



AUGUST 9 - AUGUST 15, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

46

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

92

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a question that sounded simple until I started living it: what does applying for a job actually feel like today? Not the glossy recruiting video. Not the talent-acquisition slideshow with smiling strangers and a perfectly coordinated group high-five. The real process: the application, the automated email, the panel that nobody prepared for, and the silence afterward. That is where the stories begin.

I apply to jobs, participate in hiring conversations, observe the systems and write about the experience. I hear from job seekers, employees, recruiters and readers who have stories of their own. Some make me laugh so hard I have to put my coffee down. Others are reminders that a rejected application, a bad boss or a careless HR decision can rearrange a family's entire week. I try to make room for both kinds of story.

This is not an argument that every employer is terrible or that every recruiter is the villain. Good people do this work. Thoughtful hiring happens. I want more of it. But hiring should not require ten conversations to reach one decision, and an "urgent" opening should not be urgent for three consecutive months. If a company calls itself people-first, I think the candidate and the employee should be able to feel it.

The August 9–15 edition covers overnight rejections, job descriptions written like emergency plans, a rejected handshake, an interview panel that arrived as a surprise, unpaid work assignments and a ten-round hiring process that apparently required an additional conversation to defend it. The stories also turn toward ageism, layoffs, grief, retaliation, long job searches, books, reader victories and the astonishing corporate ability to transform ordinary human moments into compliance modules.

The full posts on the following pages are taken from my LinkedIn data export and arranged by the dates they were published in Chicago. Each article opens with two brief editorial interpretations: what triggered the discussion, and why the subject matters. The post text itself is preserved. The Interview Games is part observation, part sarcasm, part public experiment—and a standing reminder that there is a person on the other end of every application.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The week at a glance.

OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9		
01	LinkedIn at 2:17 a.m.	05
02	Over 50, now at Barnes & Noble	06
03	The job description decoder	07
04	The handshake nobody wanted	08
05	Managing people is not easy	09
06	The job-seeker-to-corporate conversion	10
07	When the posters do all the work	11
08	Rejected in two minutes	12
09	Restructuring has a human cost	13
10	A toxic boss becomes a thought leader	14
11	Ghosting goes both ways	15
MONDAY, AUGUST 10		
12	Can a toxic boss really change?	16
13	Urgent hiring, eternally	17
TUESDAY, AUGUST 11		
14	A private note about character	18
15	Corporate witness protection	19
16	Over 50 arrives on Apple Books	20
17	The 100-slide resignation story	21
18	The best performance review	22
19	The six-box surprise panel	23
20	Interviewing with a machine	24
21	When speaking up costs connections	25
22	Five rounds and another rejection	26
23	Ten interviews for one job	27
24	Two hundred applications later	28

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The week at a glance.

THE WEEK, CONTINUED / SELECT ANY TITLE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12		
25	Hired, but denied access	29
26	When the recruiter changes the story	30
27	Elation Health and round eleven	31
28	Recruiters deserve a rating too	32
29	The laundry room has KPIs	33
THURSDAY, AUGUST 13		
30	The two-state interview obstacle course	34
31	What The Interview Games actually does	35
32	Target and the security clearance	36
33	Sixteen years, and still disposable	37
34	Not everyone wants to manage	38
35	Too perfect for the job?	39
FRIDAY, AUGUST 14		
36	Eight hours of free interview work	40
37	The Meijer interview memory	41
38	A year and a half, then eleven rounds	42
39	The four-week background check	43
40	Grief versus the QBR	44
SATURDAY, AUGUST 15		
41	HR heard it. Then the boss did.	45
42	The interview question worth asking	46
43	The CEO who blocked feedback	47
44	Preparing for the corporate SAT	48
45	Over 50 and worth the salary	49
46	When your role no longer aligns	50

POST 01 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

LINKEDIN LIFE

LinkedIn at 2:17 a.m.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A sleepless night turns into a scroll through self-styled thought leaders, recruiters and corporate inspiration.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used the absurdity of the feed to laugh at polished advice that often misses people's real working lives.

Some nights your brain refuses to sleep because apparently 2:17 a.m. is the perfect time to remember every awkward interview answer and decision you have made since 2004.

The other night I was staring at the ceiling, completely awake, so naturally I grabbed my phone and opened LinkedIn. That was my first mistake. Within thirty seconds, I was reading a post from a 24 year old "thought leader" explaining how to lead through adversity. Sir, your biggest adversity this week was probably the office running out of oat milk. Then came the CEO who wrote, "People don't quit jobs, they quit leaders," which was inspiring until I clicked his company reviews and discovered his employees had apparently been quitting him like a gym membership in February.

I kept scrolling. One recruiter posted, "Candidates, please remember recruiters are human too." Absolutely. And candidates are apparently woodland creatures who can survive 6 weeks without feedback. Another post said, "Your job search is about strategy." Tell that to the applicant who uploaded a resume, retyped it, answered 46 questions, completed a personality test, recorded a one-way interview, and was rejected 11 minutes

later by an email addressed to "Dear First_Name."

Then I found my favorite LinkedIn species: the motivational executive. Professional headshot. Arms crossed. Slight smile. Caption, "Leadership is about listening." Somewhere, an employee waiting since March for a one on one just woke up in a cold sweat.

By 3:00 a.m. LinkedIn had replaced insomnia with corporate rage. I was investigating. Clicking profiles. Reading comments. Watching people congratulate each other for meetings that could have been emails. One guy posted a photo looking out an airplane window with, "Sometimes you have to change altitude to change perspective." Brother, you are in seat 34B. Relax.

"I'm honored and humbled to announce..." Nobody has ever been less humbled than the person typing "humbled" before attaching seventeen trophy emojis and a photo holding an award. At some point I realized I had spent an hour reading strangers explain leadership, resilience, authenticity, culture, synergy, and waking up at 4:30 a.m. Meanwhile, I was awake at 3:26 a.m., eating crackers in bed and wondering why a regional sales director

was telling me cold showers build character.

LinkedIn after midnight is not a professional networking site. It is corporate cable television with no remote. You check one notification and somehow end up watching a grown man announce that he learned more about leadership from assembling IKEA furniture than during his MBA.

Eventually I put the phone down. Not because I was tired, but because I had reached my daily allowance of inspiration, transformation, authenticity, and people pointing at whiteboards. I finally fell asleep around 4:00 a.m.

And somewhere on LinkedIn, a CEO was already awake drafting a post titled, "Why Sleep Is a Mindset." That is when I knew insomnia had officially won.

Over 50, now at Barnes & Noble

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My book *Over 50 and Over the Nonsense* becomes available through Barnes & Noble.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers facing age-related labels and hiring chaos to know where to find the book.

It's official. *Over 50 and Over the Nonsense* is now live on Barnes & Noble, Inc. For anyone who's been called "overqualified," survived eight interviews, fought an ATS, or watched a hiring manager struggle to unmute while questioning your technology skills... this one is for you. Grab a copy and enjoy the corporate circus from a safer distance.

The job description decoder

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another round of vague job advertisements packed with “fast-paced,” “many hats” and “competitive salary.”

WHY I WROTE IT

I translated recruiting euphemisms into the workplace conditions candidates worry those phrases conceal.

I’ve read so many job descriptions at this point that I no longer read them like a candidate. I read them like a hostage negotiator. Every buzzword is suspicious, and I’m trying to figure out how many people quit before they posted the opening online.

“Fast-paced environment” means the building is on fire, but everyone agreed to call it growth. “Wear many hats” means you are about to become the manager, receptionist, IT department, therapist, delivery driver, and office Keurig technician. “Self-starter” means your boss will give you a laptop, whisper “good luck,” disappear for three weeks, then return asking why you have not completed a project that exists only in his imagination.

I’ve been doing this long enough that the translations happen automatically. “Competitive salary” means your paycheck will be competing against rent. “Unlimited PTO” means take all the vacation you want, if you enjoy returning to 4,700 emails. “Family like culture” means boundaries are about to disappear. “Rock star wanted” means they want Mick Jagger energy for substitute teacher money. And “must thrive under pressure” means Linda from accounting cried in the parking lot twice last Thursday.

Then there is “entrepreneurial mindset,” which means think like the owner, work like the owner, worry like the owner, but please do not look at what the owner makes. “Comfortable with ambiguity” means nobody knows who you report to, the org chart was last updated during the Obama administration, and three people will contradict each other before lunch. “Influence without authority” means you are responsible for people who do not report to you and already muted you on Teams.

By the time I reach qualifications, I am no longer job hunting. I am solving a murder mystery. Ten years of experience. Eight software platforms. Four certifications. Travel 50%. Nights occasionally. Weekends as needed. Must be strategic, tactical, visionary, hands on, analytical, empathetic, aggressive, patient, independent, collaborative, and available 24/7 with excellent work life balance. Salary: \$57,500 and a quarterly pizza party. That is not a job description. That is a dare.

Then comes my favorite corporate sentence: “We value work life balance.” Then: “Must remain accessible outside

normal business hours.” Nothing says balance like answering Slack from your niece’s birthday party because Chad marked “circle back” as urgent. I used to read job descriptions and ask, “Do I qualify?” Now I ask, “How many people had this job last year?”

After enough time in corporate America, you stop seeing opportunities and start seeing subtitles. “Dynamic workplace” means chaos. “Rapid growth” means nobody documented anything. “Lean team” means Kevin quit, Maria is interviewing elsewhere, and you are replacing both. “Play hard” means somebody bought a ping pong table nobody uses.

And whenever I see “We’re like a family here,” I quietly close the browser. I already have a family. They at least let me take PTO.

POST 04 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

INTERVIEW STORY

The handshake nobody wanted

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An in-person panel begins with a greeting that one interviewer declines to return.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used an awkward first impression to question the strange expectations candidates face in interview rooms.

Nothing prepares you for an in person panel interview like realizing that the most dangerous part of the process is apparently saying hello.

The other day I was invited to an in person panel interview. I walked into the conference room, smiled, introduced myself, and did what I thought was normal professional behavior: I reached out to shake one hiring manager's hand. He looked at my hand. Then he looked at me. Then he looked back at my hand like I had just offered him a suspicious package. For three seconds, my arm was hanging there with no leadership support. No handshake. No fist bump. Just me, my rejected hand, and several people pretending this was not happening.

Eventually I pulled it back and tried to act natural, which is impossible after your greeting has been declined. There is nowhere for the hand to go. Pocket? Too casual. Folded in front of me? Too funeral. Behind my back? Now I look like I am inspecting troops. I considered saluting just to give the hand some closure. Then the hiring manager casually said, "I'm not really a handshake person." Fantastic. That would have been useful information four seconds earlier, Captain Communication.

Then the interview started, and the questions were about leadership, communication, and handling uncomfortable situations. I already had fresh material. "Tell us about a time you had to navigate an awkward professional moment." Sir, I can give you one from seven minutes ago. "How do you build rapport with new people?" Apparently not like this. "What does strong communication mean to you?" Ideally, telling somebody you do not shake hands before they spend three business days standing there with their palm out.

The funniest part was how much the panel talked about culture. They wanted someone warm, approachable, collaborative, confident, and comfortable building relationships. Meanwhile I had entered cheerful and professional and somehow got ghosted by a human palm. I wondered if the company handbook had a section on approved greetings. Maybe handshakes had been replaced by Teams reactions.

By the end, everyone stood up, and suddenly I faced the final assessment: goodbye etiquette. There was no chance I was trying that handshake again. Both hands stayed glued to my

sides like they had received a written warning from HR. A panelist reached toward me and I nearly backed into a chair because I could no longer tell whether she wanted to shake my hand, take my visitor badge, or point toward the exit.

I walked out realizing modern interviews require one more competency nobody puts in the job description: advanced greeting risk management. Resume polished. STAR stories ready. Salary researched. References prepared. And apparently I now need to contact HR beforehand and ask whether the panel supports Handshake 2.0 or if that feature was removed in the latest corporate update.

Sometimes the first rejection is not your experience, qualifications, or salary expectations. Sometimes it is just your hand.

Managing people is not easy

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A hiring manager dismisses how difficult it is to lead people and teams.

WHY I WROTE IT

I defended the real operational and human skills behind leadership while making room for sarcasm.

Some interviews measure experience. Others measure how long you can maintain eye contact while a hiring manager says something so ignorant your soul quietly leaves your body and updates LinkedIn.

A while back, I sat across from a hiring manager with TED Talk confidence and shopping cart self-awareness. Within five minutes, he had interrupted me, explained my industry incorrectly, and demonstrated why employee turnover exists. I mentioned leading large teams, managing multiple locations, staffing, training, and operations.

He leaned back and said, "Managing people really isn't that difficult." I almost looked around for Ashton Kutcher. Sir, managing people is easy if your leadership strategy is sending "Per my last message" emails and disappearing whenever someone needs help. Actual management involves staffing shortages, payroll, performance issues, customer complaints, scheduling, and Kevin calling off because his emotional support iguana is having a difficult morning.

Then he looked at my background and said, "Sometimes people with a lot of experience struggle to learn new things." Ah yes. The dangerous

condition known as knowing what you're doing. Apparently after enough years, your brain becomes a fax machine. New software appears and you start yelling, "Where do I put the carbon paper?" I explained that I had implemented systems, trained teams, adapted through acquisitions, and learned new technology.

He nodded, then said, "Younger employees are usually more adaptable." There it was. No disguise. No HR approved wrapping paper. Just fresh, locally sourced ignorance placed directly on the conference room table. The recruiter became fascinated with her notebook and started writing like she was drafting her own "Open to Work" post.

Then he said the company needed "fresh thinking," which is corporate language for, "We want 20 years of experience, ten years using software released four years ago, executive judgment, entry level enthusiasm, and someone born last Thursday." Then came my favorite: "Would you be comfortable reporting to someone younger than you?" I said, "Of course. I've never measured leadership by birthdays." The silence that followed was beautiful. You could hear his confidence unplugging itself from the

wall.

By that point, I wasn't interviewing anymore. I was watching a documentary called How to Lose a Qualified Candidate Before Lunch. Hiring managers love reminding candidates that interviews are about fit. Correct. Sometimes the candidate discovers the company fits perfectly into a category called Absolutely Not. Experience does not make someone outdated, and having a title does not magically make every thought intelligent.

Sometimes the biggest red flag is not the salary, the job description, or the six round interview process. Sometimes it is sitting directly across from you, holding your resume upside down, explaining your own career to you, and wondering why good candidates keep "mysteriously" declining the offer.

POST 06 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

CORPORATE CULTURE

The job-seeker-to-corporate conversion

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former critic of corporate culture changes tone after re-entering the system.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explored how quickly the pressures and incentives of work can alter what people say publicly.

Corporate America has a fascinating ability to change people faster than a software update nobody asked for.

A while back, a woman used to message me all the time about her job search. She had stories. Bad recruiters, ridiculous interviews, pointless assessments, ghosting, fake “urgent” openings, and hiring managers who acted like giving someone access to Microsoft Teams was a humanitarian achievement. She was completely against corporate jobs. Corporate culture was fake. Leadership was disconnected. Meetings were useless. Buzzwords were nonsense. She wanted nothing to do with “the machine.”

We would go back and forth about applications, interviews, rejection emails, and all the strange things candidates are expected to tolerate while smiling professionally. Every few weeks another message arrived like Job Search: Survivor Edition. Then, after all that criticizing corporate America, something miraculous happened.

She got a corporate job. Not a little corporate either. Corporate corporate. Badge. Outlook. Teams meetings. Benefits portal. Probably a company water bottle and mandatory password training. I was happy for her. She had

finally landed somewhere stable.

So later, I sent a simple message asking how she was doing and how the new job was going. She read it. And disappeared. No reply. Nothing. The woman who had spent months telling me how awful it was when recruiters ghosted candidates had apparently completed orientation and immediately unlocked Recruiter Mode. I stared at the little “Seen” notification like a proud parent watching someone graduate. Corporate America works fast. Apparently ghosting now qualifies as a corporate benefit.

One minute you are messaging me about how companies have lost basic human decency. Two weeks later you are ignoring a friendly message while sitting through a meeting called “Building Authentic Connections.” I imagine her first week was intense: onboarding, benefits enrollment, cybersecurity training, company values, and by Friday, a full personality migration.

By week two she was probably saying “circle back,” “bandwidth,” and “let’s take this offline.” By week three she had stopped using complete sentences and started replying “Pls advise.” By week four, I was apparently no longer a

person. I was an external stakeholder.

I’m not even mad. I’m impressed. That is elite character development. She went from fighting corporate America to becoming Corporate America so quickly I expected LinkedIn to send me a notification saying, “Your connection has evolved.”

Maybe she is busy. Maybe the job is demanding. Maybe she opened my message during a meeting and forgot. Or maybe somewhere right now she is explaining to a candidate how communication is one of the company’s core values while my message sits there, professionally abandoned.

Either way, congratulations to her. She finally beat the hiring system. Unfortunately, the hiring system appears to have downloaded itself directly into her personality.

POST 07 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

CORPORATE CULTURE

When the posters do all the work

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Fortune 500 interview contrasts framed company values with what happens in the room.

WHY I WROTE IT

I compared leadership slogans with the actual candidate experience and asked which deserves belief.

There is something comforting about walking into a Fortune 500 company and realizing the motivational posters are working harder than half the leadership team.

The other day I was invited to interview at one of those corporate headquarters covered in words like INTEGRITY, PEOPLE, ACCOUNTABILITY, and EXCELLENCE. Near the elevators was the company mission statement framed like the Declaration of Independence. It promised putting people first, empowering employees and leading with transparency. I read it like a museum exhibit titled "Things That Allegedly Happened Here."

Then the interview started and within twenty minutes the mission statement needed legal representation. I learned the role had been vacant for 7 months because they "just hadn't found the right fit," which meant several qualified adults escaped before signing. The hiring manager explained that the culture was fast paced, which usually means everyone is behind, understaffed, answering emails during dinner and lunch is considered a character flaw. They said they value work life balance, then casually mentioned evenings, weekends, travel, after hours calls, and the importance of

being flexible.

Then came the teamwork speech. "We're like a family here." That sentence should come with a smoke alarm. Corporate families are fascinating because Dad controls your PTO, Mom schedules meetings at 6:30 a.m., your siblings steal credit for your work, and Thanksgiving is mandatory team building near the airport.

I asked how leadership measures employee engagement. Suddenly the room became quiet enough to hear the mission statement sweating in the hallway. One interviewer said, "We really listen to our people." Another added, "Of course, not every concern can be addressed." Beautiful. The suggestion box apparently connects directly to a paper shredder.

Then they explained accountability. Employees are expected to own results, solve problems, support other departments, adapt quickly, stay late when needed, remain positive through change, and smile while doing the jobs of three people. Leadership, from what I could gather, schedules meetings about why employees aren't doing enough of that. By the end, I walked back through the lobby and read the mission statement again. "People first."

Absolutely. Right after shareholders, quarterly targets, executive bonuses, consultants, reorganizations, and the vice president's idea to replace three employees with one exhausted person named Kevin.

I left thinking every corporate mission statement should come with a disclaimer underneath, "Values shown are for decorative purposes only. Actual workplace experience may vary." Because nothing says integrity like putting INTEGRITY in six foot letters while employees quietly update their resumes in the parking garage and HR announces a mandatory wellness webinar during lunch.

That wasn't a Fortune 500 company. That was a Torture 500 company with excellent branding and a mission statement doing unpaid overtime.

POST 08 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

ATS & REJECTION

Rejected in two minutes

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader reports applying at 10:00 p.m. and receiving a rejection at 10:02 p.m.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned whether automated speed has displaced thoughtful review and basic candidate care.

Modern hiring has officially reached the point where your resume can be rejected faster than you can regret applying.

We used to joke that recruiters spent six seconds reviewing a resume. Apparently six seconds was too generous, so somebody gave the ATS caffeine, a red rejection button, and permission to work the night shift.

A woman shared this story with me now. She applied for a job at 10:00 PM. At 10:02 PM, the rejection email arrived. Two minutes. I have waited longer for a microwave burrito to cool down enough to disappoint me. There is no way a human opened her resume, reviewed her experience, compared it with the role, discussed her background with the hiring team, considered her potential, and thoughtfully concluded, "Unfortunately, we have decided to move forward with other candidates." Unless the recruiter is The Flash wearing a Patagonia vest and holding a laptop, something else happened.

Her resume likely entered the applicant tracking system and immediately heard, "We've been expecting you." Then the algorithm cracked its digital knuckles. Wrong keyword? Goodbye. Too much experience? Dangerous. Not enough

experience? Also dangerous. Salary expectations within the posted range? Suspicious. Somewhere inside the system, a tiny robot wearing an HR badge probably screamed, "CULTURE FIT UNKNOWN," slammed a red button, and launched the rejection before she could close the browser tab.

And of course the email was probably beautifully written. "Thank you for your interest." Interest? She had barely finished being interested. "We carefully reviewed your qualifications." Carefully? At 10:01 PM somebody was still microwaving popcorn. "After thoughtful consideration..." Thoughtful consideration apparently now has the same runtime as a TikTok clip. I would almost respect the process more if the email simply said, "Our software saw something it didn't like. Nobody is awake. Best of luck."

This is the part of modern job hunting companies keep calling "efficiency." Candidates upload a resume, retype it into seventeen little boxes, answer questions already answered on it, create an account, verify the account, choose a password containing an uppercase letter, a symbol, a fossil, and the blood type of their first manager, then receive an automated rejection before the password manager saves the

login. That is not a hiring process. That is an obstacle course designed by raccoons with Workday permissions.

Her story is funny because it is ridiculous, but it explains why so many job seekers feel like they are applying into a black hole with Wi-Fi. People spend hours tailoring resumes and researching companies while some systems spend less time evaluating them than Netflix spends asking if you are still watching.

Two minutes. She did not apply for a job. She pulled up to the corporate drive thru, handed over her resume, and before she could say "no pickles," the rejection was already flying out the second window. At least fast food gives you fries.

Restructuring has a human cost

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Long-serving employees are displaced beneath language about automation and “realignment.”

WHY I WROTE IT

I put the people behind corporate change vocabulary back at the center of the conversation.

Somewhere between “digital transformation” and “we’re optimizing for the future,” a lot of real people got quietly erased from the org chart.

I keep seeing the same story. People who spent 20, 25, 30 years building companies, training teams, surviving mergers, keeping customers happy, and knowing exactly which printer required a gentle kick on Tuesdays suddenly get told their role is being eliminated. Sometimes by a calendar invite titled “Quick Sync,” which is corporate language for “please bring your laptop charger and emotional support animal.”

Then comes the explanation. Efficiency. Restructuring. Automation. AI. Strategic realignment. Apparently nobody is ever laid off anymore. They are “impacted.” That word does a lot of heavy lifting for something that can turn a mortgage payment, health insurance, retirement plan, and identity upside down before lunch.

The cruelest part is many of the people being pushed out are the same people who helped build the systems now being used to replace them. They trained the teams. They implemented the software. They sat through 47 meetings about innovation. They nodded politely while someone half

their age explained “future readiness” using a slide deck with six arrows and a stock photo of people pointing at sticky notes.

Then one Friday afternoon, the future arrives and apparently it needs their badge back. And yes, technology changes. Businesses change. Jobs change. Nobody can freeze the workplace in 1997 and demand everyone keep using a fax machine because Gary knows how to clear the paper jam. But somewhere along the way, we started confusing progress with disposability.

Experience became “expensive.” Loyalty became “legacy thinking.” Knowing how the business works became less impressive than knowing how to say “AI enabled ecosystem” without laughing.

Behind those words are people moving back in with family, draining savings, losing confidence, applying for jobs they could have trained someone else to do, and wondering how decades of contribution somehow became a liability. You can joke about applicant tracking systems, eight round interviews, and recruiters disappearing into the Bermuda Triangle, but there is a very human side to all of this.

That is why I keep writing about it. Humor does not fix a broken hiring system. Sarcasm will not pay somebody’s mortgage. A raccoon joke cannot rebuild a retirement account. But sometimes laughing for thirty seconds is the only break someone gets from feeling invisible for the other 23 hours and 59 minutes.

So yes I will keep making jokes about buzzwords, AI interviews, culture fit ninjas, and companies looking for unicorns with twelve years of experience in software invented last Thursday. But underneath every joke is the same message: people still matter.

Experience still matters. Dignity still matters. A career is more than a line item waiting to be optimized. The future of work should not require us to forget the humans who built the present.

POST 10 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

A toxic boss becomes a thought leader

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A former boss shares inspirational leadership advice at odds with my recollections.

WHY I WROTE IT

I called out the gap between declaring empathy online and practicing it with a team.

The other day I made a joke about my ex toxic boss posting a heartfelt message about leadership, and apparently I opened a corporate evidence locker.

The post was beautiful. Empathy. Accountability. Listening. Psychological safety. Respect. All from someone who treated a team meeting like a hostage negotiation. I stared at the screen thinking, "Sir, this is not thought leadership. This is historical fiction." This was the same boss who could turn "Good morning" into a performance warning and make a normal Tuesday feel like Corporate Survivor. People checked the parking lot before work. If his car was there, everyone remembered an urgent dental appointment.

And now he was posting about creating safe environments where employees feel heard. Heard? This man could interrupt you halfway through saying your own name. The comments were better. "Powerful message." "So true." "Leadership starts with self-awareness." I was reading them like a crime scene investigator watching people compliment the suspect's neighborhood watch presentation. That is LinkedIn. You can terrorize a department for five years, destroy

morale, chase away your best people, make everyone afraid to use PTO, then post a sunset photo with "People don't leave companies, they leave leaders" and suddenly you are Simon Sinek with a company badge and Canva.

My joke hit a nerve because former employees messaged me with their own stories. Everybody knows one of these leaders. The manager who preaches work life balance while sending emails at 11:47 PM. The boss who posts about trust after installing enough software to monitor a lunar mission. The executive who talks about transparency while communicating major changes through rumors and accidental calendar invites. Nothing says "healthy culture" like a teamwork poster hanging above the desk where three resignations were accepted before lunch.

I am not saying people cannot change. Maybe my former boss had an awakening. Maybe somewhere between destroying morale and discovering Canva, he found empathy. Miracles happen. But if you spent years being the reason employees updated their resumes during lunch, posting about compassionate leadership does not erase the director's cut. The people who worked for you remember the

Sunday texts, the public criticism, the moving targets, the "we're family" speeches before somebody got thrown under the corporate bus, and the mysterious "quick chat" that lasted 90 minutes and ended with everyone reconsidering their careers.

So when toxic leaders suddenly become online philosophers, forgive the former employees for laughing. We are not bitter. We are simply enjoying the most expensive rebrand since a gas station started calling itself an energy company.

Post it. Add the sunrise. Talk about empathy, trust, and people first leadership. Just understand that somewhere, a former employee is taking a screenshot, sending it to the group chat, and saying, "You are not going to believe what this person posted now."

POST 11 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Ghosting goes both ways

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recruiter reports that many candidates failed to appear for scheduled interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I argued that neither side wins when disappearing becomes the norm rather than an exception.

Apparently, the hiring world has finally completed its full circle transformation. Recruiters spent years ghosting candidates, candidates took notes, and now everyone is shocked that the haunting has become a two way street.

I read a post tonight from someone saying 40% of the candidates she recently scheduled for interviews did not show up. No cancellation. No message. No "sorry, something came up." Just pure disappearance. One minute you are preparing questions, the next you are sitting alone in Zoom staring at your own face in a corporate horror movie.

For years, candidates have told stories about recruiters vanishing after interviews, hiring managers promising updates "by Friday" and then entering witness protection, and companies sending rejection emails months after the role was filled. Eventually, candidates apparently said, "Fine. Hand me the bedsheet."

Now hiring managers are sitting in empty Teams meetings wondering where the candidate went. Candidates have been waiting for that promised Friday update since 2017.

To be clear, no showing an interview is

ridiculous. If you agreed to the meeting and cannot make it, send a message. "Something came up." "I accepted another offer." "I reconsidered after reading your Glassdoor reviews and seeing 'work hard, play hard' fourteen times." Any of those is better than disappearing like you were recruited by the CIA between breakfast and lunch.

But the outrage is hilarious. Corporate America spent years perfecting ghosting at industrial scale. Candidates would complete five interviews, a personality test, a case study, provide references, surrender vacation days, and then receive absolutely nothing. Not even a ceremonial "thanks for playing." Just silence so complete you wondered whether the company had been acquired by the Bermuda Triangle.

Then candidates discovered the same feature. Suddenly LinkedIn became a neighborhood emergency meeting. "Candidates are ghosting us!" Yes. The monster escaped the laboratory.

The funniest part is both sides now have legitimate complaints. Recruiters hate candidates who vanish. Candidates hate recruiters who vanish. Hiring managers complain about wasted time. Applicants complain

about spending hours preparing only to be forgotten afterward. Everyone wants professionalism, communication, respect, and courtesy, but apparently nobody wants to go first.

Maybe that is hiring in 2026. We have ATS platforms, AI screening tools, automated scheduling, video interviews, assessments, dashboards, and enough recruiting technology to launch a satellite, yet the solution is still something our parents taught us before kindergarten: if you are not coming, tell somebody.

Candidates, show up or cancel. Recruiters, follow up or close the loop. Hiring managers, communicate. Otherwise, we are not running a hiring process anymore. We are operating the world's most expensive paranormal activity franchise, and everybody keeps getting angry at the ghosts they helped train.

POST 12 / MONDAY, AUGUST 10

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Can a toxic boss really change?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader asks whether the boss discussed in my earlier post may have changed.

WHY I WROTE IT

I took the question seriously without letting a fresh LinkedIn slogan erase past behavior.

The other day I posted about my ex toxic boss, and someone asked me, "But what if he changed?"

I stared at that comment for a minute because, technically, yes, people can change. Caterpillars become butterflies. Phones get software updates. So sure, maybe my former boss woke up one morning, looked in the mirror, and thought, "You know what? I have spent enough years turning grown adults into nervous interns. Today I choose empathy."

Maybe he starts meetings by listening instead of delivering a 45 minute hostage monologue disguised as "alignment." Maybe "Can I see you in my office?" no longer causes employees to calculate their savings, update LinkedIn, before standing up. Maybe he finally learned that leadership is not measured by how quickly a room goes silent when you walk in or how many people are afraid to disagree with you. Maybe he changed. Maybe he finally learned fear creates silence, while respect creates actual leadership. And if he did, good.

Because underneath all the jokes, there is a part of toxic leadership that is not funny. People carry it home. They second guess themselves. They stop

speaking up. They sit in parking lots before work trying to build enough courage to walk through the door.

Talented people start believing they are the problem because one person with a title kept reminding them that they were never quite enough. That damage does not disappear because the person responsible eventually discovered a Simon Sinek quote.

Growth is great. Accountability is better. If my old boss truly changed, I hope he apologized to people who deserved one. I hope he reached out to employees he embarrassed, dismissed, intimidated, or made miserable. I hope he did more than learn the vocabulary of healthy leadership. Posting about empathy is easy. Practicing it when nobody is applauding, liking the post, or watching is the part that counts.

And this is where corporate redemption gets interesting. The same people who once treated staff like replaceable printer cartridges can rebrand themselves online as champions of culture, trust, and psychological safety. Suddenly every post sounds like they spent a weekend at a leadership retreat, discussed vulnerability, and emerged with a certificate in Emotional Intelligence. Meanwhile, former employees are

reading it like survivors watching the villain launch a wellness podcast.

Could he have changed? Absolutely. But change does not rewrite history. Becoming better today does not make yesterday imaginary. You can forgive someone and still remember what happened. You can wish them well and still tell the truth. You can acknowledge growth without pretending the damage was just a quirky chapter in everyone's professional development.

I actually hope he changed. I hope he became the kind of leader we all deserved back then. But if you spend years setting the building on fire, you do not get offended when former employees remember the smoke just because you eventually bought a fire extinguisher.

POST 13 / MONDAY, AUGUST 10

JOB POSTINGS

Urgent hiring, eternally

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A “hiring ASAP” post reappears a week later with the same supposedly urgent language.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked employers to be transparent about their hiring timelines instead of manufacturing panic.

Nothing creates panic quite like a recruiter posting “URGENT HIRING” in all caps. The other day I saw one of those posts. “Immediate need!” “Hiring ASAP!” “Looking to move FAST!” The energy was less “job opening” and more “someone has 24 hours to defuse a bomb in accounting.” I almost applied just to help stabilize the economy.

A week later, the exact same job was reposted.

Same title. Same recruiter. Same emergency. Same dramatic “please share with your network.” At that point I had questions. Where did everybody go? You had hundreds of applicants seven days ago. Did the resumes catch fire? Did Workday accidentally send them all to a landfill? Did the hiring manager interview 47 qualified people and reject them because none had “the right vibe” while wearing business casual under fluorescent lighting?

Apparently “urgent” in recruiting does not mean urgent. It means, “We would like someone immediately, but first we need six interviews, a panel, a personality test, a case study, three references, a blood sample, your third grade report card, and final approval from a vice president currently hiking somewhere with no cell service.”

Meanwhile candidates are treating the posting like an actual emergency. They rewrite their resume, cancel lunch, apply before dinner, upload the resume, then spend 25 minutes manually typing the exact same resume into 19 separate boxes because technology has advanced far enough to create artificial intelligence but not far enough to read a PDF.

Then comes silence. A few days later the recruiter pops back up smiling like nothing happened: “Still searching for the perfect candidate!” Perfect? You had 900 applicants. If the perfect candidate was not somewhere in that pile, maybe the problem is not the talent pool. Maybe you are looking for a 28 year old with 19 years of leadership experience, six certifications, zero salary expectations, weekend availability, no personal life, and the ability to “hit the ground running” before receiving a laptop.

Then they add, “Know someone? Tag them below!” Absolutely. Let me summon the village. I’ll notify local authorities. We’ll organize a search party. Somebody call the National Guard. This Senior Operations Manager position has now been missing for 23

days.

And the funniest part is watching the post appear again two weeks later with “URGENT” still attached. At this point, the job is no longer urgent. It is a permanent resident of LinkedIn. It has seniority. It probably qualifies for PTO. I have seen it more consistently than some of my relatives.

Six months later, it returns with a different title, nine extra responsibilities, and salary range that somehow lost \$15,000 during the journey. Still urgent, naturally.

So now when I see “URGENT HIRING,” I no longer rush to apply. I check the comments, make coffee, and settle in. Because there is a very good chance that job is not going anywhere.

In fact, at this point, it may have been employed longer than the recruiter.

POST 14 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

READER MAIL

A private note about character

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shares a private response to my discussion of toxic leadership and change.

WHY I WROTE IT

I reflected on why repeat behavior matters more than a beautifully rewritten set of values.

Every once in a while, someone sends me a message that makes me stop scrolling, laugh, and think, "Well, that just ended the entire toxic boss debate in one paragraph."

A woman messaged me privately after one of my posts about toxic leadership. She said she didn't want to comment publicly because she couldn't put her name out there right now, which already tells you everything you need to know about workplaces. Nothing says "healthy culture" quite like employees needing witness protection before sharing an opinion on LinkedIn.

Her message was simple: people can change, but when someone repeatedly shows you who they are, pay attention. Behavior might improve. Character? That is a much harder renovation project. You can repaint the office, change the mission statement, order new coffee mugs and schedule a leadership retreat, but if the same person keeps treating people like disposable printer cartridges, the inspirational posters are not performing miracles.

Then she said something I loved: the challenge is staying true to yourself while working around toxic people. Not becoming bitter. Not turning into the

same kind of manager. Not letting someone else's poor leadership rewrite your own values. She said prayer helps her through it, and that one day she will answer for how she treated people, not for how badly somebody else behaved toward her.

That is where I imagined HR slowly closing the laptop. Because corporate America loves accountability right up until someone introduces actual accountability.

We have performance reviews, engagement surveys, leadership competencies, anonymous feedback tools, culture committees, values statements, and enough mandatory training modules to qualify everyone for a minor in PowerPoint. Yet somehow the toxic boss can still survive three reorganizations, six complaints, nine resignations, and an employee satisfaction score that looks like a credit rating after bankruptcy.

Then leadership announces, "We're working on culture." Of course you are. Apparently culture is always under construction, but the same manager keeps getting promoted.

What struck me about her message was that it wasn't really about winning

against a bad boss. It was about refusing to let a bad boss turn you into someone you don't recognize. That is harder than posting a quote about resilience before breakfast. It takes discipline to stay professional when someone is testing every spiritual gift you have before 9:00 a.m.

And maybe that is the real victory. You may not be able to change the toxic leader. You may not be able to fix the company. You may not even be able to understand how the person who destroyed morale just posted an article about empathy and received 147 comments saying, "Powerful leadership."

But you can decide who you are while you are there. Keep your values. Keep your humor. Keep your receipts. And if your boss is truly committed to personal growth, wonderful. Just maybe don't volunteer to be the control group.

POST 15 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

WORKPLACE CULTURE

Corporate witness protection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman describes being afraid to comment publicly about the toxic workplace she knows.

WHY I WROTE IT

I spoke for people who cannot safely tell their stories while they still need their jobs.

There is a special kind of exhaustion that comes from working somewhere you have to rehearse your own personality before you walk through the door.

You know the place. You open LinkedIn, see a post about toxic leadership, start typing the comment of the century, then remember you still need health insurance and quietly hit delete like a corporate hostage with Wi-Fi.

A woman messaged me and described herself as being in the “corporate witness protection program,” and I laughed because that may be the most accurate description of surviving a toxic workplace I have ever heard. You see everything. You know everything. You have stories that could shut down a leadership retreat. But publicly? Silence. You are smiling in meetings while mentally drafting a 14 page resignation letter titled, “Since We’re Being Honest.”

She told me she wished she could comment on every relevant post, but she would get fired before she had the satisfaction of quitting. That sentence was funny, but it also hit hard. A lot of professionals live exactly like that. They have opinions, experience, boundaries,

and common sense, but the culture teaches them that speaking honestly is somehow more dangerous than the behavior they are speaking about.

Then came the part that deserves its own corporate training module. She texted her boss that she was going to observe a situation and process it because sometimes less is more. Mature. Professional. The kind of message companies claim they want from experienced employees. Her boss replied, “Good girl.” Good. Girl. To a 55 year old professional woman.

At that point I would have needed several business days to process the situation, because my first reaction would not have passed HR review. Nothing says “we value your experience” quite like responding to a seasoned professional as if she just successfully sat on command and earned a biscuit.

And that is the absurd part of toxic workplaces. The disrespect is often so casual that the person delivering it does not even realize how insulting it sounds. They call it culture. They call it leadership style. They call it “just how I talk.” Meanwhile, employees are sitting in their cars before work taking deep breaths like they are preparing to enter

a hostage negotiation.

She is hoping to close a new job offer soon and finally leave what she described as a toxic, dysfunctional mess mixed with a dumpster fire. I hope she does. Not because every difficult workplace requires an escape plan, but because nobody should have to shrink themselves just to make bad leadership comfortable. Sometimes the funniest stories are funny because the alternative is screaming into a copier.

So here is to everyone currently serving time in corporate witness protection. Keep your screenshots. Keep your dignity. Keep your resume updated. Smile when necessary, document everything, and remember that one day you may finally get to say what you have been thinking.

Preferably after your direct deposit clears.

POST 16 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

BOOK NEWS

Over 50 arrives on Apple Books

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My sarcastic guide to modern job hunting becomes available on Apple Books.

WHY I WROTE IT

I shared another way readers could find the book and its humor about ageism and hiring.

It's official! Over 50 and Over the Nonsense: A Sarcastic Survival Guide to Modern Job Hunting is now available on Apple Books.

If you've survived ghosting, "overqualified," endless interview rounds, mysterious salary ranges, and job descriptions looking for a unicorn with 37 years of experience in software released last Tuesday, this one is for you. A little sarcasm, a lot of truth, and plenty of modern hiring nonsense. Grab your copy on Apple Books!

POST 17 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

READER MAIL

The 100-slide resignation story

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman preparing to leave a difficult workplace hints at a story too large for one message.

WHY I WROTE IT

I made space for the people who keep a team together even while planning their own exit.

I thought I had heard every workplace horror story possible. Then a woman messaged me and casually dropped one sentence that made me sit up like someone had just announced the building was on fire:

"I gave notice yesterday. I'm trying not to get walked out. But this story is a doozy."

That was enough for me. She told me the full story would probably require a 100 page PowerPoint, which is already the most corporate sentence imaginable. Not a story. Not a conversation. A presentation. I'm picturing slide 1 titled "How We Got Here," slide 37 labeled "Warning Signs Everyone Ignored," and slide 92 simply containing a screenshot of someone from leadership saying, "Per my last email."

She said she feels terrible for her team, but they understand why she's leaving and support her decision. That alone tells you plenty. When the people working closest to you don't try to talk you out of resigning and instead basically say, "We get it. Run," that is not a resignation. That is an evacuation.

But then came the sidebar. HR quit too. Yesterday. I had to read that twice. HR

didn't schedule an exit interview. HR apparently became the exit interview.

At that point, the story stopped being normal workplace dysfunction and officially became a corporate disaster movie. When the person responsible for helping manage employee departures looks around and says, "Actually, put me on the departure list too," you know morale has left the building, taken the coffee machine, and changed its phone number. I can already imagine the emergency leadership huddle, "Why is everyone leaving?" followed by 45 minutes of theories, three spreadsheets, a culture survey, and absolutely nobody suggesting, "Maybe we should ask the people leaving." Corporate archaeology at its finest. Absolutely incredible.

Now she's trying to quietly survive her notice period without getting walked out before she can finish the job properly. Meanwhile, somewhere in that office, management is probably scheduling an emergency meeting titled "Employee Engagement Strategy" while the employees are actively engaging with Indeed.

And I feel for her team, because that is always the hardest part. Good leaders can tolerate a lot longer than they

should because they care about the people around them. They stay through the chaos, cover the gaps, protect their teams, fix problems nobody notices, and keep smiling through meetings that should have been emails and emergencies that were created by the same people now asking for solutions. Eventually, though, even the strongest employee looks at the circus, realizes they are holding three flaming torches while riding a unicycle, and decides maybe this should not be their career path.

She promised me the ending once she is safely out. I told her I'm ready. Because if the preview includes a resignation, a 100 page PowerPoint worth of chaos, a supportive team, and HR quitting on the same day, I don't need the trailer. I need popcorn. And possibly a helmet.

POST 18 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

COMMUNITY

The best performance review

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader tells me that my posts make them laugh every day.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to thank readers and explain why laughter counts as a meaningful result for this project.

Today I received the kind of performance review I care about, “You make me laugh every day.” No competency matrix. No calibration meeting. No 14 page development plan explaining that I need to “increase executive presence.”

Just one sentence from a stranger on LinkedIn confirming that my years of corporate confusion are finally producing measurable results. And I have to admit, that message made me laugh too.

LinkedIn became this strange place where every third post sounds like it was written by a committee trapped inside a conference room with a whiteboard. Everyone is “leveraging synergies,” “driving transformational outcomes,” “leaning into ambiguity,” and “showing up authentically” while using a headshot so serious it looks like they are about to announce interest rates.

Meanwhile, I’m over here writing about recruiters disappearing mid conversation, hiring managers asking questions nobody understands, panel interviews that feel like congressional hearings, toxic bosses posting leadership quotes, and job descriptions requesting twelve years of experience

in software invented last Thursday.

Apparently, that is my contribution to professional development. I’m not teaching a masterclass. I’m documenting the wildlife. Every day corporate America hands us new material free of charge. A recruiter posts an “urgent” role and reposts it six weeks later. A company says it moves fast, then schedules interview number seven for sometime after the next solar eclipse. A manager tells employees to protect their mental health and then sends “quick question” messages at 10:47 p.m. HR announces an employee appreciation week and celebrates by giving everyone a PDF.

You cannot write satire faster than the workplace can produce it. That’s why messages like this mean more to me than people realize. Behind every ridiculous story is somebody who has lived through the same thing and thought they were the only one. Someone has stared at a rejection email sent four minutes after applying. Someone has survived an interview where the salary mysteriously changed between the job posting and the conversation. Someone has watched a terrible boss post about empathy and nearly dropped their phone.

Sometimes laughter is just recognition wearing a fake mustache. So when someone tells me, “You make me laugh every day,” I take that seriously. Not because I believe I’m running a comedy empire from my phone, but because work can be exhausting, job hunting can be humiliating, leadership can be absurd, and sometimes five minutes of laughing at the nonsense is exactly what people need before returning to it.

My goal has never been to pretend the workplace is perfect. It is to point at the circus, describe the elephant sitting in the Zoom meeting, and remind everyone that we are all seeing the same show.

If one sarcastic post makes somebody laugh during a bad day, then corporate America has finally delivered a benefit package I can support. No enrollment period required.

POST 19 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

PANEL INTERVIEWS

The six-box surprise panel

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A call expected to be one-on-one becomes a panel of disengaged and late interviewers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned whether an intimidating committee actually improves a hiring decision.

We seriously need to retire the current version of panel interviews. Because right now, it's giving less "professional assessment" and more "trial by a jury of people who all secretly hate meetings."

Nobody looks happy to be there. The candidate is nervous, the panel is multitasking, and somehow we all pretend this is the best way to measure chemistry and communication successfully.

Let me paint the picture. I logged into the Zoom thinking it was a quick 1 on 1. But no, SURPRISE! 6 boxes popped up like I was about to play Hollywood Squares: Corporate Trauma Edition. One guy was on mute for the entire hour, didn't ask a question, didn't blink, might've been a cardboard cutout. One lady looked like she was doing her taxes on a second screen. And one person joined 17 minutes late with no apology, just, "Hey, sorry, I was on another call." No worries, Karen. I've just been emotionally performing a TED Talk for five strangers like it's the finals of Corporate America's Got Talent.

First question, "Can you walk us through your resume?" Sure! Let me start in 2012 when I still had hopes and dreams. Apparently the resume

everyone has open is just a prop, because now I get to narrate it like an audiobook while 6 adults nod. Then someone asked, "How do you handle ambiguity?" By surviving this exact interview. Another hit me with the classic, "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?" Honestly? In a job that doesn't require defending my entire career history to a Brady Bunch grid of mildly interested people.

Midway through, I tried to show my fun side, cracked a little joke about team collaboration being like group texting with deadlines. Silence. Like full on "did his mic cut out?" silence. I actually checked my microphone because the silence was so complete I thought Zoom had disconnected me from civilization. Then I got asked, "Tell us about a time you failed." Girl, I'm on Zoom with 6 people fighting for a job that might already be filled internally, this is the story.

At the end they said, "We'll be in touch." And just like that poof, they vanished into the recruiting void, never to be seen or heard from again. No update. No rejection. No carrier pigeon. Just radio silence, as if the entire panel had entered witness protection. So here's my suggestion: let's spice these up. Add a live studio audience. Have

candidates and panelists swap roles for 10 minutes. Maybe even a dodgeball round to test reflexes. Something. Anything. If we're turning interviews into corporate endurance events, at least give candidates a scorecard.

Because if I have to go through another panel interview where I feel like I'm pitching a Shark Tank idea while someone silently eats trail mix offscreen... I'm gonna lose it.

Next time, I'm showing up with props, a puppet, and a theme song. "Now presenting: Alex, finalist for the role of Employee #387 with a 401K and moderate PTO!" Let's make hiring fun again or at least slightly less like a Hunger Games audition with wi-fi issues.

POST 20 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

AI & HIRING

Interviewing with a machine

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

One-way and automated screening can remove the human conversation from the hiring process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked what candidate respect means when software makes nearly every interaction.

Hiring has officially reached the point where a candidate can complete an entire interview process without accidentally interacting with another human being.

We used to joke that recruiting felt robotic. Corporate America apparently heard that and said, "Great idea, let's remove the people."

Now you apply online, an algorithm scans your resume, another system decides whether your experience contains the correct sacred keywords, and if you survive that digital obstacle course, congratulations: you may be invited to interview with a machine at 1:00 in the morning. Nothing says "we value our people" quite like sitting alone in your kitchen at an hour normally reserved for bad decisions and leftover pizza, staring into a webcam while a cheerful robot asks, "Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership."

Sure. Right now. I demonstrated leadership by putting on pants for this. The candidate gets to choose when they would like to be judged by software. Midnight? Absolutely wonderful. Two in the morning? Even much better. Nothing improves executive presence like trying to

remember a STAR format answer while your refrigerator is making sounds that suddenly feel more emotionally supportive than the interviewer.

Then the recording gets analyzed. Eye contact: 82%. Confidence: 74%. Enthusiasm: suspicious. Blink frequency: apparently not aligned with company values. Meanwhile, somewhere in the company, a hiring manager who could have spent fifteen minutes talking to the candidate is sitting in a meeting discussing how difficult it is to find good people.

"We just can't find the right talent." The talent is literally talking to your robot. And the robot is rejecting them because they paused for 2.7 seconds before answering a question about conflict resolution. We have somehow built a hiring system where candidates use AI to write resumes, companies use AI to read them, AI conducts the interview, another AI scores it, and then an automated email tells the human being they have decided to move forward with other candidates. At this rate, the candidate and hiring manager are supporting characters in a romance between two software platforms.

The applicant's AI will submit the

application. The recruiter's AI will reject it. Then both systems will connect on LinkedIn and congratulate each other on "leveraging technology to enhance the candidate journey." Beautiful. Technology should make hiring easier, faster, and smarter so people have more time to talk to people. Instead, some companies have used it to create a digital escape room where the prize is another assessment.

Hiring does not need fewer humans. It needs fewer hoops, fewer performances, fewer automated obstacles, and fewer companies pretending that removing every human interaction from recruiting is somehow a people-first strategy.

If your hiring process can happen entirely without you, eventually candidates are going to realize something uncomfortable. Maybe the job can too.

POST 21 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When speaking up costs connections

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Some contacts grow quiet or disconnect as I publicly challenge hiring norms.

WHY I WROTE IT

I reaffirmed that saying what candidates experience matters more than protecting a comfortable network.

There is a funny thing that happens when you stop being convenient for people: suddenly your name becomes very easy to forget.

When I started speaking up about eight round interview marathons, recruiter ghosting, ridiculous hiring processes, fake “we’ll keep your resume on file” messages, and the corporate Olympics candidates are expected to survive just to earn a paycheck, a lot of people who knew me got very quiet. Some removed me from their network. Some deleted me from their contacts. Some stopped engaging completely. A few probably saw my posts and thought, “Oh no, he’s saying the part out loud.” Apparently criticizing a hiring process that requires eight interviews, three assessments, two case studies, a personality test, and an audience with someone’s regional vice president’s cousin is dangerous behavior.

So, people disappeared, and I noticed. I did not chase them. I did not send, “Hey, did I do something?” messages. I did not beg anyone to stay connected. I just kept writing. I kept talking about candidates getting ghosted after final interviews. I kept making jokes about recruiters promising updates and then entering witness protection. I kept talking about people being told they

were “overqualified,” “not quite the right fit,” or somehow expected to demonstrate passion during interview number seven while wondering whether the company itself knew how to hire anyone.

Then something strange happened. Other people started following me. A few became hundreds. Hundreds became thousands. Eventually that number passed 61,000. And suddenly, some of the same people who had quietly removed me started appearing again. Connection request. Follow. “Hey Alex, hope you’ve been well!” Well, look who escaped the LinkedIn Bermuda Triangle. Nothing says professional networking quite like deleting someone when their opinions make you uncomfortable, then rediscovering their existence after the follower count starts looking respectable.

I have to admit, there is something beautifully corporate about it. When I had an opinion, I was apparently risky. When 61,000 people had an interest in that opinion, suddenly I became “someone worth reconnecting with.” Same person. Same jokes. Same criticism. Same ridiculous stories about hiring processes that somehow require more rounds than a heavyweight

boxing match. The only thing that changed was the number sitting next to my profile.

And I am not angry. If anything, it taught me something useful. Some people connect with you because they value you. Others connect with you because other people value you. Those are not the same thing. The people who stayed when the audience was smaller, when the jokes were uncomfortable, and when speaking honestly did not come with social proof? I remember them. The people who came back once the crowd got bigger? Welcome back. There is plenty of room.

Just understand that I kept the receipts, the screenshots, and apparently the exact same personality you deleted the first time.

POST 22 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

READER MAIL

Five rounds and another rejection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman searching for more than a year is rejected after five interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted the emotional cost of repeated false hope to be visible, not hidden behind process metrics.

Tonight I was reminded that job searching is one of the only experiences where you can be told “you’re doing great” five times and still end the day wondering whether your laptop should be gently closed or launched directly into a lake.

A woman messaged me after being rejected from a job she had gone through five rounds for. Five rounds. Five separate times she had to show up, explain her experience, answer another version of “tell me about yourself,” meet another person, prove herself again, and start believing this opportunity might be different. With each round, she started picturing herself there. She got excited. She imagined the relief of finally being able to say, “I got the job.” Then today, after all of that, the answer was no. And she has been searching for a job for over a year.

That part matters, because after a year you are not just applying anymore. You are carrying every rejection, every unanswered follow up, every recruiter who said, “You’re exactly what they’re looking for,” before disappearing, and every interview that felt promising. Eventually one opportunity starts feeling different, and hope sneaks back in even though you promised yourself

you would stay detached. Round two becomes possibility. Round three becomes hope. Round four becomes, “Maybe I can finally stop refreshing LinkedIn like I’m monitoring the stock market.” By round five, your brain has already picked the desk plant and told everyone asking “Any updates?” that yes, there is finally an update worth sharing. Then the rejection email arrives. Corporate America really knows how to build suspense. Netflix could take notes.

I replied because I could hear how defeated she felt. I told her five rounds is a huge emotional investment, because it is. We tell candidates to stay professional, resilient, positive, and not take rejection personally, while forgetting they are human beings. You cannot ask someone to spend hours imagining a future with your company, meeting half the building, and proving their value again and again, then expect the rejection to feel like a canceled dentist appointment. She wrote back, “Thank you, Alex. I really needed that. It’s been a rough day. Appreciate the support.”

That is why I am sharing her story. Not because she needs pity. She does not. I am sharing it because somebody reading this may be in the same place

tonight, staring at an email beginning with “Unfortunately” after weeks of hope. Getting rejected at the end does not mean you were never good enough. Five rounds means they saw value five times. It means you belonged in the conversation. Yes, it hurts. Be mad. Order dessert. Complain to the ceiling. Temporarily rename the company in your phone “Absolutely Not.” Then keep going.

The right opportunity does not need five hundred people to believe in you. It only needs one company to finally say yes. And when that happens, every rejection that made you question yourself becomes part of the story you tell from the other side.

POST 23 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

PANEL INTERVIEWS

Ten interviews for one job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post celebrates a new hire after a ten-round process plus additional assessments.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned how many conversations are genuinely needed before employers make a decision.

Corporate hiring has officially reached the point where getting a job feels less like an interview process and more like applying for citizenship in a country with strict immigration laws.

I saw a post today from someone celebrating a new role after TEN rounds of interviews, background screenings, and design challenges. Ten rounds. At that point, you are not a candidate anymore. You are a recurring character. You should have your own parking space and an email address before the offer letter arrives.

Round 1: tell us about yourself. Round two: tell someone else about yourself. Round three: meet the hiring manager. Round four: meet the person who sits near the hiring manager. Round five: meet a leader who has absolutely no idea why they were invited but has strong opinions about “culture fit.” Round six: complete an assignment. Round seven: explain the assignment. Round eight: defend the assignment like it is your doctoral dissertation. Round nine: meet the executive team. Round ten: congratulations, one final conversation with a person who joined the company three days ago and wants to know where you see yourself in five years.

And apparently that still wasn't enough. Add background screenings and design challenges, because naturally after nine conversations there is still a chance the candidate secretly has no idea what they are doing. We have reviewed your resume, portfolio, career history, references, personality, communication style, problem solving ability, and probably your childhood dreams, but before we make a decision, could you redesign our entire customer experience by Friday?

The funniest part is how companies describe these processes as “thorough.” Thorough? A colonoscopy is thorough. Ten interviews is a documentary series.

By interview seven, the candidate should be allowed to ask the company questions like, “Why are we still doing this?” “Has anyone here been empowered to make a decision?” and “Am I interviewing for this job or being slowly adopted by the organization?”

Congratulations to the person who survived it. Seriously. Anyone who makes it through ten rounds deserves more than an offer letter. They deserve a medal, catered lunch, six months of PTO, and the right to skip every future meeting that begins with, “Let's go

around the room and introduce ourselves.”

This is what hiring has become in certain corners of corporate America. Companies say they want decisive leaders, then build a hiring process requiring twelve people, three committees, two case studies, a background check, and what appears to be approval from the United Nations.

Meanwhile, somewhere out there, an incredible candidate is being rejected after round eight because one interviewer said, “I don't know, I just didn't feel the energy.”

Ten rounds later, this person finally got the job. At this point, I just hope their first performance review says, “Congratulations. You already completed your annual evaluation during interviews four through nine.”

POST 24 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 11

READER SUCCESS

Two hundred applications later

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader finds work after eight months, 200 applications, 40 interviews and several final rounds.

WHY I WROTE IT

I celebrated perseverance without pretending the long search or lower compensation was easy.

Corporate America has somehow turned unemployment into an unpaid full time job with mandatory overtime, emotional damage, no dental and a performance review conducted by people who may never email you back.

A woman messaged me and said my posts helped her get through eight months of unemployment. During that time she applied to more than 200 jobs, went through 40 interviews, survived countless ghostings, made it to five final interviews and finally landed a job. Two hundred applications. Forty interviews. Five final rounds. At that point, you are not “between jobs.” You are employed by the Department of Rejection Management, refreshing your inbox, rewriting your resume again and wondering whether “we’ll be in touch” means tomorrow or never.

She told me the new job does not pay what she made before, but she also said something that mattered more: it is a place where she can add value, rebuild and climb back up. That is not failure. That is strategy. Sometimes the comeback does not arrive with the exact salary or title you had before. Sometimes it arrives as one open door after 200 closed ones. You walk through it, prove yourself again and start climbing without apologizing for

taking the opportunity that saw your value.

Then she thanked me for the humor and honesty because the posts made her feel seen, and that part hit me. So many talented people struggle quietly because unemployment still carries this ridiculous stigma, as if being laid off somehow deletes your experience overnight. You can have twenty years of accomplishments on Friday and by Monday LinkedIn acts like you were discovered behind a Costco Wholesale with no memory of Microsoft Excel.

Then she ended her message with career advice I need framed: “Keep fighting the good fight... and don’t get sued by Amazon.” Excellent point. Apparently my strategic plan has two pillars: keep exposing ridiculous hiring practices and avoid Amazon Legal’s Monday meeting. I can picture it now: “Prime deliveries are moving, AWS is humming along, and unfortunately Alex made another joke.” Somewhere, a lawyer slowly removes their glasses. “Again?” Again.

Amazon, I am trying. Truly. But when hiring loops last long enough for candidates to qualify for a service anniversary, the material basically arrives with free two day shipping. If I

ever stop joking about eight round interviews, recruiter ghosting, case studies, personality tests, and candidates proving themselves seven different ways, please assume Amazon Legal has placed me in a conference room with no Wi-Fi.

So celebrate this woman. Eight months. More than 200 applications. Forty interviews. Five final rounds. Endless ghosting. And she kept going until somebody finally said yes. That is endurance. If my sarcasm helped her laugh through even one miserable day, every joke was worth it.

Amazon, if you are reading this, I have nothing but respect for customer obsession, leadership principles, and fast package delivery. Please tell Legal I said hello.

POST 25 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

ONBOARDING

Hired, but denied access

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A newly employed IT professional experiences delayed onboarding and missing credentials.

WHY I WROTE IT

I highlighted how careless setup can turn a promising first week into a corporate scavenger hunt.

Corporate America has officially discovered a new way to test employee patience: hire someone, delay their start date, bury them in onboarding videos, and then forget to give them access to the systems required to actually do the job.

A woman messaged me last night with an update that was pure corporate comedy. She told me she is finally, gainfully employed. Great news, right? Absolutely. Except the company apparently decided employment should begin with a scavenger hunt. She was told she was hired, then waited three weeks to be fully onboarded because her start date kept moving. Every time she thought she was about to begin, corporate hit her with the professional version of “Actually, one more thing.”

Now she is officially on week two. Her current job duties appear to include watching training videos. Lots of training videos. Endless training videos. The kind where you finish twelve, feel a small sense of accomplishment, and then Outlook arrives like a villain in a sequel, “Part 2: Onboarding.”

Ten more mandatory videos. At this point, Netflix should be jealous. At least Netflix asks if you're still watching. Corporate training calmly loads the

next module titled “Creating a Culture of Efficiency” while consuming six hours of your day. But here is the masterpiece. She works in IT. And she is still waiting for her admin credentials so she can begin training for her actual role. Her coworkers told her it could take up to TWO MONTHS to get them. Two months. Seriously.

They hired an IT professional and apparently the biggest technical challenge facing the organization is giving the IT professional access to IT. Imagine joining a fire department and being told, “Welcome aboard. Your truck access should arrive sometime in October. Until then, please complete these 37 videos about rapid emergency response.” The funniest part is that she told me she keeps thinking about my posts while all of this is happening. She said the chaos is so ridiculous that she now sees corporate life through the lens of comedy.

That might actually be the healthiest onboarding strategy available. Because once you realize half of corporate America is just adults sending calendar invites to discuss why the thing nobody approved still hasn't been completed, everything becomes easier to understand. Somewhere right now, there is probably a meeting scheduled

to discuss her missing credentials. Eight people will attend. Someone will share a screen. Someone else will say, “Who owns this?” A third person will promise to circle back. Then they'll schedule a follow-up meeting for next Thursday.

Meanwhile, she'll be watching Video 46: “Taking Ownership in the Workplace.” I'm genuinely happy she found a job. After everything people go through to get hired, that offer matters.

But I also love that within two weeks she has already discovered the secret nobody puts in the employee handbook: Sometimes the job isn't the hard part. Getting permission to do the job is.

POST 26 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

GHOSTING

When the recruiter changes the story

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader reports contradictions and silence during a Topgolf recruiting process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I advocated for consistent information and accountability whenever candidates ask fair questions.

A guy messaged me with a question that summarizes modern hiring: "Have you heard from other people about catching recruiters in lies and then getting ghosted?"

Yes. Absolutely. Recruiter ghosting is so common I'm surprised companies don't include it in the benefits package. "Competitive salary, flexible schedule, and the possibility that nobody will ever speak to you again after Thursday." He told me it just happened to him with Topgolf. The recruiter said one thing, reality said another, and once the contradiction became obvious, communication changed from "We'll keep you updated" to radio silence. Companies love talking about transparency until somebody asks a transparent question. Then suddenly everyone forgets how email works.

Candidates, meanwhile, are expected to be flawless. Reply quickly. Research the company. Prepare STAR stories. Dress professionally. Smile. Ask intelligent questions. Send a thank you note. Follow up politely, because wanting an answer can make you look "desperate." Meanwhile, a recruiter can tell you the role is urgent, promise an update by Friday, disappear for two weeks, repost the same position on Monday, and return with, "Sorry for the

delay, things have been hectic." Hectic? You vanished I assumed LinkedIn had opened a missing persons investigation.

And heaven help you if you catch an inconsistency. "Wait, you said the position was approved." Silence. "You said the hiring manager wanted to move quickly." Silence. "You said I would hear back yesterday." Seen. That little "Seen" notification deserves funeral music. Companies build brands around trust and communication, then turn the candidate experience into an escape room where the only clue is a recruiter who stopped answering.

The funniest part is that he wasn't even ranting. He was simply asking if other people had experienced it. The recruiter promises Friday. Friday comes and goes. The "urgent" position stays open for four months. They tell you they went with another candidate, but the same job is reposted three days later. Then comes the classic line: "We'll keep your resume on file." Sure. Right next to the office printer manual nobody has opened since 2017.

Candidates remember this stuff. They remember who communicated honestly, who lied, who disappeared, and who treated them like a human being instead of an application number.

Years later, when that company needs employees, customers, referrals, or reviews, people remember how they were treated when nobody thought it mattered.

Ghosting doesn't make a company look selective. It makes the process look disorganized. Lying doesn't make recruiting easier. It makes every future sentence harder to believe. And disappearing after someone catches the contradiction doesn't erase what happened. It confirms it.

So yes, I've heard stories like his. A lot of them. At this point, getting ghosted after catching a recruiter in a lie isn't even a plot twist anymore. It's practically part of the onboarding process.

POST 27 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

INTERVIEW EXPERIMENT

Elation Health and round eleven

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Leadership contacts me after I joke about a ten-round hiring process, recalling my Amazon experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the notion that explaining extra interview rounds makes those rounds automatically worthwhile.

The other day I made a joke about a candidate celebrating a new job after TEN rounds of interviews at Elation Health.

Members of their leadership team reached out to explain why the process needed 10 rounds. That made the whole thing even funnier, because nothing proves 10 interviews were necessary quite like needing an eleventh conversation to explain the first 10. I was sitting there thinking, "This feels familiar." Then it hit me: Amazon.

I went through an eight panel interview loop with Amazon, and by the end I felt less like a candidate and more like a limited series nobody knew how to cancel. Eight interviews, repeated questions, and enough behavioral storytelling to qualify as an unauthorized autobiography. So when I saw ten rounds at Elation Health, my first thought wasn't, "Wow, what a thorough process." My first thought was, "Amazon has officially been out Amazoned."

To be clear, I'm happy the candidate got the job. Surviving ten rounds should come with the offer letter, a trophy, and six months of PTO. But corporate hiring has developed this habit of

confusing more steps with better decisions. One interview checks experience. Another checks technical ability. Another checks leadership. Fine. Then somebody checks "culture." Another checks "alignment." Another executive checks whatever the previous executive forgot to check. Eventually the candidate has told the same career story so many times they start discovering plot holes.

And when people question it, companies respond with explanations about how every conversation serves a unique purpose. Of course. Interview seven evaluates collaboration. Interview eight evaluates whether you can remain cheerful after interview seven. Interview nine tests stamina. Interview ten confirms you still remember which company you applied to. By that point, "Tell me about yourself" should legally become, "Tell us something we haven't already written down."

I can laugh about Amazon now, but that experience changed how I look at marathon interview processes. If eight panels weren't enough to know whether I could do the job, interview nine probably wasn't going to reveal anything new. At some point, a company is no longer gathering

information. It is gathering people. You start wondering whether the hiring manager is making a decision or assembling a jury.

That's why the Elation Health story made me laugh. Not because the candidate succeeded. Good for her. And not because leadership reached out. I respect anyone willing to explain their thinking. It made me laugh because corporate America normalized the idea that hiring one capable adult requires the same approval process as launching a satellite. Ten rounds. Background screening. Design challenges. Multiple leaders. Then a post game explanation about why all ten were necessary.

Amazon gave me eight panels. Elation Health apparently said, "Hold my calendar." Corporate hiring isn't interviewing anymore. It's endurance sports with Outlook invitations.

POST 28 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

READER MAIL

Recruiters deserve a rating too

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Ricki describes executive job hunting after an Expedia Group restructuring.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explored the idea of candidate ratings for hiring experiences and the value of thoughtful replies.

Corporate America has officially lowered the bar so far that a thoughtful rejection letter now feels like five star customer service.

Ricki messaged me today and shared what the last six months have looked like. Her team at Expedia Group was restructured in February, and since then she has been navigating an executive level job search filled with applications, interviews, follow ups, waiting, and disappearing recruiters. She believes the search may finally be coming to a close, which I hope means an offer, not another hiring manager saying, "We'll have an update by Friday," before entering witness protection.

But one thing she said absolutely got me: she wished there were a way to rate employers, recruiters, and headhunters the same way we rate Uber drivers. Imagine finishing an interview and getting a notification, "How was your hiring experience?" Recruiter arrived late. Communication was inconsistent. Job description did not match destination. Salary range changed halfway through the ride. Candidate was dropped off at Ghosting Avenue with no explanation. Two stars. Would not ride again.

Then Ricki shared something optimistic. She received a rejection letter from a company she interviewed with and she described it as delightful. Yes, a delightful rejection letter. That is where we are now. The company mentioned specific things they had discussed, referenced details from the interview and made it clear a human being remembered she existed. Personalized rejection has become the corporate equivalent of receiving a handwritten thank you note.

I completely understand why she appreciated it. Job seekers are not asking for luxury. They are asking for basic communication. Tell people where they stand. Respect the time they gave you. If someone spent hours preparing, researching your company, interviewing with your team and answering the same leadership question four different ways, they deserve more than silence or a generic template fired off by an applicant tracking system.

Ricki also told me she reads my articles every day and plans to mention me to a group of executives who are also navigating the job search. That meant a lot, because behind all the jokes about eight round interviews, recruiter

ghosting, personality tests, "urgent" roles and hiring processes designed like escape rooms, there are real people trying to stay optimistic while navigating a system that too often forgets there is a human being on the other side.

I am rooting for Ricki and officially supporting her Uber style rating system. Five stars if you communicate clearly. Four if the interview starts on time. Three if the salary range is actually real. Two if someone says, "We're like family." One if the recruiter vanishes after saying you are the top candidate. Zero if you make someone complete nine interviews, ask for a case study, request references, and then repost the job Monday morning.

At that point, we are not reviewing the company. We are filing an incident report.

POST 29 / WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

JOB-SEARCH LIFE

The laundry room has KPIs

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Ryan writes about missing work and applying corporate thinking to chores during a job search.

WHY I WROTE IT

I used a funny household example to show that people often miss purpose and teamwork, not just pay.

I read a LinkedIn post today that perfectly captured what happens when corporate life follows you home, opens the refrigerator, and decides it belongs there.

Ryan Mollic is heading into week four of her job search, and she wrote about something many people feel: she misses working. Not just the paycheck. She misses the momentum, collaboration, team wins, and even the corporate jargon. That last part is where the post became comedy gold, because Ryan said her husband learned the hard way what happens when someone with a business brain has too much time at home. She started pitching the “ROI” of a laundry room upgrade.

Once you start presenting home improvements like a quarterly business review, there is no going back. “Babe, I’ve reviewed our current laundry workflow and identified several operational inefficiencies.” Sir, this is a washing machine. But now there are KPIs. Laundry completion rate is down 14%. Sock retention remains below target. The dryer continues to create unacceptable bottlenecks. Leadership has identified an urgent need for alignment between the hamper, washer, dryer, and closet. Her husband

probably thought they were discussing shelves. Ryan was preparing a capital expenditure proposal.

Then she took it further, joking that she is ready for her next chapter, while her husband is ready for her to stop proposing “high ROI home initiatives” designed to streamline workflows and create synergy across the garage to living room ecosystem. Imagine being married to someone from corporate America during a job search. You casually ask, “Can we clean the garage Saturday?” and suddenly you receive a calendar invitation for a 9:00 a.m. stakeholder meeting. There is an agenda. A slide deck appears. The garage is undergoing a strategic transformation, and by lunch someone has been placed on a performance improvement plan. Somehow it is the leaf blower.

But underneath the humor, Ryan’s post made a good point. A lot of people searching for work do not just miss income. They miss being useful. They miss solving problems, helping a team, having people depend on them, and getting that little rush when a plan works.

Job searching can feel strangely quiet after years of constant motion. One

day you are talking staffing, projects, budgets, deadlines, and strategy. The next day you are standing in your kitchen wondering whether reorganizing the spice cabinet qualifies as process improvement. Eventually your professional brain starts looking for somewhere to go, and that is exactly how a laundry-room renovation gets a business case.

I hope Ryan finds the right next opportunity soon, because she clearly has the energy, humor, and corporate vocabulary ready to go. For the sake of her husband, somebody please hire her before the refrigerator gets restructured, the garage gets outsourced, and the family dog is asked to submit a 30 60 90 day plan.

Until then, I support the household transformation initiative. Just make sure everyone circles back.

POST 30 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 13

INTERVIEW MARATHON

The two-state interview obstacle course

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Jo recounts eight interviews, extensive travel, late lunches and a rain-soaked campus tour.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked why endurance challenges are mistaken for evidence that someone can do an HR job.

Corporate America has officially found a new way to turn a job interview into an endurance sport.

I read Jo Colombo's story, and I had to check whether she was applying for an HR lead role or auditioning for a survival show. Eight interviews. Two states. Two days. Twelve people. Both days, lunch showed up late, and she couldn't even eat because another interview was waiting. Then came the campus tour. In the rain. No umbrella. Because nothing says, "We value our people" quite like making a candidate wander around soaked while wondering whether the next interview includes building a shelter from office supplies.

Before all of this, the recruiter had warned her that the process was intentionally grueling because they wanted to test the candidate's stamina. Stamina. For an HR leader. Not a firefighter. Not a Navy SEAL. Human Resources. At some point, hiring managers became so obsessed with "testing candidates" that they forgot the candidate is also testing them. Every interview, every delay, every hurdle, and every soggy walk is telling the candidate exactly what life inside the company might look like. The interview process is now the first

demonstration of the culture.

Jo actually liked the company, which makes the story even better. She liked it enough to travel, meet twelve people, miss meals, and participate in what sounded like the Corporate Hunger Games with business cards. After seeing how the process was designed, she withdrew her interest. Not because she couldn't handle it. Because she could. She simply realized she didn't want to work somewhere that believed exhaustion was a recruiting strategy. And her final observation was perfect: she couldn't think of another company that needed HR more. That sentence deserves to be framed and hung in the lobby beneath a motivational poster about employee well being.

Imagine designing an interview process so punishing that the HR leader you are trying to hire walks away thinking, "Wow, these people desperately need an HR leader." That is not candidate screening. That is a live demonstration of the problem. Companies keep saying they want resilience, adaptability, executive presence, emotional intelligence, and good judgment. Then a candidate demonstrates excellent judgment by withdrawing from a ridiculous process, and everyone acts shocked. Hiring should help both sides

decide whether there is a fit. It should not feel like a loyalty test before the person even receives a badge.

If your interview process requires travel across states, twelve conversations, skipped meals, rain, and a recruiter proudly announcing that the experience was designed to be grueling, congratulations. You are no longer interviewing candidates. You are hosting an obstacle course with Outlook invitations.

Jo didn't fail the stamina test. The company failed the common sense test. Somewhere, I hope an HR meeting is being scheduled to discuss why the HR candidate decided the company needed HR more than she needed the job.

POST 31 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 13

THE EXPERIMENT

What The Interview Games actually does

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Questions about my hiring-process experiments prompt a plain explanation of my approach.

WHY I WROTE IT

I laid out why I apply, observe, document and publish what candidates experience firsthand.

At this point, I'm pretty sure I accidentally created the least profitable consulting business in America: I test companies' hiring processes for free, collect the emotional damage, and then write about it so the rest of you know what may be waiting behind the "Apply Now" button.

I don't get paid. Nobody sends me a fruit basket for completing round seven. There is no loyalty program where ten interviews earns me a free rejection. I apply, go through the process, take notes, and document what happens.

Think of me as a mystery shopper, except instead of checking whether the fries are hot, I'm checking whether the recruiter remembers my name after asking me to create an account, upload a resume, retype it, complete an assessment, record a video, meet six people, and survive Workday.

I do it because hiring changes constantly. New interview formats show up. AI arrives. Tests multiply. Panel interviews suddenly need enough people to form a softball team. Companies introduce "quick conversations" that somehow require three weeks, two reschedules, and a final meeting with someone who

discovered the job five minutes before Zoom.

Candidates deserve to know what is happening. When I write about these experiences, I'm not saying every company is terrible or every recruiter is plotting from a secret HR bunker. I'm showing what the process feels like from the candidate side. Sometimes I find a company that communicates well, moves quickly, respects people's time, and runs a process that makes sense. I almost get suspicious.

Other times, I enter what appears to be an interview process and discover I've joined a corporate escape room.

"Congratulations, Alex. You've advanced to the next stage." Wonderful. What do I win? "Another interview." Of course I do.

People ask why I bother if I'm not seriously looking at every opportunity. Because somebody should be paying attention. Job seekers are told to research companies, prepare harder, customize everything, follow up, stay professional, and bring their best selves. Fair enough... But candidates are evaluating companies too. If your hiring process takes eight weeks, requires ten interviews, changes the job description halfway through, ghosts

people for twelve days, then sends an "URGENT" email asking for availability tomorrow morning, that tells candidates something before they ever receive a badge.

So I keep testing. I keep taking notes. And I keep writing about it. No sponsorship. No official title. Just me wandering through America's hiring maze with a resume in one hand, reporting back from places where "streamlined process" apparently means six interviews. If my stories make someone laugh, great. If they help someone recognize a red flag, ask a better question, avoid wasting weeks, or realize they're not alone in being confused by modern hiring, even better.

Corporate America keeps building the obstacle courses. I'm just the unpaid guy testing the equipment before everybody else gets on.

Target and the security clearance

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Julie recalls eight Target interviews, intelligence tests and a psychological evaluation.

WHY I WROTE IT

I examined whether more screens always mean better evaluation or merely more obstacles.

I thought I had seen every way to make a job interview complicated. Then I read Julie Estes, PMP's story and realized someone looked at hiring and said, "What if we made it feel like qualifying for a security clearance?"

Julie shared that when she interviewed with Target back in the day, she went through eight rounds of interviews, two intelligence tests, and a psychological evaluation before receiving an offer. Eight rounds. Two intelligence tests. A psychological evaluation. At that point, I'm not sure whether they were hiring her or trying to determine if she could be trusted with the nuclear codes.

Imagine showing up for round one thinking, "This seems promising." By round four, you've met half the company. By round six, you're answering behavioral questions from someone you're pretty sure works in accounting and wandered into the meeting. By round eight, you're no longer interviewing. You're defending a dissertation called "Why I Would Like a Paycheck."

Then came the intelligence tests. Apparently surviving eight conversations wasn't enough proof that Julie could operate indoors without supervision. They needed confirmation.

Please identify the next shape in this sequence. Solve this logic puzzle. If Susan has four projects, three deadlines, two managers, and one nervous breakdown, how many Teams meetings can she attend before lunch?

And then the psychological evaluation. That's where the process stops feeling like recruiting and starts feeling like a Netflix documentary. Because after eight interviews and two intelligence tests, the only psychological question I would have left is, "Why am I still participating in this?"

Julie joked that she felt like she should have received a plaque with the offer letter, and she's right. Forget the standard "Congratulations, we're pleased to offer you the position." They should have sent a trophy, a sash, a commemorative coin, and a handwritten note saying, "You survived us."

This is what makes these marathon hiring processes funny. Companies will build an interview sequence longer than some relationships, then act shocked when candidates accept another offer during round seven. They'll schedule another panel because "we just want everyone to feel comfortable," while the candidate has

forgotten which job they applied for.

And yes, companies should evaluate candidates. Interviews matter. Skills matter. Fit matters. But if your hiring process requires eight rounds, multiple intelligence tests, and a psychological evaluation, maybe the candidate isn't the person who needs to be evaluated.

Julie got the offer, which means she completed the decathlon. I think the plaque should have read:

"Congratulations. You demonstrated patience, intelligence, emotional stability, calendar flexibility, and the supernatural ability to answer 'Tell me about yourself' eight different ways without screaming."

That's not interviewing. That's survival. At that point, the resume deserves its own employee number...

Sixteen years, and still disposable

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An anonymous reader describes added responsibility, stagnant pay, grief and an attempted demotion.

WHY I WROTE IT

I emphasized that work decisions have consequences far beyond a corporate organization chart.

Sometimes the job market doesn't just kick you while you're down. It waits until life is already heavy, then sends an automated email asking how your candidate experience was.

Someone shared this story with me today, and I'm keeping him anonymous. He spent 16 years with the same company. He moved through roles, earned promotions, relocated internationally, built teams, and eventually became an Area Manager. Then came corporate's favorite promotion: more responsibility with the same salary.

First came a bigger team, larger territory and travel. No salary increase. Then came another "promotion" with an even larger scope, more travel, and still no salary review. Apparently career advancement meant his title was climbing the ladder while his paycheck stayed downstairs. He has a four year old at home and was already traveling regularly, so he did something unreasonable by corporate standards: he asked to be compensated appropriately for the job. Leadership responded by trying to move him into a lower position. That plan failed because the person they wanted to replace him with said no. Corporate succession planning at its finest.

Then life became much heavier than work. He flew back to the U.S. because his mother was dying of cancer. She passed away in March. His company said they supported him. When he returned to Australia, he learned someone else was being brought in to take his job and he would be moved into the lower position they had already tried to give him. Nothing says "welcome back from bereavement" quite like a surprise organizational chart. He sought legal advice and left with a redundancy package. Sixteen years ended without an exit interview, without a proper goodbye to his team, and with lawyers handling the final chapter.

Then came the job search. Nearly 300 applications. Six companies called him. One put him through six rounds. Recently, he interviewed for an Operations Manager role and felt it went well. The Managing Director said he was traveling and would follow up afterward.

So today, he emailed to check in. He received an out of office reply listing people to contact while the MD was away. Including their newly hired Operations Manager. Yes. He

discovered he didn't get the job because Outlook accidentally introduced him to the person who did.

Recruiting has apparently evolved beyond rejection emails. Now Microsoft Office handles emotional closure. Today is five months since he lost his mother. His loss isn't funny. The timing isn't funny. But the corporate absurdity surrounding all of this deserves to be called out.

Behind every application is a human being. Sometimes they're interviewing while grieving. Sometimes they're smiling through six rounds after hundreds of rejections. Sometimes they just need the basic respect of being told, "We chose someone else."

If you're hiring, remember that. And please tell candidates they didn't get the job before your automatic reply introduces them to their replacement.

POST 34 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 13

CAREER PATHS

Not everyone wants to manage

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A professional shares that individual-contributor work suited her better than managing direct reports.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the assumption that a promotion into management is everyone's definition of success.

Apparently career success now comes with a mandatory subscription to management.

I read a post today from someone who said she once had eight direct reports and hated it. Not because she hated people or couldn't lead. She discovered she enjoyed producing, mentoring, recruiting, solving problems, and doing the work more than approving PTO, mediating personality conflicts, and attending meetings about meetings. She made a reckless career decision by corporate standards: she stopped managing people and focused on work she actually enjoyed.

Naturally, this violates one of corporate America's favorite beliefs: every capable employee is dreaming of collecting more direct reports until their calendar looks like a hostage situation. We have created this strange career ladder where success works like a video game. Do good work, level up. Become an expert, level up. Lead a project, level up. Eventually you unlock "Manager," followed by "Senior Manager," "Director," and the final boss battle where you spend 70% of your week asking people whether they completed the spreadsheet you never wanted.

And if someone has already climbed

that ladder and decides they would rather step back into an individual contributor role, suddenly we hear the sacred corporate diagnosis: "overqualified." Hiring managers look at someone with leadership experience applying for a smaller role. Surely this person cannot want fewer meetings, less politics, and more time doing work they enjoy. Maybe they're plotting something. Maybe they plan to seize control of the break room. Or maybe they learned what makes them happy.

I know people who love leading large teams. I know others who would happily trade a bigger title for four uninterrupted hours and a laptop. Neither person is failing. They simply want different things. Career growth does not always mean more employees under your name on an organizational chart. Sometimes growth is learning that being responsible for 37 adults, three budgets, two restructures, and someone named Kevin who keeps forgetting his password is not your definition of fulfillment.

The funniest part is that companies constantly tell employees to "own your career." Then someone actually owns it and says, "I don't want to manage anymore." Corporate America responds, "No, not like that."

If an experienced person applies for your role, try something radical before rejecting them for being overqualified: ask why they want it. Maybe they already had the title you think they should be chasing. Maybe they sat in the big meetings, managed the big team, carried the big responsibility, and discovered that the view from the top mostly included more emails and another calendar invitation titled "Alignment."

Not everyone wants the next title. Some people want meaningful work, decent compensation, competent leadership, and enough energy left at 5:00 p.m. to remember what their family looks like.

That isn't lack of ambition. That's experience finally becoming useful.

Too perfect for the job?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An online claim treats a closely tailored resume as a possible hiring red flag.

WHY I WROTE IT

I pointed out the moving target candidates face when following one hiring rule violates another.

Apparently we have officially entered a new phase of hiring where doing exactly what employers have spent years telling candidates to do is now somehow very suspicious.

I saw a post today saying that if your resume looks like a perfect match for the job description, it may be a red flag. I had to read that twice because for years candidates have been told to tailor the resume, study the posting, use relevant keywords, highlight the right experience, show measurable results, and make it obvious why they fit the role. People did exactly that, and someone in HR apparently said, "This person appears way too qualified. Something feels off."

At this point, applying for jobs feels less like a professional process and more like a secret experiment where the rules change the moment you follow them. Resume doesn't match the job? Rejected. Resume matches too closely? Suspicious. Not enough experience? Rejected. Too much experience? Overqualified. Use AI to improve your wording? Red flag. Don't use AI and miss one keyword? The ATS launches your application into the digital basement with everyone else nobody will call.

Then we move to the interview, where the confusion continues. "Why are you interested in this role?" Well, according to the resume you just called suspicious, I have the exact background you requested. "Why does your experience align so perfectly with our requirements?" Because I read the job description, Susan. I thought that was the assignment. Apparently the ideal candidate now needs to be qualified, but not suspiciously qualified; interested, but not desperate; confident, but humble; experienced, but affordable; customized, but somehow naturally customized without looking like they customized anything.

Basically, employers say they want a unicorn, but if the unicorn actually walks into the interview wearing a name tag, somebody whispers, "This seems fake."

Maybe the next round of career advice will be to intentionally add random irrelevant experience to make the resume look more believable. "Director of Operations, 15 years. Regional Manager, 8 years. Weekend alpaca consultant, four months. Professional toaster reviewer, seasonal." That should reassure everyone that you didn't try too hard.

Candidates are exhausted because every week there seems to be another reason why doing the right thing is secretly the wrong thing. We have turned job searching into a game where the candidate gets criticized for learning the rules, punished for following them, and then receives an automated rejection thanking them for their "interest in the opportunity."

If a resume matches your job description, maybe the first assumption shouldn't be fraud, AI, desperation, or an elaborate conspiracy to trick your company into hiring someone qualified. Maybe the person simply read what you asked for, has the experience, and took the time to show you.

Until then, I'm updating my resume to be approximately 73% relevant. Anything higher might look suspicious.

POST 36 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 14

UNPAID ASSESSMENTS

Eight hours of free interview work

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Sean reports being asked for an unpaid eight-hour project during an Oklo Inc. process.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned where a fair assessment ends and free labor begins, especially without an offer.

Corporate America has officially found a new way to turn “free trial” into a hiring strategy. Apparently, after assessments, panels, and case studies, somebody eventually asks, “What if we also get an entire workday out of them for free?”

A guy named Sean messaged me today after finishing an interview process with Oklo Inc.

On top of the interviews, he was asked to complete an eight hour mini project for free. Eight hours. That is not a mini project. That is a full workday wearing a fake mustache and pretending not to be employment. He did it anyway because candidates treat every extra request like a loyalty test. Smile. Be flexible. Show initiative. Prove you really want it. Donate Tuesday. And after completing the project, he still didn't get the job.

But apparently the eight hour audition was only the opening act. Sean said the interview panel included displaced aerospace engineers asking him questions about the SMR/micro reactor industry, an area he had never worked in. Nothing says “let's evaluate your qualifications” like turning the interview into Jeopardy: Highly Specialized Nuclear Edition. I can picture it now.

“Tell us about your leadership experience.” “Now explain a technical concept from an industry you've never worked in while six people stare at you like you personally misplaced the reactor.” Perfect. Should I also land a spacecraft before we discuss compensation?

This is the part of hiring that fascinates me. Companies post roles asking for leadership, strategic thinking, communication, problem solving and business experience. Then the interview starts and suddenly someone wants to know whether you memorized a textbook from a completely different career. When you don't know the answer, everyone takes notes like they uncovered a major weakness instead of discovering that you're not a walking encyclopedia. Then comes the rejection: “We've decided to move forward with candidates whose background more closely aligns with our needs.” Translation: We built an obstacle course and were disappointed you didn't bring climbing shoes.

An eight hour unpaid assignment should come with snacks, parking validation and a W-2. If I spend an entire business day creating something for your company, we're dangerously close to becoming coworkers. What I

liked most about Sean's message was his attitude. After all of it, he said he could still learn new lessons. And he's right. Every ridiculous interview teaches you something. Sometimes you learn about the company. Sometimes you learn about yourself. Sometimes you learn that “mini project” has undergone the same corporate inflation as “entry level,” “competitive salary,” and “quick interview.”

Candidates shouldn't have to prove their worth by donating hours of labor and surviving questions designed to make the panel feel smarter. Interview people for the job you actually need them to do. And if your “mini project” takes eight hours, at least have the courage to call it what it is: an unpaid shift.

POST 37 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 14

INTERVIEW EXPERIMENT

The Meijer interview memory

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

News of a former Meijer interviewer's career transition brings back an earlier interview experience.

WHY I WROTE IT

I connected a current professional update with the hiring-process research I have been doing.

Every once in a while, LinkedIn hands me a plot twist so perfectly written that I have to check whether someone has been reading my drafts.

Today I saw that Jovana García, SHRM - SCP is wrapping up nearly five years with Meijer and it immediately brought back a memory from one of my own little adventures in corporate hiring. A while back, Jovana interviewed me for a role at Meijer. Now, I should probably admit something: I wasn't exactly sitting there dreaming about where I'd park on my first day. I was also doing what I occasionally do for research, experiencing a company's hiring process firsthand so I can later write about what candidates actually go through.

Think of it as mystery shopping, except instead of checking whether the fries are hot, I'm checking how many people suddenly appear on Zoom. And Meijer delivered. I went in expecting a conversation. Then I discovered there was a six person panel involved, and somewhere around person number four my brain stopped saying, "Tell them about your experience," and started saying, "Alex, congratulations. You have enough material for three LinkedIn posts and possibly a chapter."

Nothing prepares you for thinking you're having a normal interview and then watching little boxes populate the screen like the opening credits of a corporate Avengers movie. One person asks about leadership. Another asks about conflict. Someone wants a STAR example. Someone else is silently studying you like they're deciding whether you can be trusted with the nuclear codes. By the end, you're no longer sure whether you're applying for a job or trying to win custody of the break room.

The funny part is that Jovana was always professional, and I actually enjoyed talking with her. My issue was never with the people. It was the process. Six person panels have always fascinated me because at some point you have to wonder whether we're hiring one employee or selecting the next pope. Fast forward to today and I see Jovana posting that her own chapter with Meijer has ended. That is the part nobody talks about enough.

Recruiters, hiring managers, candidates, executives, eventually almost everyone becomes the person posting, "After several wonderful years, my journey has come to an end." Corporate titles are temporary. Org charts are written

in pencil. The person interviewing you today may be updating their own resume tomorrow. The candidate you reject might become a customer, a leader somewhere else, or, in my case, a guy with a large LinkedIn audience and an alarming amount of free time to write jokes about panel interviews.

So I genuinely wish Jovana the best in whatever comes next. She unknowingly became part of my ongoing research into the magnificent, confusing circus we call hiring and for that I am grateful. And Meijer, thank you too. I didn't leave with the job, but I definitely left with content.

In my world, that's practically a benefits package. That six person panel kept my content calendar busy for a few weeks...

POST 38 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 14

GHOSTING

A year and a half, then eleven rounds

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Michelle recalls a company ghosting her, returning much later, then putting her through eleven more interviews.

WHY I WROTE IT

I highlighted how candidates can be treated as endlessly available even after earlier disrespect.

I read a story today that perfectly explains why some hiring processes feel less like recruiting and more like an arranged marriage negotiated by a committee.

Michelle shared that she once interviewed with a company where the interviewer barely let her speak. You know, one of those interviews where you show up prepared to discuss your experience, accomplishments, and ideas, but apparently your role is to sit there and admire the interviewer's podcast episode. Then came the best part: after the interview, the company disappeared. No follow-up. No rejection. No "thanks for your time." Just the professional equivalent of turning off the lights and pretending nobody is home.

A year and a half later, the same company called her back. Not because they suddenly discovered manners. Not because someone found her resume trapped behind a filing cabinet. They wanted her to interview again. Michelle reminded them that she had already interviewed and never received the courtesy of a response. Apparently that made them even more interested. They practically fell over themselves trying to get her back into the process.

And then she went through ELEVEN more interviews. Eleven. At interview three, you are a candidate. At interview five, you are becoming a consultant. At interview seven, you should have your own parking spot. By interview nine, someone needs to add you to the company holiday party invitation. And by interview eleven, HR should stop saying "next steps" and start discussing whether the ceremony will be indoors or outdoors.

Michelle finally asked the only reasonable question left, "Are you going to put a ring on it or not?" Because what exactly are we evaluating after eleven conversations? Did meeting number eight reveal something the first seven missed? Was interview ten necessary because Gary from Accounting needed to determine whether she could "thrive in ambiguity"? Did interview eleven involve the plant casting the deciding vote?

Companies love talking about efficiency, lean operations, productivity, and respecting people's time. Then they create a hiring process that requires a candidate to meet everyone from the CEO to the guy who changed the printer toner in 2019.

And somehow the candidate is still expected to remain enthusiastic. "Great news! We'd like to invite you to another interview." Should I bring my resume or a sleeping bag? The funniest part is that companies will spend weeks or months trying to decide whether someone is decisive enough for the role while demonstrating absolutely no ability to make a decision themselves.

Hiring should involve enough conversation to understand the person, the role, the expectations, and the fit. It should not require an endurance medal. If you need eleven interviews to decide whether to hire someone, the candidate is probably not the problem.

At that point, just send the ring, merge the LinkedIn profiles, and admit everyone is in a long term relationship with the hiring committee.

POST 39 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 14

ONBOARDING

The four-week background check

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Michelle accepts a remote communications job but the background screening continues for weeks.

WHY I WROTE IT

I asked whether screening timelines are reasonable and what prolonged delays cost a new hire.

There is a special kind of confidence that comes with accepting a job offer. You stop refreshing LinkedIn every six minutes, tell your family the search is over, and for approximately 14 minutes believe the hiring process has officially released you back into society. You start thinking about your first day and which coffee mug will become your unofficial coworker.

Then the background check begins.

Michelle accepted a remote communications role in July. Great! New chapter. Brand work, content, home office, probably already imagining whether sweatpants technically count as business casual. 4 weeks later, the background check is still going.

Four weeks. At this point, I don't think they're checking her background anymore. I think they're producing a Netflix documentary called "Michelle: The Early Years." Somewhere, an investigator is standing outside her elementary school asking a retired third grade teacher, "Would you describe Michelle as collaborative during group projects?" Her former neighbors have been contacted. Her childhood lemonade stand finances are probably under review too. "Can you explain this

unexplained \$4.75 in revenue from June 1996?" Meanwhile, Michelle is sitting at home wondering whether she accepted a communications job or accidentally applied for security clearance at Area 51.

I understand background checks. Companies should verify employment, education, criminal history, and whatever else is relevant to the role. But four weeks for someone working on brand and content from home? What exactly are we protecting?! The secret Canva password? Nuclear launch codes hidden inside the company newsletter? A classified folder labeled "Q3 Social Media Ideas FINAL_v7_USE_THIS_ONE"?

Hiring has become fascinating because companies can spend months interviewing someone, ask for references, review the resume six times, conduct assessments, have multiple leaders approve the hire, extend an offer, and then suddenly act like they discovered the person traveling under an assumed name at an airport.

"Before we let you write the Tuesday blog post, we need to verify your whereabouts between 2003 and 2006."

Candidates are expected to move at lightning speed. Respond today. Interview tomorrow. Complete the assessment by Friday. Provide references immediately. Sign the offer within 48 hours. Then the company enters a mysterious dimension where calendars, clocks, and urgency apparently no longer exist. Four weeks later, "Good news! Your background check is still processing." At that point, "good news" is doing some heavy lifting.

Michelle, congratulations on the offer. Hopefully the investigation concludes before your retirement party. And if they eventually ask you to explain a suspicious absence from kindergarten in 1989, tell them your attorney has advised you not to comment.

Because apparently getting a remote communications job now requires the same vetting process as joining the CIA. Except I'm pretty sure the CIA moves faster.

POST 40 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 14

WORKPLACE EMPATHY

Grief versus the QBR

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader travels to deliver a business review just after a death in her family.

WHY I WROTE IT

I called for human compassion when corporate performance expectations collide with genuine loss.

There are moments when work reminds you that some companies have mastered the phrase “people first” right up until an actual person needs understanding, compassion, or five minutes to be human.

A woman messaged me today with a story I can’t stop thinking about. Last year, her mother in law passed away. She helped her father in law and husband pick up the ashes. Right after that, they dropped her off at the airport because she had to fly to the Bay Area to deliver her QBR in person.

Not next week. Not after someone in leadership said, “Take care of your family. We’ll move the meeting.” Nope. Apparently the quarterly business review was sitting there like the final boss of corporate grief, armed with PowerPoint slides and no emotional intelligence. So she got on the plane, showed up, and did the presentation.

A few days later, she heard whispers that her QBR “wasn’t as good as usual” and that she seemed a little “out of it.” Out of it? She had just helped her family collect the ashes of someone they loved and then boarded a flight for a business presentation. I’d be impressed if I remembered my laptop password, much less delivered a

polished review.

But this is where corporate culture becomes almost parody level ridiculous. We put “empathy” in leadership decks. We hold webinars about mental health. We tell everyone to “bring your whole self to work.” Then somebody actually brings their whole self, including grief, exhaustion, sadness, and the fact that they are human, and suddenly the notes read: “Energy seemed slightly below expectations.” Well, yes, Brad. She wasn’t coming from a spa.

The part that hit me hardest was that these weren’t strangers. These were people she had known for more than 20 years in her career. Twenty years. You would think after two decades the response might be compassion. Instead, she got commentary on the QBR.

That is the part companies still get wrong. People remember who gave them grace when life became heavy, and they remember who asked for PowerPoint anyway. No quarterly result, forecast, dashboard, or beautifully color coded spreadsheet is more important than recognizing when someone is carrying something much bigger than work.

Leadership is never more visible than in

those moments. Not when numbers are great. Leadership shows up when someone is hurting, exhausted, grieving, or simply trying to hold themselves together long enough to get through the day. That’s when employees discover whether “we care about our people” is a value or just decorative office wallpaper.

She finished her message by saying she was glad she grew up in the fun days of selling. I understand what she means, because somewhere along the way, business became so obsessed with measuring performance that we forgot to measure humanity.

And for the record, if someone shows up to your QBR immediately after a family loss, maybe don’t critique their energy. Maybe thank them for showing up. Better yet, tell them they never should have had to.

POST 41 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

HR & TRUST

HR heard it. Then the boss did.

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I describe reporting a toxic boss to HR and then facing the fallout.

WHY I WROTE IT

I questioned whether reporting channels are trustworthy if they expose the employee who speaks up.

You know you're dealing with a toxic boss when everyone in the building knows who the problem is, everyone has a story... and somehow that person still walks around with diplomatic immunity from accountability.

A while back, I reported a concern to HR. I didn't storm into the office with dramatic music, witness statements, or a 47 slide presentation titled "Reasons This Person Should Not Be Managing Humans." I explained what happened, stayed professional, and assumed the process would work the way employees are told it works. HR listened, nodded at the appropriate moments, thanked me for bringing it to their attention, and for a moment I thought it might be handled correctly. That optimism had short shelf life.

Somehow the toxic boss found out I had reported the concern. Meetings felt different. Conversations got shorter. My work got examined like the FBI had opened an investigation. Things that had never been an issue were suddenly "areas of concern," and normal mistakes became evidence. Apparently I had reported the fire to the fire department, and the fire department's first move was to call the fire and tell it exactly who complained. That taught me one strange corporate

lesson: sometimes the person causing the most damage is also the person everyone is afraid to challenge.

Coworkers would quietly tell me, "We all know how they are." Former employees had stories. Other departments did too. Behind closed doors, everyone knew the behavior. Publicly, the whole building developed selective amnesia. At that point, this boss didn't need another review. They needed a Netflix documentary. Toxic leaders survive by creating the illusion that they are untouchable. They make speaking up feel more dangerous than staying quiet, so employees stop reporting problems and start updating resumes. Then leadership wonders why engagement is low, turnover is high, and talented people keep leaving. They didn't leave because of the company picnic. They left the person everyone kept protecting, tolerating, or describing with the magical phrase, "That's just how they are."

Looking back, I don't regret speaking up. I would rather be the person who said something than become another person whispering the same warning to the next employee. "That's just how they are" has protected more bad managers than any leadership program ever created. A title doesn't make

someone untouchable. Neither does tenure, friendship with senior leadership, impressive numbers, or surviving every complaint ever filed. Eventually, toxic leadership sends a bill: turnover, burnout, lost talent, damaged trust, and good employees deciding they have had enough.

The toxic boss may survive the complaint. They may survive HR. They may even survive several talented people walking out the door. But every person who finally tells the truth removes one more brick from the pedestal they were standing on.

And sometimes that pedestal was never made of leadership. It was made of everyone else's silence.

POST 42 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

INTERVIEW REFLECTION

The interview question worth asking

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interviewer at Boston Consulting Group asks which resume line a friend would recognize.

WHY I WROTE IT

I explored a rare interview question that reveals identity rather than demanding memorized answers.

I've been asked a lot of strange interview questions over the years, but this one actually made me stop and think instead of immediately wondering which leadership book, TED Talk, or forgotten HR workbook it came from.

A while back, I went through an interview loop with Boston Consulting Group (BCG). During one conversation, the interviewer looked at me and asked, "If I took your resume and removed the name at the top, what line on your resume would make your friends read it and recognize you?" For a few seconds, my brain did what every highly qualified professional brain does under pressure: absolutely nothing. I just sat there waiting for my brain to reboot.

Then I started reviewing my resume in my head. Leadership? Too generic. Operations? Half my friends still couldn't explain what I do for a living if there were cash prizes involved. MBA? Definitely not. So I finally gave them my answer.

I said it probably wouldn't be one specific accomplishment. It would be the pattern throughout the resume: walking into complicated situations, questioning why things are being done a certain way, fixing what doesn't make

sense, developing people, improving results, and occasionally being the person in the room willing to say, "Why are we doing this?" That part would definitely give me away because my friends know I struggle to watch a bad process survive because someone says, "That's how we've always done it."

Give me a broken process and I'll ask questions. Give me an unnecessary meeting and I'll wonder why this couldn't have been an email. Give me eight interviews for one position and suddenly I have enough material for a comedy tour and a congressional hearing. The interviewer smiled, and for a brief moment I thought, Nice!! Nailed it.

Apparently, "nailed it" and "getting hired" are handled by two completely different departments. I didn't get the job. No dramatic ending, no recruiter outside my house holding balloons and a consulting offer. Just another interview process that ended with someone else getting the position.

But I did get something from it: a great question. And strangely, a useful one too. Most resumes are designed to make us look qualified, but very few actually make us recognizable. We remove the humor, personality, and

weird little traits that make us who we are, then replace them with "strategic leadership," "operational excellence," and "cross-functional collaboration" until our own families wonder if we joined a consulting cult.

By the time we're finished, someone who has known us for twenty years could read the document and say, "This person sounds impressive. Do we know him?"

So, no, I didn't get the Boston Consulting Group job... But I got a story, a surprisingly good interview question, and another reminder that sometimes the most valuable thing you take from an interview isn't an offer.

Sometimes it's material. And considering how hiring processes have been going lately, material might actually have better job security.

POST 43 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

LEADERSHIP

The CEO who blocked feedback

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A corporate executive's message about open dialogue clashes with a reaction to critical feedback.

WHY I WROTE IT

I distinguished authentic transparency from polished posts that cannot survive disagreement.

Nothing says "strong leadership" quite like posting a polished message about accountability, courage, authenticity, and open dialogue... then blocking the first person who tries to have some.

The other day, I came across a LinkedIn post from the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. It had everything a post is supposed to have: thoughtful language, inspirational lines about people and culture, and enough corporate warmth to make you believe somebody had discovered the phrase "psychological safety." It was also written by AI. That didn't bother me. I use technology too. But if you're going to publish a sermon about authentic leadership, trust, transparency, and listening to different perspectives, it helps if the behavior behind the post survives longer than the comment section.

So I challenged him. Nothing outrageous. No insults. No personal attacks. I simply pointed out the gap between the leadership message being advertised and the leadership behavior people have experienced. Apparently that was my mistake, because I discovered I had been blocked. And I laughed. Not because getting blocked by a Fortune 500 CEO is some life accomplishment, although I'm considering adding it under

"professional development."

The whole thing was accidentally perfect. The post said, "Great leaders welcome difficult conversations." My comment said, "Okay, let's have one." His response was the digital equivalent of closing the office door, turning off the lights, and pretending nobody was home. Nothing screams "I value different perspectives" quite like making sure you never have to see one again.

That's the part of corporate leadership that fascinates me. Everyone loves "honest feedback" when it arrives in an employee engagement survey, gets converted into a pie chart, and comes with three approved action items. Actual honest feedback? That apparently requires security clearance. We tell employees to speak up, challenge assumptions, disagree respectfully, and hold leadership accountable. But sometimes the moment someone does those things, suddenly the company values come with terms, conditions, and a convenient block button.

And yes, there is something funny about watching a CEO publish an AI generated message about authenticity and then personally demonstrate why

the message was needed. But there's also something sad about it. Leadership isn't the post. It isn't the polished language, the professional headshot, or the comments from executives congratulating one another for being inspiring. Leadership is what happens when someone disagrees with you, especially when that disagreement is public and inconvenient.

It's whether you listen when the feedback is uncomfortable. Whether you can separate criticism from disrespect. Whether your confidence survives a comment you didn't approve in advance. Anyone can post about having an open door. The real test is what happens when someone walks through it.

In this case, apparently the open door had a block button.

POST 44 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

INTERVIEW PREP

Preparing for the corporate SAT

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My recurring interview preparation extends from company research to unpredictable questions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I encouraged preparation while poking fun at an interview process that can become an exam marathon.

Interview preparation is important. Because apparently somewhere along the way, getting a job turned into preparing for the SAT, a board meeting, a psychology exam, and trivia night at the same time.

Over the years, I've learned that before an interview, I need to do my homework. I research the company, read about the role, look at the leadership team, understand the business model, review news, study the description, and prepare questions that prove I didn't just click "Easy Apply" while standing in line for coffee. I also think through the usual questions. "Tell me about yourself." "What are your strengths?" "What is your biggest weakness?" "Where do you see yourself in five years?" That last one always makes me smile because after some of the hiring processes I've experienced, I'm just hoping to know where I'll be after interview number six.

Then come the behavioral questions. "Tell me about a time you dealt with conflict." "Tell me about a difficult employee." "Tell me about a time you failed." By round three, I'm basically producing an unauthorized documentary about my career. But no amount of preparation protects you from the oddball questions.

I've had interviews where everything was going perfectly. Great conversation. Strong connection. We're talking operations, leadership, results, strategy. I'm thinking, This is going well.

Then suddenly, "How many ping pong balls would fit inside a 747?" And now I'm sitting there wondering if the job description quietly mentioned aerospace engineering. My first instinct is never to calculate the volume of a ping pong ball. My first instinct is, "Are we flying the plane first, or are we replacing all the passengers with sporting equipment?" Of course, they're usually not looking for the exact answer. They want to understand how you think, how you approach a problem, whether you ask clarifying questions, and how you behave when you don't immediately know something.

Which is fair. But sometimes I want to return the favor. "How many qualified candidates can fit inside a nine round hiring process before everyone loses interest?" "If a recruiter says 'we'll circle back Friday' and disappears for three weeks, at what speed are they circling?" "If five executives interview one candidate for eight hours, how

many calendar invites could have been avoided with one decision maker?"

Preparation matters. Research matters. Asking good questions matters. Walking into an interview knowing the company and understanding the role gives you confidence, and candidates should do the work beforehand. But my personal experience has taught me to prepare for one additional category: Questions nobody warned you about.

Because you can study the annual report, memorize the company values, prepare ten STAR examples, and know the CEO's biography. Then somebody leans forward and asks how many tennis balls fit in Manhattan.

At that point, forget five years. I'm just trying to make it to the next five minutes.

POST 45 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

AGEISM & PAY

Over 50 and worth the salary

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A commenter claims older candidates lose jobs because their salary expectations are too high.

WHY I WROTE IT

I challenged the idea that career experience is a disadvantage just because expertise has value.

Someone said to me recently, "I think you missed the fact that people over 50 have higher wage expectations. That's why younger people get the jobs."

And I couldn't help but laugh. Because the idea that "higher wage expectations" is the problem is classic corporate spin. It's not that people over 50 expect too much, it's that companies expect too little from the paycheck they're offering. Let's be real: legends over 50 don't have "unreasonable" expectations. They just know what life actually costs.

Here's the scene. A 24 year old fresh out of school sees a job posted at \$45,000 and thinks, "Awesome, I can finally stop sharing my parents' Netflix password." A 52 year old sees the same posting and thinks, "Hang on, you want me to manage staff, handle systems, babysit clients, AND survive weekly team building exercises on that salary? That's not a job, that's community service."

And yet, instead of adjusting the pay to match experience, companies go for the "budget friendly" hire. They tell themselves, "We'll save money!" Fast forward six months: the underpaid, overwhelmed new hire is gone, projects are behind, customers are furious, and

the company ends up paying consultants three times as much to clean up the mess. Somehow, though, the narrative never changes, it's always, "older workers are too expensive."

Older workers aren't asking for yachts. They just want to cover the mortgage, buy groceries without selling a kidney, and maybe take a vacation that isn't in someone's basement. "Competitive pay" should mean competing with inflation, not unpaid internships.

Meanwhile, companies pitch job descriptions that read like science fiction: "Must have 10 years of experience in technology that's been around for 4. Must be a rockstar/ninja/guru. Must thrive in a fast-paced environment (translation: chaos)." They want a superhero, but they offer a sidekick's salary. And when a 50 year old legend dares to say, "Actually, my time and expertise are worth more," suddenly it's branded as "unrealistic wage expectations."

Here's the kicker, those same companies eventually panic and start begging for the exact experience they once rejected. They realize the 24 year old didn't magically download 30 years of troubleshooting wisdom. They need someone who's been through

recessions, restructures, and bosses who thought "synergy" was a strategy. They need the 50 year old they ghosted. It's like refusing to buy a decent umbrella because it's "too expensive" and then paying double for towels once the storm hits.

So no, the problem isn't that people over 50 expect too much. It's that companies want Bentley performance at go kart prices. Experience costs money, but inexperience costs more. And when the dust settles, it's the legends yes, even the "expensive" ones who keep the whole machine from collapsing.

Stay legendary, my friends. And next time someone says older workers are "too pricey," remind them: wisdom isn't expensive. Ignorance is.

POST 46 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

CAREER REFLECTION

When your role no longer aligns

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation about a role being eliminated raises the personal side of organizational change.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wrote about identity, loss and rediscovering direction after the familiar workplace disappears.

When they told me my role was “no longer aligned with the company’s future,” I didn’t flinch. I didn’t argue. I didn’t even ask for the official HR approved script.

I just leaned back, tilted my head, and thought, Ah. We’ve reached the mid season cliffhanger. Because that’s exactly what it felt like. One moment I was in a workplace sitcom, complete with inside jokes, passive aggressive email threads, and the eternal mystery of who keeps stealing the good pens. The next, I was in a moody documentary about resilience, watching my to do list disappear in real time.

Here’s the thing companies rarely admit: it is personal. When you’ve poured your energy into something, taken calls on your lunch break, stayed late to help a teammate, run interference on an office meltdown, or fixed the Wi-Fi with a paperclip, it becomes more than a paycheck. It becomes part of your identity. A rhythm you built your days around. So when they say, “It’s a strategic decision,” what you hear is, “You no longer belong here.”

And whether they mean it that way or not, it cuts deep. It shakes your

confidence. It makes you second guess everything. Was I too outspoken? Too invisible? Too willing to bring banana bread to meetings nobody wanted?

But here’s the plot twist inside the plot twist: sometimes the door closing isn’t the end. Sometimes it’s the exit ramp you didn’t realize you needed. Once the noise died down and my calendar became a blank canvas, I started noticing things.

I noticed how much of my confidence had been outsourced to quarterly check-ins. How many creative ideas I had buried under “maybe later” because they didn’t fit the company brand guide. How long it had been since I asked myself, “What do I actually want to be doing?” Turns out I had been very busy being useful, but not necessarily being me.

So here’s the truth I’m holding onto now: Your paycheck is not your permission slip to matter. Your title is not your only credential for worth. You are still you, capable, resourceful, and worth every bit of the space you take up, even without a company logo under your name.

And yes, this job market is relentless. Rejections pile up. Ghosting feels

personal. And those “I wasn’t even looking, but I just landed my dream job” posts can make you want to launch your phone into a lake.

But if you’re here, in the middle of your own narrative shake up, staring at a future that looks nothing like the past, remember this: You’re not adrift. You’re in the rewrite. And the rewrite is where the best arcs happen.

So keep applying. Rest without guilt. Keep going, even if slowly. Take the walk. Eat the pie. Shout into the pillow if you have to. And remember, just because one chapter closed doesn’t mean the story is over. It means you get to decide the tone of the next one.

I’m rooting for every person carrying coffee in one hand and courage in the other, because you’re the ones who know how to turn a plot twist into a comeback. And those are the stories worth telling.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PROCESS

There is something profoundly strange about the language we use when we discuss hiring. A person spends years building a career, solving hard problems, training others, moving across the country, helping a company survive its busiest season and getting results that made somebody else look brilliant in a quarterly review. Then a piece of software sends a rejection in two minutes. Two minutes. The coffee has not finished brewing, the applicant has not closed the laptop and apparently the company's entire view of their worth has been decided. I am impressed by the efficiency. I am less impressed by what we lost to achieve it.

During this week I wrote about a woman who received a rejection almost immediately after applying, another person who endured five rounds of interviews and still went home with nothing, and a reader who finally found work after two hundred applications and forty interviews. Those numbers sound tidy in a spreadsheet. In real life, they are evenings spent rewriting a resume, gas money, missed plans, hope that returns after a promising call and disappointment that lands with a perfectly formatted subject line. The people who keep applying after all of that are not weak or desperate. They are determined, and sometimes exhausted, and sometimes both before breakfast.

I can laugh at the absurdity. I will absolutely laugh at it. An application portal that asks me to upload my resume and then type every line of it into twenty little boxes deserves a comedy special. A panel that cannot agree whose turn it is to ask a question deserves a producer and a studio audience. But the laugh is not the entire story. Behind the joke is a simple expectation: if someone gives you their time, respect it. If you cannot move forward, say so. If the position is closed, close it. If the company changes direction, do not let people keep preparing for a conversation that will never happen.

And if you are searching right now, please remember that a company deciding not to hire you is not the same thing as deciding who you are. A rejection can mean a hundred different things: the budget changed, a manager changed their mind, an internal candidate appeared, the role was rewritten, an algorithm became overly confident or somebody simply made a poor decision. You still have the work you did, the people you helped and the skills you earned. No automated template can take those away.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE INTERVIEW IS GOING BOTH WAYS

The modern interview has become an extraordinary invention. We invite a qualified professional to tell us about their experience, then schedule enough meetings to film a documentary about it. Somebody asks them to explain their leadership style. Somebody else asks the same question with different nouns. Another person checks “culture fit.” A senior executive shows up halfway through because their previous meeting ran late and expects the candidate to restart the entire story from the beginning. By round eight, the applicant should receive either an offer or a recurring speaking fee.

This week included a job seeker celebrating a role after ten rounds of interviews, a reader describing an eight-interview journey across two states, another describing extra intelligence testing and a psychological evaluation, and a candidate asked to complete an unpaid eight-hour project. The details differ, but the pattern is familiar. Employers keep adding hurdles in the name of confidence, as though more steps guarantee a better decision. Yet the experience itself sends a powerful message about the company. Candidates are paying attention to whether anyone seems prepared, whether questions are relevant and whether the people across the table respect their time.

I believe companies should take hiring seriously. A bad choice affects teams, customers and the person who accepted the role. Interviews should explore judgment, ability, working style and realistic expectations. But serious is not synonymous with endless. An interviewer asking a thoughtful question can reveal more than three people reading the same list aloud. A well-designed work sample can be fair. A full day of unpaid work from someone you may never call again is something else. And the phrase “we want to test your stamina” should not be used as a substitute for understanding the actual job.

Candidates have obligations, too. They should prepare, arrive on time, be truthful and communicate when plans change. This week I also wrote about interview no-shows, and the principle is the same in both directions. A recruiter who vanishes after promising an answer is not demonstrating professionalism. A candidate who disappears without a word is not helping, either. Courtesy is not a benefit reserved for the party with the offer letter. Both sides should be able to finish an interview and say, “At least these people treated me like a person.” That is not an impossible standard. It should be the minimum.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

WHEN COMPANY VALUES MEET REAL LIFE

Corporate America has mastered the art of the inspirational wall. INTEGRITY in twelve-inch letters. PEOPLE FIRST in brushed silver. ACCOUNTABILITY illuminated like a luxury hotel sign. Somewhere near the conference room there is probably a poster of two hands holding a seedling. I have nothing against seedlings. I would simply like to see the values survive contact with an actual employee. That is where the motivational poster tends to request emergency leave and hide behind the office ficus.

This week I wrote about a woman who had just helped her family collect the ashes of someone they loved and then traveled to deliver a quarterly business review. Instead of receiving compassion, she heard criticism about not being quite herself. Think about that. A grieving person crossed the country, did the presentation and somehow the important observation was that her energy looked different. It should not take a leadership consultant to explain why. Sometimes the bravest thing somebody does at work is show up on a day when they should have been allowed to stay home.

I also wrote about reporting a toxic boss to HR and discovering how complicated “speak up” can become when the person with power learns who complained. A company can put an open-door policy in every handbook and still create a culture where people are scared to use it. Employees notice what happens after they raise concerns. They notice whether a manager is held to the same standards as everyone else. They notice when a nice LinkedIn message about accountability is followed by defensiveness the moment someone offers feedback. Nobody has to conduct a survey to detect those contradictions. They live in the room every day.

Leadership does not mean promising never to make a hard decision. Layoffs happen. Teams change. Not everyone receives the promotion they hoped for. Real leaders can communicate hard news honestly, protect confidentiality, listen without retaliation and treat people with dignity even when a meeting is uncomfortable. When somebody is grieving, let them grieve. When somebody gives feedback, listen before building the defense case. When you write a post about authenticity, check whether the people who work for you would recognize the person who wrote it. The wall does not need another value statement. The team needs a reason to believe the last one.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

EXPERIENCE IS NOT AN EXPIRATION DATE

One comment stayed with me this week: the suggestion that people over fifty lose opportunities because their salary expectations are simply too high. It is a convenient explanation. It is also a little too neat for a complicated problem. Experienced workers have mortgages, families, histories, specialized expertise and a clear understanding of what certain responsibilities cost in hours and energy. Younger workers have bills and talents of their own. Neither group should be reduced to a stereotype because doing so makes the budget conversation easier.

There are absolutely situations where a company cannot afford a candidate. That is a real financial decision. Say what the position pays. Describe the work accurately. Let applicants decide whether it fits. What frustrates me is asking someone to run a department, develop a strategy, mentor the next generation, improve profitability, keep customers happy, fix ancient systems and maybe troubleshoot the copier, all while describing a reasonable salary request as evidence that they are difficult. If you need the skills, decide what they are worth. If you do not need them, do not make a twenty-year veteran apologize for possessing them.

I also read stories of long-serving employees being “realigned” out of jobs, and a reader who spent sixteen years building a career only to find greater responsibility did not necessarily mean greater respect. Employers can make choices about staffing and structure. But “impacted” is not a magical word that prevents a layoff from hurting. A role disappearing can shake a person’s identity, confidence, routine and financial security all at once. When you remove the title, the person still exists. That should remain true in the company’s words and actions after the meeting ends.

To anyone who has been told that their experience is too much, their age is a concern or their expectations are unrealistic merely because they know the value of their work: keep the facts in focus. You have delivered results before. You can learn new systems. You can adapt. Ask employers to evaluate what the job actually requires, not the story they invented about your birth year. And to hiring leaders: if a candidate knows how to solve the problem you have been complaining about for three quarters, perhaps try asking about the solution before asking whether they remember fax machines. For the record, surviving a fax machine jam is its own leadership competency.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

KEEP THE HUMAN PART

Every week I hear the same question in different forms: why keep doing this? Why apply to jobs to study the process? Why write about uncomfortable interviews? Why make jokes about the professional world when you know some executives may read them with their serious corporate faces? The short answer is that people keep sending stories, and the stories keep mattering. Somewhere tonight a candidate is deciding whether to send one more application. Somewhere a hiring manager is deciding whether to answer a follow-up. Somewhere an employee is wondering if speaking honestly will cost them a paycheck. Those decisions do not make headlines, but they shape lives.

This week also gave me good reasons to smile. A reader told me that my posts make them laugh every day. Another finally landed a job after a search that seemed determined to test every ounce of patience available in the human nervous system. I shared news about my book reaching new platforms. I wrote about someone who missed having a team so much that she started thinking about household laundry in the language of quarterly business reviews. And I encountered an interview question that was actually worth thinking about. Those moments matter. I do not want this project to become a complaint department with a dramatic logo. I want it to celebrate humor, courage, possibility and the employers who get things right.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

KEEP THE HUMAN PART / CONTINUED

If you are employed, look around. Is there someone searching who could use an introduction? Is there a message you have not answered? Is there a colleague whose effort went unrecognized because the dashboard already moved on to next week? You may not be able to offer a job. You may be able to offer clarity, encouragement or a recommendation without turning it into a networking seminar. If you manage people, remember that they have lives outside the numbers. If you recruit people, remember that the silence between messages is filled with real anticipation. If you are on a panel, read the resume before the camera turns on. I promise the surprise will still be there if you save it for the birthday party.

And if you are unemployed, I hope you find a reason to laugh today without feeling that laughter means you are not taking the search seriously. You can be frustrated and hopeful at the same time. You can dislike the process and still show up professionally. You can need the next paycheck without allowing anyone to talk to you as if you were a nuisance for asking questions. Maybe the breakthrough arrives tomorrow. Maybe it takes longer. Either way, your worth did not begin with your last title and it will not end with the next rejection email.

That is the reason I keep writing The Interview Games. I want the absurdity to be impossible to ignore and the people experiencing it to be impossible to forget. Thank you to everyone who shares a story, trusts me with a difficult moment, celebrates another candidate's success and sends a message that says, "I needed this today." I hear you. I hope the companies reading hear you too. Until next week, be kind, ask better questions, and for the love of everything professional, stop making candidates create a new login just to upload a resume you already have. Somebody in IT has enough problems.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS**Behind every application is somebody's real life.**

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES