



SEPTEMBER 21 - SEPTEMBER 27, 2026

# THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

54

ORIGINAL POSTS

7

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

108

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

**WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT**

# The experiment behind every story.

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The Interview Games began with a question that should not require a research project: what does modern hiring feel like when you are the candidate? Not the glossy recruiting video, not the company mission statement, and not the slide deck describing the “world-class candidate experience.” I mean the full journey: finding a role, applying, being screened, speaking to real people, waiting for a decision, and sometimes never hearing another word.

I apply for real opportunities, test different ways of presenting the same truthful experience, take the assessments, attend the interviews, and pay attention to the small moments that reveal how a company operates. Some employers are excellent. Others make the application feel like a password-reset simulation designed by a committee that lost its meeting invitation. Either way, I write about what happened so candidates and leaders can see the process from the same side of the screen.

People know these stories for the sarcasm and the jokes. The jokes are deliberate. Humor can make an uncomfortable truth easier to recognize: a recruiter who disappears, a panel that feels like a courtroom, a candidate who is expected to prepare for hours while the interviewer does not arrive on time. But behind each punchline is a human being who has taken time out of their day and put real hope into a possible next chapter.

The week of September 21-27 was a particularly telling mix: rapid rejections, strange panel dynamics, questions about pay and references, candidate conversations about layoffs, coffee-shop observations, and hands-on experiments with employers including Amazon, Walgreens, Lowe’s, Disney and Starbucks. There were reader letters that deserved seriousness, and corporate moments that practically wrote their own jokes.

This edition reproduces every original LinkedIn post found in my export for the week, in chronological Chicago time. Before each is an editorial note describing what appears to have triggered the piece and the point I wanted to make. Those notes are interpretations of the posts; the posts themselves remain the text I published. Thanks for following along and for making the experiment about more than any one application.

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OPEN ANY STORY BY SELECTING THE TITLE

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# The Job Search That Makes You Question Reality

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The grind of applying for work, matching the requirements and then receiving an impersonal automated rejection became the starting point for this reflection.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make the emotional absurdity of job hunting recognizable and remind capable people that automated replies are not a verdict on their abilities.

Job hunting has a special way of making you question everything you know about yourself, including whether you actually exist.

One minute you're reading a job description thinking, "I have done every single one of these things," and the next minute an automated email arrives at 4:17 a.m. informing you that after careful consideration, they have decided to move forward with someone who apparently descended from the heavens carrying 14 certifications, 22 years of experience, and the ability to operate Excel telepathically.

And somehow, you keep going. You update the resume again. You change one word because a website told you "managed" is tired and "spearheaded" will apparently unlock corporate paradise. You upload the resume, then retype the entire resume into the application because technology can put a robot on Mars but still can't remember where I worked in 2019. Then comes the personality assessment asking whether you strongly agree that stealing office furniture is inappropriate. I click "strongly agree," mostly because carrying a

conference table to the parking lot seems exhausting.

Then you wait. You check your email. Nothing. You check LinkedIn. Someone you went to high school with just became Senior Executive Global Vice President of Strategic Synergy. Good for Brad. Brad used to eat glue.

But here is the part job hunting sometimes makes us forget: rejection does not erase experience. Ghosting does not cancel talent. A recruiter disappearing after telling you that you were "exactly what they were looking for" does not mean you forgot how to do your job. Sometimes hiring is messy. Sometimes budgets change. Sometimes an internal candidate was already sitting in the chair while you were polishing your interview shoes. And sometimes the process is simply held together with duct tape, calendars, and one exhausted HR coordinator named Denise.

Keep going anyway. Not because every company deserves another hour of your time, but because eventually one opportunity will line up with the right person, the right

timing, and the right room. You do not need every hiring manager to understand your value. You need one good match to recognize what you bring and give you the chance to prove it.

So laugh when you can. Take a break when you need one. Close LinkedIn. Go outside. Get coffee. Talk to people who remind you that you are more than an applicant tracking system score. And when another rejection email appears, read it, sigh dramatically, maybe blame the raccoon who clearly sabotaged your application, and move forward.

Your career is bigger than one application, one interview, one recruiter, or one company that decided to "pursue other candidates." The job search can bruise your confidence, but it does not get to define your worth. Keep applying. Keep laughing. Keep showing up. Somewhere out there is a hiring manager who is going to look at your experience and think, "Finally." And when that happens, Brad can keep his strategic synergy.

# A Rejection Email Written in Corporate Riddles

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shared a strange response to an application for a Senior Payroll Manager role, framed in language about changes within the business.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to decode vague hiring language and ask companies to communicate decisions in a way people can actually understand.

I'm starting to think job seekers need a translator, a lawyer, and possibly an archaeologist just to understand rejection emails now.

A reader sent me a message after applying for a Senior Payroll Manager role. She received what looked like a normal status update and instead got a corporate riddle. The company explained that "changes within the business" meant they were no longer recruiting for the role. Fair enough. Companies change plans. Budgets move. Positions get frozen. Entire departments occasionally disappear faster than snacks in the break room.

Then came the sentence that made her stop and ask me what it even meant: they would "love to consider" her for another position. That sounds encouraging. Maybe there is another role. Maybe a recruiter is about to call. Nope!! The next sentence basically said: please visit our website and explore all open job opportunities. So, just to make sure I understand modern hiring, you applied for a job, the job vanished, the company says it would

love to consider you for another job, but apparently you must now wander back onto the careers page, locate this mysterious other job yourself, create another application, upload the same resume, retype the same resume, answer whether you are legally authorized to work for the 47th time, and hope the next position exists long enough for somebody to read it.

This is the part that worries me. Not because a company canceled a position. That happens. What worries me is how often candidate communication sounds warm and hopeful while saying almost nothing. "We'd love to consider you" should mean something. It should mean, "We have another role in mind," or, "A recruiter will contact you," or, "Here are openings that fit your background." It should not translate to, "The internet is over there. Best of luck."

Job seekers are already navigating automated rejections, disappearing postings, assessments, one way video interviews, ghosting, reposted jobs and systems that need your resume in PDF form and then

demand the same information in 12 separate text boxes.

I'm sharing her story because she genuinely wondered whether she was missing something. She wasn't. The message was polite, but it basically left her standing at the front door of the hiring process while someone inside yelled, "We'd love to have you back sometime!" and then turned off the porch light.

If companies truly want to keep strong candidates in their pipeline, tell them what happens next. Connect them to a recruiter. Point them toward a specific role. Give them something more useful than a scavenger hunt through the careers page. Because at this point, "We'd love to consider you for another position" feels less like recruiting and more like a restaurant saying, "Come see us again," after handing you the receipt and locking the door.

She wanted to know if there was another job waiting for her. From the email alone, it looks like the only position currently available is Full Time Website Explorer.

# Reply All: Corporate America's Most Dangerous Button

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Remembering the early days of corporate email made me think of how quickly a harmless office-wide message can become a sprawling reply-all disaster.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to turn a universal workplace annoyance into a shared laugh about how communication tools create more communication.

I remember when I first stepped into the corporate world and thought email was supposed to make communication faster. That was adorable. Nobody warned me about Reply All.

If you have ever worked in corporate, you know Reply All is not a button. It is a weapon. One person sends a harmless message saying, "The printer on the third floor is down," and within six minutes 47 people are involved, HR has an opinion, and a vice president replies, "Please remove me from this chain," while replying to the entire chain.

Then somebody responds, "You can remove yourself by clicking the three dots." Reply All. Another person says, "Thanks." Reply All. Somebody from another state asks, "Is this affecting our location?" By 10:30 a.m., your inbox has 83 unread messages about a printer you have never seen, in a building you have never visited, 900 miles away.

Corporate life also introduced me to the meeting about the meeting. This is where productivity reaches its final form. You get a calendar invitation titled "Quick Alignment."

That meeting exists to prepare for tomorrow's "Strategy Discussion," which is preparation for Friday's "Leadership Sync," where everyone will discuss what should be discussed at next Tuesday's "Execution Meeting." At some point you realize nobody has actually executed anything because everyone has been in meetings discussing how efficiently they plan to execute things once the meetings stop.

My favorite was the pre meeting. Someone would say, "Can we jump on for 15 minutes before the meeting so we're all aligned?" Absolutely. Because nothing says efficiency like scheduling a meeting to make sure we understand the meeting we are about to attend. Then the 15 minute pre meeting becomes 42 minutes because someone shares a spreadsheet. Now everyone is late to the actual meeting, which begins with, "I know we covered this earlier, but let's go around the room."

Corporate people know "go around the room" is where time officially leaves the building. Twelve people give the same update using different combinations of bandwidth,

visibility, ownership, cadence, alignment, and circle back. Another is frozen on Teams but somehow still nodding. Kevin has been talking for nine minutes and nobody knows what Kevin actually does.

Then, just when you think freedom is near, someone says the most dangerous words in corporate America: "We should schedule a follow up." Of course we should. Because nothing was decided. Now there is another meeting to review the notes from the meeting that followed the pre meeting about the original meeting. Someone sends those notes by email, someone accidentally hits Reply All, and 63 employees spend the afternoon begging to be removed from a conversation.

Corporate efficiency is incredible. We can take a five minute decision, add Outlook, Teams, PowerPoint, six managers, and one person saying "Let's take this offline," and somehow turn it into a three week initiative. And somewhere, that printer is still broken.

# The Ex-Boss LinkedIn Viewing Convention

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The response to an earlier post about a toxic former boss viewing my LinkedIn profile prompted more stories from former employees.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how common the awkward afterlife of a toxic working relationship can be, and give others permission to laugh at it.

Apparently, nothing brings former employees together quite like discovering that an ex toxic boss still knows how to use LinkedIn.

The other day I wrote about a former boss quietly visiting my profile, and I expected a few laughs, maybe a couple of people saying, “Yep, been there.” Instead, the comments turned into what felt like a national convention for people who have escaped questionable leadership. People were blocking old bosses. People were checking who viewed their profile. People were sharing stories about managers who suddenly developed world class investigative skills the second an employee left. Apparently, once you resign, some bosses stop managing the business and become unpaid detectives with excellent Wi Fi.

What made me laugh was how many people immediately understood the situation. No message. No connection request. No “Hope you’re doing well.” Just the silent profile visit. That tiny little LinkedIn notification that says, “Someone from your past has entered the building.” And suddenly you are wondering whether they are curious, bored, checking whether

you failed, or sitting in a dark office whispering, “Interesting... he posted again.” Meanwhile, you are just trying to drink coffee and live your life while your former management team conducts a digital wildlife documentary from the bushes.

One person said they blocked their toxic ex boss completely because they did not trust them not to interfere with something good. That hit differently. Because behind all the jokes, that is why so many people related. A bad boss does not always disappear from your nervous system the day you leave. Sometimes you still see their name and immediately remember the Sunday night anxiety, the unnecessary calls, the emergency that somehow became yours, and the meeting scheduled to discuss why everyone was having too many meetings.

And then comes the funny part: you leave, rebuild your peace, start enjoying weekends again, stop explaining problems you did not create, and suddenly the person who barely had time to listen to you when you worked there somehow has enough time to study your career like it is a Netflix

documentary. They know your new title. They know what you posted. They know who commented. At this point, I am expecting them to send me a quarterly report on my own life.

So to everyone who commented, laughed, shared a story, or quietly thought, “Wait, mine does that too,” congratulations. We have discovered a new corporate position: Former Boss, Director of Post Employment Surveillance. The salary is apparently zero, the workload is self assigned, and the main responsibility is checking whether the employee you underestimated is doing suspiciously well without you.

And if an ex boss is reading this right now, welcome back. No need to hide in the bushes. The profile is public, the coffee is hot, and yes, we are still doing fine. Please remember to like the post before submitting your surveillance report. Please brief headquarters.

# When Work Friends Enter Witness Protection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The sudden silence of coworkers after someone leaves or loses a job raised questions about how quickly workplace friendships can change.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to distinguish real personal support from proximity created by a shared employer and to acknowledge how painful that silence can feel.

Nobody tells you that leaving a job can apparently trigger a corporate witness protection program. One Friday, you are exchanging memes during a meeting, sharing lunch, complaining about the same manager, and sending “call me before I respond to this email” messages.

By Monday, your badge stops working and suddenly half the people who knew your coffee order, your kids’ names have vanished like the building was raided by the FBI. These were your work wife, work husband, lunch partner, emergency therapist, snack supplier, and the person who quietly warned you when you were about to say something in a meeting that might end up in HR.

You spent years together. You survived deadlines, late nights, weekend projects, and campaigns that somehow required seventeen revisions because one executive decided the logo needed to be “more exciting.” You celebrated birthdays, weddings, babies, promotions. At some point, these people stopped feeling like coworkers. They felt like

actual friends. Then you get laid off, resign, or your position gets “restructured.” Suddenly, silence. No call. No text. No “I heard what happened.” Nothing.

Then years later you are job hunting and discover that one of your former work buddies now works at a company with an opening that fits you perfectly. You send a message: “Hey! Long time. I saw your company is hiring. Would love to catch up and get your thoughts.” Silence. You text. Silence. You try LinkedIn. More silence. Now you start wondering whether this person was ever real or just a corporate hologram. Your brain launches an investigation. Did I annoy them? Did I say something in 2019? Did they secretly hate me while we were splitting mozzarella sticks at happy hour? Was our entire friendship based on proximity to a printer?

Apparently, some work friendships come with invisible expiration dates. Valid only while both employees have active badges, matching email domains, and access to the same break room. Nothing stress tests a five year friendship

quite like asking someone to spend thirty seconds forwarding a resume.

The same person who once called you at 10:30 p.m. because a PowerPoint font looked weird suddenly cannot locate the reply button. But job searching also shows you who the real ones are. Those are the people who answer years later like no time passed. “Send me your resume.” “I know someone.” “Let me introduce you.” “How can I help?” They remind you that not every workplace relationship was temporary corporate theater. Funny how five years of friendship can disappear faster than free donuts in the break room.

Some people really were your friends. They care even when there is no shared deadline, lunch break, Teams chat, or manager forcing everyone into the same building. Maybe that is the easiest way to tell the difference. A coworker remembers you while you share a building. A work friend remembers you after your badge stops working. Everyone else was apparently just office furniture with a LinkedIn profile.

# Strong Negotiators, Unless They Negotiate Pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The contradiction between job ads praising negotiation skills and employers reacting badly to salary negotiation stood out.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to see that a candidate advocating for fair compensation may be showing the very confidence they claim to seek.

Apparently, the hiring process has reached a fascinating stage where companies want “strong negotiators,” “strategic thinkers,” and “confident leaders,” right up until one of those people negotiates their own salary.

Then suddenly everybody gets nervous, HR starts blinking slowly, and Finance acts like you just asked for ownership of the building.

A company can spend weeks telling you how impressed they are. You survive the recruiter screen, hiring manager, panel interview, assessment, case study, and the mysterious “quick conversation” with an executive whose role is never fully explained. Then finally the phone rings. “We loved meeting you. The team thinks you would be a great fit. We would love to have you join us.” Fantastic. Then comes the offer, and somehow that first number is presented like it was carved into a stone tablet by Finance.

You politely ask, “Is there any flexibility in the salary?” Suddenly the energy changes. Apparently negotiating your salary is perfectly

normal until you actually do it. Then it becomes a personality concern. Apparently one polite counteroffer can make the compensation committee react like you personally launched a hostile takeover. The company says it wants confidence, so you show confidence. “Not like that.” They want someone who understands their value, so you explain your value. “Okay, but we hoped you would understand it silently.”

What makes this especially funny is that many of these jobs literally require negotiation. They want you negotiating contracts, pricing, vendors, leases, customers, property owners, and multimillion dollar agreements. But when you negotiate a few thousand dollars for yourself, suddenly everyone needs to “circle back internally.”

We negotiate houses. We negotiate cars. Companies negotiate contracts every day. Nobody buys a commercial property and says, “Well, that was the first number they gave us, so obviously we must respect the sacred process.” Yet candidates are expected to receive an offer, smile politely, whisper

“thank you for choosing me,” and sign before the PDF finishes loading.

And if you counter, somehow you risk being called difficult. Difficult? No. I am negotiating. I also doubt every executive looked at their first offer and said, “Perfect. No questions about salary, bonus, PTO, title, equity, or benefits. Where do I surrender?”

Negotiation is not rejection. It is not disrespect. It is not greed. It is two adults discussing the terms of a business relationship. A company can say, “This is what we believe the role is worth.” A candidate should be able to say, “This is what I believe my experience is worth.” That conversation should not trigger a corporate emergency meeting.

Because if you want employees who can advocate for your company, protect margins, negotiate hard, and confidently represent the business, maybe do not panic when they demonstrate those exact skills before their first day.

Sometimes salary negotiation is part of the interview too.

# Careful Consideration in Record Time

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader shared an exceptionally quick rejection despite extensive senior-level experience, raising doubts about the phrase careful consideration.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question whether screening processes give experienced applicants a meaningful review and to make the contradiction visible.

Apparently, “careful consideration” now takes less time than reheating leftovers, and somehow that sentence perfectly sums up hiring in 2026.

Someone messaged me with a story that would be hilarious if it weren’t becoming so painfully normal. She’s a senior executive with 20+ years of experience, including years in tax and accounting technology. This wasn’t one of those applications where someone meets three requirements and says, “Close enough, I once sat near a printer.” She read the role and thought, I actually match this. So she did exactly what candidates are told to do: spent an hour tailoring her resume, wrote a cover letter, and entered a salary expectation right in the middle of the posted range.

At 5:05 p.m., she received the cheerful confirmation email thanking her for applying and telling her she could track the status online. Great. Maybe there would be a recruiter call. Maybe an interview. Maybe seven interviews and a PowerPoint. At approximately 5:30 p.m., the journey ended. Rejected. Twenty five minutes. Apparently, somewhere in that tiny window,

decades of experience were reviewed, evaluated, blessed by the algorithm, and launched into the rejection folder.

“After careful consideration.” I have spent longer deciding what sandwich I want. Nobody outside that company can say exactly what happened internally. Maybe there was a knockout question. Maybe someone reviewed the application at Olympic speed. Maybe an algorithm made the decision. Maybe a raccoon wearing an HR badge hit reject while looking for snacks. We don’t know. But candidates are noticing patterns, especially experienced candidates watching highly relevant applications disappear before there is ever a human conversation.

People spend hours tailoring resumes, writing cover letters, completing assessments, creating accounts, retyping the resume they literally just uploaded, and answering questions already sitting on page one. Then, sometimes within minutes, the automated rejection arrives. Before you even close the browser tab, the system has apparently decided your entire

professional life can be summarized as, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

Then companies turn around and say, “We just can’t find qualified people.” They’re out here. They’re applying. They’re doing everything candidates have been told to do. For older, highly experienced workers, the silence can feel even heavier because you start wondering whether anyone actually saw the experience, or whether technology decided the story before a person had the chance to hear it.

Technology can make hiring faster. Fine. But faster is not automatically smarter, fairer, or more human. If companies want candidates to spend an hour carefully applying, candidates deserve to believe “careful consideration” means more than twenty five minutes and an automated goodbye. Eventually people stop believing there is a talent shortage. They start wondering whether the talent is being filtered out before anyone bothers to meet it.

# The Panel Interview That Felt Like an Audition

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A seemingly successful panel discussion, complete with laughter and positive reactions, still left the candidate uncertain about what would follow.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to capture the gap between interview chemistry and an actual hiring decision without pretending that warm feedback guarantees an offer.

Panel interviews are one of the few places where you can make six grown adults laugh, answer every question, build chemistry with the room, and still walk out feeling like you just auditioned for a movie called “We’ll Be in Touch.”

The other day I went through one of those panel interviews where everything seemed to be going well. I had the hiring managers laughing, people were nodding, the conversation was flowing, and somehow we even got onto the subject of a raccoon. I thought, this is it. I cracked the hiring code. Forget STAR answers. Apparently the secret is experience and one well timed raccoon story.

Then came the sentence: “We still have a lot of candidates to interview.” Of course you do. Nothing brings an interview back to Earth faster than being reminded there are 47 other contestants backstage preparing their own woodland animal material. Then they added, “We had a lot of people apply.” That is corporate hiring language for: “You were great, Alex. Unfortunately, somewhere out there is another person with the same

experience, who wants \$30,000 less and possibly owns a raccoon.”

I smiled and said I understood. Internally, I wondered how funny I needed to be to eliminate the remaining candidates. Should I have brought props? A PowerPoint? A live raccoon wearing a tie? Maybe a spreadsheet showing the raccoon’s first ninety day plan? Panel interviews are fascinating because for an hour everyone behaves like you already work there. They laugh at your jokes, tell you about the team, explain the challenges, and somebody says, “You’d really like our culture.” Your brain immediately starts decorating the imaginary office.

Then right before you leave, they remind you that you are Candidate Number 14 and tomorrow they are meeting Candidate Number 15, who probably has six certifications and rescues raccoons during lunch. Companies say they want personality, leadership, experience, culture fit, and communication skills. You show up and do exactly that. Everyone laughs. Everyone connects. Everyone seems impressed. Then somebody says,

“We still have eleven more interviews.”

Fantastic. Apparently I did not attend a job interview. I performed the opening act at a corporate talent show. I am not mad about companies interviewing multiple people. They should. What gets me is the emotional whiplash. One minute the panel is laughing like we are all going to happy hour. The next minute you are reminded there is a waiting room full of people ready to explain how they increased EBITDA, transformed culture, saved a failing division, and wrestled a bear before breakfast.

So I left feeling good, but realistic. Maybe I get the job. Maybe someone else gets it. Maybe the raccoon gets it.

And if I receive that familiar email saying, “We decided to move forward with another candidate,” I am going to assume the raccoon interviewed after me, asked for less money, had stronger Excel skills, and already knew the hiring manager. Honestly, I would hire him too!!

# If Telling the Truth Costs Me an Opportunity

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Warnings about discussing toxic bosses and broken hiring systems prompted a reflection on whether silence should be a condition of employability.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to know that respectful candor about workplace problems can coexist with professionalism and personal standards.

I've reached the point in my career where "What if they don't like what you say?" is no longer the threat people think it is. If telling the truth about toxic leadership, broken hiring, or terrible workplace behavior ruins an opportunity, maybe that opportunity came with a hidden requirement: smile, nod, and never make important people uncomfortable.

People ask me all the time, "Aren't you afraid you're ruining your chances? What if a company sees your posts? What if you get blacklisted?" Of course I think about it. I'm not walking around LinkedIn wearing a cape made out of rejected applications yelling, "COME AT ME, HUMAN RESOURCES." Screenshots travel. One post can make its way through six departments, three executives, and one guy who left in 2017 but still has opinions.

But I also know what silence costs. I've sat in rooms where everyone knew something was wrong and nobody wanted to say it first. I've watched bad leaders embarrass people, blame employees for problems they created, and call it

"accountability." I've watched good people work nights and weekends only to be told they weren't committed enough. I've watched talented employees question themselves because one manager controlled the story. Everybody knows. The group chat knows. Even the printer knows, and that thing has been offline since the Obama administration.

Speaking up can cost opportunities. Maybe someone reads my posts and decides I'm not a "culture fit." Maybe an executive sees my name and becomes interested in my LinkedIn activity. Maybe there is a spreadsheet titled, "Do Not Invite Alex," with a note that says, "Will ask follow up questions." I can live with that. If an opportunity only exists as long as I stay quiet about bad leadership, pretend nonsense is strategy, and clap while someone treats people like office supplies, I'm not sure that was an opportunity I wanted.

I don't speak up because I think I'm fearless. I speak up because I remember watching people leave companies believing they failed

when the environment failed them. I remember people being talked over, pushed aside, ignored, or quietly managed out. I remember how easily one toxic leader can make a smart person question their value. Eventually, silence starts feeling less like professionalism and more like participation.

So yes, maybe speaking up has ruined a few chances. Maybe I've been blacklisted somewhere. Maybe a recruiter has read one of my posts, closed the laptop, and whispered, "Absolutely not." That's okay. I'm not burning bridges. I'm just no longer willing to live under one because somebody might get uncomfortable. The older I get, the less interested I am in rooms where the price of admission is pretending not to notice what everyone can see.

Maybe honesty costs me a seat at a few tables. I can live with that I'd rather be remembered as the person who said what everyone else was whispering than the person who stayed quiet because the next title looked shiny.

I'll bring my own chair.

# Still Employed Somehow Arrives at Barnes & Noble

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The availability of my book Still Employed Somehow through Barnes & Noble offered a chance to celebrate the corporate satire in print.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to share the book with people who understand the absurdity of office culture and have a quick laugh along the way.

Somehow, Barnes & Noble, Inc. looked at my book about broken printers, mysterious promotions, useless meetings, and corporate chaos and said, “Yes. Put that on the shelf.”

So now Still Employed Somehow is officially available there. Perfect gift for anyone who has ever heard “we’re a family here” and immediately updated their resume. Buy a copy before Kevin becomes your vice president.

<https://lnkd.in/gydsfqr4>

# The Secret Translation of Job Descriptions

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Reading employer phrases that mean something quite different to the candidate sparked another round of corporate-language translation.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to expose the meaning hiding inside familiar job-description buzzwords and encourage employers to write more plainly.

Somewhere between clicking “Apply” and questioning every career decision I have ever made, I perform a ritual that has become necessary in 2026: I decode the job description.

I do not read it anymore. I translate it. I may start charging translation fees soon. Job descriptions are written in a secret corporate language where every pleasant phrase has a second meaning. “Fast paced environment” usually means nobody has time to train you. “Wear many hats” means congratulations, you are now operations, sales, customer service, IT, facilities, and the person fixing the microwave.

“Self starter” means your manager may disappear after your first week. “Comfortable with ambiguity” means nobody knows what is going on, but they need you to look confident while everyone searches for the spreadsheet. “Competitive salary” is my favorite. Competitive with what? Rent? Inflation? TikTok? If the salary is truly competitive, why is it hiding like it owes somebody money?

Then I get to “other duties as assigned.” That phrase can turn a regional manager into an event

planner, moving crew, printer technician, therapist, and birthday cake coordinator before lunch. And whenever I see “we are like a family,” I need clarification. Which family? The Addams Family? The Sopranos? The family that has not invited Uncle Kevin to Thanksgiving since the incident?

I read every line like I am investigating a crime scene. I compare the title to the responsibilities. I count words like “dynamic,” “resilient,” and “urgent.” By the fourth “resilient,” I assume the previous employee escaped through a bathroom window.

Then come the qualifications. Bachelor’s degree. MBA. Ten years of leadership. Multi unit experience. Salesforce. Workday. SAP. Oracle. Advanced Excel. Recruiting. Coaching. CPR. Forklift certification. Travel 70 percent. At this point I am no longer applying for Director of Operations. I am joining the Avengers.

Then compensation appears: \$58,000 to \$142,000 depending on experience. Excellent. Apparently the salary range was created by throwing darts at a wall.

The funniest part is getting to the interview and discovering the hiring manager reads the posting differently too. Suddenly we are both staring at the same description like archaeologists wondering who wrote it and why one human being is expected to perform the work of nine departments.

So before I hit Apply, I translate. “Rockstar” means overworked. “Ninja” means underpaid. “Entrepreneurial mindset” means build it yourself. “Unlimited PTO” means try asking for Friday off and see what happens. “Growth opportunity” means the salary may eventually catch up with your grocery bill.

Job hunting now requires more than a resume. You need reading comprehension, financial analysis, detective skills, corporate archaeology, and occasionally wildlife survival. If I ever find a posting that simply says, “Here is the job. Here is the salary. Here is your boss. We are normal,” I will immediately assume it is a scam.

POST 12 / TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

WORKPLACE CULTURE

# When Your Toxic Ex-Boss Sends a Friend Request

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A surprise Facebook friend request from a toxic former boss reopened an old workplace relationship I thought had ended.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explore the strange boundary between being professionally connected and giving someone personal access after the working relationship is over.

The other day, Facebook handed me a notification that made me stare at my phone like it had just served me a legal summons. My toxic ex boss sent me a friend request.

Recruiters disappearing after telling me I was a “great fit.” Companies rejecting me at 4:07 a.m. LinkedIn informing me that someone from an old workplace viewed my profile five minutes after I posted something about bad leadership. But seeing my former boss suddenly appear on Facebook felt less like social networking and more like the first scene of a documentary called, “Why Is This Man Looking for Me?” Then I found out he had searched for “Interview Games.” That is when I laughed.

Because nothing says, “I absolutely do not care what my former employee is doing,” quite like opening Facebook, typing the name of the thing your former employee is building, finding the page, finding the person, clicking the profile, and then sending a friend request. That is not casually stumbling across somebody. That is reconnaissance. I genuinely had to admire the

commitment. That is basically competitive intelligence with a profile picture. I can picture the entire process. Open Facebook. Search “Interview Games.” Scroll. Find me. Click profile. Scroll a little more. Pretend not to care. Care even harder. Maybe whisper, “Interesting.” Then hit “Add Friend” like we are about to reconnect over childhood memories instead of years of corporate nonsense.

Toxic bosses have a funny habit of believing that once someone leaves, that person is supposed to disappear. We are expected to move on, never discuss what happened, never grow from it, never build anything interesting, and never create an audience. Apparently former employees are supposed to remain frozen where management last saw them, like abandoned office furniture nobody bothered to inventory. Unfortunately, I did not receive that policy update. I kept moving. I kept writing. I kept testing hiring processes. I created Interview Games. And somewhere along the way, the same person I once worked for apparently typed those two

words into Facebook and went looking.

Honestly, I am not even mad. It may be the funniest endorsement I never asked for. Marketing departments spend thousands of dollars trying to build brand awareness. Apparently I achieved it by leaving a toxic workplace, talking about hiring, and being sarcastic on the internet. Maybe I should add it to the promotional material: “Interview Games: now being searched by former bosses who do not care.” The friend request is what really makes me laugh because I keep wondering what the plan was. Were we going to reconnect? Trade recipes? Compare leadership philosophies? Share vacation pictures? Was he going to like one of my posts about toxic management and accidentally open a portal in the space time continuum?

I think we already had our season together, and the writers ended that storyline for a reason. Still, welcome to Interview Games. Apparently even former management is watching.

# The Coffee Cup Character Witness

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The idea that carrying a coffee into an interview could be judged more heavily than the interview process itself became an absurdity worth examining.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge superficial professionalism tests and refocus attention on skills, behavior and the substance of the conversation.

At some point, job interviews became so delicate that apparently a cup of coffee can now become a character witness.

You can spend an hour researching the company, memorizing the job description, practicing answers, printing copies of your resume and mentally preparing to explain your greatest weakness without accidentally saying, “this entire hiring process.” But walk into the lobby holding a latte and suddenly somebody is wondering whether you possess the professionalism required to operate inside modern civilization. Apparently the coffee is the issue. Not the seven round interview process. Not the personality assessment asking whether I strongly agree that stealing office supplies is wrong. Not the application where I uploaded my resume and then manually typed the exact same resume into 47 separate boxes. No. We have finally located the real threat to corporate America: a medium coffee with two creams.

Personally, if I show up on time, prepared, engaged, and caffeinated, I feel like we are already off to a strong start. Depending on how

many rounds you have scheduled, that coffee may be the only reason I remain conscious long enough to meet another executive and Kevin, whose role remains a mystery. And please do not tell me the coffee looks “too casual.” Half the interview panel is joining from home wearing a company polo on top and mystery pants below the camera. Someone is muted. Someone else cannot find the presentation. The hiring manager says, “Can everyone hear me?” six times. But yes, let us discuss my beverage.

I understand one rule: do not be late because you stopped for coffee. That is different. If your interview starts at 9:00 and you stroll in at 9:17 holding a caramel masterpiece with whipped cream and your name on the cup, you have created your own documentary evidence. But simply bringing coffee? Relax. We have reached a point where candidates are analyzing whether to bring a notebook, where to place their hands, how long to maintain eye contact, whether saying “thank you” twice sounds desperate, and apparently now whether hydration could destroy their career. Next we will have interview etiquette consultants telling us the acceptable

number of sips per competency question.

“Alex demonstrated strong leadership, but unfortunately he took three drinks during the culture fit portion. We went with another candidate.” At my next interview, I will arrive completely beverage free. No coffee. No water. Nothing that could suggest I possess human organs requiring hydration. I will sit perfectly still, smile professionally, and answer every question while slowly turning into a raisin. Then, when they ask whether I have any questions, I will have only one: “Does the benefits package include fluids, or is that after the 90 day probation period?”

Because if my coffee is enough to close the door, keep the door closed. I will be across the street at Starbucks, preparing emotionally for the rejection email that will arrive at 4:07 a.m.

# I Am Not Starting a Search Party for Your Reply

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Reflecting on messages and follow-ups that never receive an answer brought me back to the difference between effort and chasing someone.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind readers that their time has value and that basic responsiveness should not require detective work.

There comes a point in life when chasing people starts to feel less like persistence and more like you accidentally accepted a side job in private investigation.

I sent the message. I made the call. I followed up. I even gave the internet enough time to recover from whatever mysterious outage apparently affects only replies to me. If I still hear crickets, I am not putting on a trench coat, hiring a bloodhound, and tracking someone through LinkedIn like they disappeared with the company payroll. I used to think repeated followups showed determination. Now I think they mostly prove I have Wi-Fi and questionable boundaries. If someone needs six reminders to remember I exist, I am not building a relationship. I am becoming a notification they swipe away while eating lunch.

I believe in making an effort. I believe in reaching out. I believe in following up once because emails do occasionally vanish into the same unexplained dimension where missing socks, printer toner, and recruiter promises go to die. But after that, I am finished. The ball is

no longer in my court. I have closed the court, sold the bleachers, and replaced the entire property with a Costco.

This applies to networking, friendships, business, and especially job hunting. Companies love saying, “We value proactive communication.” Wonderful. So you send a thank you email. Silence. You follow up. Silence. You check the application portal and it still says “Under consideration” like you are being reviewed by the Supreme Court. Three weeks later, the same job is reposted. At that point, what exactly would you like me to do? Send a carrier pigeon? Hire a skywriter? Release a raccoon into the lobby wearing a tiny badge that says, “Just circling back”?

Eventually, dignity has to enter the conversation. The same goes for networking. If I reach out and genuinely try to connect and hear nothing, I assume one of three things: you are busy, you are not interested, or Outlook has taken you hostage. All three are acceptable. What I am not doing is sending seven messages that slowly evolve from “Hope you’re doing well” to “I

have contacted your emergency contact.”

Time matters. Energy matters. Attention matters. Spend all three on people who actually participate in the relationship. Reach out. Be kind. Make the effort. But do not confuse persistence with performing CPR on a conversation that has been legally dead since last Tuesday.

If someone wants to connect, they will eventually meet you halfway. If they do not, wish them well and keep moving. There are billions of people on this planet. You do not need to chase one person through LinkedIn like they are the final shopping cart at Aldi during a snowstorm.

My self respect does not come with an unlimited follow up budget. At some point, “just checking in” starts sounding like a hostage negotiation, and I refuse to bring snacks to my own captivity. I will knock once. Maybe twice. After that, I assume the meeting about the meeting ran long.

# How Did LinkedIn Help You Get That Job?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Seeing celebratory posts proclaiming that LinkedIn helped someone get hired made me wonder what the platform actually did in the process.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to poke fun at networking mythology while asking a serious question about how people really move from visibility to interviews.

Every so often, LinkedIn serves me a sentence that makes me stop scrolling and stare at the screen like I've witnessed a miracle certified by HR: "LinkedIn helped me get this job."

Oh did it? Did LinkedIn help, or were you selected by recruiter sorcerers while the rest of us are still getting ghosted by Kayla from Talent Acquisition after sending thank you notes into the void?

Because whenever I see that post, I need details. HOW did LinkedIn help you? Did you post something about "growth mindset" while standing in front of a lake and a VP somewhere whispered, "Hire them. That's six figure energy"? Did you create a 17 slide carousel called "My Journey from Burnout to Boardroom," ending with a Canva headshot and 400 clapping emojis?

Meanwhile, I'm over here endorsing strangers for "team synergy" and "strategic leadership" hoping the algorithm decides I'm emotionally available for employment. You say LinkedIn helped you, but I need specifics. Was it your humble brag about an "unexpected layoff" becoming a "beautiful opportunity to realign with your purpose"? Was

it when you uploaded your resume, a PowerPoint, and a personality quiz? Because I did all that too, and the only message I got was from an AI bot inviting me to a webinar titled "5 Ways to Be More Hireable By Looking Slightly Taller on Zoom."

Did LinkedIn slide into your DMs with a fully formed offer letter and benefits package? Or was it Karen from college who liked your post and commented, "So proud of you!!!" even though you haven't spoken since the Bush administration? Let's be honest. Half the time, "LinkedIn helped me get this job" really means, "I knew someone, begged them privately, submitted a resume through three back channels, waited six months, interviewed with 19 people, sacrificed a goat, and THEN got a call back."

But that caption hits different. It always starts the same: "After months of searching, I'm thrilled to announce..." And I clap. I do. I like the post. I comment "Congrats!" I send a virtual high five while eating cereal in sweatpants and wondering if I, too, should post a blurry photo of myself smiling in front of a white

wall with the caption "Trust the process."

But let's not pretend LinkedIn has some magical shortcut. Sometimes it feels less like a job board and more like a high pressure talent show where the only applause comes from your old manager who still thinks you're "too creative for structure." And still, we're here. Posting. Endorsing. Reacting. Crafting summaries that say "passionate self starter" instead of "mildly panicked human who desperately needs health insurance."

So if you did get a job through LinkedIn, good for you. You're a unicorn. A LinkedIn legend. A miracle in a blazer. But for the rest of us, we'll keep refreshing our feeds, stalking job posts with 329 applicants, and whispering into the algorithm, "Hey LinkedIn... can you help me too?" Because at this point, I'd settle for a job or a really good networking event with snacks.

# Starbucks, Caffeine and the Parking Lot Olympics

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A morning stop at a packed Starbucks made a supposedly simple coffee run feel like a competitive urban survival event.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to offer readers an everyday, funny pause from the stress and strange rituals of finding work.

This morning I went to my local Starbucks because apparently job hunting now requires caffeine, Wi-Fi, emotional support.

I pulled into the parking lot and immediately realized I had made a mistake. Every space was taken. Not busy taken. Packed like Starbucks was giving away free healthcare, signing bonuses, and jobs that only required one interview. Cars were circling like unemployed sharks, and a Honda and a Subaru looked seconds away from an HR investigation over the last parking spot.

Inside, the counter looked like a beverage distribution center during a national emergency. Mobile orders were stacked three generations deep. One tray looked like coffee for an entire LinkedIn department before a mandatory meeting about employee engagement. And there I was, waiting for my coffee while checking job postings on my phone. “Posted 12 minutes ago.” “437 applicants.” Of course. Nothing wakes you up quite like discovering 436 people saw the same Director of Operations posting.

I opened another job. Great title. Salary range wide enough to include both “buy a house” and “possibly live behind this Starbucks.” Then came the qualifications: 15 years of experience, MBA preferred, expert in six systems invented last Thursday, willing to travel 75%, nights and weekends, and somehow still described as an “exciting growth opportunity.” Then I looked outside and saw a raccoon wandering near the edge of the parking lot, and honestly, he looked more employable than I did.

No resume. No cover letter. No LinkedIn Premium. No Workday password reset. He wasn’t tailoring his garbage can experience to match the job description or wondering whether the ATS understood transferable skills. He just walked toward a dumpster like a Regional Vice President who already knew somebody on the board. I respected him immediately. Meanwhile, I’m holding a \$7 coffee, debating whether changing “managed” to “strategically led” will finally unlock the sacred recruiter portal. The raccoon found breakfast in three

minutes. I’ve been applying for jobs for months and still get emails beginning with, “After careful consideration...”

Careful consideration? Kevin, I applied at 10:42 PM and you rejected me at 10:43. Unless your hiring team includes time travelers, a psychic, and that raccoon, I’m not convinced there was a committee meeting. Eventually my drink was ready. I opened LinkedIn again and saw another inspirational post telling job seekers to “stay visible, stay positive, and trust the process.” Perfect. I was visible. I was caffeinated. I was positive the process had completely lost its mind. The raccoon had networked with a trash bag and was having a better morning.

So I drove home with my coffee, three saved job postings, two fresh rejections, and one important career lesson: maybe I don’t need another resume rewrite. Maybe I need a tiny mask, stronger dumpster skills, and the confidence of a raccoon who has never once asked permission to apply.

# When a Panel Interview Becomes Tinder

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An in-person panel interview appeared to go well before a subsequent text message introduced an unexpected personal element.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to underline how professional boundaries can become blurry after an interview and why candidates should not have to interpret mixed signals.

Nothing prepares you for modern job hunting like walking out of an in person panel interview feeling confident, only to discover the hiring process has partnered with Tinder.

The other day, I sat through one of those panel interviews where several leaders sit across from you with notebooks, and enough questions to make you wonder whether you are interviewing or testifying before Congress. I talked strategy, leadership, performance, and explained my career history enough times to start charging admission. They laughed. They nodded. One said, "That is exactly what we need." Another wrote something down, which I decided meant "hire him immediately."

Eventually, we wrapped up with the traditional corporate goodbye. Handshakes. "We have a few candidates to meet with, but we'll be in touch." Perfectly normal. Professional. I walked out feeling good. My phone buzzed. Maria, one of the hiring managers, had texted me: "Alex, you were amazing today. I really enjoyed meeting you. You have such a great personality, and I

have to say, you looked very good in person too :)"

Excuse me?! That was the exact moment my inner raccoon came out. My unemployed trash panda kicked open the dumpster lid, adjusted his tie, and whispered, "Well, this just got interesting."

I stared at my phone like Workday had suddenly asked me to upload my Tinder profile instead of my resume. Was this interview feedback? Another round? Was I supposed to respond with my availability, salary expectations, zodiac sign? Minutes earlier I was discussing EBITDA. Now my inner raccoon is pacing around my brain asking whether we swipe left or right on the hiring manager.

Nobody prepares you for this part. LinkedIn tells you to research the company. Recruiters tell you to prepare questions. Nobody says, "After the panel interview, remain alert because Talent Acquisition may unexpectedly turn into Tinder with dental benefits." I considered responding, "Thank you. I also enjoyed meeting you, and I remain extremely attracted to the compensation package." My raccoon loved that response. My professional

judgment tackled him before he could hit send because screenshots live forever. So I responded professionally while the raccoon sat in the corner disappointed that I refused to create an HR investigation.

Job hunting in 2026 has reached a point where I no longer know what to bring to an interview. Resume? References? Portfolio? Ring light? Six pics holding a fish? I went in hoping someone would say, "Alex, we think you would be a great fit for the company." I did not expect the follow up to sound suspiciously close to, "We think you would be a great fit... period."

Now I am waiting for HR to send the official next steps: "Congratulations, Alex. The team was impressed. Maria selected Super Like. Please complete your background check and choose between dinner Thursday or a second interview Friday."

Apparently I now need to know whether to swipe left, swipe right, or ask about the 401(k).

POST 18 / WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

WORKPLACE CULTURE

# Your Badge Stops Working and So Does the Friendship

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reflection on layoffs and the sudden disappearance of workplace connections after a long tenure inspired this corporate reality-show comparison.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize the emotional loss that can accompany unemployment, including relationships people believed would last.

At some point in your career, you realize corporate life is basically a reality show where nobody wins, HR has the immunity necklace, and half your coworkers disappear the moment your badge stops working.

You can give a company ten years, work late, answer emails on vacation, train the new manager, fix broken departments, and still get called into a meeting where someone holding a values card says, "This was a difficult business decision." Difficult for who? You still have Outlook access. Then comes the layoff, and suddenly the people who called you "family" every day enter witness protection. Your work best friend who knew your lunch order, your kids' names, and every reason your boss was insane now acts like connecting with you on LinkedIn might trigger a federal investigation. You send, "Hey, hope you're doing well." Nothing. Three blue dots appear. Disappear. They have chosen survival.

Meanwhile, your toxic former boss is still checking your LinkedIn profile like a divorced raccoon peeking through the blinds. They

complained about everything you did when you worked there, but now they need updates on your life. Nothing says "I've moved on" like viewing someone's profile at 11:47 p.m. on a Tuesday.

Then the job search starts, and experience becomes suspicious. Twenty five years of leadership? "Overqualified." Built teams? "We're looking for someone more flexible." Managed large operations? "We want fresh perspectives." Fresh. There's that word. Corporate America loves experience right up until the experience has a birthday. Suddenly recruiters want someone with fifteen years of experience who graduated college last Thursday, accepts entry level pay, works weekends, understands six software platforms, and is "hungry."

And if you're over 40, 50, or 60, you occasionally have to prove you can still operate technology. Yes, Karen, I know what Slack is. I also remember when meetings ended without needing another meeting to discuss the first meeting. Apparently that makes me ancient.

The funniest part is companies rejecting experienced people for being "too senior," then posting messages about how hard it is to find talent. "Nobody wants to work." No, Gary. Nobody wants to complete nine interviews, three assessments, a personality test, a case study, a presentation, a blood oath, and a background check just to discover the salary is \$47,000 plus "bonus potential."

Corporate life teaches you things. Your job is not your identity. Your coworkers may genuinely like you, but layoffs reveal who knows your phone number without Teams. Toxic bosses rarely stop being toxic because you escaped. And "we're a family" should probably come with the same warning label as gas station sushi.

So if you're job hunting, rebuilding, dealing with ageism, recovering from a terrible boss, or wondering why your former coworkers suddenly joined the CIA, keep going. The corporate circus may be ridiculous, but at least now you know where the exits are. Keep laughing.

# Three Great Interviews, One Inside Connection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described receiving consistently positive interview feedback before learning that an internally connected candidate was chosen.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question how transparent hiring processes are when referrals or internal relationships influence the final decision.

Nothing says “modern hiring” quite like walking out of three interviews believing you absolutely crushed every round, only to discover the position went to someone who had the one qualification nobody mentioned in the job description: they knew somebody.

The other day, someone shared this with me. He applied for a position, made it through three interviews, and after every one, HR called with the same glowing review: “You killed it. They loved you.” That is the kind of feedback that makes you believe all the preparation, awkward handshakes, STAR method answers, and pretending to care deeply about “cross functional synergy” was finally worth it. You start thinking maybe this one is different. Maybe the final interview is final.

Then came the ending. The job went to an internal referral. Of course it did. Apparently referrals now come with cheat codes and a corporate tunnel that bypasses the interview process. Nothing says “fair and transparent hiring” quite like making an outside candidate complete three rounds while Chad’s

former roommate walks in through the employee entrance.

Companies never put this part in the posting: “Must have five years of experience, leadership skills, communication, proficiency in seventeen systems, and preferably know Steve from finance.” Imagine running a marathon, crossing the finish line, and watching someone hand the medal to a guy who arrived in a golf cart because his cousin knows the organizer.

You can make the panel laugh, answer every behavioral question like you invented the STAR method, send the thank you email, research the company values, and still get rejected because another candidate unlocked the secret bonus level: Employee Referral. Referrals are not the problem. But do not spend three rounds telling someone they are amazing if the hiring process already has a VIP lane operating behind the curtain.

Job seekers are not asking companies to guarantee them a job. They are asking for a process that does not feel like a game show where the grand prize was already

promised to the producer’s nephew. After three interviews, hearing “they loved you” should mean you are being considered, not “you provided excellent free entertainment while we finished the paperwork for somebody else.”

This is why candidates are tired. It is not always the rejection. Rejection happens. It is the emotional whiplash: “You are incredible.” “The team loved you.” “Everyone was impressed.” “We went in another direction.” What direction? Apparently straight toward the person who had someone’s extension number.

If you keep hearing how amazing you were right before a rejection, do not let it rewrite how you see yourself. Sometimes you did everything right. Sometimes you really did crush the interview. And sometimes the other candidate simply arrived with the corporate equivalent of a backstage pass.

Welcome to hiring in 2026, where the strongest answer to “Why should we hire you?” may eventually become: “Because I know Steve.”

# An Interview About Looks Instead of Qualifications

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A woman described a virtual interview in which comments about her appearance repeatedly displaced questions about her experience.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to call out inappropriate interview behavior and remind leaders that professional evaluation is about the work, not the applicant's appearance.

I thought I had seen every strange interview trend possible. Eight rounds. Personality tests. Homework assignments. One way videos. Hiring managers who disappear faster than witnesses. But apparently we have unlocked a new level: the interview where your resume becomes background decoration because someone on Zoom has decided your face is the qualification that matters most.

A woman recently went into a virtual interview expecting questions about her experience, leadership, accomplishments and results. Instead, the conversation kept drifting back to her appearance. Not once. Not as one awkward compliment that escaped. They repeatedly told her she was sexy and that she had “the look” they wanted. Very normal. Imagine spending hours preparing, researching the company, studying the role, practicing answers about strategy and conflict, testing your Wi-Fi, and adjusting your camera. Then the interview begins and somebody leans toward the webcam like they accidentally opened

Tinder. “You definitely have the look we’re going for.” Sir, this is an interview, not Love Island: Human Resources Edition.

The woman is smart, talented, accomplished, and qualified. She brought an entire career to the conversation, but somehow her experience became the side dish while her appearance became the entree. Then they offered her the job. She turned it down. Companies love reminding candidates that interviews are evaluations, but they forget the candidate is evaluating them too. Every weird comment is information. Every uncomfortable pause is information. Every red flag waving behind the hiring manager while everyone else smiles like this is normal is information. Candidates are collecting evidence about what Monday morning might feel like six months from now.

Can you imagine the performance review? “Your team exceeded every target, revenue increased 18%, and your project finished early. However, we noticed you wore glasses Tuesday, and we are concerned about brand alignment.”

Promotion denied. Companies spend months creating interview guides, behavioral questions, scorecards, values statements, and polished career pages about respect. Then one person joins Zoom and starts freestyling like they are judging a dating show at an airport Marriott. Afterward leadership wonders why talented candidates decline offers.

An interview is a preview. If people are comfortable making comments like that while they are supposed to be on their best behavior, imagine what Tuesday afternoon looks like after six months when everyone has stopped pretending.

Sometimes the best thing an interview gives you is not a job offer. It is clarity. She got the offer, trusted what the interview had already shown her, and declined it. That was not a missed opportunity. That was recognizing the fire alarm before moving into the building. Knowing when to close the laptop, thank everyone for their time, and quietly sprint in the opposite direction might be the most valuable interview skill of all.

# Morning Walk, Loud Thoughts

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A quiet early-morning walk without emails or notifications made space for reflection on work, job searching and personal perspective.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to give readers a more human moment in a feed full of recruiting systems and corporate deadlines.

You ever go for a walk early in the morning when the world is quiet enough for your brain to finally start yelling? This morning I did. No emails. No notifications. No recruiter asking if I am still interested in a job I applied for months ago. Just me, my coffee, cold air, and enough career trauma for cardio.

Walking before everyone wakes up does something strange. You start thinking about everything you survived at work. The toxic boss who said, My door is always open, but somehow that door only opened when somebody was getting blamed. The coworker who called you family on Friday and became a protected witness after layoffs on Monday. The manager who preached loyalty right before deleting your access at 9:03 a.m.

And then there is job hunting. Nothing makes you question reality quite like applying for a position at 6:00 a.m. that was posted at 5:47 a.m. and receiving a rejection at 6:12 a.m. I am not saying the hiring manager did not review my resume. I am just saying unless they read applications at Formula 1 speed, the robot and I may have issues.

You keep walking past houses where people are sleeping peacefully, unaware that somewhere an applicant is uploading a resume and then manually typing the same resume into sixteen little boxes because technology has peaked. You think about the interviews. Tell us about yourself. Again. Why do you want to work here? Because apparently I enjoy electricity and groceries lacks corporate enthusiasm. Where do you see yourself in five years? Hopefully not completing round nine for this position.

And somehow, between the jokes, the morning gets quieter. Because underneath all the sarcasm, job hunting can hurt. Losing a job hurts. Being ignored hurts. Watching people you worked beside disappear when your title disappears hurts. Having a toxic boss make you question abilities you spent twenty years building hurts. Getting rejected repeatedly can make even confident people wonder if maybe they are the problem.

That is the part nobody puts in the inspirational LinkedIn carousel. Some mornings you feel ready. Other mornings you are exhausted

but keep going. Other mornings you are trying not to throw your laptop into a lake because Workday forgot your password again. But I kept walking. Somewhere between the empty streets, the sunrise, and a squirrel staring at me like he knew my employment history, I remembered something important. Jobs change. Companies restructure. Bosses come and go. Recruiters ghost. Coworkers vanish. Titles disappear from email signatures. None of those things erase what you know, what you built, what you survived, or what you are capable of doing next.

Sometimes you need an early morning walk to remember that your career is bigger than the worst boss you ever had and your value is bigger than the last rejection email you received.

Then my phone buzzed. Another automated rejection. Beautiful. I finished my coffee, kept walking, and decided the squirrel probably had an opening.

# Who Actually Works for This Company?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post about the possibility of businesses removing fake employee associations from LinkedIn made me think about fabricated professional identities.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh at the ease of creating an online executive title while highlighting why companies need trustworthy employee information.

I read a post today that made me stop scrolling, stare at my phone, and wonder if LinkedIn finally walked into its own building, looked around at seventeen people wearing homemade executive badges, and asked the question nobody had apparently considered before: Does anyone here actually work for this company?

Apparently, companies may now be able to remove fake employees from their LinkedIn pages. Fake employees. Because somewhere along the way, LinkedIn became a corporate costume party where anybody could put on a blazer, type Vice President of Global Strategy, stand next to a company logo, and join senior leadership. Imagine being the actual CEO, logging in before breakfast, and discovering six other CEOs have joined overnight. One lives in Toronto. One has never visited your website. Another posts motivational quotes while running international operations.

For years, people could apparently list themselves as recruiters, executives, partnership leaders, or whatever title sounded impressive enough to make strangers accept

connection requests. Somewhere, an HR director was probably reviewing payroll wondering why these mysterious vice presidents were not receiving checks while LinkedIn stood nearby saying, Well, their profile says they work here. And somehow this existed on the same platform where actual job seekers are asked to upload a resume, retype it, write a cover letter, complete an assessment, record a one way interview, verify their identity, and wait three weeks for an automated rejection at 4:07 in the morning.

Meanwhile, Chad could wake up Tuesday, update his profile to CEO of SpaceX, pour coffee, and continue his day. No recruiter screen. No panel interview. No personality test. No presentation. Nobody asking where he sees himself in five years. Just type CEO, save changes, and congratulations on the promotion. Real employees are fighting to get an outdated title corrected while a stranger has promoted himself to Chief Executive Officer before breakfast.

So yes, giving companies more control over who claims to work for them sounds like progress. But while

LinkedIn has the hood open, I have few repairs to request.

Can we remove fake job postings next? Maybe delete the urgently hiring roles that have been reposted every Tuesday since electricity was discovered. Perhaps give candidates a button that says, Recruiter entered witness protection after the final interview. We could also add a warning label to jobs requiring ten years of experience, seven interviews, three assessments, a case study, and a salary that still requires two roommates.

Still, progress is progress. Somewhere tonight, a self appointed CEO is quietly changing his title to Independent Consultant and hoping nobody from the actual company asks follow up questions. LinkedIn, please continue cleaning. The corporate garage is still packed, the raccoons have moved into Talent Acquisition, and I am pretty sure Kevin just updated his profile to Chairman of the Board.

# Starbucks Closures and the Corporate PowerPoint

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

News of additional Starbucks store closures became a way to examine the corporate vocabulary that surrounds difficult business decisions.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to satirize executive euphemisms while remembering that every closure can affect real people.

Starbucks is closing 250 more North American stores, which means my morning coffee may soon require a passport, two tanks of gas and an overnight bag.

At this rate, the Starbucks app is going to stop asking whether I want pickup or delivery and start asking whether I have TSA PreCheck and enough PTO. Somebody is going to leave home for a grande coffee and return three business days later.

The company says it is moving away from locations that are not profitable or are not delivering the experience it wants. Nobody says, this store is struggling and we are shutting it down. No, we optimize the portfolio. We streamline the footprint. You know there was a meeting, then a meeting before the meeting, and eventually someone opened a PowerPoint called Store Optimization Strategy while 250 little green sirens updated their resumes. Apparently even coffee shops can get put on a performance improvement plan. Because why not?

Imagine being a Starbucks location called into HR. We appreciate

everything you have done, but unfortunately your latte to rent ratio is not aligned with our strategic vision. Please return your espresso machine, store keys and that suspiciously permanent holiday display by Friday. Somewhere a district manager is nodding solemnly while trying not to make eye contact with the pastry case.

The funniest part is that Starbucks has become part of the modern job search ecosystem. Recruiter call? Starbucks. Early for an interview? Starbucks. Toxic boss scheduled another meeting that could have been an email? Starbucks. Rejected after six rounds and a case study? Extra shot. Half the tables are laptops, resumes, AirPods, and people whispering salary expectations. Now imagine a recruiter saying, let us meet at Starbucks. Which one? Main Street? Closed. By the mall? Closed. Downtown? Under renovation. Airport? Open, but parking costs more than the coffee. Great. I will see you at Dunkin'.

I understand the business side. Stores have to make money. But corporate language makes it sound

like the building failed a leadership assessment. Maybe the store needed another interview round. Perhaps Starbucks should have asked each cafe where it sees itself in five years and assigned a presentation titled How I Will Increase Foam Based Synergy. Then, after seven rounds, it could send an email saying, We were impressed, but we decided to move forward with another location.

The company plans to invest in stores it keeps, so somewhere one Starbucks is getting renovations while another is outside with a cardboard box full of mugs wondering why corporate stopped answering.

Welcome to the modern workplace. Even the coffee shops are getting reorganized. At this pace, the next time I order a grande coffee, the barista will lean across the counter and quietly say, enjoy it while this location still exists. And I will, because apparently caffeine now comes with job security anxiety and the possibility that tomorrow my nearest latte may be two counties away.

POST 24 / THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

WORKPLACE CULTURE

# One Employee, Three Jobs, Zero Additional Pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The familiar pattern of unfilled vacancies and redistributed responsibilities prompted a post about how employers stretch one person across multiple jobs.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to question whether reducing headcount is always efficiency when the human cost is exhaustion and burnout.

Corporate America has mastered one of the greatest magic tricks ever performed: turning one employee into three people, calling it “efficiency,” and then acting shocked when that employee starts staring into the parking lot like it contains the answers to life.

You know the setup. Someone quits. Another person gets laid off. A position stays open for six months. Management says, “We’re being strategic with headcount.” Translation: congratulations, Brenda, you now have three inboxes, four dashboards, two phones, six meetings, and a mysterious spreadsheet named FINAL\_v17\_REAL\_FINAL.xlsx. Somehow the work still gets done, so leadership decides this arrangement is clearly sustainable. Why hire another person when Brenda has not technically burst into flames yet?

Then the KPIs start looking fantastic. Numbers are up. Goals are being crushed. Somebody in a meeting says, “Great job, team!” Meanwhile the “team” is one exhausted person eating crackers over a keyboard while responding to emails marked URGENT from people who scheduled

three meetings to discuss why everyone has too many meetings.

That is the beautiful part. The people watching the dashboard see green boxes and celebrate. The people actually doing the work are texting each other, “Are you okay?” because they know what those green boxes cost. They know the 19 wins on the report came with skipped lunches, late nights, unanswered personal texts, and a nervous laugh every time another “quick favor” appears in Teams.

And there is always a quick favor. Corporate quick favors are never quick and rarely favors. “Can you just cover this?” becomes your permanent responsibility. “Can you help until we hire someone?” becomes a family heirloom passed down through generations. Three months later you ask about the open role and discover it has entered witness protection. Nobody has seen it. Nobody knows its location. HR may or may not have a blurry photo.

The funniest part is when you finally say you are overloaded and someone suggests time management. Time management? My friend, I am

managing time so aggressively I have appointments with minutes that have not happened yet. I am answering tomorrow’s emails today. I have color coded my breakdown. Outlook knows me better than my family.

Companies love to talk about resilience, but sometimes resilience is just a very polite word for “we kept adding work and you kept surviving.” Being dependable should not become a punishment. Being good at your job should not automatically qualify you for everybody else’s job too.

So if you are currently doing the work of three people while being paid as one, remember this: the KPI dashboard may be singing your praises, but your eye twitch is also submitting a quarterly report. Laugh when you can. Take the lunch. Use the PTO. And the next time someone says, “We’re all wearing multiple hats,” ask where payroll keeps the multiple salaries. Because at this point, the only thing more flexible than staffing plans is you.

# HR in the Walmart Dog-Food Aisle

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An evening dog-food run to Walmart turned into an accidental encounter with someone discussing workplace termination matters in public.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to use an absurd everyday scene to highlight the difference between confidential HR work and very public corporate behavior.

Walmart after dark is not a store. It is a live action corporate documentary with fluorescent lighting and strangers broadcasting their personal business. I only went in this evening to grab dog food for my golden retriever. That was all. Dog food. A simple mission.

Then I saw her. A woman near dog food wearing a corporate looking name tag that said HR Lauren. She was on the phone using that suspiciously calm HR voice that usually means somebody else's evening is about to become more interesting. I was comparing two bags of dog food when I heard words like termination, documentation, approved, and effective immediately. Nothing says peaceful shopping like accidentally overhearing someone lose their livelihood while choosing dog food.

Lauren ended the call and looked over. I should have nodded politely and continued shopping like a normal adult. My inner raccoon had already clocked in. I said, Sounds like somebody is having a worse Walmart trip than me. She laughed. Huge mistake. That was verbal authorization for me to continue. I asked if she worked in HR. She said

yes. I asked if she had just approved a termination while standing next to chew toys. She paused and said, Technically, I approved the process.

Of course. The process. Corporate America never fires anybody anymore. That sounds too human. Now people are separated, transitioned, realigned, reorganized, impacted, or released to explore exciting new opportunities such as updating LinkedIn at 11:47 p.m. and explaining why the company laptop needs to be returned by Friday. I asked Lauren if HR people ever feel weird handling these calls in public. She said work follows you everywhere. Apparently it follows you straight into Walmart.

I told her job seekers would be fascinated by the efficiency. Getting hired can require seven interviews, four assessments, a panel presentation, references, a background check, a personality test, and one final conversation with a vice president who joins eight minutes late and asks why you want to work there. Getting terminated? One phone call. Approved. Effective immediately. Please return your badge. Amazing. No panel interview. No culture assessment. No forty five

minute PowerPoint titled Why I Should Continue Receiving Health Insurance.

I grabbed the dog food and told Lauren she was a great sport. She laughed and said HR conversations are less entertaining than this one. I told her that was probably because most people do not accidentally conduct an HR interview while deciding between chicken and rice and lamb formula. She laughed again, and I headed toward checkout realizing this is exactly why I cannot go anywhere anymore. I went to Walmart for dog food.

I left with dog food, an accidental HR interview, a lesson in corporate vocabulary, and confirmation that somewhere tonight a person's career decision may have been approved between aisle twelve and a display of squeaky chickens. My golden retriever just wanted dinner. I came home with content.

# Why I Run the Interview Games

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Readers new to my page needed an explanation of the real-world hiring experiments behind the stories and jokes.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make the premise clear: I follow the candidate journey and report what the process actually feels like.

For anyone who is new here, I have a strange little hobby that turned into an ongoing experiment: I apply to real jobs at real companies, go through their hiring processes, and document what candidates actually experience.

Job seekers constantly hear how polished, efficient, candidate friendly, and “people first” these systems are supposed to be. So instead of repeating corporate slogans, I test them. I apply. I interview. I wait. I get ghosted. I take notes. Then I share what happened.

My latest experiment was CVS Health.

The email said I was being invited to a “quick 10 minute phone screening interview.” Ten minutes. Beautiful. Efficient. Reasonable. Pay: \$18.50 an hour, non-negotiable. I figured this would be ten minutes of confirming I am alive, can answer a phone, and have not recently been banned from a pharmacy. Then the recruiter was late. Of course.

Nothing creates confidence in a “quick 10 minute screening” quite like sitting there staring at your phone wondering whether Talent Acquisition has entered another

dimension. Five minutes passed. Then more. At some point my inner raccoon started pacing around, knocking over imaginary trash cans and requesting a wellness check.

Eventually the call began, and that quick 10 minute interview somehow evolved into more than an hour. Not 12 minutes. Not 20. Over an hour. By minute 35, I realized this was no longer a phone screen. We were building a life together. I expected the recruiter to ask whether I preferred a spring or fall wedding and whether CVS would be included on our joint Costco membership. The questions kept coming. Background. Experience. Customer service. Situational examples. Why CVS. Why this role. Somewhere in the middle I wanted to say, “Well, I am currently handling a 10 minute interview that has lasted long enough for me to qualify for employee benefits, so I think we have evidence.”

To be fair, the recruiter was pleasant once we connected and the conversation itself was fine. But this is exactly why I run these experiments. Candidates are constantly given one expectation and then handed something

different. Ten minutes becomes an hour. Two interviews become six. “We will get back to you Friday” becomes a missing person investigation.

I am impressed by the confidence of that 10 minute estimate. That number walked into my inbox wearing sunglasses, carrying a clipboard, and lying with the calm professionalism of someone who had done this before.

So CVS officially joins my ongoing hiring experiment: recruiter late, ten minute screening, more than an hour on the phone, for a role listed at \$18.50 an hour, non-negotiable. Apparently the salary was non-negotiable. The definition of ten minutes was extremely flexible.

Maybe companies should stop estimating interviews in minutes and start using movie runtimes. “Your phone screen will be approximately one feature length film. Snacks recommended.” Welcome to hiring in 2026, where even time has entered the negotiation process.

# The Interview Games Gets a Microphone

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An invitation to a podcast conversation with executives gave me a new place to discuss the experiments and hiring-process problems.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to share that these stories can lead to serious conversations about better recruiting, not just funny comments on LinkedIn.

Apparently, if you spend enough time applying to jobs, testing hiring processes, getting ghosted, sitting through panel interviews, and wondering why a “quick conversation” requires three calendars, a personality assessment, and a small sacrifice to the corporate gods, eventually somebody gives you a microphone.

The other day I was invited onto a podcast with a couple of executives to talk about the hiring process. I laughed because somewhere an HR department probably felt a cold chill and whispered, “He found audio equipment.”

For anyone new here, this is what I do. I apply to real jobs, interview with real companies, test the process, and document what candidates actually experience. I have seen one way video interviews, endless panels, assessments that felt like the SAT in business casual, recruiters vanish into witness protection, and jobs demanding ten years of experience in software invented last Thursday.

So when these executives asked me to talk about hiring, I had material. Enough that I probably should have arrived with snacks.

We started talking about the difference between how companies describe hiring and what candidates actually live through. Companies say, “We move quickly.” Candidates say, “Wonderful. I applied when my phone still had a home button.” Companies say, “We value communication.” Candidates are refreshing Gmail like they are waiting for test results from NASA.

Then we got into interview rounds. Recruiter screen. Hiring manager. Panel. Second panel. Executive panel. Culture interview. Assessment. Presentation. Final conversation. Then suddenly Steve from Finance needs to meet you because Steve was camping during rounds one through seven and apparently possesses the final Infinity Stone.

I said getting hired now feels less like applying for a job and more like gaining security clearance for the office Keurig.

We talked about salary ranges that disappear when candidates ask about them, “urgent” openings that remain posted long enough to qualify for historic preservation, rejection emails arriving at 4:03 a.m., and companies asking

candidates to “stay engaged” after disappearing for five weeks.

The executives laughed. I laughed. My inner raccoon sat beside the microphone wondering whether podcasts have snacks. What makes the whole thing even funnier is that companies keep saying they cannot find talent while talented people are in round six preparing a 47 slide presentation titled “Why I Deserve Access to Your Break Room.” And somehow my weird experiment has now gone from applications and interviews to conversations with executives behind microphones.

I still cannot decide whether that means the experiment is working or corporate America has concluded it is safer to let me talk than keep letting me apply. Either way, I showed up ready. And before recording started, I asked the most important question of the entire hiring experiment: “How many rounds is this podcast?” Thankfully, just one. I almost cried.

# The Myth of the Perfectly Successful Person

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Thinking back to how I once viewed people who looked confident and successful made me reflect on the messier reality behind their careers.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind readers that public success often hides setbacks, uncertainty and persistence.

When I was younger, I thought successful people had discovered a secret instruction manual the rest of us somehow missed.

They stood on stages, spoke with confidence, posted quotes about discipline, and looked like they had never refreshed Indeed at 2:00 a.m. wondering whether “application under review” meant hope or corporate purgatory. I would watch them and think, I want to be like that person. Same confidence. Same success too.

Then life handed me the actual journey, and apparently it came without GPS. I worked for great leaders and toxic bosses. I chased promotions, lost opportunities, sat through interviews with more rounds than a heavyweight fight, and watched recruiters enter witness protection. I also learned a toxic boss can give a speech about loyalty on Mondays and have HR deactivate your badge by Friday.

For years I thought becoming better meant becoming more like people I admired. Wake up earlier. Work harder. Be more polished. Maybe buy a notebook with GOALS on the

cover because apparently a \$12 notebook can intimidate unemployment. But somewhere between applications, rejection emails, bad bosses, layoffs, comebacks, and enough “we moved forward with another candidate” emails to wallpaper a bathroom, something changed.

I stopped wanting to be them. I wanted to be me. Not the corporate approved version. Not the interview version who says, “That is a great question,” while my inner raccoon is screaming, “WHY ARE THERE SIX PEOPLE ON THIS ZOOM?” Not the version pretending every setback is a blessing while calculating how many more blessings the checking account can survive. Just me. Sarcastic. Imperfect. Stubborn. Still learning. Still showing up. Still able to turn a terrible day into a story that makes somebody laugh.

Job hunting taught me confidence is not walking into every interview believing you are the greatest candidate alive. Sometimes confidence is getting rejected Tuesday, ghosted Wednesday, seeing the same job reposted Thursday, and applying somewhere else Friday

without throwing your laptop into a retention pond. Toxic bosses showed me exactly who I never wanted to become. Sometimes the lesson is simply, “Whatever that was, do the opposite.”

I still admire successful people. I still get inspired by people who built something meaningful or found the courage to start again. But I no longer look at them and think I want their life. I want mine, including the weird chapters, mistakes, ridiculous interviews, people who believed in me, people who underestimated me, and a few toxic bosses who accidentally became unpaid contributors to my character development.

Maybe growing up is realizing inspiration was never supposed to turn you into somebody else. It was supposed to remind you what might already be inside you. So now I take the lesson and keep moving. I do not want to be the next version of them. I want to be the first version of me. Preferably employed. And nowhere near a mandatory team building escape room.

# Applying to Jobs at Midnight: An Escape Room

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A late-night application session made an applicant tracking system feel less like a gateway to work and more like an obstacle course.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how unnecessary application friction drains candidates and can make a qualified person doubt the system.

At some point in the modern job search, you stop applying for jobs and start entering unpaid escape rooms designed by people who already have jobs.

The other night I couldn't sleep, which is the perfect time for my brain to whisper, "You know what would relax us? Let's apply for a job we are qualified for and let an applicant tracking system judge our entire career." So there I was after midnight, staring at a job description that looked like somebody copied my resume, added "fast paced environment," and posted it. Years of leadership experience? Check. Multi unit operations? Check. Budget responsibility? Check. Team development? Check. Meetings that should have been emails? Certified.

I thought, this is it. I qualify. Not "I could probably learn it." Not "maybe if they are desperate." I could practically walk into the building Monday morning, find the coffee machine, fix three problems, calm down two managers, answer six fake emergencies, and get invited to the leadership meeting before lunch. Then came the application. Upload resume. Wonderful. Now manually

type everything from the resume into 47 separate boxes because the computer that just accepted my resume forgot how to read.

Employment history. Dates. Titles. Education. Skills. Address. Phone number. Salary expectations. Forty five minutes later, I was still going. At the one hour mark, I finally hit Submit. "Thank you for your interest." Beautiful. We had a moment. I closed the laptop feeling accomplished. Maybe this one would lead somewhere. Maybe I would wake up to an interview request.

I woke up to an email. "After careful consideration..." Careful? I applied at 12:41 a.m. The rejection arrived at 2:13 a.m. Unless your hiring manager is an owl with an MBA, nobody carefully considered anything. Apparently in 92 minutes, someone reviewed my career, compared me with the requirements, consulted leadership, and decided I was not moving forward. Either that, or Gerald the Algorithm saw one keyword missing and launched me into the corporate basement.

This is the part of job hunting that makes people question reality. You can spend an hour customizing a resume, answering questions, re-entering the same resume, making sure every box is perfect, and convincing yourself that this time a human might see it. Then the company rejects you before your pillow gets cold. Three days later, same job is reposted. Of course it is. Nothing says "we found stronger candidates" like continuing to search for candidates.

So if you are job hunting and getting these lightning speed rejection emails, don't let an automated message convince you that your experience suddenly became worthless overnight. Sometimes you were never reviewed. Sometimes the system filtered you. Sometimes the company already had someone in mind. And sometimes the entire hiring process is operated by a raccoon behind a laptop at 2 a.m. slapping the Reject button while eating shredded cheese.

At least the raccoon is working nights too.

# Candidates Prepare; Companies Improvise

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The contrast between the preparation expected of candidates and the disorganization tolerated from employers sparked this observation.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to hold themselves to the same standards of punctuality, preparation and courtesy they demand from applicants.

There is a strange rule in modern hiring: candidates are expected to behave like they are auditioning for NASA, while some companies behave like they are organizing a group project five minutes before it is due.

Show up early. Research. Prepare. Follow up. Be professional. Meanwhile, the recruiter is seventeen minutes late, the hiring manager forgets the interview exists, and HR says, "We'll circle back by Friday," which apparently means sometime between now and the collapse of civilization.

For years, applicants have dealt with ghosting, fake promises, endless interview rounds, canceled meetings, late recruiters, and interviews where nobody shows up at all. People rearrange schedules just to stare at an empty Zoom screen wondering whether they accidentally interviewed with a company operating from witness protection. Then the candidate is expected to send a thank you email for the conversation that never happened.

That is why I started the experiments. I apply. I go through the process. I pay attention. I

document what happens. Sometimes recruiters communicate clearly and respect the candidate's time. Other times it feels like a corporate escape room where the final clue is whether the job was ever real. Then people started sharing their stories with me. Messages began with, "This happened to me too." People who went through six interviews and got ghosted. People completed projects, then heard nothing.

This has never been about embarrassing a company. It is about holding companies accountable for the experience they create. If candidates are expected to show up prepared, communicate clearly, be punctual, stay professional, and respect everyone's time, companies should be held to that same standard. Accountability is not an attack. Asking companies to communicate better is not negativity. Pointing out a broken process is not trying to destroy a brand. Sometimes change starts with, "This is not working."

I am not sitting in a basement with a spreadsheet titled CORPORATE REVENGE while stroking a raccoon and ranking recruiters by punctuality. The goal is simple:

make the process better. If a recruiter is late, send a message. If the position is filled, tell the applicants. If someone spends hours interviewing, give them closure. If a hiring manager says they will follow up, follow up. Basic respect should not be a recruiting innovation.

Candidates remember how they are treated. They talk about it. They tell friends. They become customers, employees, leaders, and people who write sarcastic LinkedIn posts over coffee. The experiments are not attacks. They are a mirror. Sometimes companies look into that mirror and see a good process. Other times the mirror starts smoking and HR quietly asks who approved the lighting.

Companies can do better because applicants deserve better. I will keep applying, testing, sharing, and holding companies accountable when the process falls short.

Not to embarrass anyone. To help change what hiring has become.

# Amazon and the Endless Interview Production

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An Amazon area-manager interview experiment involved a pre-brief and multiple meeting links that made the process feel unusually complicated.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to document the candidate experience of a large-company interview process, with the funny moments left intact.

At some point, a job interview stops feeling like a conversation and starts feeling like you accidentally enrolled in a corporate reality show where the grand prize is maybe getting another email.

That was today's experiment with Amazon, and somewhere between the pre brief, the different meeting links, I started wondering whether I was interviewing for Area Manager or being introduced to the company one employee at a time.

For those who are new here, I test hiring processes to see what candidates actually experience after they click Apply. Not the polished careers page version where everyone is smiling under a "People First" banner. I mean the real version: calendar invites, prep, repeated behavioral questions, awkward pauses, and the moment you have told the same leadership story so many times that even you start wondering whether it happened.

Amazon brought five different people into the process. Five separate conversations. Five introductions. Interview one went

well. Then another person appeared. Then another. By the third interview, my inner raccoon had stopped being nervous and started keeping notes. By the fourth, it had organized my stories into categories: leadership, conflict, results, failure, difficult employee, and miracle involving a spreadsheet.

Then Garry from finance showed up, and suddenly every number I had ever mentioned in my career felt like it needed supporting documentation. Garry would ask about results and my inner raccoon would quietly pull out a calculator. Was it 14 percent? Was it 15? Did I say revenue? EBITDA? The raccoon leaned over and whispered, "Whatever happens, say EBITDA confidently. Finance people respect acronyms."

By interview number five, I had stopped wondering who was next. I was expecting the lights to dim, the Amazon smile to appear on the wall, and a hologram of Jeff Bezos to materialize above my desk. "Alex, congratulations. You have completed the previous levels. Before we continue, please describe a time you demonstrated ownership while reducing costs, developing people,

improving customer experience, and launching something into orbit." At that point, my inner raccoon would have grabbed its tiny briefcase and informed Jeff we would follow up after careful consideration.

But this is exactly why I keep doing these experiments. Candidates go through versions of this every day. They prepare, stay energetic, meet different interviewers, repeat stories, remember names, remember numbers, and try not to answer, "I believe I already covered this in Episode Three." Companies call it getting to know the candidate. After five separate interviews, Amazon may know me better than several members of my extended family.

Five interviewers, five personalities, one Alex trying to remember which story went where, and one increasingly confident inner raccoon now convinced it works in finance. And still no Jeff Bezos hologram.

Honestly, that may have been the biggest disappointment of the entire experiment.

# The Look on Someone's Face After a Layoff

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation with a recently laid-off person brought home the shock and disorientation that can follow a sudden job loss.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to write beyond the comedy and recognize that losing a job is a real life event, not a tidy HR transaction.

There's a very specific look people get after being laid off. It's somewhere between "Did that really just happen?" and "Should I still finish the leftovers I packed for lunch?" Your brain is trying to process a major life change while also wondering whether you're supposed to return the company coffee mug.

This evening I talked with someone who was recently laid off, and I could hear the shock in their voice. They were replaying the meeting, the wording, the awkward goodbye, and every conversation from the last six months like there had to be a clue hidden somewhere. I remember that feeling. Suddenly you become a detective in your own career. Was it that meeting? That email? The time I said "per my last email" with a little too much confidence?

That's the strange part about layoffs. One minute you're discussing budgets, projects, staffing, and Q4 priorities like you personally control the economy. The next minute your calendar is empty, your laptop is locked, and Brenda from HR is explaining "organizational changes" with the emotional energy of

someone reading the instructions on a microwave dinner.

And then the questions start. Was I not good enough? Did I do something wrong? What am I supposed to do now? Here's what I told them: your job ended. Your value did not.

A company can eliminate a position. It cannot eliminate your experience. It cannot delete the years you spent solving problems, leading people, learning lessons, surviving bad meetings, fixing other people's mistakes, and pretending the 3:30 p.m. "quick sync" was actually going to be quick.

You do not have to wake up tomorrow and become a motivational speaker. You do not have to post "I'm excited for my next chapter" while your soul is still sitting in the parking lot asking what just happened. Give yourself a minute. Be mad. Be confused. Eat the emergency ice cream. Stare at the ceiling. Google jobs at midnight. Close LinkedIn. Reopen LinkedIn seven minutes later. That is apparently part of the process now.

But do not confuse being shocked with being finished. Some of the best

things that happen to us begin as something we absolutely did not ask for. A layoff can feel like somebody slammed a door in your face, but sometimes that door was attached to a building you had already outgrown. I remember thinking setbacks meant I was falling behind. Now I look back and realize some of them were redirects wearing terrible disguises.

So if you are sitting in shock mode tonight, wondering what comes next, do not try to solve your entire life before breakfast. Take one step. Update one line on the resume. Make one phone call. Send one message. Take one walk. Laugh once, even if it's at how HR somehow turned "you're fired" into a twelve-minute presentation with bullet points.

You are allowed to be disappointed. You are also allowed to come back stronger, smarter, louder, and with much better boundaries. Losing a job can shake your confidence. It does not get to keep it either.

# Your Interview Homework Is Our Free Consulting

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader reported being asked to present strategy analysis and concrete recommendations as part of a hiring process.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge interview exercises that require substantial unpaid business work without clear boundaries.

I have discovered a new category in the modern hiring process: the interview that quietly turns into a free consulting engagement with no invoice, no contract, and no shame.

A reader sent me a story that belongs in the Corporate Hiring Hall of Fame. She was asked to prepare a presentation for the leadership team, analyze the company's strategy, identify opportunities, and bring recommendations. This was no longer "tell us about yourself." This was "please study our business, diagnose the problems, organize the solution into PowerPoint, and present it to the people already being paid to think about this." So she researched, prepared, refined the deck, rehearsed the presentation, and stared at slide 14 at midnight wondering whether one bullet point would alter civilization.

Then came presentation day. She delivered the work. Leadership listened. Questions were asked. Insights were shared. Ideas were collected. Everyone enjoyed the strategic buffet. And then the company announced that the position was being placed on hold. Beautiful. Nothing says "we value

your time" quite like asking someone to complete hours of unpaid work and then sending the job opening into corporate witness protection. I'd add one final slide: "Thank you for your time. The role may be on hold, but my consulting invoice remains active."

I understand companies want to evaluate how candidates think. Give someone a hypothetical case. Ask how they would approach a problem. Let them explain their decision making. But when the assignment starts looking like a real business problem the company needs solved, my inner raccoon starts putting on reading glasses and looking for a purchase order.

Job seekers already upload a resume and then manually type the same resume into twelve separate boxes. They take personality assessments to determine whether they would remain calm if Karen from accounting steals their yogurt. They attend multiple interviews, complete case studies, send thank you emails, provide references, and wait while the hiring team enters a mysterious dimension where calendars stop

working. Now we are adding unpaid strategy consulting to the package?

Soon the process will look like this: upload resume, re enter resume, meet recruiter, meet hiring manager, meet panel, prepare strategic plan, solve the company's biggest operational problem, train the executive team, and receive an automated email at 4:07 a.m. saying, "After careful consideration, we have decided to pursue other candidates." Meanwhile, your presentation has quietly been renamed "2027 Strategic Growth Initiative."

Maybe the position really was put on hold. Budgets change. Priorities shift. Leadership reorganizes. That happens. But if you ask a candidate to invest serious time producing original work, the bare minimum should be communication, gratitude, and respect for the time they gave you.

Candidates are applying for jobs. They are not opening a temporary consulting firm inside your conference room.

# The Toxic Boss Who Called Burnout Leadership

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Reflecting on a past toxic boss brought back the tendency to blame myself for problems caused by harmful management.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to recognize the signs of toxic leadership and stop confusing unreasonable treatment with a personal shortcoming.

A while back when I worked for a toxic boss, I used to think the problem was me. Maybe I needed to communicate better. Maybe I needed to work harder. Maybe I needed to smile more while being professionally set on fire. Normal corporate self reflection. Meanwhile, this person could turn a Monday morning into a hostage negotiation before coffee.

Toxic bosses are fascinating because somehow they are always “results driven” right up until the results include turnover, burnout, complaints, resignations, and half the team updating LinkedIn during lunch. Then suddenly nobody knows what happened. Leadership opens a PowerPoint called Employee Engagement and acts shocked that morale is somewhere between a root canal and a delayed Spirit Airlines flight.

The funny part is how long companies protect them. Someone says, “This manager humiliates people, plays favorites, threatens jobs, and has the emotional stability of a raccoon trapped inside a vending machine.” Corporate responds, “Have you tried

understanding their leadership style?” Leadership style? If your leadership style requires three HR investigations, six exit interviews, and employees twitching when your Teams icon turns green, we may be stretching the word leadership.

I remember watching good people leave one after another. Good people who cared. Every time someone resigned, the boss had a reason. That person was too sensitive. That one was not committed. This one was negative. Another “couldn’t handle accountability.” After a while, I wondered how one manager could be surrounded by so many terrible employees without anyone noticing the common denominator wearing a company polo.

And companies love the phrase “we take these concerns seriously.” Nothing says serious like another meeting, an action plan, and promoting the person everyone complained about because chaos looks fantastic on a succession chart. Then comes the employee survey. Anonymous, of course. Nothing makes people feel safer than an anonymous survey containing your location, department, job title,

tenure, childhood nickname, and the exact chair you sit in.

The sad part under all the sarcasm is that toxic management does real damage. People lose confidence and question abilities they had for years. They dread Sundays. They bring work stress home. Some leave jobs they loved, not because of the work, but because one person was allowed to make the environment unbearable while the company kept calling it a “personality conflict.”

A while back, I learned something important: sometimes the strongest career move is realizing you are not required to keep proving your value to someone committed to misunderstanding it. If people keep leaving the same manager, stop interviewing the exit door. Maybe interview the manager.

And if fifteen talented employees have to leave before leadership realizes there is a problem, congratulations. You did not build a retention strategy. You built a witness protection program with direct deposit.

# There Is No Magic ATS Password

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Questions about how I receive interviews led me to explain the repeated testing and adjusting behind the experiment.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to demystify the process and encourage candidates to test approaches rather than assume there is a secret recruiter shortcut.

A lot of people see my interview posts and think I have a recruiter hotline, a golden ATS password, or Kevin hiding inside Workday pressing “advance candidate.”

I don’t. What I do is experiment with the hiring process. I apply to companies, change variables, track what gets responses, and pay attention to what gets me from “application submitted” to a human asking about my 5 year plan. I’m treating job hunting like a science experiment where the lab equipment is my resume and the control group is my patience.

The biggest thing I learned is that I do not use one resume for everything. I have different versions for operations, multi unit leadership, automotive, and executive roles. My resume folder looks less like career planning and more like I’m preparing to assume new identities and leave the country. ATS systems are scanning for titles, skills, keywords, dates, that match the job description. If the posting says “multi unit operations” and I have actually led multiple locations, I make sure my resume says “multi unit operations.” I am not making the robot solve a riddle.

I also keep the formatting simple. No graphics. No charts. No skill bars showing I am 92% leadership and 8% emotionally available. Just clean headings, dates, job titles, and keywords that match my experience. I tailor the wording, but I do not invent experience. There is a difference between speaking ATS and writing corporate fan fiction.

Then there is salary. If an application forces salary expectations, I sometimes put a number toward the lower part of the posted range if it works for me. Why? Because I am trying to get to the conversation first. I am not negotiating my final compensation with a dropdown box while Workday asks me for my address again. Getting through the screen does not mean I agreed to accept that number forever. It means I want to speak to an actual mammal before software removes me.

Timing matters too. If I see a role that fits and it was posted recently, I try to apply early. I would rather be applicant 73 than applicant 2,914 while the hiring manager gets tired and promotes Steve. I also use company career pages whenever possible. LinkedIn is great for

finding openings, but sometimes Easy Apply feels like throwing your resume into a lake and waiting for a recruiter to scuba dive for it.

None of this guarantees interviews. I still get rejected, ghosted, and get the famous “we were impressed with your background” email from companies that were apparently so impressed they never wanted to hear my voice. But I stopped treating every application the same. I test resume versions, wording, timing, salary expectations, and approaches. Then I watch what gets responses and do more of that.

That is what my interview experiments are really about. I’m not just collecting ridiculous hiring stories. I’m testing the process to understand what actually gets a human being to finally say, “Let’s schedule an interview.” And when something works, I pay attention.

# The Walgreens Hiring Experiment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Walgreens customer-service application became another chance to see the hiring process from an ordinary applicant's perspective.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to describe the difference between what a company promises applicants and how its process actually unfolds.

For anyone new here, I have somehow turned job hunting into a social experiment. I apply to companies, go through the process, sit in the interviews, and document what the candidate experience actually feels like. Basically, I volunteer as tribute so the rest of you can find out whether the hiring process is normal or whether you need snacks and a survival map.

This week's experiment: Walgreens.

I applied for a Customer Service Associate role expecting the usual interview obstacle course. You walk in, sit under fluorescent lighting, smile like a responsible adult, and prepare to explain your entire professional existence while wondering whether the chair is designed to make you confess to crimes you did not commit.

Instead, I met with two people, and it was actually a great experience. The hiring manager was funny, professional, relaxed, and made the interview feel like a conversation instead of a courtroom deposition. The second person was just as welcoming.

They asked practical questions: Tell us about yourself. Why Walgreens?

What does good customer service mean to you? How would you handle an upset customer? Tell us about a difficult problem. How do you prioritize when several customers need help at once? Are you comfortable working in a fast paced environment? And of course, the availability question, where every candidate suddenly becomes a human Google Calendar.

At one point the conversation got so comfortable that I looked at both of them and said, "So if I survive this interview, do I at least get Walgreens Rewards points for it?" The hiring manager started laughing. The other person laughed too. I told them that after the number of interviews I have done this year, I should probably have a loyalty card. Ten interviews and the eleventh one is free.

My inner raccoon was proud and started calculating whether the points could be redeemed for snacks, employment, or emotional damages.

That moment said a lot about the interview. The manager could joke, laugh, and still keep everything professional. It made the room feel human. Nobody asked whether I

was more like a lighthouse, a stapler, or an emotionally resilient spreadsheet. There was no surprise case study, no personality maze, and no seven round tournament to determine whether I could help someone find toothpaste.

The whole process was straightforward, respectful, and organized. I could ask questions, get clear answers, and leave knowing what the role involved instead of walking to my car wondering whether I had interviewed for customer service or undercover intelligence.

That is why I keep doing these experiments. Hiring does not need to feel robotic to be professional, and interviews do not need to be miserable to be effective.

Based on my experience, I would definitely recommend interviewing with Walgreens. Two people, practical questions, good conversation, a hiring manager with a sense of humor, and no unnecessary circus tricks. My inner raccoon gave it four paws up.

POST 37 / SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

WORKPLACE CULTURE

# Why the Toxic Ex-Boss Is Still Watching

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Leaving a toxic workplace should have ended the relationship, but profile-viewing and online curiosity suggested otherwise.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show that people can move forward without giving their former bosses a continuing role in their lives.

Leaving a toxic workplace is supposed to feel like closing a chapter. You turn in the keys, delete the group chats, stop answering “quick questions” that somehow become six hour emergencies, and finally enjoy not being blamed for problems created three management levels above you. You start sleeping better and remembering that your personality does not have to revolve around someone else’s poor leadership decisions.

Then LinkedIn turns into a neighborhood watch program.

Apparently toxic bosses do not believe in closure. They believe in reconnaissance. Not official surveillance, of course. That would require paperwork. I mean the cheaper corporate version where people you have not spoken to in years suddenly start viewing your profile like they have been assigned a mission. Out of nowhere, someone from your old company appears with, “Hey Alex! Long time. How have you been?” Sir!! We were never friends. You once asked me where the toner was. That was our relationship.

Nobody checked on me when I worked there. Nobody asked how I was doing when the workload doubled, the meetings multiplied, and leadership’s strategy became “figure it out and make us look good.” But leave, and suddenly everybody has Wi-Fi and free time. You can almost hear the conversation back at headquarters. “Did you check his LinkedIn?” “Yeah!” “What is he doing?” “He seems happy.” Silence. Absolute panic. Because nothing bothers a toxic former boss quite like discovering that the person they convinced was the problem became happier after leaving.

Then the questions begin. Where is he working? Who is he connected with? Why is he posting? Did he mention us? Is that raccoon joke about us? No, Gary. Not every raccoon joke is about you. Some are about recruiting. Some are simply about raccoons having better communication skills than certain leadership teams.

The funniest part is the people sent to investigate usually disguise it as concern. “Just wanted to see how you’re doing.” Really? We have not spoken since 2022, but apparently

one LinkedIn post activated the friendship package. I am doing great. Thank you for checking four years later. Please report back that I am alive, laughing, and somehow surviving without the weekly meeting about the previous meeting.

And honestly, I do not even mind the profile views. Please, look around. Stay awhile. Read the posts. Check the comments. Maybe endorse me for “Surviving Meetings That Should Have Been Emails.” Moving forward has a funny way of exposing people. Real friends reach out because they care. Former coworkers sometimes reach out because they are curious. Toxic bosses send minions because apparently clicking “View Profile” themselves would violate the villain handbook.

So when someone from your old company suddenly appears after years of silence, smile!!! They are not checking whether you failed. They are checking whether you succeeded without them.

And nothing ruins a toxic boss’s afternoon faster than finding out you did.

# Same Experience, Different Resume Experiment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Testing different versions of a real resume made it possible to observe how framing affects attention and screening outcomes.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to understand what the experiment changes, what stays truthful, and why presentation matters to an ATS.

There is a point in every job search experiment where you realize you are no longer applying for jobs. You are conducting research with a resume, coffee, and an inner raccoon who has no respect for corporate hiring systems. The applications start feeling like a strange documentary.

For anyone new here, I apply to companies using different versions of my resume, take assessments, go through interviews, and document what happens. Same person. Same work history. Different positioning. I want to see what gets through, what gets rejected, and whether the ATS is evaluating candidates or spinning a digital wheel labeled “maybe.”

This week’s experiment: Chewy.

For this one, I did not use the polished operations leadership resume full of KPIs, budgets, multi unit responsibility, and corporate language. I used the simpler version: customer service, communication, problem solving, reliability, and helping people. Nothing that screamed, “I have survived quarterly business reviews and know what EBITDA means.”

Then came the assessment, my favorite part of modern hiring. Nothing makes you question your personality faster than answering the same question six different ways while wondering whether “strongly agree” has become legally binding. There were customer scenarios, judgment questions, and personality questions designed to determine whether I am dependable or planning to flip a desk because someone returned dog food without a receipt. I stayed customer focused and resisted selecting, “My inner raccoon would like to speak with management.”

Then the email arrived. I passed. For a few seconds I felt like I had won something. Not employment, obviously. Let’s not get reckless. I had simply earned the privilege of advancing to the next square on the corporate board game. Shortly after the email, my phone rang. Recruiter.

We talked about the role, schedule, work from home setup, training, availability, and next steps. The recruiter was professional, friendly, and easy to talk to, which made the conversation feel less like screening and more like two adults discussing

a role. At one point I told them, “I have taken so many hiring assessments this year that if Chewy gives me one more, I expect a certificate and at least a bag of dog treats.” They laughed. I said, “Not for the dog. At this point, those are for me.” My inner raccoon approved and immediately began researching employee snack benefits.

What I liked most is that Chewy has been clearer. The email explained the basics, the recruiter followed up, and the conversation matched what was communicated. Nobody made me schedule a call just to discover information that could have been an email.

Now I move to the next step wondering whether the simpler customer service resume made the difference. That is why I run these experiments. Same person. Different resume. Different approach. And somewhere inside Chewy’s hiring system, an algorithm apparently looked at mine and said, “Fine. Let the raccoon through.”

# The Hiring Scavenger Hunt

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

After enough applications, assessments, calls and interviews, the project began to look like a broader study rather than a single job search.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain why documenting patterns across employers can reveal more than one isolated bad interview.

Somewhere along the way, my job search experiment stopped being a personal project and turned into a scavenger hunt through hiring.

After enough applications, assessments, recruiter calls, panel interviews, and automated rejections, I realized this had become something bigger. I apply to companies, test different resumes, take assessments, sit through interviews, document what happens, and share the candidate experience. Sometimes the process is impressive. Sometimes it is confusing. Sometimes an assessment feels like a psychological evaluation designed by a raccoon with an MBA.

So now I am opening the experiment up to all of you. If there is a company you have always wondered about, tag them. If you went through a bizarre hiring process and want me to test it, send me a message. If a company has seven interviews, three assessments, a recorded video, a personality test, a case study, and a final conversation with Brad who joins late and repeats a question from round two, send it my way. My inner raccoon has a clipboard and no respect for interview rounds.

I want to see what happens when I apply. I want to test the application process, figure out what resume gets through, talk to the recruiter, meet the hiring manager, and see whether the candidate experience matches the employer brand. I want to know whether the company communicates clearly, respects a candidate's time, explains the role, and treats the person applying like a human instead of Application Number 84721 trapped inside Workday.

Tag a company in the comments. Send me the job posting. Message me the company and role. Tell me what happened to you, if the story includes ghosting, rejection emails, interview rounds multiplying overnight, salary ranges disappearing during the recruiter call, or someone saying, "We are like a family here" while five employees stare into the distance like they have witnessed things they cannot legally discuss.

Big companies. Small companies. Retail. Automotive. Technology. Healthcare. Restaurants. Airlines. Banks. Warehouses. Remote jobs. If they are hiring and the role makes sense, I want to experience the

process from the candidate side and document what happens.

The purpose is not to attack companies. When a company does something well, I say it. When a recruiter is professional, I give them credit. When a hiring manager creates a great experience, I talk about it. When the process feels like an escape room designed by Human Resources after three energy drinks, I document that too.

So here is your chance to help pick one of my next experiments. Tag the company. Send me a message. Send me the role. Tell me why I should test their hiring process. I cannot promise I will get an interview, that the recruiter will call, or that the ATS will acknowledge my existence instead of launching my resume into the digital sun.

But if they let me through the front door, I am taking notes. And somewhere nearby, a raccoon is already studying for the assessment.

# Starbucks Store #10734: The Barista Interview

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A barista interview at a busy Starbucks location became one of the week's hands-on hiring experiments.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to document what a frontline retail hiring conversation looks like and keep the details that do not appear in recruiting ads.

Some interviews happen in a quiet office with a resume on the table and a hiring manager holding questions.

My Starbucks experiment apparently decided that sounded too calm. I apply to companies, test resumes, go through the hiring process, sit in interviews, and document the candidate experience. This time I applied for barista at Starbucks Store #10734 and met with Kristen, the store manager.

When I walked in, the location was packed. Mobile orders were lined up, customers were waiting, baristas were moving like air traffic controllers, and there was enough caffeine in the room to restart a power grid. Before the interview started, one customer was frustrated because his coffee was missing the extra espresso shot. I started talking with him and joked that missing an extra shot is serious because some of us are one caffeine shortage away from questionable decisions before breakfast. He laughed. The employees laughed. Kristen laughed. Naturally, my inner raccoon appeared. I said my raccoon would have climbed over the counter, found the espresso machine, fixed

the drink, and promoted himself to assistant manager before anyone could stop him. Everyone laughed again, and the lobby became round one of my interview.

Once Kristen and I sat down, the interview was relaxed and conversational. We talked about customer service, working in a fast paced environment, teamwork, availability, difficult situations, and what I would do when several customers needed help at once. The questions connected to the job. Nobody asked where I see myself in ten years. Nobody asked what kitchen appliance represents my personality. There was no surprise assessment or panel asking the same question five ways.

What stood out was how Kristen handled the interview. She listened, explained the expectations, talked about the environment, and gave me room to ask questions without making everything feel scripted. It felt like two people having a real conversation instead of an interrogation under fluorescent lighting. The funniest part was realizing the customer interaction before the interview probably

showed more than any rehearsed answer could. You can ask someone, "Tell me about a time you handled an unhappy customer," or watch them deal with one while the store is packed and somebody is emotionally recovering from a missing espresso shot.

That is what I liked about this experiment. Apply. Get contacted by the manager. Schedule the interview. Show up. Talk about the job. Ask questions. Learn what the role looks like. No seven rounds, case study, recorded video, or final interview with someone who has no idea what happened in the previous six.

So far, I give Starbucks credit for the candidate experience I had. Kristen was professional, funny, easy to talk with, and made the interview comfortable even while the store around us looked like caffeine had declared a national emergency.

My raccoon is still waiting to hear whether his assistant manager promotion was approved.

# What Happens If an Experiment Produces an Offer?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

People asked what I do when a real application and interview experiment results in an actual job offer.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to answer a fair question about the experiment's boundaries and explain what happens when the hiring process reaches a decision.

At some point, every experiment gets the same question: "Okay, Alex... but what happens if one of these companies actually offers you the job?"

Fair question, because from the outside it probably looks like I am wandering through corporate America collecting interviews and waiting for HR to hand me a badge.

For anyone new here, I apply to companies, test different resumes, take assessments, sit through interviews, and document the candidate experience from application to final decision. I want to see what employers communicate well, what makes no sense, and whether the employer brand matches what candidates experience. And yes, sometimes the experiment goes all the way to an offer. More than a few companies have offered me jobs. That is usually when my inner raccoon looks at me like, "Congratulations. We accidentally got employed again. Should I start filling out benefits paperwork?"

But that is also where the experiment ends. If I receive an offer

and I am not planning to take the role, I decline it. I thank the company, tell them I appreciate their time, and explain that I have been documenting the hiring process as part of an experiment about candidate experience. You can imagine the conversation. Recruiter: "We are excited to offer you the position." Me: "Thank you, I really appreciate that." Inner raccoon: "ASK ABOUT DENTAL." Me: "There is something I should explain."

Most companies have been professional about it. Some are surprised. Some are curious. A few ask what I thought about their process, and those conversations can be more interesting than the interview because everyone can stop performing and talk about what happened. If the recruiter was excellent, I tell them. If the hiring manager made the conversation comfortable, I tell them. If the process was organized, transparent, respectful, and human, I say that too. And if I spent forty five minutes taking an assessment asking whether I am "energetic" or "dependable" fourteen different ways, we may discuss that too.

The purpose has never been to collect job offers like Pokemon cards or see how many recruiters I can confuse before lunch. The offer is not the trophy. The experience is the information. I am interested in everything between clicking Apply and hearing the final decision. How does the ATS behave? Does the recruiter show up on time? Does the interview match the job? Does the company communicate? Do candidates get treated like people instead of application numbers trapped inside Workday?

So yes, companies have offered me jobs during these experiments, and yes, I have declined offers. Politely. Professionally. Then I explain the experiment, thank them, and share what I experienced. Sometimes they laugh. Sometimes they ask questions. Sometimes the conversation after declining the job is better than the interview itself.

And somewhere in the background, my raccoon quietly closes the benefits enrollment tab he absolutely opened too early. Research complete. What a ride!!!

# When Hiring Starts to Resemble a Background Investigation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A later stage in an interview experiment involved more extensive requests and made me question how much information employers need and when.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to call attention to the line between reasonable evaluation and unnecessarily intrusive candidate screening.

The modern hiring process has reached the point where applying for a job sometimes feels less like an interview and more like being quietly entered into a federal database.

You submit the resume, survive the recruiter call, answer leadership questions, explain your career history, smile through “tell me about a time,” and eventually wonder whether the next step involves fingerprints.

The other day I was doing another one of my hiring experiments, and everything was moving along normally. We talked about leadership, experience, operations, culture, expectations, and all the usual corporate vocabulary that makes everyone sound like they invented teamwork. Then they said it: “We’ll need to call your work references.” My inner raccoon immediately stopped digging through the emotional trash and looked up. Work references? Absolutely. Which chapter of my professional life would you like to investigate first?

Would you like the former boss who thought employee recognition meant saying “good job” once every fiscal

quarter? The coworker who survived three restructures? Or the manager who constantly reminded everyone that “we are one big family” right before half the family disappeared from the organization chart? I have references.

References are treated like some sacred final verification process. “We just want to speak with people who worked with you.” Perfect. But I have questions. Are you calling to verify my employment, or are we producing a Netflix documentary? Do I need to warn Steve from accounting that someone may call about my leadership during Q3 of 2022?

I almost wanted to say, “Just so we are clear, some of these people have stories.” Not bad stories. Corporate stories. The kind where someone says, “Alex was excellent under pressure,” then quietly adds, “mostly because management created pressure every 17 minutes.” A company can interview you four times, review your resume, study your LinkedIn, ask behavioral questions, and still decide they need another adult to confirm you are the same person they have been talking to for weeks.

So, for the experiment, I agreed. Call them. I wanted to see how the process worked. Would they ask meaningful questions about performance and leadership, or simply confirm dates and disappear back into the corporate fog? This is why I keep doing these experiments. Hiring is full of rituals everyone accepts because “that’s how it works,” but few people stop and ask whether those rituals actually identify the right person.

After multiple interviews and hours of conversation, I wonder how much confidence a company gains from calling three people I personally selected because I already know they like me. I did not exactly submit my toxic ex boss and write, “Good luck.”

So yes, the company wanted references. I gave them references. I hope my former coworkers remember the important parts: leadership, results, teamwork, problem solving, and staying calm under pressure.

And absolutely nothing about the raccoon.

# The 1:47 A.M. Career Memory Archive

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A sleepless night opened the floodgates to memories of previous jobs, people and turning points.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to write about the emotional backlog that comes with a long career, using humor without ignoring the feeling behind it.

You ever have one of those nights where you cannot sleep, so your brain decides 1:47 a.m. is the perfect time to reopen every memory you thought had been archived?

That was me the other night. I was lying there staring at the ceiling, exhausted, while my brain reopened files. Suddenly I remembered jobs I left years ago, people I have not talked to in forever, interviews I thought I forgot, mistakes I made, things I should have said, things I definitely should not have said, and random conversations from years ago that apparently needed review. Sleep was gone. My inner raccoon had taken over the night shift.

It is funny how memories work. During the day you are busy. You move, work, answer messages, solve problems, laugh, and keep going. But at night, when everything gets quiet, your brain starts playing the director's cut of your life with deleted scenes nobody asked for. I remembered people who once meant everything to me and are now strangers. Coworkers I spent more time with than my own family. Managers who taught me what kind of leader I never wanted to be. People who believed in me, and

people who doubted me so loudly that I started believing them too.

Then came the career memories. The promotions I wanted, the jobs I thought would change everything, and the rejections that felt personal. The toxic bosses. The good bosses. The meetings where I sat quietly even though I knew I should have spoken up. The times I spoke up and immediately realized silence had some underrated benefits. At 2:16 a.m., my brain was reviewing my existence. Needs improvement: sleep. Exceeds expectations: overthinking.

But somewhere between the embarrassing memories and the things that still hurt, I realized something. I have survived every version of myself that I thought was failing. Every job that ended eventually became a story. Every rejection that felt devastating eventually became something I could laugh about. Every person who walked away created space for someone else. Every mistake taught me something, even if the lesson arrived wearing steel toed boots.

We spend so much time looking forward that sometimes we forget to look back and see how far we

actually traveled. Not everything worked out the way I planned. Thank God. Some of my plans were terrible. If life had given me everything I wanted ten years ago, I would probably be sitting in a conference room somewhere defending a spreadsheet I hate while pretending a mandatory team building exercise changed my life.

So yes sometimes my brain keeps me awake and rewinds the memories. Some make me laugh. Some still sting. Some make me wonder what the hell I was thinking. But they all belong to me. They are proof that I lived, failed, learned, changed, kept moving, and gave my inner raccoon plenty of material.

Eventually I smiled, rolled over, and started falling asleep. Then my brain whispered, "Remember that embarrassing thing you said in 2009?" The raccoon opened one eye. And we were back in business.

# Lowe's and the Waiting Bench

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Lowe's application advanced to an in-person interview, followed by last-minute scheduling and time spent waiting in the store.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to examine the respect employers show for a candidate's time once the person arrives for an interview.

For those who are new here, I've spent this year applying to companies, going through their hiring processes, sitting in interviews, and documenting what candidates actually experience once the polished careers page disappears and real life begins. Think of it as mystery shopping for recruiting, except my inner raccoon is taking notes.

This round was Lowe's Companies, Inc.

I got a message saying I had passed the screening and they wanted an in-person interview. Problem: the interviewer's calendar was full, so they would contact me when availability opened. I joked that the interview slot had entered witness protection. Apparently witness protection lasted two hours, because the recruiter called and asked if I could come in that day. Absolutely. My inner raccoon put on a tiny tie and prepared for The Interview Games.

I arrived, checked in, and was told to sit on a bench and wait for the hiring manager. So I sat. And waited. By 30 minutes, I was beginning to feel like store inventory. At minute 40, I wondered whether the bench

came with benefits. Then the hiring manager finally appeared and took me into the office.

Once we sat down, he started talking. And talking. For about 30 minutes. He told me the store was short staffed, he was working more than 60 hours a week, and they needed someone ASAP. He explained enough chaos that I briefly forgot which one of us had applied. I said, "Am I interviewing for a position, or did I accidentally respond to an emergency distress signal?" He laughed. I laughed. My inner raccoon started looking for a Lowe's vest.

Then he looked at the time and said he had to go soon because he needed to release someone for lunch.

Perfect. Nothing says "we desperately need people" like making the candidate wait 40 minutes, spending 30 minutes explaining how badly you need help, and then ending because somebody needs a sandwich. Then came the question: "Do you have any questions for me?" Sir, I had 40 minutes on a bench followed by a 30 minute documentary about staffing collapse. I know the overtime situation, the coverage problem, the

lunch schedule, and enough about the store to accidentally get scheduled tomorrow. What exactly is left? "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Probably still waiting for someone to return from lunch.

This is why these experiments are interesting. The careers page tells you about culture, teamwork, growth, and opportunity. The interview tells you what Tuesday actually looks like. To Lowe's credit, the manager was friendly and had a sense of humor. But the sequence was beautifully corporate: calendar full, two hours later come immediately, need someone ASAP, wait 40 minutes, manager talks for 30, then he has to leave to cover lunch.

Lowe's has officially entered The Interview Games. I passed the screening, survived the bench, got the staffing confession, made the manager laugh, and nearly became part of the lunch coverage plan. My inner raccoon is still there. He has a vest now.

# A Bike Ride Into the Starbucks Executive Summit

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A bike ride meant to clear my head led to a crowded Starbucks full of laptops and intense work conversations.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make an ordinary morning scene into a funny look at how corporate work follows us into every coffee shop.

Some mornings you go for a bike ride because you need fresh air, some quiet, and twenty minutes where nobody can send you a calendar invite. Other mornings you accidentally pedal straight into what looks like an emergency corporate summit next to the espresso machine.

This morning I took my bike out and cruised around the neighborhood because my brain had apparently opened 47 tabs overnight and refused to close any of them. Fresh air, quiet streets, no meetings, no emails, no recruiters asking if I have five minutes for a “quick conversation” that somehow becomes a 45 minute discussion. Just me, the bike, and the hope my brain would finally stop hosting its own executive committee meeting.

Then I decided to stop at my local Starbucks. The place was packed. Every table had somebody behind a laptop. People staring intensely at spreadsheets, Teams calls, presentations, and whatever mysterious document requires someone to sigh every three minutes. I thought I had interrupted a corporate retreat. Apparently

Starbucks is now headquarters for people who escaped the office but still want deadlines and somebody saying “circle back.”

I walked in wearing bike clothes, holding my helmet, looking like the only person in the building who had not been invited to the quarterly earnings call. One guy had two laptops open. Two. That is not working remotely. That is running a small government. Another person whispered on a video call, “I completely agree with the strategy,” while stirring an iced coffee like the strategy had offended them.

I looked around and said, “Did Starbucks merge with LinkedIn overnight, or am I supposed to have a performance review before I order?” A couple people laughed. One guy nearly spit out his coffee. Another looked over his laptop like I violated the employee handbook. Perfect.

I ordered my coffee and stood there watching this beautiful ecosystem of modern work. One person was typing like the keyboard owed them money. Another was nodding seriously on Zoom while clearly

reading something unrelated on a second screen. Someone else had a notebook open with three words on it, which felt like executive level productivity.

And it hit me how funny work has become. We spent years trying to escape cubicles, only to recreate the cubicle at Starbucks with better coffee and strangers listening to our conference calls. Now instead of Bob from accounting hearing your meeting, seventeen random people ordering caramel macchiatos know the Q3 numbers are disappointing. I grabbed my coffee, went back outside, got on my bike, and continued my ride. My mind was definitely clearer, mostly because I realized whatever chaos I had going on could be worse. I could have been the guy with two laptops.

Somewhere behind me, the unofficial Starbucks board meeting continued. No agenda. No conference room. Just caffeine, Wi-Fi, and eighteen people pretending not to listen to each other's meetings. Corporate America may have finally achieved hybrid work.

# When a Company Says Thank You

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Responses to the hiring experiments included not only PR and legal messages but also people and companies expressing appreciation.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize productive feedback and show that constructive criticism can lead to positive changes.

For those who are new here, I spend a ridiculous amount of time applying to companies, going through their hiring processes, sitting in interviews, documenting what candidates actually experience, and sharing the parts that never make it onto the polished careers page.

I test the process the way a real candidate experiences it, from the application and screening to the interview, follow up, ghosting, and the moments where my inner raccoon quietly says, “We should probably write about this.”

Sharing these experiments has created some interesting mail. PR teams reach out. Legal sometimes gets involved. I get pushback, questions, responses that feel like they were reviewed by attorneys, executives, and someone whose job was to remove every human emotion from the sentence.

But here is the part people do not see as often: I also get emails that simply say, “Thank you.” Thank you for pointing this out. Thank you for showing us what the candidate experienced. Thank you for bringing attention to something we did not realize was happening. Messages

matter, because the point was never to embarrass companies or stand outside headquarters with a megaphone screaming, “YOUR ATS HAS FAILED HUMANITY.”

The point is to show what hiring feels like from the other side. Candidates do not see internal meetings, recruiter workloads, approvals, or why something went wrong. They experience the interview that started 40 minutes late, the recruiter who vanished, the automated rejection at 4:07 in the morning, the seventh round that became an eighth, or “We will definitely follow up” right before everyone disappears into corporate witness protection.

What has surprised me most is that some companies actually do something about it. I have had people tell me they reviewed their process, changed communication, addressed a poor experience internally, improved follow up, or talked with managers about how candidates were treated. That is when the sarcasm becomes something more, because behind every ridiculous interview story is a real person trying to find work, support a family, recover from a

layoff, or simply find a company that treats them like a human being.

I joke about the raccoon, witness protection recruiters, mysterious calendars, robotic rejection emails, and hiring managers who disappear like they owe the IRS money. But I also notice when a company listens. Nobody expects perfection. Hiring is messy. People get busy. Systems fail. What matters is what happens after someone points it out.

Do you get defensive? Call PR? Call legal? Or look at the experience and say, “We can do better.” Sometimes I get all four. And if one sarcastic post makes one company fix one part of its process, then the experiment did more than make people laugh. It made the next candidate’s experience a little better.

That is worth every awkward email, especially the ones that begin, “Dear Alex, our legal department would like to speak with you.” My inner raccoon loves those. Always!

# The People Behind the Layoff Statistics

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Messages from readers who had spent years building careers before suddenly losing their jobs made the subject impossible to treat as just a number.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to see the people behind restructuring announcements and recognize the dignity of their work and experience.

Every once in a while, a message lands in my inbox that makes me stop laughing for a second.

Someone tells me they gave a firm 10, 15, 20 years of their life. They showed up, adapted, survived reorganizations, new systems, new leaders, budget cuts, and enough corporate acronyms to qualify for a second language. Then one day, they are told their role is gone and suddenly they are standing outside wondering how something that took decades to build disappeared in a fifteen minute meeting.

You can prepare financially. You can update your resume. You can tell yourself you knew it might happen. But there is no spreadsheet that prepares you for waking up on Monday and realizing nobody is expecting you anywhere. One week you are invited to meetings nobody wants to attend. The next week you are refreshing LinkedIn at 7:12 a.m. wondering why a job posted seventeen minutes ago already has 483 applicants and apparently three astronauts with MBAs. Then comes the job search: upload the resume, retype the resume, answer the same questions, upload a cover letter, take an assessment, record a video, smile

naturally while talking to absolutely nobody, wait, get rejected by an automated email at 4:03 a.m., and apply again.

Modern job hunting can make accomplished people question themselves in ways they never expected. Someone who led teams, delivered projects, solved problems, and spent decades building expertise suddenly starts wondering whether the problem is that their resume uses the wrong font.

It is not funny. But sometimes you have to laugh because the alternative is throwing your laptop through a window, and apparently that is not considered a transferable leadership skill.

This is one reason I keep writing about hiring. Behind every application is somebody carrying a story you cannot see. Maybe they were laid off after twenty years. Maybe they have been unemployed for twelve months. Maybe savings are disappearing. Maybe they are smiling during an interview while wondering how many more rejections they can take before their confidence packs a suitcase and leaves. And then sometimes a stranger sends a message saying,

“Your words helped.” Those messages hit differently.

Because I can joke about ATS systems, ghosting recruiters, panel interviews, disappearing hiring managers, and my inner raccoon rummaging through the emotional dumpster behind corporate America. But underneath all of it is something serious. People want to feel useful again. They want somewhere to go Monday morning. They want someone to look at twenty years of experience and see value instead of an expiration date.

So if the job search has made you feel dislodged from reality lately, you are not alone in that feeling. Keep applying. Keep laughing when you can. Walk away from the laptop when you need to. And remember that a rejection email written by software does not get to summarize your career.

Your story is bigger than an applicant tracking system. Even my raccoon knows that.

# The Resume Strategy Behind My Interviews

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Repeated questions about landing interviews led to a detailed explanation of customizing truthful resumes to specific roles.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to share a practical approach: highlight relevant experience instead of sending exactly the same framing to every employer.

Someone asked me earlier how I keep landing all these interviews, which is fair because at this point my calendar looks less like a job search and more like Corporate Speed Dating.

I run hiring experiments. I apply to real jobs, go through interviews, test different approaches. Sending the exact same resume to 100 jobs is basically throwing spaghetti at a wall and then blaming the wall for not calling you back.

One of the biggest things I do is use multiple resumes. Not fake resumes. I'm not suddenly becoming an astronaut or Vice President of Space Operations depending on what Indeed recommends that morning. The experience is mine. What changes is how I present it based on the job description. If a company wants multi unit operations leadership, I bring those accomplishments forward. If the posting emphasizes sales, P&L, training, staffing, customer experience; I adjust the resume so the most relevant experience is easier to see. I use their language to make it easier for a recruiter, hiring manager, and ATS to understand

why my background connects to that role.

Recruiters are not sitting there studying your career journey like it's a Netflix documentary. They are scanning, comparing, filtering, and moving. And here is something else I have experienced: companies sometimes look at your resume and immediately decide how expensive you must be before anyone asks what you actually want. They see senior titles, years of leadership, large teams, and suddenly somebody imagines you arriving at the interview demanding a corner office, unlimited PTO, and a compensation package approved by the Federal Reserve.

I have tested this. I submitted a heavier executive style resume and received silence. Then I changed the presentation, focused the same real experience around the role, simplified certain descriptions without misrepresenting anything, and suddenly the phone rings. Same person. Same career. Same questionable relationship with coffee. Different presentation. Sometimes the company is not rejecting your experience. It may be

rejecting the salary they invented for you in their own head. I also pay attention to salary expectations. If an application forces me to enter a number, that number can decide whether a human ever sees the resume.

That does not mean lying or hiding your background. It means understanding that a resume is not your autobiography. It is a marketing document showing why your real experience matches that opportunity. Every experiment teaches me something. Sometimes changing ten words improves the response. Sometimes a simpler resume performs better. Sometimes the ATS behaves like it was programmed by a raccoon standing on a keyboard after three energy drinks.

So when people ask how I am getting interviews, there is no secret handshake. I test. I adjust. I tailor. I track what happens. Apparently even your resume needs multiple personalities to survive modern hiring. Modern hiring is part strategy, part science, and mostly circus.

# Disney and the Interview With the Camera Off

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A Disney interview became another documented experiment when the interviewer arrived late with camera trouble.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how small moments of preparation and humor influence an interview and how the candidate experiences them.

For anyone new here, I have turned the modern hiring process into a social experiment, a research project, and occasionally a comedy series that HR probably wishes came with a mute button.

I apply to jobs, test different resumes and approaches, attend interviews and document what the candidate experience is actually like. I am not trying to collect jobs like trading cards. If an offer comes from one of these experiments, I respectfully decline it and explain what I was doing. The goal is to see how companies communicate and whether the experience matches the employer brand.

Today's experiment was The Walt Disney Company.

I logged in early. The interviewer joined about 5 minutes late with his camera off and explained that he was having technical issues. I told him, "No worries. It's Disney. I figured keeping a little mystery was part of the magic." He laughed. So we started with my camera on and his camera off, giving the interview the energy of a podcast where only one person knew there was video.

Then we started talking, and we kept talking. What should have been a normal virtual interview turned into more than an hour of conversation about my background, leadership, experience, situations I had handled and follow up questions. At some point I wondered whether I had accidentally subscribed to the extended director's cut. Somewhere around minute fifty my inner raccoon stopped taking notes and started demanding snacks.

Then something magical happened. His camera suddenly turned on. There he was. An actual human being. For about 20 glorious seconds. I had just enough time to confirm I was not being interviewed by an AI voice, a Disney animatronic, or Mickey Mouse working remotely from accounting. He appeared, I saw him, he saw me and before my brain could process the moment, the camera disappeared again. My inner raccoon looked up like, "That's it? That was the cameo?" Twenty seconds of visual evidence during an interview lasting more than an hour. I felt like I had captured Bigfoot footage.

The funniest part is that the conversation was actually good. He was professional, engaged, laughed with me and asked thoughtful questions. That is why I keep doing these experiments. A career page can promise communication, culture and an amazing candidate experience, but the interview is where candidates see what those words look like in real life. Sometimes the recruiter is late. Sometimes Zoom decides cameras are optional. Sometimes an interview runs twice as long as expected. And sometimes you get 20 seconds of visual proof the interviewer exists before technology sends him back into corporate witness protection.

Another experiment complete. Disney: more than one hour of conversation, 5 minutes late, approximately twenty seconds of camera footage, one good interviewer, one Disney magic joke and one inner raccoon demanding royalties for emotional support.

Modern hiring continues to be the greatest unscripted show nobody remembers auditioning for.

# Why So Many Amazon Employees Are Following

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

After writing about Amazon's hiring process, I noticed an unusual number of followers who worked for the company.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to laugh about the attention while emphasizing that people inside large organizations are often interested in real candidate feedback.

Somewhere along the way, my LinkedIn stopped feeling like a professional networking platform and started feeling like I accidentally wandered into an Amazon employee reunion where nobody told me there was a dress code.

Recently, I have noticed a lot of new followers from Amazon. A lot. And every time another one pops up, my inner raccoon sits up, adjusts his imaginary tie, and says, "Well, this feels completely normal."

For anyone new here, I document my experiences with the modern hiring process. I apply, interview, test different approaches, and share what happens from the candidate side. Sometimes it is impressive. Sometimes it is confusing. Sometimes it feels like the process was designed during a fire drill by departments that have never met each other.

Amazon has definitely been one of the more memorable experiments. After going through their interview process and writing about it, I started noticing something funny. More and more people connected to Amazon began following me.

Recruiters. Managers. Employees. People with job titles long enough to require a second line on LinkedIn.

At first, I thought maybe it was coincidence. Then another followed. Then another. Then another. At this point I am starting to wonder whether there is a private internal Slack channel called "What Did Alex Post Now?" I can picture it now. "Team, he posted again." "What did he say?" "He mentioned the interview process." "Did he use the raccoon?" "Yes." "Dear God."

Honestly, I find it hilarious. I am not trying to start a corporate uprising. I am sharing candidate experiences, asking questions, pointing out the strange parts, and making jokes because if we cannot laugh about modern hiring, the alternative is staring at an application portal that says "Under Consideration" for six months.

And to the Amazon people following me: welcome. Make yourselves comfortable. There is coffee somewhere, the raccoon is mostly house trained, and there will probably be another hiring story soon. Maybe you agree with me.

Maybe you do not. Maybe someone forwarded a post and said, "You need to see this guy."

Either way, I appreciate you being here. The point has never been to attack companies. It is to talk about the candidate experience in a way people actually want to read. Hiring affects real people. Rejection emails, endless rounds, ghosting, assessments, automated messages, and recruiter conversations are not just processes on a spreadsheet. They become stories candidates remember.

So yes, apparently I now have an expanding Amazon section in my follower list. I did not receive a Prime box with them. There was no two day delivery. They simply appeared. At this rate, if enough Amazon employees follow me, I am expecting Jeff Bezos to personally send a notification that says, "People who followed Alex also followed: emotional damage, interview panels, and one suspicious raccoon."

Welcome to the experiment. Keep cameras on, interview rounds reasonable, and raccoons out.

# Ten Seconds to Explain Your Entire Career

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panelist asked why I should be hired, then imposed a ten-second limit that turned an ordinary question into a game-show moment.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show how arbitrary interview theatrics can replace a useful conversation about someone's qualifications.

Applying for jobs in 2026 no longer feels like looking for employment. It feels like I accidentally signed up for a game show where the grand prize is another interview, the consolation prize is an automated rejection email, and nobody bothered to tell the contestants the rules.

One minute you are discussing leadership, the next somebody is holding an imaginary stopwatch over your career like, "Alex, you have ten seconds. Good luck."

The other day I was sitting in a panel interview, smiling, making eye contact with a collection of little boxes on the screen, and pretending my inner raccoon was not knocking over trash cans behind my confidence. Then one of the panelists asked the classic question: "Why should we hire you?" Then came the twist: "You have ten seconds." Ten seconds. Apparently I was no longer interviewing for a leadership position. I was on Corporate Jeopardy and somebody had just hit the buzzer.

So I answered: "Because I know how to walk into an operation, find what is not working, build the people around me, improve the numbers, and leave the business stronger than

I found it. I don't need six months to figure out where the problems are. I listen, I lead, and I execute." That was it. No inspirational soundtrack. No PowerPoint. No smoke machine. No leadership quote from a guy standing on a mountain. Just the answer, delivered before the imaginary clock could explode.

Then I looked at the VP and decided the game show needed another contestant. I asked him, "Now you have ten seconds. Why should I choose your company?" The room got quiet for a second, and then he laughed and said, "That's a good question." My inner raccoon leaned back in his chair, crossed his arms, and whispered, "Well, now we have a game."

That moment is why modern interviews fascinate me. Candidates are expected to explain years of experience, leadership philosophy, failures, successes, career goals, personality, emotional intelligence, and their relationship with Microsoft Excel before the next calendar notification. But when a candidate turns the question around and asks the company to explain its own value, suddenly everyone

remembers interviews are supposed to work both ways.

Companies are evaluating candidates, but candidates are also evaluating companies. I want to know what leadership looks like when nobody is reading from the recruiting brochure. I want to know why people stay, how employees are developed, how decisions are made, and what makes the organization worth choosing beyond the careers page.

That is why I keep doing these hiring experiments. I apply, interview, test different approaches, ask different questions, and document what happens. Every process teaches me something about how companies hire and what candidates are expected to do. Apparently interviews now come with a stopwatch too.

Welcome to job hunting in 2026. Resume uploaded. ATS defeated. Panel assembled. Clock running. Alex, you have ten seconds. Apparently the VP does too.

# The Recruiter Who Can Sell You the Missing Documents

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described being asked for unusual employment documents and then referred to someone who could create them for a fee.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to warn readers to think carefully about suspicious recruiting requests and separate legitimate screening from potential exploitation.

Every time I think I've seen every possible version of the modern hiring process, somebody opens a new door and reveals another room I absolutely did not know existed.

Tonight someone messaged me asking for my take on a recruiting situation. A recruiter had requested documents he had never been asked to provide before. But then came the plot twist: the recruiter referred him to someone who could create those documents for him... for a fee.

At that point my inner raccoon put down the coffee, adjusted his tiny reading glasses, and whispered, "Excuse me, what kind of employment escape room is this?"

Because now we're apparently entering the premium version of job hunting. Apply for the job. Upload the resume. Complete the assessment. Survive three interviews. Provide references. Perform the sacred corporate handshake. Then unlock Level 7, where someone tells you that you need a mysterious document that can conveniently be purchased from their preferred document wizard.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but if a legitimate employer requires a specific document, certification, license, portfolio item, background form, or other verification, I would expect the company to clearly explain what it is, why it is required, and how to obtain it. I would not expect the conversation to suddenly feel like I'm buying concert tickets from a man named Tony behind a gas station.

People are already navigating fake job postings, mystery recruiters, six round interviews, unpaid projects, personality tests, AI screenings, ghosting, salary ranges wide enough to include both minimum wage and private island ownership, and rejection emails arriving at 4:13 in the morning like HR has become a nocturnal species. Now we may also need to add "unexpected document sales funnel" to the list.

My advice in a situation like this would be simple: slow down and verify everything independently. Ask exactly what the documents are, why they are required, whether the employer requires them directly, and whether there are official sources for obtaining them. Contact

the company through a verified website or phone number if necessary. Do not send money, sensitive information, identification, banking details, or anything else simply because someone attached the word "recruiter" to their profile.

Scammers love urgency. Bad processes love confusion. Legitimate companies should be able to answer reasonable questions without turning the candidate into Sherlock Holmes with a LinkedIn account. This is one of the strangest parts of studying hiring: every week someone sends me a story that makes me think, "Surely we have reached the bottom." Then recruiting shows up with a shovel.

If your hiring process requires candidates to purchase mystery paperwork from somebody you conveniently recommend, please understand that the candidate is no longer thinking about your company culture.

They are wondering whether the next interview is with a Nigerian prince. The modern job search remains undefeated.

# HR Is Reading My LinkedIn Now

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

More followers with HR, recruiting and executive titles prompted jokes about how corporate leaders react to the stories.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to welcome serious discussion about hiring practices, even when the subject makes a company uncomfortable.

At some point, my LinkedIn follower list stopped looking like networking and started looking like the attendance sheet for a corporate emergency meeting.

Lately I've noticed more and more people following me with titles like HR Director, Talent Acquisition, Recruiter, People Operations, Vice President, Regional Manager and other titles that usually come with access to policies and a "quick chat" that somehow lasts forty seven minutes. I can only imagine what some of them are thinking when they see my name pop up: "Please don't let him apply here." Others are wondering whether their hiring process is as polished as the career page says it is. Somewhere, an HR leader is refreshing my profile like people track a storm, waiting to see which company appears next.

For anyone new here, I run real world hiring experiments. I apply to companies, go through the recruiting process, interview with their teams, and document what actually happens. I look at the application, the ATS, recruiter communication, interview questions, and my inner raccoon climbs onto the table and starts

asking whether anyone has read the job description. I don't announce the experiment ahead of time because that would defeat the purpose. I want to see what a regular candidate sees when nobody thinks someone is documenting the process. Same application. Same waiting. Same recruiter call. Same panel. Same "we'll be in touch soon" followed by enough silence to qualify as a meditation retreat.

That is what makes my follower list so entertaining lately. HR people. Recruiters. Executives. Managers. People with "culture" in their title. People from companies I have interviewed with, companies I have written about, and companies I may or may not have sitting on my application list.

Every time I submit an application now, I picture somebody inside the company getting a notification and yelling, "EVERYBODY ACT NORMAL. HE'S HERE." Suddenly cameras work. Recruiters arrive on time. The hiring manager knows which job I applied for. Nobody sends me a seven hour unpaid project labeled "quick exercise." Someone even says the salary without making me solve

a riddle and offer a resume to the ATS gods.

The funny part is that I'm not looking for companies to fail. Some of the best stories I share come from recruiters and hiring managers who are prepared, transparent, funny, respectful, and good at what they do. When a company creates a great candidate experience, I talk about that too. This experiment is about seeing hiring exactly as candidates experience it. But when the process becomes nine interviews, six people asking the same question, three assessments, an unpaid case study, and two weeks of silence, the raccoon gets the keyboard.

So to all the HR leaders, recruiters, executives, PR teams, managers, and corporate observers following, welcome. Grab some coffee. Enjoy the experiment. If you happen to see my application come through your system, please remain calm. Your company may be next.

# How the Interview Experiments Actually Work

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST ↗](#)

## WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recurring question about the volume of interviews prompted another explanation of testing, adjusting and tracking applications.

## WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain that the method involves persistence, honest presentation and comparison rather than a secret system.

One of the questions I keep getting lately is, “How are you actually getting all these interviews?”

Every time someone asks, I wish I had a dramatic answer involving a secret recruiter network, a hidden LinkedIn button, or a password whispered into the ATS at midnight. Unfortunately, it is much less exciting. There is no magic portal. There is a lot of testing, adjusting, rewriting, applying, and occasionally arguing with a robot that has decided my resume is emotionally incompatible with employment.

I have talked about this before because I know how frustrating the numbers are. People are applying to hundreds, sometimes more than a thousand jobs, and barely getting a handful of interviews. They have survived reorganizations, layoffs, mergers, and managers who scheduled meetings to discuss why there were too many meetings. Yet somehow an application disappears into the ATS and comes back twelve seconds later with, “We have decided to pursue candidates whose experience more closely aligns with our needs.” Twelve seconds. Apparently Karen in recruiting

reviewed my entire career while microwaving soup.

What I do differently is treat each application like an experiment. I do not use one resume for everything. I have multiple versions depending on the role, industry, title, and language in the posting. I study the job description, look at repeated words, compare them to my background, and make sure the resume speaks the same language. Modern recruiting sometimes requires you to explain your experience to software before a human discovers you exist.

I also apply quickly when I can. Some jobs collect hundreds of applications in hours. By the time you spend three days perfecting your cover letter, the recruiter may already be interviewing someone who applied while standing in line at Costco.

Salary expectations matter too. I test different approaches. Sometimes a high number can knock you out before anyone speaks to you. Sometimes a realistic lower point starts the conversation. The whole thing feels less like employment and more like entering a cheat code into

a Nintendo game. None of this guarantees anything. I still receive emails at bizarre hours telling me the company went with someone else. I still see jobs reposted days later after being told they found a stronger candidate, which makes me wonder whether the stronger candidate escaped.

Difference is that I track what happens. Which resume got through? Which title worked? Which wording produced calls? Which applications died instantly? I change one variable, watch the result, and try again. Sometimes the difference between getting seen and disappearing is one keyword, timing, salary screening, location, or whatever mood the algorithm woke up in that morning.

So when people ask how I keep landing interviews, the answer is simple: I keep experimenting. And somewhere, an ATS just read this post and rejected me for not having five years of experience with software created last Tuesday.

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ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

# A last thought.

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Another week ends, and my biggest takeaway is not about a particular company, recruiter or software platform. It is about how many times people are asked to prove something that should already be obvious: they are human beings, not rows in a spreadsheet with a green or red status dot. They have families, bills, histories, strengths, doubts, and sometimes a full day scheduled around one interview that a hiring manager decides to join whenever it becomes convenient.

From September 21 through September 27, the stories covered almost every corner of that experience. There was a rejection dressed up in corporate language that would have challenged a cryptographer. There were panels where the conversation felt great but the outcome remained a mystery. There were stories about coworkers who become strangers after a layoff, and bosses who keep looking at LinkedIn long after their authority has ended. Apparently a former employee's profile is now the free trial version of corporate surveillance.

We also talked about the moments when hiring crosses a line. A woman should never enter an interview to discuss her experience and find that her appearance has become the central question. A candidate should not be asked for a meaningful free consulting deliverable without clear expectations. And nobody should wonder whether a recruiter's referral to someone selling "required documents" is part of a job application or the plot of a suspicious late-night infomercial.

There is a practical lesson here for employers: take the entire trip as a candidate. Use the public posting. Make the account. Upload the resume. Then type it again because the software apparently believes the uploaded document is an unverified rumor. Schedule the interview and wait. See whether the instructions are clear. See what happens when someone has a question. Watch the clock. If you want to know whether your process respects applicants, you must experience the things they experience.

**A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED**

And please remember that the candidate is judging the company too. That is not arrogance. It is a normal professional decision. When an interviewer is prepared, courteous and honest, people notice. When the hiring manager acts like showing up on time is an optional stretch goal for the third quarter, people notice that too. A company can spend a fortune promoting its values, but one careless interview can become the clearest expression of those values a candidate will ever see.

I also want to say something to people who have recently lost work. Your layoff is not your identity. The shock, anger and confusion do not mean you are handling it badly. Losing a job can feel like losing your routine, your community and the version of the future you expected. Sometimes the people who shared every lunch with you go quiet overnight. Their silence may hurt, but it does not erase the work you did or the care you put into it.

To people who are still employed and watching others search: send the message. Make the introduction. Give the reference when you can honestly give it. If your old colleague reaches out, do not act as though the former employer has installed a tracking device in your LinkedIn inbox. A little decency costs less than most companies spend ordering lunch for a meeting that could have been an email.

Employers, consider whether you are asking candidates for something you would be uncomfortable asking of your own employees without paying them. Hours of strategy work, presentation decks, long assessments and ten-second game-show answers are not automatically better ways to hire. Sometimes the most useful question is simple: tell me about something you improved, what you did, and what happened next. Then listen to the answer instead of imagining a stopwatch.

The Interview Games is not about declaring every employer terrible. Good recruiters exist. Thoughtful hiring managers exist. Leaders who listen to feedback exist, and their willingness to improve deserves attention. When someone responds with curiosity instead of defensiveness, it gives me hope that these posts can do more than get a laugh. They can help organizations see blind spots and do better by the next person who applies.

As for the humor, I am keeping it. A world where a coffee cup can supposedly become an interview red flag, where an ordinary bookstore launch becomes a corporate survival celebration, and where an executive interview feels like a game show has more than enough material to keep the jokes coming. I would love for companies to fix the problems faster than I can write about them. My inner raccoon might object, but I would happily retire a punchline if it meant a better experience for applicants.

**A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED**

To every reader who shares a story, asks a fair question, or simply says a post made the job search feel less lonely: thank you. Those messages are the reason this is not just a series of punchlines about meetings and software. Your experiences create the bigger picture. They remind me that the most important part of the experiment is not the company name in the headline. It is the person whose hopes and time are on the line.

So here is my last thought for the week: be the person who communicates. Be the manager who prepares. Be the recruiter who closes the loop. Be the colleague who answers the phone after a layoff. Be the candidate who values their own time, even when a system seems designed to waste it. And if none of that improves the process overnight, at least we can keep a sense of humor while we insist on something better.

Until the next round, keep your standards, keep your kindness, and remember that behind every application is somebody's real life. If a company needs nine interviews to discover that, I may have to write another newsletter.

  
**THE POINT OF ALL THIS**

# Behind every application is somebody's real life.

**MAKE THE PROCESS WORTH THEIR TIME.**