operations, employee development, difficult customers, and business growth. I gave detailed examples, explained measurable results, and answered every question without asking why six people were

needed to decide whether one person could perform a job paying less than the combined cost of their chairs.

The conversation seemed to go well. People nodded. Someone said, "That is a great example." Another person smiled while taking notes, which is either a good sign or the moment they write, "Candidate appears competent but is surrounded by cupholders." A few days later, I received the rejection. The feedback was that I had not interviewed from a "professional environment." Apparently, decades of experience were defeated by a headrest. Never mind that the car was parked, quiet, private, and free from interruptions. Never mind that I was prepared, on time, professionally dressed, and fully engaged. My answers were acceptable, but the dashboard did not align with their values.

Companies constantly advertise flexibility. They say they understand candidates have jobs, families, schedules, and responsibilities. They claim to value adaptability, resourcefulness, and problem solving. I adapted. I found privacy. I solved the problem. Then I was rejected for solving it inside a vehicle.

Maybe I should have used a fake office

background. A digital bookshelf probably would have raised my leadership score. I could have placed a plant on the dashboard and called the parking lot our Midwest regional headquarters. For extra credibility, I could have asked someone to walk behind me carrying a spreadsheet and looking concerned.

Next time, I may rent a conference room and place a sign behind my chair that says "Strategic Synergy Division." Apparently, professionalism is not about preparation, communication, or results. It is about whether your background includes a ficus plant with executive presence.

I was qualified. I was prepared. I was on time. I answered every question. But the car got rejected. I hope it updates its resume, removes the cupholders, and applies again.

POST 07 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The golden retriever tennis-ball test

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A discussion of absurd interview questions produces a riddle about tennis balls in a Golden Retriever's mouth.

WHY I WROTE IT

I turned the riddle into satire about employers who confuse novelty with meaningful evaluation.

Someone asked me a question the other day that made me realize job interviews have officially stopped trying to determine whether a person can do the job.

We were talking about strange interview questions when they asked, "How many tennis balls fit inside a Golden Retriever's mouth?" I laughed, then paused, because somewhere in corporate America that question is probably standing between a qualified candidate and health insurance.

None of it matters once a hiring manager decides your future depends on estimating the storage capacity of a family dog. At that moment, your resume closes itself and your accomplishments pack their bags. Naturally I had questions. Are these regulation size tennis balls? Is the dog cooperating? Is this a senior retriever, or an entry-level dog expected to carry six balls, answer phones, cover three departments, and accept a "competitive" salary nobody will reveal?

Say three, and they decide you lack ambition. Say eight, and Human Resources writes down "questionable judgment." Ask why anyone is putting that many tennis balls in a dog's mouth, and suddenly you are "not comfortable

with ambiguity." Amazon would turn this into an eight round interview loop. First, a recruiter confirms that you understand dogs. Then comes an online assessment with animated tennis balls and no correct answers.

By round five, you are presenting a case study on increasing mouth capacity while reducing saliva expenses. Round seven is with someone who joined last Tuesday but has strong opinions about your career. Round eight ends with, "We were impressed, but selected another candidate whose tennis ball experience more closely aligns with the role." The dog gets hired, receives a signing bonus in treats, and starts Monday. Your rejection arrives at 4:07 a.m., thanking you for your time and encouraging you to apply again.

Companies call this "creative problem solving." No. Creative problem solving is covering callouts, calming an angry customer, fixing an outage, hitting the sales target and explaining why morale cannot be repaired with one cold pizza.

Guessing how many tennis balls fit inside a dog is what happens when the panel runs out of useful questions but still has forty minutes reserved on Outlook. Honestly, the Golden

Retriever is probably more qualified than half the leadership team. It listens, shows loyalty, retrieves what was requested, and has never scheduled a meeting about why there are too many meetings.

How many qualified applicants can pass through your hiring process before they lose interest? How many rounds can Amazon add before the interview becomes a streaming series? How many employees can one understaffed department hold before everybody updates LinkedIn during lunch?

As for the Golden Retriever, I hope it negotiated unlimited treats and protection from unnecessary panel interviews. Because in today's hiring market, even the dog may be overqualified, underpaid, and still waiting for the recruiter to circle back.

Fifteen years of accounting, one odd question

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An experienced accounting professional describes an interview that appears to ignore her actual background.

WHY I WROTE IT

I stood up for candidates who prepare carefully while interviewers seem not to have read their resumes.

There are moments in the hiring process when you stop wondering whether you are qualified and start wondering whether the interviewer joined the wrong meeting or opened the wrong resume.

A woman shared her story with me, and it explains why talented people are exhausted before they ever receive an offer.

She has 15 years of experience in accounting, tax, and analysis. She has three degrees and is working on her fourth. Years of hard work. Then someone looked at all of that experience and education and asked her, "Does that mean you graduated high school?" No. Apparently she skipped high school, wandered into college by accident, earned three degrees, built a 15 year career, started a fourth degree, and hoped nobody would ask for her report card. Imagine reading a resume filled with education and experience, then needing confirmation that high school happened. That is not careful screening. That is what happens when an interviewer opens the resume seconds before the call and reads it like someone assembling furniture without instructions.

These are also the people deciding whether she is underqualified, overqualified, or "not in alignment." Alignment with what? The company mission? The moon? The office Wi-Fi? A hiring manager who thinks four degrees might be an advanced GED? Underqualified means they want more experience. Overqualified means they do not want to pay for it. Not in alignment means nobody can explain the rejection without saying the quiet part out loud.

Then came the classic question: "Where do you see yourself in five years?" At that point, five years feels ambitious. The better question is, where do you see this conversation in five minutes? Will we discuss the role? Will someone explain the salary? Are we reviewing qualifications, or confirming whether accounting involves numbers?

She even told a recruiter, "I do want to work." Apparently, honesty is dangerous now. Candidates must appear interested, but not too interested. Available, but not desperate. Experienced, but not expensive. Educated, but not intimidating. Confident, but humble enough to pretend every ridiculous

question deserves a thoughtful answer and a thank you email.

Meanwhile, qualified people are removing degrees, hiding years of experience, shrinking job titles, and wondering whether their resume needs a new section:

Education: Three degrees. Fourth in progress. High school completed. Can confirm basic literacy."
"Understands that five years comes after five minutes.

Maybe candidates should ask their own questions. Did you read my resume? Do you know which position this interview is for? Is the job available? Does the salary exist outside "competitive compensation"? Where do you see this hiring process in five business days?

Because asking an experienced accounting professional with multiple degrees whether she graduated high school is not an interview question. It is a confession that nobody prepared.

And somehow, she is still the one being evaluated.

POST 09 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

AGEISM & HIRING

The over-50 warning label

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another round of advice and hiring language makes older professionals feel that competence is a liability.

WHY I WROTE IT

I defended experienced workers and the value of people who can solve problems before a meeting is needed.

Job hunting after 50 should come with a warning label, “Experienced professional ahead. May cause insecurity in managers promoted during the last software update.”

Today's hiring market makes experienced professionals look like they entered a TikTok dance battle carrying a Times New Roman resume, real qualifications. Then Chad, promoted in February, asks whether they can handle a “fast paced environment with loose structure and good vibes.” Good vibes? These candidates have survived recessions, restructures, system crashes, budget freezes, team building and meetings longer than some careers. They do not work under chaos. Chaos reports to them.

Professionals over 50 do not need a seminar on how to “pivot.” They have rebuilt departments while others updated personal brands. They created teams, trained managers, repaired processes, and reminded Brenda that replying to everyone was unnecessary. They remember when phones had cords, coffee came from a pot, and “the cloud” meant rain. Yet companies assume they cannot learn technology because they did not grow up filming dances. They can learn the software.

Why does it take fourteen clicks to do what Excel handled in 1998?

Then the rejection email arrives: “We were impressed, but selected someone whose experience better aligned with our needs.” Translation: The candidate understood the problem before the manager finished explaining it, and the panel got nervous.

Companies call them “overqualified” because “this person may identify every broken process before lunch” sounds too honest. They worry experienced candidates may expect fair pay, clear communication, and a job description that stays accurate for three days.

People over 50 are not outdated. They are the update companies keep postponing. They have survived layoffs, trained future bosses, managed impossible deadlines, and fixed problems without six meetings or a consultant creating a PowerPoint. They do not panic during Zoom interviews. They have handled quarter end chaos while training new hires, calming customers, and fixing office WiFi with one bent paperclip. Their experience is not baggage. It is a carry on packed with solutions and radar for nonsense before it gets a calendar invitation.

Let companies chase “rockstars,” “ninjas,” “unicorns,” and candidates who use “synergy” before breakfast. Let them conduct interviews from bean bags and ask what animal someone would become during a deadline. They will keep showing up with judgment, emotional intelligence, and resumes that do not need emojis or glitter fonts. They are seasoned, strategic, capable, and professionally unshakeable. They are not behind, invisible, or too old.

The right employer is not doing them a favor by hiring them. That employer will be upgrading the operation.

So to every job seeker over 50, keep applying. Bring the Times New Roman resume, the reading glasses, the real results, and all the experience that makes insecure companies nervous and smart companies grateful.

POST 10 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

READER MAIL

Two years searching, still being strung along

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman describes years without pay, repeated interview rounds, projects and unanswered follow-up messages.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters to hear the human cost behind polite rejection templates and unexplained silence.

The other day, a woman sent me a story that began like many messages I receive. She has been without a paycheck for almost two years.

Thousands of applications. Dozens of interview rounds. Executive conversations. Projects. Presentations. Hundreds of emails. Every time she thought she was close, someone praised her experience and sent her back into unemployment.

Then came the corporate sequel nobody asked for. She spent weeks interviewing for a senior Sales Operations role. The hiring manager told her it had been down to two candidates and that he would personally call whoever was not selected to preserve the relationship. Spoiler alert. The relationship went straight to voicemail. The call never came. A week and a half later, she followed up and heard, "I was just about to call you." That sentence belongs in the Corporate Hall of Fame next to "We're like a family" and "We'll circle back."

She accepted the rejection and moved on. Then six weeks later, HR contacted her again. The person they hired apparently stayed about as long as the company's LinkedIn welcome post

remained visible. HR told her they were reopening the same role and that the hiring manager believed she was the right fit. Of course she responded. She is a single mom with two children, no income, and a home she is trying to save. This was not networking for fun. This was survival wearing business casual.

Then came silence. She emailed to confirm they received her response. Nothing. She called the hiring manager because he had previously told her to reach out anytime. Nothing. Finally, after one last follow-up, she received another rejection saying they had gone in a different direction but would like to keep her information for future opportunities. Respectfully, at this point they should return her hope, reimburse her emotional labor, and delete her blood pressure from the system.

The cruelest part was not simply being rejected. It was being pulled back in, handed hope again, ghosted again, and rejected again. Companies call this process. Candidates call it trauma with calendar invites. Behind every resume is a person carrying bills, children, fear, dignity, and a nervous system running on emergency power.

Recruiters and leaders, here is a revolutionary idea. If you say you will call, call. If you reopen a conversation, finish it. If someone is no longer being considered, tell them quickly. Candidates can survive bad news. What destroys people is false hope stretched over weeks by leaders who treat communication like an optional benefit.

And before anyone says, "It's just business," remember that dashboards do not lose sleep. Applicant tracking systems do not sit in the kitchen wondering how to keep the lights on. Automated emails do not have children watching them pretend everything is okay.

Hiring should measure qualifications, not emotional endurance. This woman is not bitter. She is exhausted. Her story deserves to be heard because she is not the only one.

Do better.

POST 11 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

A toxic workplace is an escape plan

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The pattern of blame, public praise and private punishment explains why employees eventually stop hoping.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wrote about the confidence people recover when they leave a workplace that has been wearing them down.

Some people think a toxic boss only yells. That would almost be easier. The truly toxic ones smile in meetings, praise teamwork, then throw someone under the company bus before lunch.

They believe every problem is caused by employees, every success belongs to leadership, and every resignation is somehow a mystery. They call fear accountability, confusion strategy, and burnout commitment.

A toxic boss can turn a great job into an escape plan. They schedule meetings to explain why morale is low, then spend the entire meeting proving exactly why morale is low. They ask for honesty, punish honesty, and wonder why nobody speaks up anymore. Their favorite phrase is, "My door is always open." Technically true. People just leave through it with an updated resume and a sudden interest in "new opportunities."

They demand loyalty while giving very little in return. Emails arrive at night. Messages appear on weekends. Vacations become remote work with better scenery. Somehow everything is urgent except treating people with respect. The funny part is how surprised they act when good employees leave. "It's so hard to find

good people." No, it is hard to keep them.

Employees rarely wake up excited to quit. Most spend months hoping things will improve. They work harder, stay later, take on more responsibility, and convince themselves next week will be different. Then one day they stop trying to save the workplace and start saving themselves. That decision is not weakness. It is survival.

A title does not make someone a leader. A bigger office does not create respect. Fear may get compliance for a while, but it never earns trust. Real leaders make people feel valued, heard, and safe enough to do their best work. Toxic bosses make talented people question themselves until they forget how capable they really are.

The good news is that most people eventually discover the problem was never their ability. It was the environment. The confidence that disappeared comes back. The smile returns. Sunday nights stop feeling like the end of freedom. Work becomes challenging without becoming emotionally exhausting.

If this reminds you of a boss you once had, congratulations. You survived a

management style that should require a warning label. And if you are a leader reading this, remember that employees may forget your presentations, spreadsheets, and quarterly goals, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

Be the reason someone believes in themselves more, not the reason they shrink to survive your leadership. Because when people finally leave a toxic boss, the greatest victory is not the resignation letter. It is the day they realize they were never difficult, weak, or not good enough. They were simply trying to grow in a place that kept cutting them down.

And when they finally breathe again, laugh again, and trust themselves again, that is the part no toxic boss gets to take credit for. Leaving did not break them. It helped them remember who they are.

POST 12 / MONDAY, AUGUST 3

WORKPLACE CULTURE

When the new job reveals its real culture

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An HR professional and reader describes how a polished hiring process gives way to a distressing workplace.

WHY I WROTE IT

I highlighted how workplace promises should still be true after the offer letter and orientation are over.

Some workplaces do not reveal their culture during the interview. They wait until you have signed the offer, updated LinkedIn, and told your family the search is finally over.

Then, somewhere between orientation and your third unnecessary meeting, the building becomes a corporate escape room.

A woman recently messaged me after finishing my book, *LinkedIn Chronicles*. She said it was a hoot, accurate, and proof that she was not alone. She works in Human Resources and does everything she can to give candidates a good experience because she has survived the modern hiring process. She knows the endless applications, inbox refreshing, interview preparation, and rejection emails written with the warmth of an expired coupon.

Then she explained that she had started a new job and within weeks realized she had accidentally joined toxic workplace again. Every meeting created questions. Every leadership decision felt approved by a committee of Magic 8 Balls. Orientation should have included a map, emergency exits, and a therapist's phone number. Instead, she received a laptop, a handbook nobody follows, and a

recurring meeting that could have been an email.

She said her health was frightened. Not that she was frightened. Her health. Honestly, that may be the most accurate employee engagement survey ever completed.

Imagine your blood pressure clocking in before you do. Coffee is no longer for energy. It becomes emotional support in a mug. You open Outlook and your nervous system submits a PTO request. Meanwhile, leadership announces another exciting restructure designed to improve communication by removing everyone who knew what was happening.

The saddest part is how many people discover the truth only after accepting the offer. The interviews are polished. The recruiter is cheerful. Executives talk about culture, collaboration, transparency, and opportunity. Then your first week arrives and you learn the culture is confusion, collaboration is finger pointing, transparency is missing, and the opportunity is updating your resume before your employee badge stops smelling new.

She is working hard to escape, but the job market is not cooperating. That is

the trap. People know they need to leave, but they know the hiring process may involve seven interviews, three assessments, a personality test, a presentation, and a rejection email sent at 4:07 a.m.

People do not leave because work is hard. They leave because unnecessary chaos is exhausting. Good leaders solve problems. Bad leaders schedule meetings to explain why the problems are somehow your fault, then send a survey asking whether you feel heard.

To everyone sitting in a toxic workplace wondering whether they are the problem, remember this. Sometimes the healthiest thing in the building is your plan to eventually walk out the front door.

Until then, keep your resume updated, protect your peace, and never let bad leadership convince you that your value depends on their ability to recognize it.

POST 13 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

AMAZON INTERVIEWS

Amazon and the exhausting assessment loop

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman privately recounts an Amazon screening process while coping with difficult treatment at her own job.

WHY I WROTE IT

I examined the harm of interviews that exhaust people yet reveal little about how they would actually work.

Some interview processes test your qualifications. Others test whether you can survive psychological warfare while smiling into a webcam and pretending “customer obsession” has not followed you into your dreams.

A woman recently messaged me privately because she cannot comment publicly while dealing with maternity discrimination at her current job. She is quietly looking elsewhere but still found humor in her Amazon interview experience.

She applied for several roles, including one she admitted was not the best fit. Naturally, Amazon selected that one. First came an assessment asking her to choose between “doing the bare minimum” and “making lots of mistakes.” Nothing says thoughtful hiring like deciding which red flag feels most authentic before breakfast.

Then came the work simulation. Emails appeared in a fake inbox while she had to rank follow-up questions, identify useful data, and catch incorrect information hidden in the messages. Before starting, she received a warning that the system would know if she left the browser window, checked her phone, or asked anyone nearby for help. Apparently, this was a national

security operation.

She finished convinced she had failed so badly that the computer might send condolences. Instead, the next morning, she learned she had passed.

Then came the phone interview. Leadership principles. STAR stories. Behavioral questions. The usual Amazon ceremony where a career accomplishment must become a military operation involving metrics, ownership, risk, and a customer whose life was changed by a spreadsheet.

She left feeling less competent than before, which apparently meant she did well, because she passed again.

So she prepared much harder. She studied the leadership principles, rebuilt her examples, sharpened every story, and probably knew Amazon’s values better than some people who already had badges.

Then came the loop: five people over two days. The bar raiser said they might run into each other in the London office and ended with, “Speak soon.” Four days later, the recruiter emailed saying they would love to schedule a call.

That sounds promising in every language except recruiting. The call came. The answer was no. The reason? She had not included enough data in her stories. After passing the surveillance assessment, solving the inbox obstacle course, surviving the interviews, and preparing enough material to qualify as an Amazon historian, she was told she was not data driven enough.

Amazon did not reject a candidate. They inspected her personality, scanned every professional barcode, sent her through quality control, marked her “out for delivery,” and returned her to sender because one box was missing a percentage sign.

Companies, stop confusing exhaustion with excellence. A difficult interview does not automatically create a better hire. Sometimes it creates a highly qualified person with new trust issues, five unused STAR stories, and a sudden desire to avoid anything labeled Prime.

POST 14 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

CAREER CHOICES

Easy Apply, then corporate panic

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A fleet-and-safety professional considers a better role, declines it, and finds that her current employer noticed.

WHY I WROTE IT

I defended the right to explore career options and questioned silence from employers when candidates say no.

There is a very specific kind of workplace panic that begins when an employee says, "I like my job, but I also know I'm allowed to look."

A woman in fleet and safety shared a story that perfectly captures modern work. She genuinely liked her role. But she saw another position that looked like a clear upgrade: more money, a shorter commute, no tolls, and better flexibility. So she clicked Easy Apply, which is apparently the professional equivalent of opening a door marked "This may become unnecessarily complicated."

The company moved quickly. There was a phone interview, then an in person interview less than a week later. Communication was very clear, the people were respectful, and the process was efficient. No eight round endurance test. She walked out about 95% certain an offer was coming.

Then came PTO. The time off policy did not fit her life. For her, it was a deal breaker. She thought about it overnight, talked with her husband, and sent a thoughtful email. She thanked them, explained that the PTO structure did not work for her, and respectfully withdrew.

Before that email, they had been communicating several times a day. After it, silence. No "thank you." No "we understand." The company that had been replying faster than a recruiter chasing an available candidate suddenly entered witness protection. Apparently, communication is a core value only while the candidate is still saying yes.

She later posted about it on LinkedIn. She named no company, insulted no one, and kept the story professional. She simply said the process had been good until the ending, and that she chose her own non-negotiables over an offer that did not fit her life.

Then her current company saw the post. The owner saw it. HR saw it. Accounting saw it. Operations saw it. Suddenly, a vague post required clarification, as though she had announced her resignation by carrier pigeon. She had to explain that she liked her job and was simply maintaining boundaries.

Corporate America loves telling employees to "own their careers," "know their worth," and "set healthy boundaries." But the moment an employee actually does those things, a

meeting appears titled "Quick Conversation."

The funniest part is that she did everything companies claim they want. She communicated honestly, did not ghost, and made a mature decision. Yet the hiring company ghosted her, and her current company became nervous because she publicly admitted that employees may consider better opportunities.

That is not disloyalty. That is adulthood. People are allowed to like their jobs and still look. Candidates are allowed to reject companies. Employees are allowed to decide that more money does not make up for less time with family. Companies are allowed to hear "no" without pretending their email server collapsed.

Sometimes the best career move is not accepting the "better" job. Sometimes the clearest answer a company gives you comes after you reject them.

In this case, the answer was silence.

POST 15 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

AI & RECRUITING

Jack and Jill climb the AI recruiting hill

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shares a recruiting service using an AI career coach named Jack and an AI recruiter named Jill.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used the nursery-rhyme setup to ask whether automation brings clarity or merely digitizes rejection.

Recruiting has entered its nursery rhyme era, where candidates climb a hill carrying a resume and a cover letter.

A woman sent me a job posting from a company called Jack & Jill, and I thought she had forwarded me a children's book. She had not. Jack & Jill is using two AI agents. Jack is the AI career coach who gets to know you on a call. Jill is the AI recruiter working for the company. Jack learns what you want, Jill decides whether the employer wants you, and somewhere in between your professional identity becomes a data package.

We've reached the point where one robot listens to your hopes and another robot rejects them.

Jack says, "Tell me about your goals." So you explain your experience, career plans, and the emotional damage caused by jobs that want a unicorn willing to work for the salary of a tired houseplant. Jack listens and says your background is impressive. Then Jill reviews everything and sends, "We have decided to move forward with another candidate whose experience more closely aligns with our needs."

Jack gets the therapy session. Jill gets

the rejection button. That is cross-functional collaboration.

The posting explains that some clients ask Jack & Jill to anonymize their jobs, so candidates may not know which company is hiring. Nothing creates trust like interviewing with two artificial people for a mystery organization offering a salary listed as "Not Disclosed." The company is confidential, the hiring manager is invisible, the compensation is missing, and the only two people speaking to you were never technically people.

Then came my favorite part: Jack provides moral support. That may be the most honest innovation recruiting has produced in years. Companies have finally admitted the process is so exhausting that candidates need a digital companion just to survive it. Soon Jack will call after every rejection and say, "Alex, Jill selected someone else, but I prepared a breathing exercise and found six more roles requiring twelve years of experience in software invented four years ago."

Thank you, Jack. Please stay on the line while I scream professionally.

I was also fascinated by the sentence, "We never post fake jobs." That is the

kind of reassurance that makes everyone wonder why it needed to be written. Restaurants do not put "We never poison the soup" on the menu. Banks do not advertise "Most of the money is real." Yet Jack & Jill felt the need to clarify this while recruiting for an unnamed company through two AI personalities.

Maybe it will work. Maybe candidates will get faster responses, better matches, and fewer meaningless screening calls with recruiters. I hope it improves the process. But the branding still gives the whole experience the energy of a bedtime story written by LinkedIn after three energy drinks.

The future of recruiting is here, everyone. Jack learns your goals, Jill evaluates your fit, and together they can reject you without a single human having to pretend they will circle back.

POST 16 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

AMAZON & HUMOR

My Amazon joke will not take a day off

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An earlier joke about Amazon's drawn-out hiring process keeps returning, along with legal correspondence.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used the recurring joke to argue that hiring systems should survive criticism and be willing to improve.

Some jokes disappear after a day. Mine signed up for Amazon Prime, ignored every cancellation request, and keeps arriving in my feed before I can pretend I was not home.

A while back, I made one sarcastic joke about Amazon's eight interview hiring process. The joke was simple: getting hired there requires eight rounds and the emotional stamina of a raccoon trapped inside a revolving door. I did not expose warehouse secrets. I joked that eight interviews felt less like applying for a job and more like joining a secret society that ships toothpaste overnight.

The internet laughed. Amazon apparently opened a meeting.

Since then, the joke has developed a better career than most applicants. Someone reposts it, tags me, screenshots it, or sends it back with, "Have you seen this?" Yes. I wrote it. I have now seen that joke more times than some recruiters have seen my resume. Apparently, the joke now has better retention, reach, and follow-up than the actual hiring process.

Then came the cease and desist letters. I have received enough of them to create a new leadership principle called

"Customer Obsession, But For Lawyers." Amazon has delivered more legal correspondence to me than interview feedback to candidates who survived all eight rounds.

Candidates spend weeks preparing, researching, rehearsing, meeting recruiter after recruiter, and explaining the same accomplishments to eight different people. By interview number six, you are no longer interviewing. You are giving the extended director's cut of your resume. By interview number seven, you begin every answer with, "As mentioned in episodes one through six..." Then comes interview number eight, when Jeff Bezos appears as a hologram, asks how you handled ambiguity, while a warehouse robot judges your posture and Alexa whispers, "Candidate enthusiasm below target."

After all that, they say, "We will circle back." Circle back? After eight interviews, we are no longer circling. We are orbiting Earth.

The funniest part is that the joke refuses to disappear. Every attempt to make it go away somehow gives it another hundred thousand impressions. Legal sends a message, someone reposts it, and the whole thing comes

back stronger, like a package marked "delayed" that arrives before the rejection email. At this point, the joke has survived screenshots, reposts, thousands of comments, legal messages, and enough corporate concern to qualify for its own onboarding packet.

Honestly, I respect the efficiency. Candidates can wait weeks for one update, but make one joke about eight interviews and suddenly the communication becomes excellent. Apparently, the fastest way to hear back from Amazon is not to apply for a job. It is to hurt the algorithm's feelings.

Maybe that is the real Amazon leadership principle: Insist on Persistence.

Because apparently neither their eight interview process nor my raccoon joke knows when enough is enough. And somehow, the joke keeps getting invited back for another round.

POST 17 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

ONBOARDING

Orientation: eight hours, zero training

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A first-day training session spends hours on company trivia while leaving new employees unclear about their work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned why onboarding can be heavy on presentations and light on the information employees need.

There is something inspiring about mandatory first day orientation, especially when the people running it are less prepared than you are.

A while back, I started a new job and attended one of those full orientation classes designed to “set employees up for success.” I pictured useful training and someone explaining what my real role was. Instead, I walked into a conference room with twelve strangers, one broken projector, three retired dry erase markers and a facilitator who opened with, “Bear with me, I haven’t done this presentation before.” Excellent. Nothing inspires confidence like the person teaching orientation also being oriented.

We spent the first hour saying our names, job titles, favorite foods, and a “fun fact.” Someone climbed a mountain. Someone rescued dogs. I said I once completed a mandatory orientation without checking my phone, which was both a lie and a cry for help.

Then came the company history. Apparently, it began in 1978 with one employee and a dream. Forty slides later, we were still in 1986. I knew more about the founder’s first office chair than I knew about my benefits,

schedule, manager, or building access.

Next came the culture section. “We are like a family here,” the facilitator announced. That sentence should legally trigger a fire drill. They explained the company values using words like integrity, collaboration, accountability, innovation, passion, excellence and respect. It was corporate Scrabble. Every value was on the wall, yet nobody could explain how it applied to the job.

At lunch, we were handed sandwiches and told it was a “working lunch.” Even the turkey wrap had performance goals. The afternoon was devoted to policies. We learned what not to wear, what not to say, what websites not to visit, how many minutes late counted as late and how quickly we could be terminated for violating rules we had just discovered. We still had no passwords, equipment, or clue where to park.

Then came the safety video, filmed sometime between VHS and electricity. The actors wore shoulder pads, half the equipment no longer existed and one scene warned us not to use a fax machine during a thunderstorm. I wrote it down. Survival matters. At the end, a quiz asked, “What is our greatest

asset?” The answer was employees, which was touching, considering nobody had remembered to order my laptop.

Finally, after eight hours of learning everything except how to perform the job, the facilitator asked, “Does everyone feel ready?” Ready? I was ready to find the exit, find my car and process spending an entire day learning the founder enjoyed fishing.

Mandatory orientation is rarely about preparing you for your role. It is about proving the company can hold you captive in a room, show you 97 slides, hand you a branded pen that does not work and call it employee engagement. By day two, I had a badge, a binder, a company mug, and no idea how to do my job.

But at least I knew never to use the fax machine during a thunderstorm.

POST 18 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The interviewer who never asks a question

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A talkative hiring manager narrates a long company history and forgets to leave room for the candidate.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked interviewers to be direct, listen carefully and remember who is supposed to be answering.

Some interview questions are not really questions. They are long corporate podcasts that suddenly end with, "So...yeah," while everyone stares at you like you missed an obvious cue.

A while back, I was on a panel interview with a hiring manager who loved to talk. This man could turn "Tell me about yourself" into a documentary featuring company history, leadership philosophy, office politics, and Greg, a former employee who lived rent free in every meeting.

He would begin with something that sounded like a normal question. "Tell me about a time you handled conflict." Perfect. I had an answer ready. Unfortunately, before I could speak, he continued for five uninterrupted minutes. He explained what conflict meant to him, what the previous manager had done wrong, why communication mattered, and how someone misunderstood an inventory email. Somewhere in the middle, the original question packed its belongings and left the company.

Finally, he leaned back and said, "So...what are your thoughts?" My thoughts about what? Conflict? Inventory? Greg? The email? Was there a question? The other panelists looked

at me, trained to recognize when one of his speeches had ended. I smiled and said, "I believe clear communication is important." He nodded like I had solved a case study. "Exactly."

Then he started another one. "What would your leadership style look like in this role? Because leadership here is really about accountability..." For the next five minutes, he discussed trust, collaboration, strategy, ownership, transparency, and not leaving food in the break room refrigerator. I began taking mental notes because I assumed there might be an exam at the end.

When he finally stopped, there was silence. I waited. He waited. The panel waited. I asked, "Would you like me to answer the leadership question?" He looked confused and said, "Yes, that was the question." Was it? Because it sounded more like a keynote speech, a company town hall, and a hostage negotiation.

He said, "We have several questions remaining, so please keep your answers concise." Sir, I have spoken for eleven minutes. You have narrated the rise and fall of a department, explained Greg's departure, and delivered enough content to launch a podcast.

Companies tell candidates to be direct and respectful of everyone's time. Meanwhile, some hiring managers ask a question, answer it themselves, add unrelated stories, quote a book, explain the company mission, revisit a disagreement, and finish with, "Does that make sense?" No. But I am afraid to say that because we only have twenty minutes left.

I left the interview knowing the company's history, the manager's philosophy, the refrigerator policy, the software migration, and more about Greg than Greg's own family probably knew. The only thing I did not know was whether I had answered a single question.

Have you ever been in an interview where the hardest part was figuring out whether the interviewer had actually asked you something?

POST 19 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

TECH INTERVIEWS

Meta, where every noun is synergy

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview at Meta is filled with acronyms and business buzzwords but little explanation of the role.

WHY I WROTE IT

I poked fun at jargon that makes ordinary work sound impressive without helping applicants understand it.

Have you applied to a tech company and realized everybody had stopped speaking English and communicated only in buzzwords?

A while back, I applied to Meta. At Meta, it apparently meant, “We need someone who can say ecosystem, scalability, alignment, and cross-functional synergy without blinking.”

Every sentence sounded approved by six committees. She asked whether I had experience “driving ambiguity across dynamic stakeholder environments.” I said yes, because I have worked in corporate America, where ambiguity drives everything.

Then came the hiring manager, who explained that the team was “reimagining the future of interconnected operational excellence.” I nodded, even though I had no idea whether they were building software, opening a coffee shop, or launching a colony on Mars. I wanted to ask what department did, but I feared the answer would require a whiteboard, three acronyms, and a virtual headset.

Every question became a puzzle. They did not ask, “How do you solve problems?” They asked, “How do you

influence outcomes in low-context, high velocity ecosystems?” They did not ask, “Can you work with other departments?” They asked, “How do you activate cross-functional partnerships to unlock shared value?” At one point, I wondered whether I was interviewing for a job or joining a corporate cult with excellent dental coverage.

I adapted. I said I believed in “leveraging human capital to create scalable impact.” I said I “created alignment by reframing competing priorities through a stakeholder-centered lens.” Translation: I called everyone into a meeting and told them to stop fighting.

By the end, I was speaking fluent tech-company nonsense. I was no longer solving problems; I was unlocking opportunities. I was not managing people; I was empowering talent. I was not answering questions; I was socializing strategic narratives. Somewhere during the interview, I became a PowerPoint presentation wearing a suit.

I left feeling confident. Not because I understood the role, but because I had used “scalable” four times without laughing. A few days later, Meta sent a

rejection email saying they were moving forward with candidates whose experience was “more closely aligned with the evolving needs of the organization.”

Maybe I was not the right fit. Or maybe I accidentally used one complete sentence that did not include innovation, disruption, optimization, transformation, or synergy. Either way, I learned that interviewing at a tech company is less about explaining what you can do and more about describing ordinary work like you are announcing the invention of electricity.

The role may have been real. The team may have been real. The problems were probably real. But after seven conversations, seventeen acronyms and enough “alignment” to straighten a highway, I still could not explain what the job actually was.

That is the magic of corporate buzzwords: everyone sounds brilliant, nobody says anything, and somehow another meeting gets scheduled.

POST 20 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

REJECTION EMAILS

Rejected twice, but for which job?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman applies to multiple marketing roles and receives confusing and repeated rejection messages.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that automated email should still identify the position and communicate clearly to an actual person.

There are rejection emails, and then there are rejection emails that make you wonder whether the company is hiring people or testing material for a workplace comedy series nobody agreed to watch.

A woman recently shared two rejection stories with me, and both deserve placement in the recruiting hall of confusion. First, she applied for more than one marketing position at the same company. They were both Associate Brand Manager roles, but each focused on something different.

Eventually, the company sent her a rejection email. It thanked her for applying and explained that they had decided to move forward with other candidates. Completely useless, because the email never mentioned which job they were rejecting her from.

Was it the first role? The second role? Both? Was she supposed to log into the applicant portal and solve the mystery like an unpaid detective? Companies expect candidates to personalize every application and explain why they want that specific job. Then the company responds with, "Thanks for applying to...something. Unfortunately, no."

Her second story managed to be even

better. She applied and interviewed for a job back in March. The company rejected her, she accepted the decision, moved on. The story should have ended there. But months later, someone opened a folder, noticed there was still some unused rejection energy, and decided she needed another reminder.

This week, the same company rejected her again for the same role. Not new application. No additional interview. No renewed interest. Just a surprise sequel nobody requested, just to make certain she understood the position still was not hers. Imagine opening your inbox and seeing a company from your past return just to say, "Hello again. We reviewed our previous decision and would like to confirm that we still do not want to hire you."

That is not candidate communication. That is a corporate jump scare. Recruiting technology was supposed to make hiring more organized. Instead, candidates are receiving mystery rejections, duplicate rejections, delayed rejections, and emails connected to jobs they barely remember applying for. Job seekers already track applications, prepare for interviews and wait through weeks of silence. The least a company can do is include the job title

and reject someone only once.

One rejection is business. Two rejections for the same role is a subscription service. And a rejection with no job title is not communication. It is a scavenger hunt with no prize.

She ended her message by saying, "It is not getting any better out here. Send help." Honestly, help may not be enough. We may need a customer service line for candidates. "Press one if you were rejected without a job title. Press two if you were rejected twice. Press three if the company ghosted you and then asked you to complete a candidate experience survey."

Apparently, rejection now comes with follow-up service. Please remain on the line. Your rejection is very important to us.

POST 21 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The flip phone hero of the Zoom panel

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panel interview includes a hiring manager with a flip phone, inspiring hope that someone values experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I contrasted simple common sense with an elaborate meeting culture that still fails to make a good decision.

A while back, I joined a Zoom panel interview: six people staring into webcams, one frozen mid blink, another speaking while muted, and one panelist asking, "Can everyone see that screen?"

Then I noticed something on one hiring manager's desk that gave me hope. A flip phone. Not an old smartphone. Not a trendy "digital detox" device. A real flip phone. The kind you open with confidence, close with authority, and can drop down a flight of stairs without filing an insurance claim.

The moment I saw it, I relaxed. He was one of us. This man had survived dial-up internet, MapQuest directions, fax machines, and meetings that ended without somebody saying, "Let's circle back." He remembered when phones were used for calls and managers were allowed to make decisions. I thought, finally, a seasoned hiring manager who would understand seasoned employees. He would not ask me to describe my leadership style as a breakfast food, explain my personal brand in three emojis, or tell him how artificial intelligence creates authentic human connection. He would ask what matters: Can you do the job? Have you done it before? When can you start?

I imagined him interrupting the panel

and saying, "The candidate has decades of experience. Why are we planning seven more interviews?" Then he would snap the phone shut, which is the flip phone version of dropping a microphone.

For several beautiful seconds, I believed that phone would protect me. It did not. The interview began, and apparently the flip phone had no voting rights. We still received behavioral questions, culture questions, hypothetical questions, and one question so long that I forgot the position, the company before the interviewer reached the end.

Someone asked how I "navigate ambiguity." That is corporate language for, "How well can you clean up a disaster leadership created without mentioning who created it?" Another asked how I collaborate across cross-functional teams. I wanted to say, "Usually by calling them," but I looked at the flip phone and realized that answer might qualify me for immediate fossil status.

I kept glancing at it, hoping someone from 2004 would call and remind the panel that companies once interviewed qualified people twice, checked references, and made a decision. The

phone sat silently, probably wondering why eight adults needed an hour to decide whether one adult could do a job they had already done for twenty years.

That flip phone was not outdated. It was a hostage. It had survived dropped calls and T9 texting, only to end up trapped in a Zoom meeting about synergy, agility, and "bringing your whole self to work."

I did not get the job, but I left respecting that hiring manager and his tiny plastic time machine. Somewhere in corporate America, he is still trying to convince Human Resources that twelve interviews are excessive. Unfortunately, Human Resources keeps emailing him links he cannot open.

The flip phone had one bar of signal. The hiring process had none!!!

POST 22 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

READER MAIL

FBI experience, three-hour rejection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Jeff applies for a physical-security leadership role with twenty years of FBI experience and is quickly rejected.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned what “careful consideration” means when a clearly relevant background is dismissed so quickly.

Corporate recruiting has reached the point where companies can reject a candidate faster than most people can decide what to order for dinner, then describe the process as “careful consideration.”

A reader named Jeff sent me a story worthy of its own category at the annual Hiring Process Awards. He found a posting for an Associate Director of Physical Security role and thought it looked like a strong match. That was reasonable. Jeff has twenty years of experience with the FBI.

Not twenty years watching crime documentaries. Not twenty years guarding the office microwave. Twenty years with the FBI, handling real investigations, real security concerns, and situations where “circling back” probably involved tactical gear.

Jeff submitted his application at 4:06 PM. At 7:21 PM, three hours and fifteen minutes later, the rejection email arrived. Apparently, the company reviewed two decades of federal experience, interviewed the algorithm, and reached a thoughtful decision before dinner. The email said, “After careful consideration and representative of a very competitive marketplace, we regret to inform you

that we are unable to move you forward in the process.”

Careful consideration? Jeff’s application was in the system for less time than most corporate meetings about scheduling another meeting. Somewhere, an applicant tracking system saw “twenty years in the FBI” and responded, “Interesting, but does he have seven years of experience using the security platform we purchased last Thursday?”

Perhaps “federal investigations” was not enough, but “cross-functional badge optimization” would have unlocked the interview. Jeff suggested Oscars style awards for companies, and the ceremony is overdue. We need trophies for Fastest Rejection by a Large Company, Most Reposts of One Job in a Calendar Year, Most Interview Rounds for a Position Paying Less Than Your Current Role, and Greatest Difference Between the Job Description and the Actual Job.

The trophy should be a gold plated loading circle mounted on a tiny keyboard with a plaque reading, “After careful consideration.”

Modern hiring moves at two speeds. When companies want to reject you,

your resume is reviewed, judged, processed, and removed before your coffee gets cold. When they might want to hire you, everyone becomes unavailable. Everyone becomes unavailable, the role enters a mysterious approval process, and round seven cannot be scheduled until someone returns from vacation.

Then, after eight interviews, three assessments, two presentations, four references, and one personality test asking whether stealing office supplies is wrong, they announce the role has been placed on hold.

Jeff, thank you for sharing this masterpiece. Twenty years in the FBI may not have impressed the algorithm, but you earned a nomination for Fastest Rejection After a Relevant Career.

They may not have moved you forward, but they certainly moved quickly. The job will be reposted tomorrow as “urgently hiring.”

POST 23 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Rejected, politely replied, then blocked

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A candidate thanks a company for its rejection and is blocked after expressing interest in future openings.

WHY I WROTE IT

I highlighted the contradiction between a people-first employer brand and dismissive treatment of applicants.

There was a time when getting rejected for a job meant receiving a polite email, reading “we decided to move forward with another candidate,” and quietly returning to LinkedIn to pretend everything was fine.

Now rejection apparently comes with a complimentary block.

Someone applied for a position, learned the company had selected another candidate, and sent a reasonable message: “Thank you for letting me know. Please keep me in mind for future opportunities.” That is not aggressive or desperate. That is basic professionalism. It is the digital equivalent of shaking hands, thanking everyone for their time, and leaving without stealing a stapler.

The company responded by blocking the candidate on LinkedIn. Blocked. You would think the candidate had sent 47 follow ups, created a fake employee badge, and started joining Monday meetings. Instead, they politely expressed interest in future roles, which apparently triggered the corporate emergency response system.

Somewhere in HR, a red light flashed. “Candidate remained professional after rejection.” Recruiters were told to

report suspicious networking activity.

Companies constantly tell job seekers to build relationships, follow up, stay connected, show genuine enthusiasm. Then someone follows those instructions and gets treated like they are entering the building through the ventilation system. Recruiters love saying, “Let’s stay in touch,” but apparently that means, “Like our culture posts from a safe distance and never communicate with talent acquisition again.”

The rules are simple. Be persistent, but not noticeably persistent. Show enthusiasm, but remain emotionally unavailable. Follow up, but only through telepathy. Build relationships, but maintain 500 digital feet from the hiring manager. And when they say, “We will keep your resume on file,” understand that the file may be inside a locked cabinet labeled “Candidates Who Said Thank You.”

Job seekers now need rejection training from a hostage negotiator. Thank the company calmly. Put down the networking message. Back away from LinkedIn slowly. Do not make sudden connection requests. If the position is reposted next week as “urgently hiring,” pretend you never saw it.

The company will probably advertise another role in a few months and complain that qualified candidates are difficult to find. The posting will mention collaboration, respect, communication, and a people first culture. There will be smiling employees in matching shirts and no mention of the candidate escorted away for being polite.

Modern recruiting does not simply close the door anymore. It closes the door, locks it, pulls the curtains, disconnects the doorbell, changes the Wi-Fi password, and then posts an article titled “Why Candidate Relationships Matter.”

Not every rejection burns a bridge. Sometimes the company pours the gasoline, lights the match, blocks you on LinkedIn, and then stands beside the flames asking why nobody wants to connect with its brand again.

POST 24 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

SALARY & EXPECTATIONS

The unicorn ninja at donkey pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A leadership interview expands the role's expectations while reducing compensation from the earlier discussion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I reminded readers that candidates can decline a bad fit, especially when responsibility and pay do not align.

Some interviews don't end with a handshake. They end when you realize you've accidentally applied to become a corporate unicorn ninja for the salary of a moderately successful lemonade stand.

A while back, I interviewed for a leadership position that sounded great on paper. The job description wanted someone strategic, operational, analytical, inspirational, transformational, collaborative, innovative, financially disciplined, and customer obsessed. Basically, they weren't hiring a person. They were assembling the Avengers of middle management. By the third interview, I had explained my experience so many times I was considering putting it on a QR code.

Then the hiring manager described their ideal candidate. "We really need a unicorn." Of course. But apparently a regular unicorn wasn't enough. They needed someone who was "almost like a ninja" someone who could understand the business quickly, transform operations, build the team, increase revenue, improve margins, fix accountability, and create a winning culture. A unicorn ninja. I wasn't sure whether this was an executive role or a woodland organization.

Then we got to compensation, and that's when the unicorn lost its horn. The salary was dramatically lower than what had been discussed earlier. Not slightly lower. Not "maybe we can bridge the gap" lower. It was the kind of number that makes you look around the room for a hidden camera. I asked whether the number was correct. They confirmed it and added that there was "tremendous opportunity here." Yes. Tremendous opportunity to fix years of problems while wondering why I'm eating cereal for dinner.

They explained they wanted someone experienced enough to transform the business but "flexible" about compensation. That's another corporate word. Flexible. They wanted Fortune 500 experience with clearance rack pricing. I thanked them for their time and told them we were simply too far apart. Suddenly the energy changed. "Wouldn't you like to finish the process?" No. That was probably my most productive answer.

Sometimes candidates forget they're allowed to end the interview too. You don't have to complete seven rounds just because somebody created seven rounds. You don't have to prepare

another presentation, meet another vice president, or demonstrate your passion for unicorn ninja transformation when the company has already shown you where this is going.

An interview isn't a hostage situation. If the responsibilities keep growing while the salary keeps shrinking, you have received the information you needed. I didn't storm out. I didn't give a dramatic speech. I simply thanked everyone and ended the process on my terms. Companies are allowed to decide you're not the right candidate. Candidates are allowed to decide they're not the right company.

And if you're searching for a strategic, transformational, revenue generating unicorn ninja who can fix everything by Tuesday, that's perfectly fine.

Just don't offer donkey money.

POST 25 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

BOOK NEWS

Eight interviews became a book

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A short promotional post invites readers to find LinkedIn and the Eight-Round Interview.

WHY I WROTE IT

I shared the book as another way to laugh at, and examine, an interview culture built on excessive rounds.

Eight interviews, unlimited corporate nonsense, and somehow I turned it into a book. Grab LinkedIn and the Eight-Round Interview before they schedule one more “quick conversation.”

POST 26 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 6

LINKEDIN LIFE

The accidental like on a former boss

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

While reading a former boss's polished empathy post, I accidentally engage with it and immediately regret it.

WHY I WROTE IT

I turned a small social-media mistake into a joke about how leaders try to rewrite their reputations.

There are mistakes you make at work, and then there are LinkedIn mistakes that make you question whether your thumb should have internet access.

The other day, I was scrolling through LinkedIn pretending I was there for professional development while quietly judging leadership buzzwords, recycled motivational quotes, and CEOs explaining "authentic culture." Then I saw a post from someone I used to work with. A toxic boss. Not "we had different communication styles" toxic. I mean the kind of boss who could destroy morale before lunch and then send an email about positivity before heading home.

Curiosity won, so I opened the post. It was a beautiful essay about empathy, trust, psychological safety, listening to employees, recognizing people, and creating a workplace where everyone feels valued. I read it twice because I thought maybe the account had been hacked. This was the same person who treated employee morale like an optional subscription and accountability like something that only applied downward. Now they were explaining that "great leaders lead with empathy."

And then it happened. My thumb

slipped. LIKE. I stared at the screen like I had accidentally launched a missile. No. Absolutely not. That tiny blue thumbs up was now publicly suggesting that I endorsed this rewrite of corporate history. LinkedIn was likely preparing a notification saying, "Alex liked your thoughts on compassionate leadership." I took that like back so fast I nearly pulled a muscle. I didn't unlike the post. I repossessed my approval.

For the next thirty seconds, I wondered if they had already seen it. Did LinkedIn notify them instantly? Was my name already glowing on their phone? Were they sitting there thinking, "Wow, Alex finally understands my leadership philosophy"?

Sir, I understood it. I survived it. The funniest thing about toxic bosses is how inspirational they become after you stop working for them. Suddenly they're posting about servant leadership, healthy boundaries, employee appreciation, vulnerability, work life balance, and the importance of listening. Former employees are reading like eyewitnesses watching the villain narrate his own documentary.

And the comments are always incredible. "Powerful leadership insight." "Your team is lucky to have

you." "This is what great culture looks like." Meanwhile, former employees are staring at the screen thinking, Which team? The one from the alternate universe? Maybe people change. Maybe somewhere between yelling about a spreadsheet and discovering quotes about empathy, a transformation occurred. I support growth. I support people becoming better leaders. But I am still taking my like back.

So if you ever accidentally like a toxic former boss's post, don't panic. Remove the evidence, close it, and continue your day like nothing happened.

Because LinkedIn may forget accidental engagement. Former employees do not. And I refuse to become supporting evidence in somebody else's leadership rebrand.

POST 27 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

AGEISM & HIRING

Overqualified: apparently a disqualification

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A leadership interview turns a candidate's directly relevant experience into a concern about being overqualified.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged employers who request proven expertise and then become uncomfortable when it arrives.

At some point, experience stops being impressive and starts looking suspicious. You spend years doing what everyone tells you to do. Learn more. Lead more people. Fix broken operations. Improve results.

Then one day, you sit across from a hiring manager with all that experience on your resume, and somehow it sounds like you brought contraband into the interview.

A while back, I interviewed for a leadership role that read like someone had copied my resume. They wanted operations experience, multi unit leadership, budgeting, hiring, training, and someone who could walk into chaos without Googling "how to disappear and start a goat farm." I'd done all of it.

The interview was going great. We talked numbers, people, culture, strategy, and the usual corporate vocabulary that makes everyone sound like they are launching rockets instead of trying to get Kevin to answer an email. The hiring manager nodded, smiled, and leaned back like he was about to reveal a diagnosis.

"My only concern is that you may be overqualified." Overqualified. I almost

apologized. "Sorry. I should have failed more often." I had developed too professionally. Somewhere between leading teams and surviving budget meetings, I crossed an invisible line from "strong candidate" to "dangerously competent." I considered deleting a few accomplishments from my resume. Maybe add, "Occasionally forgets passwords" under skills.

I asked what concerned him. He said I might get bored, expect too much money, or leave when something better came along. Incredible. I had not received an offer, met the team, found the bathroom, or stolen my company pen, and we were already discussing my imaginary resignation. In his head, I had been hired, promoted, become dissatisfied, updated LinkedIn, accepted another job, and left without returning my laptop.

Companies apparently want experience, but only the amount that does not make anyone nervous. Seasoned, but not too seasoned. Confident, but not intimidating. Successful, but still willing to whisper, "Wow, that salary sounds amazing," when the number appears to have been approved in 2007.

The funniest part was the posting

asked for a "proven leader with extensive experience." I was sitting there proving it, and suddenly extensive became a security threat. Job descriptions should be more honest: "Must have 15 years of experience, but if you actually have 15 years, please explain why you are making Chad uncomfortable."

Overqualified is one of those corporate compliments that doubles as a rejection. Too little experience and you are not ready. Too much and you are a flight risk. Somewhere in the middle lives the perfect candidate: knows everything, asks for nothing, accepts the salary offered, and plans to remain until the office furniture is donated.

If the biggest concern is that a candidate has already proven they can do the job, maybe the candidate is not the problem.

Maybe the hiring process just needs someone less qualified to run it.

POST 28 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

READER MAIL

She sits in the car, then goes inside

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman continues interviewing after a restructure and many setbacks, despite being frightened before each meeting.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to see the courage behind another application and the person hidden behind each rejection.

A woman shared a story with me that reminded me how much courage it takes to keep showing up when life gives you reasons to stay home.

We see new job announcements on LinkedIn with smiling photos and captions about being “excited for the next chapter.” We rarely see the rejection emails, sleepless nights, and moments someone wonders whether that chapter will ever start.

She had spent years building her career, working hard, helping coworkers, and taking on extra responsibilities. She wanted to do good work, support her family, and believe loyalty still meant something. Then her company “restructured,” corporate language for someone making a PowerPoint while innocent people update LinkedIn. Her position disappeared. Years of dedication became a calendar invitation and the comforting sentence, “This has nothing to do with your performance.” Nothing says appreciation like being told you’re wonderful while IT disables your email.

Then came the job search. Applications became her routine. Rejection emails became a subscription she never ordered. Companies called her impressive and “exactly what we’re

looking for.” Then silence. One recruiter said she was overqualified. Another asked whether she’d take a step backward. One company held several interviews before hiring internally. Apparently, the internal candidate needed an obstacle course first.

What stayed with me wasn’t the rejection. Some mornings she sits in her car before an interview and gives herself a few minutes to be scared. She thinks about the bills and how exhausting it is to keep introducing herself to strangers who might disappear next Tuesday. Then she takes a breath and walks inside like the previous fifty disappointments never happened.

That is strength nobody puts on a resume. Resilience isn’t a glamorous competency learned during a webinar over a catered sandwich. Sometimes resilience is opening another rejection and applying again. Sometimes it’s smiling through another interview while wondering how long your savings will last, then telling your family, “Something will come,” while hoping you’re right.

Yet she still laughs. She joked that after enough interviews she could interview

the hiring managers. She probably should. “Why did the last three people leave?” “Describe a time leadership accepted responsibility.” Suddenly everyone needs to consult HR and circle back.

Behind every application is a human being carrying something we cannot see. Bills. Kids. Fear. Pride. Exhaustion. Hope. That candidate isn’t application number 8472. They may have sat in the parking lot convincing themselves this could be the one.

When someone keeps showing up after rejection, don’t call them desperate. Don’t assume unemployment erased their value. Don’t confuse a difficult season with a lack of talent. Call them determined.

Eventually, one company will recognize everything she still brings. And when that happens, they won’t be rescuing her.

They’ll finally be smart enough to hire her.

POST 29 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

AGEISM & PAY

Twenty years of talent, five years of pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Repeated talk about “culture fit,” energy and lower expectations raises the familiar issue of age bias.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that experience, adaptability and results should matter more than assumptions about someone’s age.

Ageism in hiring is funny because experience is valuable right up until you have enough of it to remember when companies trained employees instead of handing them a login and saying, “You’ll figure it out.”

You spend decades building a career. You lead teams, survive recessions, fix disasters, train people, hit budgets, and learn how to stay calm when someone says, “We made a tiny change over the weekend.” Then you apply for a job asking for an “experienced leader,” and suddenly everyone becomes concerned that you have experience. Nobody says age, of course. Instead, you hear, “We’re looking for someone with more energy.” “You may be overqualified.” “We want someone who can grow with the company.” Translation: Karen from HR noticed the dates on your resume and opened the calculator.

My favorite is “culture fit.” the culture is three people named Chad drinking cold brew and saying “let’s disrupt the space” while nobody knows where last quarter’s numbers are. Meanwhile, the experienced candidate has led teams, survived software migrations, and knows that replying ALL to a company email is how civilizations collapse. But yes, tell us more about how they might struggle in a fast-paced environment.

Then comes the interview question designed to test whether you are still allowed near electricity, “Are you comfortable learning new technology?” Absolutely. Experienced workers went from fax machines to email, desktops to laptops, landlines to smartphones, paper schedules to apps, and conference rooms to Zoom meetings where Gary still cannot find the mute button. They adapted through updates, password resets, and software rollouts without making a TikTok explaining their morning routine.

Then salary comes up, and suddenly experience becomes dangerous. Companies want 20 years of knowledge with five years of salary expectations. They want someone who has already made every expensive mistake, learned the lessons, and can spot trouble before it becomes a meeting, but would prefer to pay them like they are about to make their first one.

Ageism is strange because companies say they want leadership, judgment, stability, loyalty, accountability, mentorship, and people who can handle pressure. Then someone walks in carrying exactly that, and the hiring

team whispers, “Do you think they’ll stay?” Probably longer than your last four directors, Chad.

Experience is not a defect that needs explaining. Age does not mean someone stopped learning, producing, adapting, or became incapable of understanding Slack. Sometimes the person being screened out has already survived the problem your company has not encountered yet.

They do not need a participation trophy for experience. They need companies to stop treating birthdays like performance reviews.

Hire talent. Hire character. Hire people who can do the job. And if someone has twenty or thirty years of experience, do not ask whether they can keep up.

Ask whether your company can afford to keep overlooking them.

POST 30 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

RECRUITERS & PAY

Passion will not pay the electric bill

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recruiter resists disclosing pay for a demanding senior role and frames salary questions as a lack of passion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I defended direct compensation conversations and the dignity of asking whether the numbers make sense.

Some recruiter conversations start with opportunity and end with you wondering if your patience has a two week notice policy.

A while back, I tried to be nice to a recruiter. I came into the call professional. I had my resume ready, my questions ready, and the adorable belief that adults could discuss a job without turning it into a salary negotiation. The role sounded solid at first. The usual corporate poetry was there: fast-paced, wear many hats, self-starter. Translation: people quit and they need one person to inherit the mess.

Still, I listened. I asked about the team, expectations, why the role was open, and then asked the dangerous question. "What is the salary range?" You would have thought I asked for classified documents. Her tone changed immediately. Suddenly I was not a strong candidate. I was a man with bills. She said the range was "competitive."

I love that word. Competitive with what? My first job? A grocery coupon? A water bottle and a handshake? Every time a recruiter says competitive, a candidate prepares for a number that needs counseling. When she shared it, I

stayed polite. I said, "I appreciate that, but based on the scope, that feels low." That is when the attitude clocked in.

She said, "Well, the company wants someone passionate, not someone only focused on money." There it was. The sacred sentence. The one they use when the math starts sweating. Passion is great. Purpose matters. But my mortgage company has never asked if I am passionate. The electric company does not accept leadership principles. The grocery store has never said, "Your total is \$184, but teamwork covers it."

Then she asked if I was flexible. I said, "Within reason." She explained they needed someone senior, strategic, hands on, available after hours, fixing process, coaching teams, handling fires, and rebuilding the operation. So basically, they wanted an executive, trainer, therapist, spreadsheet wizard, and someone who would smile when the offer arrived cheap.

I still tried. I said, "I understand budgets, but responsibilities and salary are not aligned." She replied, "Well, maybe this is not the right opportunity for you." Finally. Alignment. That was the moment I realized some people do not want a professional conversation. They want you grateful, quiet, and underpaid

with enthusiasm.

Candidates are not difficult because they ask about salary. They are not ungrateful because they want clarity. They are not "money motivated" because they expect pay to match the work. That is adulthood with bills and enough interview trauma to recognize a red flag in business casual. Boundaries are not attitude. They are receipts. That is the point.

But kindness is not a permission slip for someone to push your buttons, insult your experience, and then act surprised when you do not applaud a lowball offer wrapped in attitude.

Professionalism goes both ways. If the job requires executive level skill, do not bring yard sale energy to the salary conversation.

POST 31 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The raccoon versus executive presence

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panel interview veers into comments about a candidate's LinkedIn photo rather than demonstrated leadership.

WHY I WROTE IT

I laughed at image policing and asked why presentation details can overshadow measurable work experience.

Panel interviews start as professional talks and become a documentary nobody approved. A while back, I joined a panel interview ready for the usual corporate obstacle course.

I had examples, numbers, and stories about leading teams, fixing operations, and surviving enough chaos to qualify for an emotional support spreadsheet. I expected questions about strategy, culture, conflict, and pressure. The first question was about my LinkedIn photo. Not my resume. Not my background. My photo.

One panelist leaned forward like someone about to solve a cold case and said, "So... can we ask about your profile picture?" That was when the interview entered the scenic route. For context, the photo is me holding a drink with a raccoon on my shoulder, looking like we just finished a quarterly review and disagreed with the forecast. I thought it showed personality. Apparently, it triggered an internal investigation.

The room went quiet like I had listed the raccoon as my professional reference. Someone asked, "Is that real?" I wanted to say, "No, that is our Chief Compliance Officer. He judges onboarding processes." But I stayed

professional because maturity matters when your photo is cross-examined by people who wrote "fast-paced environment".

So I explained it calmly. Yes, it was funny. Yes, it showed personality. No, the raccoon would not be joining staff meetings unless the compensation package was competitive. They laughed and kept going. One asked if I thought the picture might be "too casual" for leadership. Too casual? I have seen executives post mirror selfies with leadership quotes from airport bookshelves. I have seen CEOs announce layoffs under smiling headshots like they were launching a candle line. But my photo was the concern because a raccoon had better lighting than half the headshots on LinkedIn.

Then someone asked if people would take me seriously. That one almost got me. I have managed teams, stores, customers, vendors, crises, broken processes, hiring problems, and grown adults who still reply all to company emails. If someone cannot take me seriously because my photo has humor, that might not be a culture fit. That might be a warning label.

The best part was after ten minutes of

photo due diligence, they transitioned into asking if I could handle ambiguity. Handle ambiguity? I was in a panel interview where my picture had become a behavioral assessment. I was not handling ambiguity. I was swimming laps in it.

By the end, I realized some companies say they want authentic leaders until one shows up with personality, humor, and a photo that does not look like proof of life. They want creative, but not too creative. Memorable, but not enough to discuss in Slack. Human, but preferably the LinkedIn approved version: neutral blazer, soft background, and no face suggesting unpaid PTO.

Honestly, I respected the raccoon for staying quiet through the whole thing. He had stronger executive presence than the salary range and the panel too.

POST 32 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

TALENT STRATEGY

The talent shortage companies manufacture

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Employers complain that qualified people are scarce while filtering out those with skills and practical judgment.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned why hiring rules and fragile egos can keep a business from hiring the help it says it needs.

Corporate America has developed a fascinating new talent strategy: complain loudly about the “talent shortage” while quietly rejecting, sidelining, or exhausting the exact people who know how to fix things.

It is almost impressive. Every company wants “high performers.” They want people who move fast, solve problems, challenge bad processes, improve results, and “think like owners.” Until someone actually does. Then suddenly the high performer is “too intense.” Too direct. Too ambitious. Too independent. Too experienced. Not collaborative enough. Makes people uncomfortable. Asks too many questions. Gets results too quickly. Apparently excellence is wonderful as long as it arrives quietly and does not expose that three meetings and a steering committee were never necessary.

Weak managers do not always fear bad employees. Bad employees are predictable. They miss targets, blame systems, schedule another meeting, and disappear when accountability enters the room. A real overperformer is much more dangerous. They notice things. They fix things. They ask why the process requires 9 approvals when two would work. Worst of all, they

occasionally produce results before the PowerPoint explaining why results are impossible is finished.

That can create an emergency. So the person who could improve the department becomes “not a culture fit.” The experienced candidate becomes “overqualified.” The employee who keeps delivering gets rewarded with everyone else’s unfinished work because apparently the prize for being efficient is becoming the office adoption center for abandoned projects.

Then leadership goes on LinkedIn and posts, “Great talent is so hard to find.” Of course it is. You interviewed it on Tuesday and rejected it Thursday because it looked confident. Recruiters are told to find unicorns, hiring managers are handed unicorns, and someone says, “I’m worried this unicorn may expect to actually run.”

Back to the search. Meanwhile, talented people are sitting unemployed, underemployed, consulting, freelancing, or quietly deciding they would rather protect their sanity than spend another year convincing insecure leadership that competence is not an act of aggression.

And companies keep wondering why performance is low. Maybe the market does not have a talent shortage. Maybe it has a talent recognition problem. Because if your organization keeps losing its strongest people, rejecting experienced candidates, promoting comfortable mediocrity, and calling every person who challenges the status quo “difficult,” the problem is probably not that exceptional talent disappeared.

It probably saw the job posting, read “we value innovation,” remembered what happened last time, and kept scrolling. Some companies are searching everywhere for the people who can solve their problems while making absolutely certain those people never get close enough to solve them.

That is not talent strategy. That is corporate self-sabotage with a recruiting budget.

POST 33 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

JOB-SEARCH HOPE

After all the noes, one yes

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A string of rejection messages is set against a candidate finally landing the opportunity that changes the story.

WHY I WROTE IT

I offered encouragement without pretending the disappointment or uncertainty of searching is trivial.

Job hunting has a special way of making you question every professional decision you have made.

One week you are collecting rejection emails like loyalty points. Monday says, "We've decided to move forward with another candidate." Tuesday says, "Your background is impressive, but..." Wednesday arrives with the corporate classic, "We'll keep your information on file," which means your resume has been respectfully placed into a digital attic next to a fax machine and a Blockbuster membership card. By Friday, confidence is hanging on by one paper clip and you start wondering if maybe your biggest career mistake was not becoming the person who writes rejection templates.

Then something ridiculous happens. You get the offer. That is why I loved seeing a post from someone who said his Open to Work banner is coming down. Four job rejections hit him last week. Four. Enough to make anyone stare at LinkedIn and wonder whether the algorithm has started personally beefing with them. Then he accepted a job offer and will be starting in a couple of weeks.

This is the part of job searching nobody can predict. Rejection has terrible

timing. It can show up at 6:12 a.m., during dinner, or nine minutes after you applied for a role you were "perfectly aligned" with. Companies will reject you so quickly you start to wonder if your application triggered a smoke alarm in HR.

And rejection gets inside your head. After the first one, you shrug. After the second, you review your resume. After the third, you rewrite your summary. After the fourth, you are looking at your profile picture thinking, "Is it the shirt? Do recruiters hate blue?"

Meanwhile, the right opportunity could already be moving toward you. That is what makes this story worth sharing. Four companies said no, and none of those four decisions had the authority to decide how the story ended. They were just four doors that stayed closed while another one was getting ready to open. LinkedIn makes the process look suspiciously clean. Someone announces, "Excited to share I've started a new role!" and we see the polished ending. We do not see the rejection emails, the ghosting, the awkward interviews, the applications that vanished into Workday, the recruiter who promised an update and apparently joined a witness protection program, or the night someone sat on

the couch wondering what else they could possibly change. Then one email changes everything.

So congratulations to everyone taking down that Open to Work banner, and encouragement to everyone who still has theirs up. A bad week does not always mean a bad outcome. Sometimes it just means the plot is taking the scenic route.

Four rejections last week. One offer today. Corporate hiring may be chaotic, inconsistent, emotionally confusing, and occasionally operated like a carnival game, but every once in a while the ball lands on your number.

And when it does, take the banner down like you are retiring a championship jersey. You earned that click.

POST 34 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

JOB-SEARCH LIFE

Saturday morning at Starbucks, job hunt edition

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A coffee-shop visit becomes a noisy scene of resumes, video interviews, mobile orders and exhausted applicants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used a familiar Saturday setting to show how job hunting follows people into the rest of their lives.

Starbucks on a Saturday morning is what happens when caffeine, job hunting, toddlers, laptops, and mobile orders all collide before people are ready for human interaction.

I walked in this morning planning to grab coffee, sit quietly, and check LinkedIn for a minute. That was my first mistake. There is no quiet at Starbucks on Saturday. By 9:00 a.m., the place became an airport after twelve canceled flights. The line wrapped around the pastry case, the mobile order counter had enough abandoned drinks to open a second location, three children were negotiating cake pops like union representatives, and a guy had claimed an entire table for a laptop, charger, and emotional support muffin. Naturally, I opened LinkedIn because apparently coffee was not enough.

Within thirty seconds, I saw a recruiter posting that companies are struggling to find qualified candidates directly above a qualified candidate who had applied to 312 jobs. Then the rejection emails started arriving. "Thank you for your interest." On a Saturday morning? Apparently the ATS does not believe in weekends. Somewhere, a computer reviewed my experience, decided I lacked the exact combination of unicorn DNA, executive leadership, and

entry level salary expectations required for the job, and rejected me before my latte had foam.

Across from me sat another job hunter. I could tell immediately because he had the universal expression: resume open, forehead in one hand, and the haunted stare of someone rewriting "managed a team" into "spearheaded cross-functional human capital optimization" because robots prefer action verbs. Then he opened Workday. At that point, I knew he was beyond help. The guy beside him was clearly on a Zoom interview, wearing a suit jacket on top and gym shorts underneath, quietly saying "synergy," "scalability," and "stakeholder alignment" while a blender behind him sounded like a helicopter. The hiring manager asked where he saw himself in five years. His face said, "Hopefully not doing this."

Then my name was called. Not for an interview. For coffee. It was the best response I received all week. The barista handed me my cup without asking for three references, salary history, college GPA, whether I thrive in a fast-paced environment, or why I wanted to leave my current beverage provider. No panel interview. No assessment. No case study. No 30 60

90 day plan explaining how I intended to drink it. Just coffee.

I sat down, took a sip, refreshed LinkedIn, and saw a job posted eleven minutes ago with 486 applicants.

Saturday Starbucks taught me something valuable: job hunting and ordering coffee are basically the same experience now. You wait too long, answer unnecessary questions, hope they spell your name correctly, and occasionally receive something completely different from what you applied for.

The difference is Starbucks eventually calls your name. Recruiters leave you staring at "application submitted" until you wonder whether the position was ever real.

POST 35 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

HR & CULTURE

HR's wall of motivational contradictions

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An HR office is covered with quotes about kindness and communication while daily practices contradict the decor.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked companies to practice their stated values instead of treating framed slogans as proof of culture.

Nothing prepares you for corporate danger quite like walking into an HR office and seeing seventeen motivational quotes on the wall before sitting down.

A while back, I met an HR manager whose office looked like Pinterest had been given a corporate credit card. Every inch had a framed quote. "Choose kindness." "People first." "Be the reason someone smiles today." "Integrity is doing the right thing when nobody is watching." There was even one that said, "Employees don't leave companies, they leave managers." I remember thinking, either I entered the safest workplace in America or something terrible happened here last Tuesday.

She invited me to sit under a giant sign that said "Good Vibes Only," which is comforting when the person has a folder with your name on it. She told me they believed in transparency, communication, respect, accountability, work life balance, psychological safety, and empowering employees to bring their authentic selves to work. Basically, every LinkedIn buzzword on a coffee mug.

She explained employees were expected to answer emails after hours

because "we all pitch in." Vacations were encouraged, but taking one during a busy week could "send the wrong message." Managers were empowered to lead, provided they agreed with senior leadership. Feedback was welcome, as long as it was positive, appropriately timed, delivered through the correct channel, and preferably never spoken out loud. Apparently "Speak your truth" only applied to the wall art.

She leaned back beneath a framed quote that said "Communication is key" and told me employees had recently been written up for "creating unnecessary conversations." You cannot sit underneath "Communication is key" while discouraging communication. That is like hanging "Safety First" over a staircase with no railing.

Another quote said: "Mistakes are proof that you are trying." Beautiful. Five minutes later she explained the company had a zero tolerance policy for mistakes. So apparently mistakes were proof you were trying somewhere else.

My favorite was the giant wooden sign behind her desk, "Our people are our greatest asset." That warmed my heart

until she explained they had frozen raises, reduced staffing, increased workloads, and replaced two positions without replacing the people. Apparently the greatest asset was expected to do the work of three assets while remaining grateful for Casual Friday.

I left that office with an important lesson: the number of motivational quotes on a workplace wall may be inversely proportional to the amount of motivation inside the workplace.

Healthy cultures don't need twelve signs reminding everyone they are healthy. Respect does not need a frame. Trust does not need vinyl lettering. Good leadership does not require a decorative wooden plaque from the clearance aisle.

If I ever walk into an HR office again and see "We're a family" hanging beside "Good Vibes Only," I'm not asking about benefits. I'm checking where the emergency exit is.

POST 36 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Grit quotes from the people causing burnout

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An inspirational post about resilience comes from a leader whose employees may already be looking for exits.

WHY I WROTE IT

I contrasted inspirational leadership language with what actually helps employees feel respected and safe.

Toxic bosses absolutely love posting quotes about grit. The other day I saw one of those leadership posts floating around LinkedIn.

You know the kind. Black background. White letters. A mountain nobody in the company has ever climbed. The quote said, "Tough times don't build character. They reveal it." And right underneath it was a manager I once knew who could turn a staff meeting into a hostage negotiation before the coffee finished brewing. Nothing says resilience quite like a boss who creates the difficult environment, watches everyone struggle through it, and then posts about how adversity makes people stronger.

This man loved the word grit. Grit was apparently the secret ingredient to success. If you were exhausted, you needed grit. If three people quit and you inherited their workload, grit. If you asked for help, apparently your grit subscription had expired. If payroll was wrong, the schedule was impossible, and your vacation request disappeared into a mysterious corporate swamp, you were told to "stay focused on the mission." The mission, from what I could tell, was surviving until Friday without developing an eye twitch.

Toxic bosses have an incredible talent for turning their own management failures into motivational opportunities for everyone else. They will understaff a department, ignore every warning, lose two top performers, cancel your day off, then walk into the break room and say, "Pressure makes diamonds." Sir, pressure also bursts pipes. And the quotes never stop. "Be the energy you want to attract." Excellent advice from the person who enters every meeting like a thunderstorm wearing Dockers. "Leadership is about lifting others." Wonderful, especially considering half the team is updating their resumes during lunch.

My favorite is when they post something about loyalty. Loyalty. The same boss who would replace you before your desk chair stopped spinning suddenly becomes Marcus Aurelius because somebody resigned. Then comes the dramatic speech about commitment, family, perseverance, and how "people just don't want to work anymore." No, people want to work. They just don't want to work for someone who confuses intimidation with leadership, chaos with urgency, silence with agreement, and fear with respect.

Real grit is not smiling while someone burns down the workplace and hands you a bucket. Real grit is surviving poor leadership without letting it convince you that being miserable is a requirement for being successful. And nothing tests resilience quite like pretending the problem is employee attitude while management keeps supplying fresh reasons to resign fast. The inspirational graphics are free. The turnover, burnout, and exit interviews apparently count as workplace culture.

So whenever I see a toxic boss posting another quote about resilience, I smile. Because somewhere, an employee is reading it during lunch while applying to another company.

That is grit. And occasionally, it comes with a two week notice.

POST 37 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

AMAZON INTERVIEWS

Amazon Career Kombat: final boss pending

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A long Amazon interview sequence begins to resemble a video game with an endless series of escalating rounds.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the belief that a longer gauntlet makes the final hiring decision more fair or accurate.

A while back, I went through an Amazon interview loop that stopped feeling like hiring and started feeling like a video game designed by someone who hated weekends.

At first, I thought I was applying for a job. Cute. By interview three, I realized I had entered Career Kombat: Corporate Edition, where every round unlocked another character, another calendar invite, and another person asking me to “dive deep” into a story I had already told six times.

I reached level nine. LEVEL. NINE. By then I was no longer interviewing. I was on a quest. Level one was the recruiter tutorial: smile, nod, say “customer obsession,” and ignore what the salary range just did. Tell us about a time you failed. Tell us about a time you influenced without authority. Tell us about a time you rebuilt civilization after a stakeholder deleted the spreadsheet.

By level four, the enemies got stronger. I couldn't simply say I improved a process. I needed to explain that I improved it by 37.6%, saved \$418,000, increased morale, rescued a puppy, and still made the 2:00 PM meeting. By level six, my STAR stories had sequels. By level seven, I had repeated the same

examples so many times I started wondering if Amazon had implanted those memories for a job I still did not have.

Then came level eight: the mysterious Bar Raiser. Nobody really explains the Bar Raiser. They mention this person like an ancient prophecy. “The Bar Raiser will be joining.” Suddenly you sit straighter, check your lighting, and wonder if Darth Vader is about to enter the Zoom. I had survived recruiters, hiring managers, panels, leadership principles, and endless behavioral questions, but apparently the final boss still had not spawned.

Then I unlocked level nine. At level nine, I expected a treasure chest, a job offer, maybe Prime for life, or at least a coupon for emotional damages. Instead, another interview appeared. I stared at the calendar invite like a man who had just defeated the final dragon only to discover the dragon had a regional manager. At this point Amazon had enough information to write my autobiography and cast the Netflix adaptation.

The funniest part was hearing another interviewer say, “I know you've probably answered something similar already.” YES, CHRIS. I HAVE. I

answered it three levels ago, when my soul left the meeting. But you keep smiling because somewhere in the distance you can almost see the offer letter glowing like a legendary weapon.

After nine levels and enough “Tell me about a time” questions to qualify as therapy, the game finally ended. No fireworks. No victory screen. No Jeff Bezos descending from the clouds with a golden badge. Just the familiar corporate message thanking me for my time. Apparently I had completed the entire game, collected every leadership principle, defeated the Bar Raiser, survived nine levels, and still didn't unlock the job.

Amazon interviews taught me something important: sometimes you are not a candidate. You are downloadable content.

POST 38 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

RESIGNATION

The two-week notice transformation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A burned-out employee gives notice and suddenly receives the attention and appreciation that were missing before.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wrote about the relief of leaving and why recognition should arrive before someone hands in a resignation.

Nothing changes your relationship with a job faster than handing in your two weeks' notice after months of being drained one "quick meeting" at a time.

Suddenly the office feels quieter. Even the coworker who reheats fish in the break room becomes easier to forgive because you know your suffering now has an expiration date.

For months, maybe years, you convinced yourself to hang on. You called it loyalty. The company called it "being a team player." Your nervous system called it Tuesday. You kept showing up, solving problems nobody wanted to own, covering for people who vanished at 3:17, and listening to leadership explain that morale would improve if everyone simply brought more positive energy to the same understaffed disaster.

Then one day, something snaps. Maybe your manager schedules a "Quick Sync" that lasts 74 minutes. Maybe you get handed another responsibility because you are "so dependable," which is corporate language for, "Congratulations, you have been selected to do Karen's job too."

So you type the letter. Please accept this as my two weeks' notice. Seven

innocent words capable of lowering your blood pressure before you even hit Send. And suddenly, everyone finds your value.

The manager who barely had time to answer your emails now wants a one on one. HR would love to understand your concerns. Leadership is shocked. SHOCKED. Apparently, the warning signs and constant turnover were too subtle. Then comes the counteroffer. The exit interview is usually the first meeting where everyone suddenly becomes fascinated by your opinion.

Amazing how the budget that did not exist for two years suddenly crawls out from behind the vending machine wearing a tiny suit. "We really value you." Wonderful. It would have been more convincing before the resignation letter.

Leaving without another job lined up can be scary. Bills do not accept "protecting my peace" as payment, and the mortgage company has yet to launch an emotional wellness program. But there comes a point where staying somewhere that constantly drains you starts charging interest in ways your paycheck cannot cover.

Knowing your value does not mean

storming out dramatically while throwing your badge into a fountain. It means recognizing when a workplace has confused your patience with permanent availability. It means understanding that loyalty should travel in both directions. Being grateful to have a job does not mean loving every piece of nonsense attached to it.

Sometimes the most professional thing you can do is finish your work, document everything, thank the people who treated you well, hand over your keys, and walk out with the same dignity you walked in with.

Because no employee engagement survey is powerful enough to fix a place that only notices your value after you decide to leave.

And nothing makes a toxic workplace appreciate you quite like watching you take your talent, your experience, and your emergency password spreadsheet straight out the front door.

POST 39 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

SPEAKING UP

When speaking out becomes the offense

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Responses to public criticism of recruiting and workplace conduct focus on the jokes rather than the behavior.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explained why uncomfortable truths about hiring and leadership should not be silenced by polished reactions.

Somewhere along the way, telling the truth about toxic leadership became more controversial than the toxic leadership itself.

Apparently, screaming at employees, running endless interview loops, ghosting candidates, changing expectations halfway through the process, and calling chaos “high standards” is acceptable corporate behavior. But write one sarcastic LinkedIn post about it and suddenly Legal appears from the bushes like they have been waiting all day for someone to use the word “accountability.”

I write about the corporate circus because people recognize it. Toxic bosses post quotes about empathy. Hiring managers need eight interviews, three panels, a case study, and apparently permission from the Vatican before making a decision. People laugh because they have lived it, and that is usually when leadership gets uncomfortable. Somehow.

Nothing makes a bad leader nervous faster than a joke that sounds suspiciously like their management style. You can write about an absurd interview process without naming a company, and somewhere an executive will whisper, “Is this about us?” Sir, if

the eight round panel fits, wear it. If your first reaction to a post about toxic leadership is to call your attorney, maybe the post is not the emergency.

Then come the warnings. “You should be careful.” “Companies are watching.” “This could hurt your career.” “You might want to take that down.” My favorite is being threatened with “professional consequences” for describing behavior they apparently consider professional. Imagine running your workplace like Survivor and then being offended because somebody reviewed the island.

Interview loops deserve their own documentary. Recruiter. Hiring manager. Another manager. Panel. Executive. Culture interview. Final panel. By round eight, you are no longer interviewing for employment. You are trying to unlock a secret character. Then, after weeks of interviews, you receive a three line rejection email before sunrise.

Most of what I write is barely exaggerated. I just remove the PowerPoint deck and add punctuation. Good leaders laugh and say, “We have all seen this.” Toxic leaders start drafting warning messages while posting something inspirational about

psychological safety. That contrast tells you everything.

I am not interested in attacking people. I am interested in calling out behavior that became normal because everyone was too worried about being labeled difficult or “not a culture fit” to say anything. If your hiring process needs more rounds than a boxing match, fix it. If employees are terrified when your name pops up on Teams, fix it. If good people keep leaving and your first instinct is to blame “this generation,” fix it.

And if a sarcastic LinkedIn post about toxic leadership feels personally threatening, maybe LinkedIn is not the problem. I will keep writing, because corporate nonsense grows best in silence, and unfortunately for toxic leadership, my mute button appears to be permanently broken.

POST 40 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The ex-boss becomes an anti-toxic guru

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former boss posts advice against toxic leadership, creating a stark contradiction with earlier experiences.

WHY I WROTE IT

I turned the irony into satire and asked readers to judge leaders by how they treat people, not by likes.

Tonight, LinkedIn delivered the kind of comedy money cannot buy, my toxic ex boss posted a heartfelt message about toxic leadership.

I stared at the screen wondering if satire had finally become self-aware, because watching that person explain healthy management was like watching a raccoon teach a class on securing trash cans.

The post had everything. Accountability. Empathy. Psychological safety. Respect. Listening to your team. This was the same person who could turn Monday morning into a hostage negotiation and make "Can I see you in my office?" sound like the opening scene of a crime documentary. Now they were online explaining how leaders should create safe teams. Sir, you WERE the warning label.

I kept reading. By then, it was entertainment. Apparently toxic leaders "fail to recognize how their behavior impacts others." Incredible insight from someone whose employees checked the parking lot to see whether their car was there. If it was, people didn't walk into work. They emotionally deployed.

Then came the part about communication. Great leaders,

according to the post, listen before reacting. I nearly pulled a muscle laughing. This person could interrupt you before you finished saying good morning. Feedback was never a conversation. It was a podcast where you were the unwilling subscriber and every episode was titled "Why This Is Somehow Your Fault."

LinkedIn loved it. "Powerful message." "Leadership starts with self-awareness." "So true!" I stared at the comments like someone watching witnesses compliment the getaway driver's parking skills. That is corporate social media. Somewhere tonight, a manager who has destroyed morale, chased away good employees, scheduled unnecessary meetings, weaponized performance reviews, and used "we're family" as a threat is posting about servant leadership beneath a headshot.

Former employees remember the screaming, favoritism, micromanaging, late night emails, and how every mistake became a "coaching opportunity" while every success became leadership's accomplishment. LinkedIn remembers the inspirational quote next to a mountain.

Toxic bosses almost never believe they

are toxic. In their version, they are demanding because they care, controlling because they have high standards, unavailable because they are strategic, and terrifying because employees "don't like accountability."

Meanwhile, half the team is updating their resume in the bathroom. So I did what any mature professional would do. I kept scrolling. No comment. No reaction. No sarcastic emoji. Growth is important. I did take a screenshot, because sometimes life writes comedy better than we ever could.

Seeing a toxic ex boss teach LinkedIn about healthy leadership is proof that corporate irony is alive, thriving, and apparently posting inspirational content after dinner while former employees read it and whisper, "You have GOT to be kidding me."

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE WEEK BEHIND THE LAUGHTER

Every week, the stories arrive sounding almost like comedy pitches. A hiring manager wants to know how many tennis balls fit in a Golden Retriever's mouth. An applicant is told that the quiet car where they completed a professional interview was somehow an unacceptable office. A recruiter acts offended when the person they are recruiting asks how much the job pays. Somewhere another company promises careful consideration and sends a rejection so quickly it could have been delivered by a microwave. I laugh because the absurdity is real enough to recognize. I keep writing because the people living through it should not have to carry the frustration alone.

This particular week offered an entire corporate variety show. On Sunday, a CEO somehow made an announcement sound like employee appreciation and a warning about restructuring at the same time. By Monday, interviews had become history exams and personality tests had wandered into the animal kingdom. Tuesday brought a recruiting service with an AI coach called Jack and an AI recruiter called Jill, a pairing that sounds charming until you imagine one machine comforting you after the other machine rejects you. By Saturday, my old friend the corporate raccoon was still more qualified for certain panels than the process used to evaluate candidates. It was a busy week for professional nonsense, and not a single calendar invitation asked whether I was emotionally available.

The trouble with treating every story as a joke is that we risk missing what happened before the punchline. Somebody prepared for that interview. Somebody had their phone propped carefully against a dashboard so they could take a call between responsibilities. Somebody spent an evening making a resume readable, tailoring the language, rehearsing what to say about their achievements, and trying not to sound either too confident or not confident enough. An employer may see another entry on a spreadsheet. The person who sent the application sees one more possibility for financial security, professional pride, and a normal Monday morning.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

I am not asking companies to hire everybody who applies. That would be a very expensive experiment and I suspect the budget department would faint before lunch. I am asking for basic professionalism. Describe the work accurately. Be clear about pay. Ask questions that reveal whether the person can perform the job. If you need three interviews, explain why. If the job closes, tell people. If you cannot move forward with a candidate, communicate that without implying their years of experience were reviewed by a panel of twelve executives at 2:13 in the morning. Every applicant understands that the answer may be no. What is harder to accept is being treated as though their time has no value at all.

EXPERIENCE IS NOT A SAFETY HAZARD

Ageism kept showing up in the stories this week, sometimes directly and sometimes dressed in a business-casual outfit called 'culture fit.' We ask people to accumulate skills, grow into responsibility, lead larger teams, master changing technology and learn from their mistakes. Then one day their careers become long enough to make somebody uncomfortable. We call them overqualified. We wonder whether they have enough energy. We look at twenty years of results and ask whether they can adapt to a scheduling system invented last Tuesday. The contradiction is remarkable. It is like hiring a pilot and expressing concern that they have successfully landed too many airplanes.

One of the stories involved an applicant with twenty years of FBI experience going after a physical-security leadership role and receiving a rejection in just a few hours. I do not know everything that happened inside that employer's decision. Perhaps a detail in the job was different from what the posting suggested. Perhaps the employer had a candidate in mind. But the story captures why so many capable people feel invisible. The language says a company wants experience. The process often gives the appearance of being frightened when the experience arrives. At least explain the standards. Let the candidate understand the real job. A resume should not become suspicious simply because it contains more than one chapter.

I also heard from a woman who has been without a paycheck for almost two years. There have been applications, rounds of interviews, follow-ups and all the preparation that happens between them. I think about the emotional arithmetic of that search. The hours spent rewriting a profile. The conversations with family. The email notifications that turn out to be marketing. The tiny surge of hope when a recruiter seems enthusiastic. The long silence after somebody says they will be in touch soon. The internet often treats the job search as a numbers game. For the person living it, the numbers have names and consequences.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

There was another reader who described gathering her courage in the car before an interview. That image stays with me. Nobody sees it on the employer's scorecard. Nobody adds a line that says 'showed up despite fear, exhaustion and another month of uncertainty.' But it is there. The determination required to keep introducing yourself to strangers after repeated disappointments is not a character flaw. It is proof that people care deeply about what comes next. When you meet a candidate with an uneven job history, a long gap or an unusually deep background, ask a thoughtful question before you invent a story about them. Their experience is not expired inventory, and their search is not a personal failure.

To anyone who has started trimming years from a resume because they worry the truth will cost them a call: I understand why you feel forced to do it. The hiring market has taught people some strange survival skills. You should not need to disguise everything you have learned to prove you are still learning. And to the employer reading: you may be passing over the person who has already solved the expensive problem your leadership team keeps discussing every quarter. Sometimes the best innovation is hiring the person who knows how to stop a preventable fire before somebody creates a committee about the smoke.

LEADERSHIP IS NOT A DECORATIVE PLAQUE

The other running theme was leadership performed for an audience. I saw the online advice, the motivational posters, the polished speeches about psychological safety and the endless insistence that a company is one big family. Some of the people repeating those phrases have employees who would rather find a new family with clearer expectations and fewer 7:30 a.m. meetings. The joke is easy to make: a boss posts a quote about empathy before spending an entire afternoon demonstrating the opposite. The harder question is why organizations let the contradiction continue. A viral leadership post can draw applause from strangers who have never had to report to the person who wrote it. The employees have a different set of evidence.

This week included a story about walking into an HR office decorated with quotations about kindness and communication while the actual workplace discouraged ordinary conversations. I have nothing against wall art. A beautiful office can make a difficult day easier. But values become meaningful when they survive disagreement. An open-door policy that punishes the person who walks through the door is not an open-door policy; it is an elaborate booby trap with a laminated sign. A manager cannot fix morale by ordering another poster. People notice whether they can ask questions safely, receive feedback fairly and go home without carrying an unnecessary fight into dinner.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

One of the most exhausting parts of toxic leadership is the way it makes good people question themselves. They begin with enthusiasm. They want to help, improve operations, satisfy customers and be the coworker everybody can rely on. They stay late. They try again. They learn how to predict a manager's mood before opening an email. Eventually somebody decides to leave, and leadership announces that the employee just was not committed enough. I wish every person in that position could hear a clearer message: dedication is not the same thing as accepting constant disrespect. You can be good at your job and still decide the job is bad for you.

Then comes the strange theater of resignation. A person has requested support or recognition for months. Nothing changes. The resignation letter arrives and suddenly people discover a salary budget, a succession plan and an urgent interest in how the employee feels. Perhaps the effort is sincere. Sometimes leaders really do realize they made a mistake. But gratitude offered only after somebody reaches the exit is a poor retention strategy. If a company wants its best people to stay, it should listen while they are still trying to make things work, not merely after the resignation becomes an inconvenient item on the Monday agenda.

The lesson is not that bosses must be perfect. Nobody is. Managers make difficult decisions, miss signals and sometimes handle a meeting badly. The difference is what happens next. Can the leader admit it? Can they hear an uncomfortable truth without searching for someone to punish? Can they recognize work that never appears in the next quarterly highlight reel? If so, they probably do not need a daily LinkedIn reminder that they are authentic. People on the team already know. If not, another quote about grit will not rescue the culture. The mountain in the stock photo has already filed a complaint.

THE CANDIDATE IS INTERVIEWING YOU

At some point, hiring turned into an arms race of strange questions. How many rounds can a company add? How many hypothetical crises can it invent? Can it ask a finance candidate about an event that happened in high school and call that a rigorous assessment? Can it squeeze a leadership role, six job descriptions and a heroic turnaround into one salary that would have looked modest a decade ago? This week, I met a 'unicorn ninja' who apparently had to solve everything while being paid like the company was still selling lemonade on the sidewalk. The character was imaginary. The expectation, unfortunately, sounded familiar.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

Good interviews are not supposed to be easy because everyone is pretending to be nice. They are supposed to be relevant. It is reasonable to explore real problems the role will face. It is reasonable to understand whether an applicant knows the work and can collaborate with the team. But a thoughtful question about a budget is different from a riddle designed to amuse the interviewer. Requiring experience and then dismissing the candidate as overqualified is different from clarifying the level of the position. Asking about pay is different from being obsessed with money. An applicant can care about the mission and also notice that the electric company accepts currency instead of leadership principles.

The other thing employers forget is that a candidate learns a great deal from the interview. When a panel arrives late, has not read the resume and talks over the person it invited, that candidate is not only being assessed. They are assessing the company. When a recruiter answers questions about compensation with vague phrases, the candidate learns what transparency might look like after hiring. When an organization blocks someone on LinkedIn for replying politely to a rejection, it has communicated a lot more than it probably intended. And when a hiring manager rejects a prepared candidate because a parked car was used as a quiet interview location, the company has told that person what matters most in its version of professionalism.

This is where the interview should go both ways. Candidates should prepare, listen, be truthful and respect people's time. Employers should do exactly the same. If a salary range has changed, acknowledge it. If the job requires travel, say so. If the decision will take another week, give a realistic update. If the business wants someone who can manage complex operations, ask about decisions and results rather than checking whether they can sound enthusiastic about a riddle. Better communication is not expensive. I suspect we could fund several candidate updates by canceling just one unnecessary panel.

And please remember that the person who declines your offer has not committed an act of disloyalty. They may have a family, a commute, a current employer, or simply a better understanding of their own priorities. A respectful no from a candidate deserves the same gracious treatment companies expect when they send a no. The process is a relationship between adults, not a loyalty test. If an employer is offended that a talented person understands their worth, the conversation has probably answered a question neither side was originally planning to ask.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

THE REASON I KEEP POSTING

I know some people would prefer that I stop making jokes about corporate life. Every now and then a manager reads one of my posts with the expression of a person who has just discovered their quarterly presentation being used as a comedy set. Somebody says the jokes are unprofessional. Somebody says the story must be exaggerated. Somebody asks whether a candidate should simply be grateful for an interview, whatever happens inside it. I look at the messages from people who recognize the experience and keep writing. The comedy is not the mission by itself. It is the invitation to discuss something serious without forcing everyone into another meeting they did not request.

A reader who laughs at my story about an accidental LinkedIn like may also be the person afraid to speak up about a manager at work. Someone enjoying a joke about an AI recruiter named Jill may have spent months battling applicant systems that never acknowledge a human being is waiting. Someone chuckling at the Saturday Starbucks scene may be the candidate at the next table quietly checking a portal while their coffee gets cold. We are funny because we are human. We are tired because the systems sometimes forget that. Both things can be true, and both deserve to be said.

I think about the people who write to me after a bad interview or a painful exit. Some want advice. Some just want to know they are not being unreasonable. Some have stories that sound so strange I have to read them twice. I try to preserve the person inside the story. An applicant with twenty years of experience is more than a rejection timestamp. A woman navigating two years without a paycheck is more than a candidate ID. A person giving two weeks' notice after months of distress is more than a departure that must be classified in a retention report. People are not a row in a dashboard merely because a dashboard makes them easier to count.

If you are an employer, I hope this newsletter gives you something more useful than a reason to be defensive. Find one part of your hiring process that wastes people's time and fix it. Ask your recruiters what candidates actually experience. Read the rejection template. Check whether the job description matches the job. Ask managers whether they know how to conduct an interview without answering every question themselves. Look at the salary before announcing you need a 'unicorn ninja.' If these changes sound obvious, they should also be easy to notice in practice.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

If you are employed, you can help somebody who is looking. Share a posting that is really open. Make a thoughtful introduction. Answer a message when you can. Remember that job hunters are not performing a hobby called networking. They are trying to take care of real lives. If you are searching right now, keep your sense of humor wherever you can find it. You do not have to enjoy rejection to keep going. You do not have to smile at every absurd question to deserve respect. And a company deciding against your application does not change the work you have done or the value you can bring to the next team.

I will keep showing up with questions, stories, sarcasm and the occasional raccoon. I will celebrate employers who do the right thing and point out the systems that make ordinary people feel disposable. I hope you will keep sending your experiences, supporting one another and reminding the corporate world that the word 'human' is supposed to mean something in Human Resources. There is room for a better hiring process. There is room for laughter on the way. And there is absolutely no reason to schedule an eighth interview so someone can ask the candidate to describe their leadership style as a breakfast cereal.

Until next week, keep applying if you are looking, keep listening if you are hiring, and keep your coffee away from the keyboard whenever LinkedIn announces another mandatory inspirational quote. The Interview Games continues, because there are still stories worth telling and people worth treating well. And somewhere, right now, an applicant has probably just received a rejection email thanking them for their interest in the wrong company. Please tell me that one at least came with a coupon.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS

Behind every application is somebody's real life.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES