



AUGUST 23 - AUGUST 30, 2026

THE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Every post. Every story. In my own words.

57

ORIGINAL POSTS

8

DAYS OF THE EXPERIMENT

114

BEHIND-THE-POST NOTES

WHAT THE INTERVIEW GAMES IS ALL ABOUT

The experiment behind every story.

The Interview Games began with a question that sounded simple: what actually happens to a qualified person who walks into the modern hiring process? I wanted to see what happens after the company posts its carefully polished promise about opportunity, culture and respect. The answer has involved portals that demand the same resume twice, panels that multiply without warning, salaries that change their personalities, and recruiters who sometimes vanish more effectively than professional magicians.

I apply to roles, take part in hiring conversations, compare what employers promise with what candidates experience, and listen to the stories readers send me. Not every post is an account of my own interview. Some begin with a job listing, an executive announcement, a direct message, a former boss, or a stranger whose career story deserves a wider audience. The common thread is the human being on the other end of the system.

August 23 through August 30 was eight days of hiring theater and workplace reality: salary ranges wide enough to fit a second job inside them; a recruiter describing older workers like specimens; a woman trying to disguise her age to find work; a candidate surviving eleven interviews; a signed offer that vanished; and interview panels apparently auditioning for jury duty. There were also stories about raises, loyalty, coworkers, truth-telling, books, and trying to get through another Monday with dignity intact.

I write with sarcasm because it can make a difficult truth impossible to ignore. A funny paragraph may open a conversation that a formal HR presentation never would. But the point is not that every recruiter is terrible or every employer is dishonest. There are good people working very hard to improve these systems. I want those people to succeed, and I want the rest to pay attention.

This edition presents the complete written posts from my LinkedIn account export in Chicago publication order. Each post has two new editorial notes: "What Triggered It" and "Why I Wrote It." They interpret the context and message of the published text; they are not statements from the original post itself. The original commentary remains intact. Welcome to The Interview Games. Please take a number. Apparently Steve from Finance has one more question.

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The week at a glance.

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POST 01 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

LIFE & CAREER

The Family Performance Review Nobody Requested

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reflection on being an adult yet still feeling judged by questions from parents about work and life.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to connect job-search anxiety with the very human need for family understanding.

There's a special kind of adulthood nobody warns you about: being old enough to pay taxes, understand "insufficient funds," and still somehow feel twelve years old when your parents ask, "So... what are you doing with your life?"

Nothing hits quite like already struggling and then getting an unsolicited performance review from the people who raised you. You can be working two jobs, sending resumes, rebuilding after a layoff, and somebody casually says, "Your cousin seems to be doing really well." Fantastic. Thank you. I was enjoying the mashed potatoes, but apparently we've moved into the family quarterly earnings call.

We grow up believing there's a timeline. By 25, have a career. By 30, own something with a roof. By 35, be established. By 40, have everything figured out. Nobody mentions that life sometimes takes your five year plan, folds it into a paper airplane, and launches it into traffic. And when you don't "make it" by whatever imaginary deadline someone had for you, the disappointment can hurt more than the setback. Losing a job is one thing. Feeling like you lost someone's respect

along with it is another. That's when humor becomes survival equipment. "How's work going?" Great, Mom. I'm currently CEO of Refreshing My Email LLC. Benefits include anxiety, unlimited coffee, six versions of my resume, and a retirement plan based on one recruiter eventually responding.

But underneath the jokes, there's something real. People are carrying shame that was never theirs to carry. They're measuring themselves against siblings, classmates, cousins. Success is not a scheduled train. You did not miss the 8:15 and permanently lose your chance to get anywhere. Some people find their career at 22. Others restart at 42. Some build a business at 55. Some finally choose themselves at 60. Some spend years simply surviving, raising kids, paying bills, recovering from layoffs, bad bosses, or plain bad luck.

Your paycheck is not your value. Your job title is not your identity. Your parents' expectations are not a legally binding contract. Being behind someone else does not mean you are behind in your own life. Maybe you're still figuring it out. Maybe your biggest accomplishment right now is getting out of bed, sending another application,

showing up for your family, and refusing to quit even though life has been treating you like the office printer: jammed, confused, making strange noises, and somehow blamed for everything.

That still counts. Even when nobody applauds you. There is no expiration date on becoming who you were meant to become. There is no trophy for arriving first, and there is no shame in taking the scenic route.

Sometimes the people we desperately want approval from may never understand the road we had to walk, how hard it was just to keep moving when everyone assumed we should already be there. Keep walking anyway. Your life is not a group project. And if anybody asks why you're not further ahead, tell them your GPS is recalculating...

A Promotion in Responsibilities, Not in Pay

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Memories of taking on extra work while having to justify a reasonable request for a raise.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to recognize increased contribution before employees must plead for it.

Let's talk about asking for a pay increase, because nothing makes a grown adult question their career faster than sitting across from leadership and explaining why doing more work should maybe come with more money.

A while back I worked for a company where my responsibilities kept growing. I trained people, fixed issues, covered gaps, took calls after hours, helped other locations, and kept saying yes because I believed that if you consistently showed your value, eventually someone would notice without needing a PowerPoint presentation.

Eventually, I asked for a pay increase. I came prepared with results, added responsibilities, examples of what I had accomplished, and the impact I had made. I wasn't asking for a private island or naming rights to the building. I wanted my compensation to reflect the job I was actually doing instead of the job I had originally been hired to do.

And that's when something magical happened. Instead of discussing everything I had done right, they brought up one mistake I had made. One. Suddenly months of accomplishments disappeared faster than free food in the break room.

Revenue improvements? Forgotten. Extra responsibilities? Apparently classified information. Problems solved? Never heard of them. But that one mistake? It had been preserved like a historical artifact and stored in a climate-controlled vault specifically for the day I asked for more money.

I remember thinking, "Wow. My accomplishments have an expiration date, but my mistakes come with a lifetime warranty."

That conversation taught me something I never forgot. Good employees often believe their body of work will speak for itself. Sometimes it does. Sometimes the moment you ask to be compensated for it, somebody becomes an investigative journalist specializing in your worst Tuesday. And yes, mistakes matter. Accountability matters. But if one mistake outweighs hundreds of great decisions, projects, solved problems, and measurable results, then the conversation probably isn't about performance.

Companies tell employees to learn from mistakes, grow, improve, and move forward. Fair enough. But growth has to work both ways. You cannot tell someone, "We want you to develop," then drag an old mistake back into the

room every time they advocate for themselves. A raise should be a business conversation. What responsibilities changed? What results were delivered? What value was created? Those questions matter more than pretending one imperfect moment erased a year of contribution.

So yes, ask for the raise. Bring your numbers. Bring your results. Bring your expanded responsibilities. And if the entire conversation suddenly becomes a museum tour of the one thing you did wrong, pay attention. Sometimes the answer tells you more about your future than the paycheck ever could.

Because appreciation is nice, praise is nice, and "you're an important part of the team" sounds wonderful. But strangely, my mortgage company still refuses to accept compliments.

POST 03 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

PAY TRANSPARENCY

The Salary Range That Needs Its Own Game Show

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A job advertisement showed a salary range so broad it offered little real information.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted candidates to receive realistic compensation details instead of a guessing contest.

Job descriptions have officially reached the point where salary ranges are less like compensation information and more like a corporate game show.

I saw one recently that basically said, "Salary: \$72,000 to \$248,000 depending on experience." Depending on experience? That is not a range. That is three completely different lifestyles. At \$72,000 I'm bringing lunch from home and pretending the office coffee is fine. At \$248,000 I'm asking whether the building has valet parking and if my bonus can be diversified.

I understand companies need flexibility. Different markets, different experience levels, internal equity, budgets, compensation bands. But when the range is wider than the Grand Canyon, what exactly am I supposed to do with that information? Am I applying for a job or guessing the price of a showcase on The Price Is Right? Then the recruiter asks, "What are your salary expectations?" Friend, YOU posted \$72,000 to \$248,000. My expectation is somewhere between paying my electric bill and purchasing a small vineyard.

And somehow nobody ever calls and

says, "Great news! We reviewed your twenty years of experience and decided you're clearly the \$248,000 candidate." No, the conversation mysteriously begins near the basement. "We're currently targeting around \$78,000." Oh. So the \$248,000 was decorative. Apparently it was there for emotional support. Apparently the top number is there to inspire us, like a motivational poster hanging above the HR payroll budget. Nothing says transparency quite like advertising executive compensation and then arriving with assistant manager money.

Job seekers already have enough detective work. We're decoding titles that don't match responsibilities, "remote" jobs requiring four days in the office, entry level positions demanding seven years of experience, and descriptions asking one person to perform the duties of an entire department. Now we also need forensic accountants to determine which portion of the salary range is real.

If the actual budget is \$90,000, say \$90,000. If it is \$120,000 to \$140,000 based on experience, perfect. Adults can have that conversation. But posting

\$60,000 to \$220,000 is basically saying, "We definitely pay money here. Amount to be determined after we see how desperate you look."

Transparency is supposed to save everyone time. A realistic salary range helps candidates decide whether an opportunity makes sense before they spend hours applying, preparing, interviewing, meeting 6 people, completing an assessment, presenting a case study, and learning the childhood names of everyone on the leadership team.

There is nothing better than reaching the final interview only to discover the compensation is \$40,000 below what you discussed. At that point, don't call it a salary range. Call it salary fan fiction. If your range starts with "you may need a roommate" and ends with "you may need a wealth manager," tighten it up. We're looking for a job, not spinning the Wheel of Compensation.

POST 04 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

CANDIDATE RESPECT

When a Rejection Email Counts as Heroism

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I saw praise for a hiring leader who took the time to reply to unsuccessful executive applicants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted basic communication to become the minimum standard, not a corporate miracle.

Apparently, we have reached a point in recruiting where sending a rejection email now qualifies as an act of extraordinary human kindness.

I read a post from someone hiring for a high level executive role. She reviewed 70 resumes, found one candidate with real potential, and actually sent rejection emails to the other 69. Revolutionary stuff. At this point, "We've decided to move forward with another candidate" deserves a five star review, a fruit basket, and maybe a plaque in the lobby.

And then, of course, one rejected candidate fired back accusing her of age discrimination. Not because he knew what happened behind the scenes. Not because he had evidence. Apparently the rejection email itself was enough to trigger a courtroom drama starring LinkedIn, HR, and one exhausted Caps Lock key. Age discrimination is absolutely real. People do get screened out because of assumptions tied to age, salary, or "culture fit." But not every rejection is discrimination. Sometimes you simply do not meet the requirements. I know. Shocking. If the role needs experience running global operations, managing a billion dollar budget, leading 4,000 employees, and speaking fluent

Mandarin, and your resume says "Assistant Manager, seasonal kiosk," we may have identified the problem.

What really made me laugh was that three other rejected candidates replied just to say thank you for letting them know. Think about how broken recruiting has become that people are genuinely grateful to receive a rejection. "Dear Hiring Manager, thank you so much for crushing my dreams in a timely and professional manner. Five stars. Would absolutely be rejected here again." That is where the bar is now. Companies ghost people after interviews. Recruiters disappear after saying, "You're perfect for this." Candidates complete assessments, presentations, seven interviews, personality tests, and what feels like a small federal investigation, only to hear absolutely nothing. So when someone sends a basic, respectful nope, people practically want to send flowers.

Basic communication should not feel revolutionary, but somehow it does. Recruiters should communicate. Candidates should stay professional. Companies should stop treating silence like a hiring strategy. And job seekers, as frustrated and exhausted as they may be, should probably take a minute before turning their keyboard into a

flamethrower. You can be disappointed. You can disagree. You can even believe the process was unfair. But an all caps accusation sent five minutes after a rejection probably is not going to unlock the secret executive offer they were hiding from you.

There are humans on both sides of the screen. That should not be groundbreaking, yet here we are. If we ever reach the point where every applicant receives a clear response, LinkedIn may need to declare a national holiday. Until then, congratulations to anyone who received an actual rejection email this week. Apparently, you got the premium recruiting package.

POST 05 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

AGEISM

Experience: Valued Until It Has a Birthday

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The familiar contradiction of companies asking for seasoned judgment and then questioning older applicants.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge age-based assumptions disguised as recruiting preferences.

Ageism in the job market is fascinating because apparently experience is valuable right up until you have enough of it to make someone uncomfortable.

For years, companies tell us to learn, grow, lead, mentor, solve problems, survive recessions, adapt to technology, manage people, build teams, and become experts. Then one day you walk into an interview with all that experience and somebody studies your resume like it was recovered from an archaeological site. "Wow, you've been doing this for 25 years." Yes. That was the assignment. I followed the instructions. I kept learning, producing, and adapting. Somewhere along the way, the experience everyone told me to build apparently became suspicious.

Then come the polite little phrases. "We're looking for someone with fresh energy." Translation: we want experience, just preferably without evidence that time has passed. "You might be overqualified." Translation: you probably know what the job should pay. "We're concerned you may not be comfortable reporting to someone younger." Translation: we have already created an imaginary argument between you and a manager you have not even met. My favorite is, "We're not sure you would be happy in this

role." Amazing. We met twelve minutes ago and you have already become my therapist, career coach, and planner.

Meanwhile, the same company posts about valuing diversity, inclusion, perspectives, and bringing your whole self to work. Apparently your whole self is welcome as long as your birth year does not make the hiring manager open a calculator. And can we retire the idea that older workers cannot adapt to technology? Some of these people survived fax machines, dial-up internet, BlackBerry, Windows Vista, conference calls with twelve people talking over one another, and printers that required a blood sacrifice before producing page two. You think Microsoft Teams is going to break them?

What makes ageism frustrating is that it rarely introduces itself honestly. Nobody says, "We think you're too old." Instead, it puts on a blazer and calls itself "culture fit." It says the team is "young and energetic." It wonders whether you can "keep up with the pace." Of course, not every rejection is age discrimination. Sometimes another candidate is better. Sometimes the experience is wrong. Sometimes the interview simply does not land. But pretending age bias never happens because nobody writes "too old" in the

rejection email is equally ridiculous.

Experience should not become a penalty. If someone has spent decades learning how to make decisions, calm angry customers, train employees, avoid disasters, and recognize a bad idea before it becomes a mandatory Monday meeting, perhaps that has value.

Wrinkles are not a performance issue. Gray hair is not a skills gap. A long resume is not a warning label. Sometimes it simply means the candidate has been around long enough to know that "we're like a family here" usually means somebody is about to ask them to work Saturday.

POST 06 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

A Toxic Ex-Boss Checks Back In

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An unexpected message from a former boss brought old workplace dynamics back into view.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to see that recovering confidence after a bad boss is a victory in itself.

Nothing confuses a toxic boss more than seeing you happy after they were absolutely certain they had ruined your confidence.

The other day, my toxic ex boss sent me a message. Not a congratulations. Not a “glad to see you doing well.” Just one of those mysterious little corporate checkins that reads like a wellness inquiry but somehow feels like a background investigation. You know the type: “Hey, been seeing what you’re doing. Looks like things are going well.” Translation: “I have been monitoring your happiness and would like to understand why it survived me.”

I laughed because toxic bosses have a very specific retirement plan for former employees. They expect you to leave broken, disappear quietly, move to a cabin without Wi-Fi, and spend the next decade telling strangers, “I used to have potential before Brad put me on a performance plan.” They do not expect you to move on, succeed, smile, build something, get recognized, or post a picture where you look suspiciously well rested. Nothing ruins a toxic boss’s afternoon faster than realizing the employee they called “difficult” is thriving somewhere that doesn’t require a weekly emotional hostage negotiation.

And suddenly they become curious. Very curious. They want to know what you’re doing, where you’re working, who you’re working with, whether you’re happy, and apparently whether your happiness has received prior written approval from HR. It’s amazing. When you worked for them, they couldn’t find five minutes to recognize your effort. Now they have enough free time to follow your career like it’s a Netflix limited series. “Episode six: Former employee develops confidence. Viewer discretion advised.”

The funniest part is how casual the message always sounds. “Just checking in.” Checking in on what, exactly? My pulse? My LinkedIn engagement? Whether I still wake up at 3 a.m. remembering that meeting where you blamed me for something you approved two days earlier? I’m good. Thanks for your concern. My blood pressure has actually gone down since our last one on one.

Toxic bosses don’t always hate bad employees. Bad employees can be useful. They’re easy to blame, easy to control, and they rarely threaten anybody’s ego. What really makes a toxic leader nervous is a good

employee who realizes they’re good. Someone who stops begging for validation. Someone who discovers that “you’ll never find better than this” was not career advice. It was a hostage note written in Calibri. Apparently, surviving their leadership was supposed to be your final career achievement, not your origin story. Cute.

Sometimes the best revenge is not revenge at all. It’s doing well. It’s laughing again. It’s getting your confidence back. It’s becoming successful enough that your former boss suddenly remembers your phone number.

And when that message arrives, smile. Because nothing says “I’m proud of your growth” quite like a toxic ex boss quietly checking whether you had the audacity to grow without them.

POST 07 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Who Is Really the Flight Risk?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I compared corporate fears about older workers with the way workers of every age change jobs.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to assess commitment as behavior, not guess from a candidate's age.

Corporate America has somehow convinced itself that the biggest flight risk in the building is the 55 year old with a mortgage, decades of experience, and no desire to spend another six months learning a new expense reporting system.

Meanwhile, the 27 year old has already updated LinkedIn, taken two recruiter calls, changed their headline to "open to opportunities," and mentally resigned because the company switched from cold brew to coffee. But sure, let's keep worrying about the person over 50. Companies look at someone with 25 years of experience and say, "We're concerned you may retire soon." Then they hire someone 24, train them for six months, give them access to every system, get them productive, and watch them leave for a company because it offers remote Fridays, snacks and an extra \$7,000.

Then leadership gathers in a conference room to solve the mystery. "Why can't we retain talent?" Maybe check the parking lot. Half the new hires are already backing out. Older workers get questioned like they're applying for a 40 year mortgage. "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Probably still working, Karen. Where do you see Tyler in five years?

Because Tyler may have worked for you, your competitor, a startup, a consulting firm, and something called Moonbeam Labs by then. And this isn't a criticism of younger workers. Changing jobs can be smart. People move for better pay, growth, flexibility, leadership, or simply because they discovered their manager schedules long meetings to discuss a spreadsheet that could have been an email.

The funny part is pretending age automatically predicts loyalty. A 52 year old candidate can walk into an interview with stability, experience, references, results, and a history of staying with companies for years, and somehow the concern becomes, "Will they stay?" Then a younger candidate says, "I'm really looking for somewhere I can grow," and everyone nods warmly while ignoring that "grow" sometimes means "until another recruiter offers me \$10,000 more and free DoorDash credits."

Companies should stop using birthdays as retention analytics. If you care about flight risk, track flight risk. Look at tenure. Look at pay. Look at bad managers. Look at promotion opportunities. Look at why people actually leave. Maybe even conduct an exit interview that isn't treated like a

ceremonial form employees complete while mentally driving home.

Because the countdown clock isn't sitting above every employee over 50 like they're a carton of milk approaching the expiration date. Experience does not come with a "best if used by" sticker. Sometimes the person you're worried will retire in five years is the person who would have stayed seven. Sometimes the "long term investment" you hired instead is updating their resume before their company laptop has finished installing Microsoft Teams.

But yes, please keep rejecting experienced candidates because they might leave someday. That strategy should really help with retention.

POST 08 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

If I Ran Public Relations, We Would Tell the Truth

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I imagined replacing reassuring company jargon with plainspoken public communication.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to argue that honesty protects credibility better than polished evasions.

If I'm ever put in charge of PR, just know the company is about to become either wildly successful or forever banned from issuing press releases.

Because I'm not doing traditional PR. I'm not writing, "We value transparency" five minutes after deleting 47 emails. I'm not calling a complete disaster a "learning opportunity." If I'm running PR, we are telling the truth, but with better punctuation.

The CEO says something ridiculous? I'm not cleaning it up. I'm posting, "Our CEO had a thought. Unfortunately, it escaped into public." The company misses its quarterly target? We're not saying, "Market headwinds impacted performance." We're saying, "We spent three months in meetings discussing why we were behind instead of doing anything that might help us catch up."

HR rolls out another engagement survey? Fantastic. My announcement will say, "Please complete this anonymous survey so we can identify exactly which department you work in based on your comments." And if leadership announces, "We're like a family here," I'm adding a disclaimer: "Some families also need therapy."

No more corporate statements written like everyone swallowed a dictionary during an MBA program. No more "leveraging cross functional synergies to drive transformational outcomes." Nobody knows what that means. My PR department would have simple rules. If the meeting could have been an email, we admit it. If the email could have been two sentences, we apologize. If someone says, "Let's circle back," security gently escorts them out of the circle. If management says employees are the company's greatest asset, we immediately check whether those assets received raises this year.

I'd also rewrite job announcements. Forget "exciting new chapter." Sometimes somebody quit because their manager scheduled a 7:00 a.m. meeting to discuss morale. Just say that. "Susan has decided to pursue an opportunity where nobody messages her 'quick question' at 9:48 p.m. We wish Susan well and frankly understand."

Customer complaint? I'm responding personally. "We hear you." Not the corporate version where nobody heard anything and a chatbot named Brenda closed the ticket. I mean: "Yep. We messed that up. Here's what happened.

Here's what we're fixing. Also, whoever approved that decision has been temporarily removed from PowerPoint privileges." The best part would be crisis communication. Companies normally gather twelve executives, four lawyers, two HR leaders, and one terrified communications person to create a statement containing 600 words and absolutely no information.

Not me. I'd walk in, read the situation, and type: "Well, this is awkward." Would I last long in PR? Probably not. But for those great eleven business days, engagement would be through the roof, employees would finally understand the emails, customers would know what was happening, and somewhere a corporate consultant would be whispering, "You can't say that."

That's exactly when I'd know the PR strategy was working.

POST 09 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

Should a Raise Have to Be Requested?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone challenged my assumption that employees always need to ask for compensation review.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to notice and reward results before hard conversations become necessary.

A while back someone told me, "If you work for a company and have to ask for a pay increase instead of them giving it to you first, you might be working for the wrong company."

I laughed because I thought that sounded dramatic. Companies are busy. Leaders have budgets. Maybe they don't notice everything. Maybe you just have to speak up once in a while and remind them what you've been doing.

You know the meeting. You walk in after carrying extra responsibilities for months, solving problems nobody else wanted, training people, covering vacancies, answering messages after hours, and fixing things that were never technically yours to fix. Somewhere along the way, your job description quietly became a historical document. Then the conversation starts with, "So, what are you looking for?" Well, I was hoping you were going to tell me. Nothing makes you feel more appreciated than having to explain why the company should notice the work it already benefits from.

Then comes the corporate greatest hits album. "We really value you." Fantastic. Is there a direct deposit option for value? "You've done an amazing job." Great, I'll tell the electric company. "We

just need a little more time." Of course. My responsibilities can increase immediately, but compensation apparently needs to age like fine wine while three committees discuss whether grapes are in the budget.

Asking for a raise isn't uncomfortable only because money is awkward. Sometimes it's uncomfortable because you already know how much more you've been giving. You remember the late nights, the weekends, the calls you answered when you were supposed to be with family, the emergencies you handled because "we know we can count on you," and the extra jobs you absorbed when someone left. Funny how companies identify your reliability instantly when they need help, but suddenly need months of research when you ask what that reliability is worth.

I'm not saying every company should know the exact second you deserve more money. People should advocate for themselves. Sometimes compensation conversations need to be started by the employee. But there's a difference between having a professional conversation about growth and repeatedly having to convince people that your contribution matters while they keep adding more to

your plate.

At some point, "We appreciate you" starts sounding less like recognition and more like the corporate version of leaving a nice note instead of a tip. The right company may not throw money at you every time you do something well, but it should notice when your role changed, when your impact has grown, and when the person everyone keeps leaning on is carrying more weight than the job they accepted. Employees rarely leave over one denied raise. They leave after years of being told they're invaluable while being compensated like they're easily replaceable.

Sometimes the most expensive raise a company refuses to give is the one its best employee eventually gets somewhere else.

POST 10 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

INTERVIEW THEATER

The Interview That Read Me the Job Description

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A hiring manager appeared to spend interview time reading a description already supplied to candidates.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviews to test mutual fit and problem-solving rather than reread a posting.

There are job interviews where you walk out thinking, "That was a great conversation." Then there are interviews where you wonder if you accidentally attended a live reading of a document you already studied the night before.

The other day, I sat across from a hiring manager who opened the job description and began reading it to me. Not summarizing it. Not highlighting anything. Reading it. Line by line. Slowly. With pauses and eye contact like he was announcing international policy.

"Candidate must demonstrate strong communication skills." He looked up at me. I nodded like we had just uncovered a breakthrough. Then came, "Must be able to work independently and as part of a team." Another pause. Another look. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to answer, applaud, or turn the page for him. Then came, "Proficiency in Microsoft Office." Sir, I drove here, found the building, checked in, operated an elevator, and located the conference room. There is a good chance I can open Outlook.

But we continued. "Ability to manage multiple priorities in a fast paced environment." Pause. Eye contact. I

almost leaned forward and whispered, "What happens next?" Twenty minutes in, we were still reviewing the same job description I had already memorized because job seekers now prepare for interviews like final exams. Then we reached the qualifications section. "Five years of leadership experience." He looked at my resume. I looked at him. He looked back at the job description. For a few seconds, we confirmed the same words existed.

Ask me about leadership. Ask me how I improve performance. Ask me how I handle conflict, coach employees, fix broken processes, increase sales, or make decisions when everything goes sideways. Ask me about a mistake and what I learned. Give me something that requires more than a respectful nod.

Then we entered the benefits section. "Competitive salary." No number, of course. We wouldn't want to ruin the suspense. "Comprehensive benefits package." Wonderful. "Opportunities for growth." Growth into what remained classified until after the fifth interview and personality assessment. By the end, I knew the job description better than when I walked in. I was half expecting him to close the laptop, smile, and ask, "Any questions about the book?" Yes. One. When does the

actual interview start?

Job interviews are supposed to be conversations. You already have my resume. I already have your job description. We do not need to gather in a conference room and perform a dramatic table read of two documents we both received days ago. Ask me how I think. Ask me what I've built. Ask me what I would do in the first 90 days. Ask me how I lead when the plan falls apart.

But if the entire interview is going to be someone reading the posting back to me word for word, at least dim the lights, provide snacks, hand out bookmarks, and hire Morgan Freeman to narrate.

I came prepared for a job interview. Apparently, they came prepared for an audiobook.

POST 11 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

HR & CULTURE

Sharron Believed the Human Part of HR

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A story about an HR leader who treated people seriously raised questions about what organizations reward.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to recognize principled people in HR while challenging hollow culture slogans.

Companies love to say, "Our people are our greatest asset." It sounds great in a town hall or on a careers page. But sometimes someone inside the company actually believes those words. That was Sharron.

Sharron was an HR manager who believed HR was supposed to be more than policies and paperwork. She believed the "human" part mattered. Then a promotion came up for an employee who had earned it. Strong performance. Proven results. More responsibility.

You would think the conversation would be simple. Promote them. Pay them. Thank them. Apparently not. During the discussion, the CEO made a comment about the employee being "young." Young. Funny how age suddenly becomes a business metric when it is time to increase somebody's paycheck. Nobody brings up age when the employee is staying late or taking on extra work. But mention a promotion and suddenly birthdays matter.

Sharron pushed back. She asked why being young had anything to do with whether someone deserved the promotion or the pay that came with it. She was doing what HR is supposed to

do: protect the employee and the principle. Corporate America loves integrity until somebody uses it in a meeting. Then integrity becomes "not being aligned." If someone is already doing the work and producing the results, telling them to wait because they are young makes no sense. Imagine using that logic anywhere else. "Congratulations. Your performance is excellent. Unfortunately, your birth certificate has not reached the appropriate compensation level. Please keep exceeding expectations while your age catches up."

The CEO did not appreciate the pushback. Before long, Sharron was without a job. Think about that. The HR manager lost her job because she tried to protect an employee during a conversation about promotion and pay. Apparently, HR was expected to provide resources while skipping the human part.

Companies spend thousands creating value statements. RESPECT. INTEGRITY. PEOPLE FIRST. Then they hang them in conference rooms where someone can apparently say, "They're young," as justification for holding back a career. Corporate leadership usually beats satire to the punch.

What happened to Sharron is funny in that dark workplace way where you laugh because otherwise you might start reading the employee handbook like a fantasy novel. But underneath the sarcasm, it is sad. She had a choice: stay quiet and protect her position, or speak up and protect someone with less power in the room. She spoke up. And she paid for it. Sometimes the person labeled "difficult" is the only one willing to say, "This isn't right." Sometimes the person pushed out is the one who believed the company values on the wall. And sometimes HR really does stand up for an employee.

Sharron did. Titles can be replaced. Paychecks can be replaced. Companies can be replaced. Character is much harder to find. Sharron lost her seat at that table, but she kept the one thing nobody in that room could fire her from: her integrity.

POST 12 / MONDAY, AUGUST 24

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

The CEO and the Monday Mindset Lecture

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A big-box retail CEO's motivational post prompted questions about positivity versus operating conditions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to remind executives that staff support matters more than inspirational language.

Monday morning had barely clocked in when I came across a post from the CEO of a major big box retailer explaining how everyone should start the week with a "positive mindset." I read it twice to make sure I hadn't missed where positive thinking had been promoted to Regional Vice President of Staffing, Payroll, Inventory, and Broken Equipment.

Apparently, surviving retail isn't about enough people on the schedule, functioning registers, realistic sales goals, or managers covering four jobs at once. No. The secret is waking up on Monday, looking at complete operational chaos, and saying, "You know what this needs? Better energy." Somewhere, a store manager is unlocking the doors after two callouts, a no show, and a late truck while the CEO is posting, "Choose optimism." Inspirational. Nothing gets the blood pumping like motivational advice from someone whose Monday emergency is the conference room getting regular coffee instead of dark roast.

The post talked about bringing good energy, embracing challenges, and approaching the week with the right attitude. Wonderful ideas when you are not standing at customer service explaining why the website says an

item is available even though nobody has seen it since the Obama administration. Meanwhile, an employee is covering electronics, online pickup, and sporting goods because payroll says hiring another person would "impact productivity." But remember, team, positivity starts with you.

Corporate positivity always travels downhill. I've never seen a cashier email CEO, "Quarterly results are tough, but keep smiling!"

I believe attitude matters. Encouragement matters. Leaders should motivate people. But positivity without acknowledging reality is just a motivational poster taped over a hole in the wall. If you want employees to feel positive on Monday, give them enough people to operate the store. Fix the equipment that has been "waiting on parts" forever. Stop expecting five star service with a two person crew and a labor budget created by someone playing The Price Is Right.

Before posting the next inspirational Monday message, spend one full shift inside a store. Wear the name tag. Answer the phone. Work a register. Cover a lunch. Find the online order that supposedly arrived yesterday.

Explain why a coupon expired. Get yelled at because a customer drove 45 minutes for an item the inventory system swore was sitting on shelf seven. Then help unload the truck because half the team is already doing three jobs.

At the end of that shift, skip the speech about mindset. Look at the employees and say, "I saw what you dealt with today. Thank you. What can we fix?" That sentence would create more positive energy than a thousand executive LinkedIn posts.

Employees are already performing miracles with a skeleton crew, a broken printer, and a headset held together by tape. They do not need someone standing on the roof yelling, "Think sunny thoughts!" They need someone to bring a ladder and help fix the leak.

POST 13 / MONDAY, AUGUST 24

AGEISM

Twenty Years of Experience Is Not Expired Yogurt

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The way some employers read long work histories as an expiration date caught my attention.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to reframe experience as adaptable knowledge rather than baggage.

Some companies out here really look at a resume and go, "Hmm... 20+ years of experience?" like they just found a yogurt container in the back of the fridge and are checking whether the date says best by or call archaeology.

Meanwhile, that resume belongs to a battle tested professional who has survived more workplace plot twists than a Netflix drama.

Listen, if you have been working since fax machines roamed the earth, Outlook ruled with an iron fist, and reply all was considered an act of war, you are not expired. You are vintage resilience with a Wi-Fi upgrade. I once watched a manager squint at a candidate resume and ask, "Do you think they will be able to adapt to the tech we use here?" Sir. SIR. This person used to send TPS reports by hand, survived three company rebrands, and remembers a Windows 95 password. They trained their replacement twice, learned six systems that were later discontinued, and survived every rollout that began with, "This will make your job easier."

They do not need to adapt to your Slack channels. Give them 48 hours and

they will be running them, muting notifications, and wondering why there are fourteen group chats called Leadership Team FINAL. You know who panics when the Wi-Fi goes out? Half the office. You know who calmly pulls out a legal pad, clicks a pen, and keeps working like civilization did not just collapse? Janet from accounting. Janet has seen every version of Excel since dinosaurs used Lotus 1-2-3. Janet knows formulas nobody documented and can fix a printer by staring at it with disappointment while everyone else is confused!!

She survived floppy disks, dial-up internet, Blackberry keyboards, conference calls where someone forgot to mute, and at least one copier that required emotional support. These are not expired professionals. They are adaptive evolution in business casual. They are the workplace equivalent of a Swiss Army knife: tools you did not know you needed, three mystery attachments nobody understands, and still sharp enough to solve the problem before the meeting starts.

So next time you see decades of experience, stop treating it like a carton of milk someone forgot behind the

orange juice. Treat it like aged scotch: rare, powerful, expensive for a reason, and likely to make your company meetings much more interesting. Experience is not a defect. It is what happens when someone has already made mistakes, learned from them, cleaned up other people mistakes, trained the people making new mistakes, and sat through enough exciting organizational announcements to recognize a layoff email from the subject line alone.

Moral of the story? Respect your elders. Especially the ones who can out type you on a Blackberry with one hand, fix your copier with a paperclip, remember when lunch meetings actually included lunch, and still beat you to inbox zero before 9 a.m. They are not outdated. They are fully updated, heavily tested, battle proven, and somehow still compatible with all your nonsense.

POST 14 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 25

INTERVIEW EXCESS

The Hiring Process Outlives Some Marriages

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how endless rounds, assignments and changing “final” interviews waste applicants’ time.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to make faster decisions and respect the time candidates invest.

Hiring has officially reached the point where getting a job can take longer than some marriages.

You can meet the entire leadership team, complete enough assessments to qualify for your own psychology degree, build a free business plan, survive three “final” interviews, and still receive an email 6 weeks later saying the team is “carefully considering next steps.” At that point, the next step should be sending the candidate a W-2 for all the time they have already worked there.

A candidate can spend nine months applying, preparing, interviewing, rearranging schedules, answering the same questions, creating unpaid projects, and hearing, “We really want to make sure we get this right.” Then suddenly they meet one company that actually knows what it needs. They talk. They ask relevant questions. They evaluate the experience. They communicate. They make a decision. Eight days later, hired. No corporate Hunger Games. No twelve person panel. No presentation explaining how you would solve every problem the company has had since 1987.

And somehow, when a company hires quickly, people act like they discovered

fire. “How could they possibly know after only a few conversations?” Because they were hiring an employee, not selecting the next pope. You do not need six months to determine whether someone with fifteen years of experience can lead a team, manage a budget, solve problems, or communicate with humans. Yet somewhere else, a hiring committee is entering month four of deciding whether a candidate can “handle ambiguity.” The candidate has already met recruiting, operations, HR, the hiring manager, the hiring manager’s manager, and Greg, who joined the Zoom call late and asked a question nobody understood.

Then comes everybody’s favorite part: the project. Companies call it a “case study.” Candidates call it “unpaid consulting with a PowerPoint template.” Spend your weekend building a market analysis, growth strategy, retention plan, staffing model, and competitive review. Then receive the classic email: “We were incredibly impressed, but we decided to move forward with another candidate.” Fantastic. Glad you enjoyed the strategy deck. Please send payment for slides 1 through 27. Slide 28 was complimentary.

A good hiring process does not have to be reckless. Interviews matter. Background checks matter. Making sure the person can do the job matters. But somewhere along the way, “thorough” became corporate language for “nobody wants to make a decision.”

More interviews do not automatically create better hires. More homework does not reveal better talent. More waiting does not magically create certainty. Sometimes it simply creates exhausted candidates who accept an offer from the company that respected their time.

If one company can identify talent, interview, communicate clearly, and make a decision in eight days, maybe hiring was never supposed to be this complicated. Maybe we built a maze and then wondered why the best candidates found the exit.

POST 15 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 25

LAYOFFS

Laid Off by Someone Reading a Script

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The impersonal language organizations use in workforce reductions stood out to me.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted managers to speak with real compassion when delivering life-changing news.

Somewhere in corporate America, somebody is being told today that their position has been eliminated while a manager reads from a script that sounds like it was written by a toaster with an HR certificate.

"This decision is not a reflection of your performance." Wonderful. Nothing says comfort like losing your paycheck while being reassured that you were apparently doing a great job.

Layoffs are strange because in the moment, nobody is thinking, "What an exciting new chapter." You are thinking about the mortgage, health insurance, the kids, the bills, and whether LinkedIn is about to become your full time unpaid internship. You are angry. You are embarrassed even though you did nothing wrong. You replay every conversation wondering if there was a clue you missed. Meanwhile, the company sends an email thanking everyone for their "continued flexibility" and somehow the person who designed that sentence still has a job.

But here is the part we do not talk about enough: sometimes the worst meeting on your calendar becomes the beginning of something better. Not immediately. Usually first comes panic,

then updating the resume, then remembering your LinkedIn password, then discovering that every job application now requires you to upload your resume and manually type the entire resume again because technology has apparently peaked.

Eventually, though, something shifts. Maybe you find a company that values what the last one overlooked. Maybe you change industries. Maybe you start consulting. Maybe you build something yourself. Maybe you finally realize the job you were terrified to lose had been exhausting you for years. Sometimes getting pushed out the door is the only reason we stop standing in a room we had already outgrown.

That does not mean every layoff is secretly a gift wrapped in corporate stationery. Losing a job hurts. People are allowed to be angry, scared, disappointed, and tired of hearing, "Everything happens for a reason" from someone who still has direct deposit arriving Friday morning. Sometimes you do not need a motivational quote. You need a paycheck and five minutes to complain without someone turning your unemployment into a leadership seminar. And yes, there may be a stage where you stare at the ceiling at 2 a.m. calculating how long savings will last

while promising yourself you will never say "circle back" again ever.

But your career is bigger than one company, one title, one manager, or one meeting invitation mysteriously titled "Quick Catch Up." Companies restructure. Leaders change. Budgets disappear. Departments vanish. None of that erases what you know, what you built, or what you are capable of doing next.

So if corporate America ever gives you an unexpected shove out the door, be mad. Be disappointed. Update the resume. Eat something irresponsible. Then remember this: the company ended a job, not your value.

And sometimes the best career move you ever make begins with someone else accidentally making it for you.

POST 16 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 25

GHOSTING

Recruiter Ghosting Is Not a Relationship Strategy

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on a candidate who interviewed, followed up, and then waited through silence.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted basic follow-through to be part of every candidate experience.

At some point, job searching became the only relationship where one side can disappear for days and the other side is expected to send a thank-you note for the privilege.

A candidate interviews on Monday, prepares, shows up on time, answers every question, leaves believing the conversation went well, and then waits. Friday arrives. No update. So they send a follow-up saying they have not heard back yet. Apparently, this is now a tone problem. Not the silence. Not the missed update. The real concern is that they dared to describe reality using words.

We have reached the stage where candidates need diplomatic training before sending a follow-up email. "Dear Hiring Team, I hope this message finds you thriving. I wanted to gently and humbly inquire whether the position still exists. Please know I am experiencing no human emotions whatsoever. I remain grateful for the opportunity to wait without information." Perfect. Very professional. Meanwhile, companies can say, "We'll get back to you by Wednesday," vanish until the following month, repost the job twice, schedule another interview, cancel it, reschedule it, and send a rejection at 4:17 a.m. But

if a candidate writes, "I haven't heard back," suddenly somebody is analyzing the email like it came from a hostage negotiation.

Yes, tone matters. Nobody is suggesting candidates send, "Hello, remember me?" followed by fourteen question marks. But there also needs to be perspective. Candidates are not robots sitting peacefully in a charging station between interviews. They have bills. They may be unemployed. They are applying to jobs, preparing for interviews, completing assessments, rearranging schedules, finding childcare, and trying to make decisions about their lives while waiting for companies to make decisions about theirs. Following up after several days is not aggression. It is communication. If a company tells someone when they should expect an update, send the update. Even if the update is, "We need more time." That sentence takes fifteen seconds and prevents somebody from spending three days wondering whether the recruiter moved overseas and joined a monastery.

And if a candidate sounds slightly frustrated after being left hanging, maybe the first question should not be, "Do they have the right tone?" Maybe it should be, "Did we communicate well

enough to begin with?" Professionalism should work in both directions. Candidates should be respectful. Companies should be responsive. Recruiters should communicate. Hiring managers should make decisions. Nobody should need a thesaurus, legal counsel, and a hostage negotiator to ask whether they are still being considered for a job.

Because if "I haven't heard back" is now considered too aggressive, I assume the approved follow-up will soon be: "Please ghost me at your earliest convenience. I remain extremely interested in receiving absolutely no information, and I apologize if my continued existence has created any pressure for the hiring team."

POST 17 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 25

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Twenty Years of Results, One Missing Degree

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A candidate's strong interview progress ran into a degree requirement raised too late.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted hiring teams to clarify non-negotiable credentials before consuming applicants' time.

Apparently somewhere in the hiring universe, 20+ years of experience can get you through round one, impress HR, earn a second interview, and even come with a recommendation... but one missing degree can still turn the whole process into an episode of "Surprise! You're Disqualified."

Imagine commuting from New Jersey to New York for a second round interview, dressed professionally, mentally prepared, probably rehearsing examples of leadership, strategy, systems, operations, and everything you have spent decades doing. You arrive ready to talk about the future, and HR greets you with the corporate version of a game show buzzer: "Before we continue, do you have a degree?" No. Cue dramatic music. Suddenly, the interview is over. Not because you lied. Not because you lacked experience. Not because you failed the first interview. In fact, you were told the experience was not the problem.

The issue was a requirement that somehow survived the resume review, the application review, the first interview, the scheduling process, and the calendar invitation before finally being discovered after you arrived. That is impressive efficiency if the goal was to waste everyone's time. And

then comes my favorite corporate phrase: "We have to be consistent." Ah yes, consistency. Nothing says consistency like noticing a basic qualification requirement halfway through the hiring process.

If a degree is truly nonnegotiable, that is completely fair. Organizations are allowed to set requirements for roles. But maybe, and I know this is a radical concept, check whether the candidate meets the requirement before asking them to travel across state lines for round two. That little trick is called reading the resume. It is free. No software subscription required. No six person panel needed. No 30-60-90 day presentation. Just one person, one resume, and approximately 45 seconds of attention.

What makes situations like this so frustrating is not simply the rejection. Most experienced professionals understand that not every opportunity will work out. It is the unnecessary humiliation of making someone invest time, energy, preparation, travel, and hope into a process that should have ended before the first conversation. Twenty plus years of experience did not suddenly disappear when HR discovered there was no four year degree listed. The candidate was the

same person who had already been moved forward.

Hiring teams talk constantly about candidate experience, employer brand, respect, values, and treating people with dignity. Those words are easy to put on a website or careers page. The real test is what happens when a candidate walks through the door.

Because if your hiring process requires someone to commute two states, show up for round two, and then get escorted back out over information that was sitting on their resume the entire time, you do not have a candidate qualification problem.

You have a reading comprehension problem with a calendar invitation. Plain and simple.

POST 18 / TUESDAY, AUGUST 25

INTERVIEW ETHICS

The Interview That Wanted Free Sales Intelligence

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An apparent interview turned into requests for useful market contacts and selling information.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to stop treating applicants' experience as unpaid consulting.

Apparently, job interviews have unlocked a new level of corporate creativity: inviting someone to discuss a "great opportunity," spending an hour making it feel legitimate, and then revealing that what they really wanted was free sales intelligence.

Apparently cold calling is exhausting, so why not invite a job seeker into a meeting and have them map out their former company for you?

A candidate recently told me about exactly this. The conversation started normally. The recruiter explained the role, talked about what the company needed, and asked detailed questions about the candidate's background and most recent position. Everything sounded legitimate, so naturally the candidate was thinking, "This is going well." Then came the plot twist. Toward the end, the questions changed. No more career goals. No more leadership questions. Instead, it became questions about the candidate's former company, who the decisionmakers were.

Excuse me? That is not an interview. That is prospecting with a resume attached. Imagine researching the company, practicing answers, and

showing up ready to explain why you are the right person for the job, only to realize that you are actually the unpaid guest speaker at somebody else's sales meeting. They might as well slide a CRM across the table and say, "Since we have you here, could you rank these leads and make a few introductions?"

Job seekers already have enough to deal with: multiple interview rounds, personality tests, case studies, panels, ghosting, and job descriptions asking for twelve years of experience in software invented four years ago. Now apparently candidates also need to ask, "Just checking, is there an actual job here, or are you hoping I can introduce you to Steve from procurement?" The worst part is the false hope. When someone is looking for work, an interview means something. They prepare. They get excited. Using that hope as bait to collect contacts, names, budgets, or sales leads is not recruiting. It is disrespectful.

If an interviewer suddenly becomes unusually interested in your former company's vendors, budgets, decisionmakers, or people they can contact, pay attention. You may have entered the world's strangest interview,

where the only person who might actually get hired is their salesperson. If you want sales leads, hire a salesperson. If you want market intelligence, pay for research. If you want introductions, build relationships. But stop putting "career opportunity" on the invitation when what you really want is somebody's contact list.

Candidates are applying for jobs. They are not arriving with a corporate directory, three warm introductions, and an organizational chart. At this rate, the next interview confirmation email will say, "Please bring your resume, references, salary expectations, former boss's cell number, and the names of anyone at your previous company who controls a budget."

Welcome to modern recruiting, where apparently even the interview has a hidden upsell.

POST 19 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

HIRING BIAS

The Resume Is Not a Criminal Record

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered hiring someone with a messy employment history who deserved to be heard.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviewers to understand context before treating layoffs or gaps as character flaws.

I swear some hiring teams look at a resume like they are reviewing evidence in a criminal investigation. Two layoffs in two years? Suspicious. Six months at one company? Call security. Employment gap? Clearly this person spent months plotting the downfall of corporate America.

A while back, I hired someone whose resume looked like it had survived a tornado and several reorganizations. They had been laid off twice in two years. There was a gap, a short stint, and a six month contract role. Before the interview, my inbox filled with concerns about stability, commitment, termination history and risk. You would have thought I was trying to hire a raccoon to manage payroll.

But I saw something different. I saw resilience. I saw someone who had been knocked down, dusted themselves off, updated the resume again, smiled through interviews, answered recycled questions, and kept showing up anyway. So I hired them.

And brace yourself for the corporate plot twist. The building did not collapse. Clients did not flee. HR did not sound an alarm. In fact, the person was incredible. They showed up early, stayed late when needed, asked smart

questions, owned mistakes without creating a 42 slide PowerPoint explaining why someone else was responsible, took feedback, helped teammates, contributed ideas that saved money, and never acted like certain work was beneath them. They even brought muffins on Mondays.

Since then, I have hired people with resume stories that would make an applicant tracking system need therapy. Someone who took seven years away from work to raise twins. Someone who had been terminated twice. A former bartender who learned Excel on YouTube and could run circles around people with certificates on the wall. A guy who left corporate life to chase music, then came back after learning landlords remain unimpressed by artistic passion.

None of them had perfect resumes. All of them were phenomenal employees. That is why I laugh when companies treat resumes like crystal balls. An employment gap does not mean lazy. A short tenure does not mean flaky. A layoff does not mean incapable. Getting fired does not automatically mean dangerous. A career path that looks like someone dropped spaghetti on a map does not mean the person will fail.

Life happens. Companies restructure. Parents raise children. Industries change. People make mistakes, recover, learn, pivot, restart, and sometimes return stronger than people with perfectly polished timelines.

Yet somewhere in corporate America, somebody is still staring at a six month employment gap like they uncovered evidence for a congressional hearing. Maybe we should stop hiring the prettiest timeline and start hiring the strongest human. Perfect resumes are easy to admire. Resilient people are the ones you want beside you when everything goes sideways.

Hire the human. Not the highlight reel. Sometimes the messiest resume belongs to the person who knows exactly how to survive, adapt, contribute, and win.

POST 20 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

TOXIC MANAGEMENT

The Boss Who Had to Fix Everything I Fixed

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered a manager who undermined results by repeatedly interfering with successful work.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to distinguish accountability from micromanagement that destroys trust.

A while back I worked for a boss who had a fascinating leadership strategy: if something was going well, interfere with it immediately.

I could hit the numbers, solve problems, help the team, calm angry customers, fix issues nobody else wanted to touch, and somehow the response was never, Great job. It was more like, Interesting. But have you considered doing all of that while I move the goalposts, change the expectations, and question your decisions? Nothing builds confidence like being handed a shovel, digging the hole, and then being asked why you did not know they wanted a swimming pool.

That is the strange thing about toxic bosses. They do not always sabotage you by trying to make you fail. Sometimes they do it professionally. They withhold information, change priorities, take credit when things work, disappear when things go wrong, and then arrive with a clipboard like they are investigating. My favorite was being told to take ownership, followed two hours later by, Why did you make that decision without asking me? Apparently ownership came with parental controls and a permission slip.

After a while, you start questioning

yourself. Maybe I really am missing something. Maybe everyone else received a secret employee handbook titled How to Read Your Boss's Mind Without Making Eye Contact. That is where toxic leadership becomes dangerous. When someone spends enough time minimizing your wins and magnifying your mistakes, you can begin measuring your worth through their opinion. One bad manager can make a talented employee feel average. One insecure leader can make a confident person second guess everything. One company enabling that behavior can convince people the problem must be them.

Then one day you leave and something weird happens. Your ideas are not stupid anymore. Your judgment is trusted. People ask for your opinion without preparing a rebuttal. You solve a problem and nobody schedules a meeting about the tone in which you solved it. You realize the skills were there the whole time. The work ethic was there. The only thing that changed was the room, and suddenly you are not spending half your energy trying to survive the person supposedly leading you.

That is why knowing your worth matters. Not in the motivational poster

sense where you stare into a mirror every morning and yell, I AM A LEADER, while your family closes the bedroom door. I mean knowing what you have accomplished, contributed and survived, and what happens when you can finally work without someone putting banana peels in front of your career and then evaluating how gracefully you fell.

A great boss helps you become better. A toxic boss needs you to believe you were never that good to begin with. So if you leave a bad environment and start thriving do not be shocked. Sometimes the employee was never the performance problem.

Sometimes the biggest productivity improvement is removing the person who kept standing on the garden hose and asking why nothing was growing.

POST 21 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

JOB-SEARCH REALITY

Job Hunting Now Requires a Warning Label

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The exhausting volume of portals, applications and delayed responses prompted another reality check.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers who are searching to feel seen and employers to notice the waste.

Job hunting in 2026 deserves its own warning label: may cause rage, endless refreshing, and thoughts of launching your laptop into a pond.

A decade ago, people could say, "I'm between jobs," apply to a reasonable number of positions, have a few conversations, and eventually land somewhere. Today, you can apply to 145 jobs, customize 145 resumes, answer questions already on your resume, upload that same resume six different ways, complete a personality test to determine whether you are compatible with Excel, and still get an automated email at 2:13 a.m. saying, "We were impressed by your background." Were you? Because you rejected me before breakfast.

Then come the interviews. First, the recruiter screen. Then the hiring manager. Then the manager's manager. Then a panel. Then another panel because Janet from Finance apparently has opinions about Marketing. Then an assessment. Then a "quick conversation" lasting 47 minutes. And now we have AI interviews, where you sit alone talking to a computer while trying to maintain eye contact with a tiny green light like you are negotiating with a nice toaster.

And if you are 50 something? Congratulations, you have unlocked the bonus round. Now your decades of experience are somehow both your greatest strength and a suspicious package HR does not know what to do with. They want someone seasoned, strategic, adaptable and proven, but not so seasoned that you remember when people actually answered the phone after an interview.

You hear phrases like "culture fit," "long term potential," and "overqualified," which are corporate fortune cookies containing no information. Meanwhile, the job description asks for 15 years of experience, transformational leadership, executive presence, technology skills, industry expertise, and the energy of a golden retriever who just discovered espresso.

And still, job seekers keep going. They apply again. They show up again. They prepare for another interview as if the previous six never happened. They smile while explaining their career for the seventh time to someone who opened the resume 14 seconds before the call. They stay cautiously optimistic because apparently optimism is now another unpaid requirement. That is the part companies should pay attention to.

If someone has applied to 145 jobs, endured rejection, ghosting, awkward interviews, AI interviews, "we went in another direction" emails, and still shows up ready for number 146, you are not looking at someone who lacks resilience.

You are looking at someone who could probably survive your quarterly reorganization, three software migrations, two leadership changes, a budget freeze, and Kevin scheduling a meeting at 4:30 on Friday. The job market may have changed dramatically in ten years, but experience did not suddenly become a liability.

Sometimes the candidate you are quietly labeling "too experienced" is simply the person who has already survived every workplace disaster your company is about to invent.

POST 22 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

BOOK NEWS

The Great American Hiring Circus Hits Barnes & Noble

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

My hiring satire became available through a major book retailer.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers who recognized the hiring chaos to know the book was available.

Well, it happened. The Great American Hiring Circus is now on Barnes & Noble, Inc., because apparently even my sarcasm needed a respectable retail address. If you've ever survived Easy Apply, seven interviews, a disappearing recruiter, a personality test, and a "final conversation" followed by three more final conversations... congratulations, you're basically already in the book.

POST 23 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

EMPLOYMENT FAIRNESS

Eliminated, but Could You Still Do the Job?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I considered a position-elimination story in which a different role appeared promising but security disappeared.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted workers to question arrangements that ask for work without an ordinary employment commitment.

Corporate America has officially discovered a new way to say, "Congratulations, you're fired... but we'd still love for you to keep doing the work."

Imagine hearing there may be an opening in another department. Better pay. Fully remote. Better visibility. You have the experience, the background, and even the potential new manager is excited about bringing you over. For a moment, you think the system worked. You advocated for yourself, people recognized your value, and maybe your career is finally moving forward instead of sideways into another meeting that should have been an email. Then your director calls you in and says there's bad news and good news. The bad news: your current position is being eliminated. The good news: they still want you. Except "want you" now means without the employee part.

Same company. Same work. Same manager. Same expectations. But now you get the exciting privilege of paying more of your own taxes, losing health benefits, paid vacation, sick time, the 401(k) match, and whatever stability you had left. But leadership came prepared. Since you currently make around \$33 an hour, they're offering \$35 an hour. A raise!

Technically. That's like taking away someone's house, handing them a patio umbrella, and announcing, "Great news, we upgraded your outdoor living package."

Corporate math is special. Remove thousands of dollars in benefits, shift tax responsibility onto the worker, eliminate protections, and then proudly slide an extra dollar or two across the table like someone hit the career lottery.

And then comes the best part: the choice. Take the contractor arrangement or lose your job. Nothing says "exciting career opportunity" quite like negotiating while someone is holding your paycheck over a trapdoor. This is why employees roll their eyes when leadership says, "We value our people." People now ask the follow-up: "Wonderful. Can you point to where that value appears on the spreadsheet?"

Because appreciation is not a motivational email, a company mug, or calling a pay cut a raise. It is not removing benefits and pretending the employee just received an upgrade. And it definitely is not saying, "We really want to keep you," immediately before explaining all the ways you plan

to keep less of what made the job worth having.

If a company wants contractor flexibility, fine. Pay contractor rates. Real contractor rates. Rates that account for self-employment taxes, insurance, retirement, unpaid time off, risk, and the fact that the company transferred a pile of expenses from its balance sheet directly onto someone's kitchen table. You cannot remove the safety net, hand someone \$1.50 and expect them to respond like they just won Employee of the Month.

Until then, please stop calling \$35 an hour a raise when the employee needs a calculator, an accountant and a small support group just to determine how much money they actually lost. That isn't a promotion. That's corporate hide and seek with compensation.

POST 24 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

The Completely Anonymous Survey With Your Name on It

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recognized how employee surveys may collect enough detail to make respondents identifiable.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to build conditions where people can give useful feedback without fear.

Nothing builds trust in the workplace quite like an email that says, "Your feedback is completely anonymous."

Completely anonymous, of course, except for the department, location, tenure, job title, manager, shift, and the exact time you clicked the survey link. But other than that, total mystery. Sherlock Holmes himself could not possibly figure out who wrote, "Leadership communication could improve," five minutes after Kevin left another 47 minute meeting that should have been an email.

Anonymous employee surveys are corporate theater at its finest. HR sends a message saying, "We want your honest feedback!" Then everyone stares at the screen like they have just been asked to confess to a crime under stadium lights. Question one: "Do you feel comfortable speaking openly at work?" Absolutely. That is why I am sweating over whether "Strongly Disagree" comes with severance.

Then comes the comment box. The most dangerous rectangle in corporate America. "Please share any additional thoughts." Oh, I have thoughts. I have a whole documentary series. But

suddenly every employee becomes a diplomatic speechwriter. Instead of typing, "My manager changes priorities every six minutes and communicates exclusively through panic," we write, "There may be opportunities to enhance strategic alignment and consistency." Look at us. Terrified, but fluent in hostage language.

And companies always insist the survey is anonymous while somehow producing reports so specific they sound like a police investigation. "We noticed one employee in Midwest Operations, with seven years of service, who reports to a director whose name rhymes with Brad, expressed concerns about workload." Wow. Could be anyone. Call the FBI.

My favorite part is what happens after the survey. Leadership schedules a meeting to discuss the results. They announce, "We heard you." Then they present 64 slides explaining why everyone misunderstood the questions. Employees say workloads are too high, and leadership responds with a resilience webinar. People ask for better pay, and suddenly there is free pizza on Thursday. Staff complain about too many meetings, so naturally

we schedule a weekly meeting to discuss reducing meetings.

And please do not make the mistake of being too honest. There is always that brave soul who writes exactly what everyone else is thinking. Three weeks later, management is casually asking, "Does anyone know who uses the phrase 'dumpster fire with Wi-Fi'?" No reason. Just curious. If organizations truly want honest feedback, create a culture where people can say what is wrong without updating their resume afterward. Employees should not need witness protection to explain that morale is low.

Until then, I will continue treating every "anonymous" survey the same way I treat a suspicious email attachment from someone claiming to be the CEO. Carefully, skeptically, and with absolutely nothing in writing that I would not want projected onto the conference room wall Monday.

POST 25 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

RECRUITING ROLES

Crossover and the \$200,000 Recruiter Challenge

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An executive-recruiter posting at Crossover listed unusually expansive expectations.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to examine whether impressive pay corresponds to achievable, transparent responsibilities.

I found a job posting today that made me wonder whether recruiting has finally become a competitive sport.

Crossover is hiring an Executive Recruiter remotely for \$200,000 a year, and before anyone starts polishing the resume, this is not your ordinary “find great people and schedule interviews” recruiting job. No, this is recruiting after someone selected Expert Mode, deleted the instruction manual, and handed you a laptop with a note saying, “Good luck.” The posting says you will close the searches nobody else can close, deal with executives who have conflicting criteria, fix broken hiring systems, build AI tools, benchmark compensation, spot compliance risks, and remember every loose thread until the circus is finished.

Then comes my favorite part. Crossover tells candidates this is not the job for them if they need a playbook, want to be liked more than effective, get drained by documentation heavy stakeholder management, or expect requests to arrive complete. Translation: You may receive a first name, half a job title, three contradictory opinions, and a mysterious message saying “Thoughts?” Your assignment is to reconstruct the hiring strategy before lunch.

But wait, recruiting friends, there is more. The role pays \$100 an hour, which Crossover says equals \$200,000 a year assuming 40 hours a week for 50 weeks. Sounds fantastic. Then farther down, we learn this full time, long term position requires an independent contractor agreement. Ah yes, the corporate version of ordering the steak and discovering the plate is sold separately. “Full time” energy with contractor paperwork. Somewhere an accountant just sat up in bed for reasons they cannot explain.

The qualifications are equally relaxing. Eight plus years in recruiting. Hard to fill searches as your normal workload. Executive stakeholder management. Hiring assessment design. Compensation benchmarking. Compliance knowledge. Written process artifacts. Daily AI use. And not just, “I asked AI to rewrite an email.” They want examples of things you actually built. At this point I am surprised they do not require landing a helicopter while sourcing a VP. And then Crossover says its application process “takes real effort, because the work does.”

I respect the honesty. Most companies

hide the obstacle course until after you click Apply. Crossover is standing at the entrance holding a clipboard saying, “Before you come in, just know there are flames.” Maybe this is the right job for someone. Maybe a recruiter is reading this thinking, “Finally, peace and quiet.”

Everyone else, stretch first. Because apparently recruiting is no longer just finding candidates. Now you must find candidates, fix the system, build the tools, challenge executives, interpret incomplete clues, police compliance, analyze compensation, document everything, use AI daily, and do it all without needing anyone to like you.

By the time you fill the first role, they should let you recruit yourself a support animal.

POST 26 / THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

Two Resumes, One Ageism Experiment

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I described creating two versions of a resume to probe how employers respond to age cues.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted readers to question hidden filters and judge candidates by actual ability.

You ever get so fed up with job hunting that you start running your own experiments just to prove a point?

Because the other day, I did. I decided to test the unspoken rule everyone denies but everyone knows exists: ageism. Not the obvious kind, no one's out here posting "We only hire 30 under 30" but the quiet, polite version that hides behind words like "culture fit" and "fresh energy."

So, I created two resumes. Same experience, same achievements, same results. The only difference? One was me, seasoned, over 40, proudly marinated in experience. The other was me, same career history, but the dates were "updated," the college graduation a little more recent, the early years trimmed like a resume diet plan. I gave the younger version a cooler font, dropped the commas, and made it sound like they'd learned Excel from birth. Then I sent them both out. Guess which one got the callbacks?

Let's just say the "younger me" suddenly became very popular. Recruiters were tripping over themselves to schedule interviews. "Your energy really stands out," one said. Meanwhile, the "real me" got the usual auto responses: "We've decided

to move forward with other candidates." Translation: "We saw your graduation year."

It was funny, but not the ha ha kind. More like the laugh to keep from crying kind. Because apparently, the difference between "experienced professional" and "outdated" is about 15 years and one reference to TikTok. I even got a message from one recruiter saying, "We're looking for someone who can bring a fresh perspective." So I replied, "Oh good, because this version of me is 34 and still believes in work life balance." Haven't heard back.

What's wild is that the older resume, the one with decades of results, should've been the obvious choice. It had leadership, crisis management, actual data, real wins. But the younger version got points for "adaptability." You know what adaptability looks like after 20 years in the workforce? Surviving six reorgs, three bad bosses, two recessions, and one mandatory "fun" Zoom trivia night. The whole thing made me realize something: it's not that older workers aren't qualified, it's that companies get uncomfortable around proof of experience they can't underpay. They say they want wisdom, but they hire enthusiasm. They say they value mentorship, but they choose

"fresh ideas" that still come with training wheels.

So yeah, I ran my little experiment. It confirmed what most of us already know: the job market doesn't need another diversity workshop, it needs a reality check. And to all the hiring managers who say, "Age is just a number" you're right. It's the number you filtered out in your applicant tracking system.

So I'll keep applying, wrinkles and all. Because one day, someone's going to realize the best candidates aren't the ones who look new, they're the ones who've been through the reboot, survived the crash, and still show up ready to work.

POST 27 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

We Are Family, Until You Need Your Family

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled employers using family language to justify after-hours sacrifices.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to see that genuine workplace care should not demand abandoning home life.

The fastest way to make me nervous at work is when a boss leans back in a meeting, smiles, and says, "We're not just a company. We're a family."

Because every time I heard that sentence, somebody was about to ask me to sacrifice something my real family never would.

I remember working for a company where the word family got used so much I wondered if I should bring potato salad to the quarterly meeting. Every speech sounded the same. We take care of each other. We go above and beyond. We do whatever it takes. Until you realize "family" means answering your phone at 9:47 p.m., canceling plans, working through lunch, covering three jobs, smiling through disrespect, and feeling grateful because someone ordered pizza after you missed dinner with your actual family.

And I bought into it for a while. I stayed late, came in early, answered calls on days off, and solved problems that were not mine because I cared. I thought loyalty would be remembered. I thought if I kept showing up for the company, it would show up for me. Then one day I needed understanding. Suddenly the family meeting turned into a performance review, and I

learned corporate family can be strange household. They want you to be the dependable sibling in a crisis, the rich uncle when they need extra effort, the babysitter when someone quits, and the emotional support cousin when morale is low. But the second you need support or one afternoon with your kids, congratulations, you have been adopted by Human Resources.

Now it is all policy, attendance points, business needs, and a manager staring at you like you asked to borrow the company jet. That is the part toxic leaders never understand. People are not angry because work is hard. They get tired when sacrifice only travels in one direction. They get tired of hearing "we appreciate you" after the raise is denied. They get tired of being called essential during emergencies and expensive during budget meetings. They get tired of leaders preaching loyalty while changing the org chart.

Eventually, the employee who volunteered for everything starts saying no. The person who answered every call lets one go to voicemail. The person who stayed two hours late starts leaving on time. Then management acts shocked and asks, "What happened to your commitment?"

Nothing happened to the commitment. It finally met the return policy. A real workplace does not need to call itself a family every six minutes. It proves respect through fair pay, reasonable expectations, honest communication, real time off, and leaders who remember employees have homes they would also like to visit. Call me a teammate. Call me a leader. Call me an employee. Call me the guy fixing problems nobody put in the job description. Just do not call me family while scheduling me like I lost custody of my weekends.

Because my actual family does not ask for a KPI report before Thanksgiving dinner. And if they ever do, I am putting Grandma on a performance improvement plan.

POST 28 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

CANDIDATE RESPECT

Why Does My Resume Get Seven Seconds?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A post suggesting recruiters should understand resumes immediately struck me as one-sided.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to apply the same clarity and efficiency standards to their own hiring.

I read a post recently that said recruiters should be able to understand your resume instantly because they do not have 15 minutes to sit there decoding your career.

And I thought, well, that is a fascinating standard coming from the same hiring process that sometimes needs two months, seven interviews, and personality test to decide whether you can answer email without supervision.

Candidates are expected to explain twenty years of experience in seconds. Your resume must be clear, concise, measurable, tailored, exciting, and preferably short enough to fit on a cocktail napkin. Meanwhile, the company can post a job description that says “dynamic self-starter who thrives in ambiguity” and expect you to understand what that means. Translation: three people quit, nobody documented anything, Brenda left Friday, and your first assignment is finding out where she saved the passwords.

I agree that resumes should show results. “Managed sales” is weaker than “grew sales 25%.” “Led a team” is weaker than “led 50 employees across six locations.” Great advice. Now let’s apply the same honesty to job postings.

Instead of “competitive salary,” say, “We checked what competitors pay, removed 18%, and added free coffee.” Instead of “fast-paced environment,” say, “You will receive six Teams messages while answering an email asking why you have not replied to the first.” Instead of “must wear many hats,” admit, “We eliminated four jobs and bought one chair.”

Rejection emails could use some clarity too. Stop saying, “We decided to pursue candidates whose experience more closely aligns with our needs.” Just write, “We hired the VP’s neighbor.” Stop saying, “We were impressed by your background.” Try, “Everything was going beautifully until compensation came up.” And “we’ll keep your resume on file” should finally mean: “Your resume is entering a mysterious digital warehouse where missing socks, Blockbuster cards, and unanswered recruiter follow-ups go to live forever.”

Then we have the interview process. Round one is the recruiter. Round two is the hiring manager. Round three is apparently the hiring manager again. Then comes the panel, assessment, case study, culture interview, reference check, and the “final conversation,” which is never actually final because

corporate America uses the word final the same way Hollywood uses “final chapter.”

After all that, somebody joins interview number eight, looks into the camera, and says, “So, walk me through your background.” Beautiful. We have returned to the resume.

Yes, candidates should make resumes easy to understand. Use numbers. Show impact. Make accomplishments obvious. But hiring is a two way street. If applicants get six seconds to prove they deserve a conversation, employers should get six seconds to explain the salary, responsibilities, reporting structure, schedule, interview process, and why this “urgent opening” has been reposted seventeen times.

The clock is ticking. Please quantify your urgency.

POST 29 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

LAYOFF PRACTICES

Severance Should Not Be a Hostage Negotiation

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I considered an account of a departing employee expected to train replacements to secure severance.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted organizations to handle transitions fairly without exploiting vulnerable staff.

Apparently, we have reached a new level of corporate creativity. Not content with simply laying someone off, certain companies have decided to turn the exit process into a hostage negotiation.

The message is basically: Congratulations, your position has been eliminated. Please continue performing at a high level, transfer every piece of knowledge in your head to the person replacing you, smile in meetings, answer all questions, and if you do a good enough job helping us remove you, we may allow you to keep the severance package we promised.

Nothing says employee appreciation like being asked to professionally participate in your own disappearance. Imagine sitting across from leadership while they explain this with a straight face. We value everything you have contributed over the years. In fact, we value it so much that we need you to teach it all to someone else before we escort you out. Please document your processes, introduce your contacts, explain the politics, share the shortcuts, clean up the messes, and make sure your replacement is comfortable.

Then the severance becomes a motivational tool. Train your

replacement well, and you get paid." "Leave early because the whole situation is humiliating, and apparently you have failed the corporate loyalty exam. This is the workplace equivalent of someone breaking up with you, asking you to help their new partner move in, showing them where the good towels are, explaining how the thermostat works, and then saying, By the way, if you leave before they are settled, I am keeping your security deposit.

And companies will call this a transition plan. No. A transition plan is transferring responsibilities respectfully. A transition plan is giving people notice, clarity, dignity, and a reasonable path forward. Holding severance over someone while asking them to spend months training the person taking over their job is less of a transition plan and more of a corporate escape room where the final clue is your own LinkedIn update.

Somehow the employee is expected to remain fully engaged. Absolutely. Let me just finish writing the 87 page manual titled Everything I Learned While You Were Ignoring Me, schedule three training sessions called How Not to Break What I Built, and prepare a farewell presentation titled Best of

Luck With Kevin.

Then leadership acts surprised when morale drops. People can handle bad news. What hurts is tying dignity to severance.

If a company has made the business decision to eliminate a role, fine. Business changes. Positions disappear. Restructuring happens. But there is a big difference between asking someone to support a professional handoff and telling them their financial safety net depends on how enthusiastically they train the person replacing them.

You do not need six months to explain that. You need one sentence: We have decided to eliminate your position, but before you go, please make this as painless as possible for us. At least that version is honest.

POST 30 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

BOOK NEWS

A Book for Everyone Who Survived Easy Apply

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The publication of *The Great American Hiring Circus* created another opportunity to reach readers.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to turn familiar hiring frustrations into a shared laugh and a reason for change.

My book, *The Great American Hiring Circus*, is officially out there documenting the beautiful modern hiring experience, where Easy Apply requires a password reset, a personality test, seven interviews, an unpaid homework assignment, and possibly a background check on your childhood lemonade stand.

If you have ever been ghosted by a recruiter, interviewed by half the company, heard “final interview” three separate times, or watched a salary range mysteriously shrink during the process, this book may feel less like fiction and more like evidence.

You can grab a copy on Barnes & Noble, Inc. or Apple Books.

Grab a copy. Laugh a little. Cry responsibly. And remember: somewhere right now, a hiring manager is scheduling one more interview because apparently nobody invited Steve from Finance yet.

POST 31 / FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

WORKPLACE TRUST

The Coworker Who Borrowed My Job

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I recalled trusting a coworker who appeared to be positioning themselves for my responsibilities.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to build healthy boundaries while still valuing genuine workplace friendship.

A while back, I learned something strange about work: sometimes the person cheering the loudest for you is also checking whether your chair has lumbar support.

I worked with someone I thought was a friend. Looking back, I should've known. You know the type. They laughed at your jokes, asked how your weekend was, grabbed lunch with you, complained about the same meetings, and whispered, "Between you and me..." which, looking back, should have come with a warning label and a legal disclaimer. I trusted this person. I shared ideas with them. I helped them when they were struggling. I defended them when other people questioned their performance. Apparently, while I thought we were building a friendship, they were building a résumé using pieces of my role.

Then things started getting weird. Ideas I shared privately somehow appeared in meetings with someone else presenting them like they had discovered electricity. Conversations I thought were confidential developed legs, put on business casual, and walked directly into leadership's office. Little mistakes I made suddenly became breaking news, while everything I accomplished was treated like a

weather report from three weeks ago.

And then I figured it out. My coworker wasn't standing beside me. They were measuring my chair. That is a special kind of workplace heartbreak because betrayal rarely arrives wearing a villain costume. Sometimes it brings you coffee. Sometimes it says, "I've got your back." Sometimes it sends you a thumbs up on Teams five minutes before explaining to your boss why they could probably do your job better.

I can laugh about it now, but at the time it hurt. Not because someone wanted to advance. Ambition is fine. Want the promotion. Chase the title. Ask for more responsibility. Build your career. But if the only elevator you can find requires pushing someone else down the shaft, you're not climbing. You're just showing everyone what kind of leader you'll eventually become.

I learned something from that experience: be kind at work, help people, mentor people, celebrate people, but understand that friendliness and loyalty are not the same thing. Someone knowing your lunch order does not mean they deserve access to every concern, plan, frustration, or career move. And never become bitter because one person

betrayed your trust. Keep helping good people. Keep sharing credit. Keep opening doors. Just stop handing everyone a map to your house and acting surprised when one of them tries to change the locks.

Years later, I don't remember every project we worked on or every meeting we sat through. I remember how it felt realizing someone I supported had quietly been campaigning for my seat. But I also remember this: they could chase my title, copy my ideas, repeat my words, and study everything I did.

They still couldn't become me. Your job can be taken. Your title can change. Your office can disappear overnight. Your character follows you everywhere. And so does theirs.

Can You Learn Teams After Twenty-Five Years?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how mature applicants are still asked to prove basic technology adaptability.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted technology questions to assess skills rather than serve as coded age assumptions.

In 2026, we have artificial intelligence writing emails, cars driving themselves, and refrigerators that can tell you when you're out of milk. Yet somehow, certain companies still look at a candidate with 25 years of experience and think, "Hmm... but can they learn Microsoft Teams?"

Welcome to ageism in 2026, where your experience is celebrated right up until somebody calculates how many birthdays it took you to get it.

You spend decades becoming the person companies claim they want. You lead teams, survive recessions, fix disasters, train people, adapt to new technology, manage customers, and learn how to stay calm when someone schedules a meeting titled "Quick Chat" at 4:47 on Friday. Then you start interviewing and your greatest accomplishment is apparently remembering where you parked.

The language is rarely obvious. Nobody says, "You're too old." That would require honesty and probably an conversation with HR. Instead, you hear things like "We're looking for someone with more energy," "We're building a younger culture," "You might be overqualified," or my personal favorite, "We're concerned you may

not be comfortable with technology." Technology? These candidates went from fax machines to email, from pagers to smartphones, from paper applications to ATS portals that make you upload your resume and then type the thing again. They survived dial-up internet. They learned Zoom during a shutdown. Trust me, Karen can figure out Slack.

And the saddest part isn't even the rejection. It's watching talented people start questioning themselves. People who spent 20 or 30 years building careers wonder whether they should remove dates from their resume, delete half their experience, change their profile picture, stop mentioning accomplishments, or somehow pretend they weren't alive when Blockbuster still had late fees.

That's where the joke stops being funny. Experience should not become something people are embarrassed to show. A 52 year old candidate isn't asking you to preserve them in a museum. A 58 year old isn't applying because they need something to do between bingo tournaments. A 63 year old isn't planning retirement during orientation.

They're applying because they still have

something to contribute. And here's the irony: companies constantly say they want resilience, loyalty, emotional intelligence, leadership, perspective, and people who can handle change. Then someone walks through the door carrying decades of exactly that, and everyone gets nervous because the graduation year isn't recent enough.

We can do better. Hire the 28 year old with potential. Hire the 42 year old changing careers. Hire the 57 year old with battle scars and stories. Hire the 65 year old who still wants another chapter. Talent doesn't expire because somebody added another candle to the cake.

If your hiring strategy in 2026 still treats experience like spoiled milk, the candidate isn't outdated. Your hiring process definitely is.!

The First Thirty Days of Corporate Witness Protection

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I reflected on the pressure and uncertainty that come with learning a new workplace.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted managers to remember that onboarding is a human experience, not only a checklist.

Nobody warns you that starting a new job comes with two emotions at the exact same time: "I'm excited to be here" and "Please don't fire me before I figure out where the bathroom is."

The first 30 days are basically corporate witness protection. New email. New passwords. New people. New acronyms. Everyone assumes you understand what's happening because you nodded confidently during orientation. The first week is pure optimism. You say, "Absolutely, happy to help," while secretly searching the company drive for a folder called **WHAT IS EVERYONE TALKING ABOUT**.

Then week two arrives. That's when the passwords begin fighting back. Your email works, but payroll doesn't. Payroll works, but benefits says you don't exist. IT resets your password, and somehow your printer now has access to your retirement account. Meanwhile, you're trying to learn the culture. Every workplace has unwritten rules nobody explains. Karen loves early meetings. Steve considers anything before 9:00 a personal attack. Todd has been there 17 years, nobody knows exactly what Todd does, but

everyone copies him on emails because that feels safer.

By week three, you start getting comfortable. You know where the bathroom is without pretending you're "just looking around." You've figured out who actually gets things done, who says "circle back" because they have no answer, and which meetings could have been emails before the invitation even arrives.

Then your brain remembers your previous jobs. Suddenly every unexpected meeting invite looks suspicious. Your boss sends, "Got five minutes?" and your nervous system immediately starts cleaning out your desk. You've been employed for 23 days. Relax. The first 30 days shouldn't be about proving every five minutes that you deserve to stay. They should be about learning, listening, asking questions, making mistakes, building relationships, and figuring out how your experience fits into a new environment.

Starting over is exciting, but it can also be scary, especially if you've experienced layoffs, toxic bosses, restructures, or that Friday afternoon "quick call" that permanently changed

your relationship with calendar notifications.

So celebrate the first month. Celebrate remembering names, surviving onboarding, finding decent coffee, understanding the spreadsheet everyone called "self-explanatory," and finally joining a meeting without wondering whether you clicked the wrong link. Thirty days doesn't mean everything will be perfect. It means you made it through the awkward beginning. Keep learning. Keep laughing. Keep showing up. And stop panicking every time your manager types, "Got a minute?" Sometimes they really do just need a minute.

The first month at a new job is basically orientation mixed with optimism, confusion, and just enough paranoia to keep LinkedIn quietly open in another tab. By day 30, someone new asks you a question and you truly know the answer. Congratulations, you're no longer the newest person.

POST 34 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

HIRING DELAYS

ASAP Means Six Interviews From Now

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A supposedly urgent vacancy appeared to invite months of delays and scheduling loops.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to align their claims of urgency with their actual process.

I always laugh when a company says, “We need someone ASAP,” because apparently ASAP now means “after six interviews, three scheduling conflicts, two vacations, one budget review, and a mysterious week where nobody responds to email.” Corporate urgency.

The panic is incredible at first. “We needed this person yesterday.” “This role is critical.” “We’re losing money every day it stays open.” “Can you send candidates immediately?” So the recruiter moves fast. The candidate moves fast. Everyone clears calendars, updates resumes, jumps on calls, completes assessments, meets the team, meets the team’s team, and somehow meets Bob from a department that has absolutely nothing to do with the role.

Then everything stops. Silence. The same company that was acting like the building was on fire suddenly needs “a little time to align internally.” Align internally with what? The moon? The candidate checks in. The recruiter checks in. The hiring manager says they are “still gathering feedback,” which is corporate language for “someone forgot to fill out the scorecard.”

Meanwhile, the candidate has another interview. Then another offer. Then a

start date. Three weeks later, the original company finally emerges from the wilderness. “Great news! We’d like to move them to the next round.” Wonderful. They’ve already moved to another company.

This is my favorite part of modern hiring. Companies will post “URGENT HIRE” in all caps, add “immediate need” to the job description, tell recruiters to prioritize the search, and then treat the actual decision like they are selecting the next pope. You cannot have an urgent opening and a leisurely hiring process. Those two things do not belong in the same sentence. If the role is truly critical, the calendar should reflect that. The feedback should reflect that. The decision making should reflect that.

Great candidates are not sitting at home staring at their phones hoping your seventh stakeholder finally has an opening next Thursday at 2:30. They are talking to other companies. They are getting offers. They are moving on. And then leadership acts shocked. “What happened to that great candidate?” They escaped. You left the gate open for 24 days.

Sometimes companies complain that “good people are hard to find.” Maybe.

But sometimes good people are actually pretty easy to find. The hard part is convincing five executives, two managers, HR, Finance, Legal, and apparently Steve from Procurement to agree that the person everyone already likes should actually be hired.

Speed does not mean reckless hiring. It means respecting everyone’s time enough to make decisions. If you say ASAP, act like ASAP. Otherwise just be honest and say, “We urgently need someone whenever our internal committee finishes discussing it sometime before the next fiscal year.”

At least the candidate can plan accordingly. Because apparently the fastest part of urgent hiring is watching the best candidate accept somebody else’s offer first. Now.

POST 35 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

UNPAID WORK

Eleven Interviews and Code Already in Production

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A rejection account described extensive technical interviews and take-home work that was apparently used.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted candidates' time and intellectual contribution treated with respect.

I saw an interview rejection email this morning that deserves its own glass display case in the Museum of Modern Hiring.

The candidate had gone through 11 technical interviews, completed a one week take home project, and was told the work was so good that parts of it had actually been accepted into the company's codebase. Then came the rejection. Not the project. Not the code. Just the human being who created it. Somewhere, a hiring committee looked at work they liked enough to use and apparently said, "Excellent. Now let's make sure we never have to pay the person who made it."

It immediately reminded me of when I went through the Amazon interview process, because somewhere along the way hiring stopped being about finding the right person and became an endurance competition sponsored by Outlook Calendar. You start out excited. Intro call. Hiring manager. Technical conversation. Leadership conversation. Another leadership conversation. Then comes the famous loop, where you spend enough time answering questions that you begin

wondering whether you are interviewing for a job or applying for citizenship.

By interview number five, you have told the same career stories so many times that your own accomplishments start sounding like reruns. By number seven, you are trying to remember which interviewer already heard which example. By the end, you know their leadership principles and probably enough internal terminology to accidentally show up at Monday's staff meeting.

That is why this rejection email is comedy gold. Eleven technical interviews. A one week project. And the candidate's actual work made it into the company's codebase. Imagine a restaurant saying, "We tasted your cooking, loved it, added your recipe to the menu, but unfortunately we have decided not to move forward with you as a chef."

At some point, this is no longer an interview process. This is a free consulting engagement with rejection benefits. Companies love saying they need extensive interviews because they want to reduce hiring risk.

Meanwhile, candidates are investing hours, days, sometimes weeks proving they can do the job while working, raising families, applying elsewhere, and pretending another quick 45 minute conversation is perfectly reasonable.

And after all of that comes the polished sentence: "This was an incredibly difficult decision." Was it? Because after 11 interviews and a week of free work, I would hope the decision was difficult enough to require a congressional hearing. There has to be a point where companies trust their own hiring managers. Interview people. Verify their skills. Absolutely. But if a candidate has completed more rounds than a heavyweight boxing match and contributed production ready work before receiving a paycheck, maybe the process is not rigorous.

Maybe it is just ridiculous. Somewhere out there, a rejected candidate is updating their resume: Successfully contributed to company codebase. Employment status: apparently unnecessary.

POST 36 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

WORKPLACE RECOGNITION

One Mistake Erases a Hundred Saves

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered how a single issue could eclipse months of hard work and good decisions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to evaluate people fairly across the full record of their contributions.

You can spend months being the person who fixes the mess, saves the day, takes the call nobody wants, and keeps the wheels from falling off. Then one issue shows up and suddenly the company acts like your career was a clerical error. Amazing how quickly a workplace can go from You are incredible to Please explain yourself in Conference Room B.

I remember when I worked for a company where I gave everything I had. Fixing problems, helping struggling teams, hiring people, training people, saving accounts, growing sales, putting out fires, and answering emails while eating dinner. I could walk into a broken operation and help turn it around, and for a while everyone would say, Great job. Incredible work. We appreciate you.

Then one issue happened, and suddenly the scoreboard reset. Not a scandal. Nobody had to call the FBI. It was just one issue. One decision someone disliked. One moment where everything did not go perfectly. Suddenly the company developed amnesia. All those months? Gone. All the problems I solved? Fictional. All the extra hours? Must have been a dream. All the times I stepped in when nobody else would? Deleted from the historical

record.

The conversation became entirely about that one issue, like we were filming a Netflix documentary called The Day Alex Was Not Perfect. That is the part that gets you emotionally, because when you care about your work, you do not keep score every day. You are not saying, I fixed that problem, saved that account, helped that person, missed dinner for that meeting, so please add another point to my corporate loyalty card. You just do the work. You believe people see the full picture.

Then one day you realize some companies do not keep a scrapbook of your accomplishments. They keep a magnifying glass for your mistakes. A great company can say, We have an issue to fix, while still remembering everything you brought to the table. A great leader does not judge your entire contribution by your worst Tuesday. Bad leadership can use one mistake to erase months or years of results because selective memory is convenient.

I can laugh about it now. Apparently corporate recognition has the same expiration date as milk. You can exceed expectations for months, but a rough

meeting later somebody is staring at you like, Remind me again what exactly you do here? Sir, I have been carrying three departments, two phones, a laptop, and half the company's emotional stability. But sure. Let us spend forty five minutes discussing the one email.

The lesson for me was simple: never let one company's short memory become your identity. Your value is not erased because one situation went sideways. Your work still mattered. The people you helped still remember. The results still happened. The impact is still real.

And if a company can only remember your mistake but somehow forget every reason they trusted you in the first place, maybe the problem is not your performance. Maybe their memory just needs a performance review.

POST 37 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

AGEISM & PAY

Over Fifty and Apparently Too Expensive

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone suggested older workers lose opportunities because they expect higher salaries.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted experience-based pay discussions separated from lazy age stereotypes.

Someone recently told me, "Companies hire younger people because workers over 50 want too much money."

Mystery solved. Apparently the biggest threat to corporate America is a 53 year old asking to cover a mortgage, groceries, insurance, property taxes, and occasionally order guacamole. Apparently knowing your value is now a personality defect.

A company will post a job requiring leadership, budgeting, hiring, training, strategy, customer retention, technology skills, and survive six hours of meetings that should have been three emails. Salary: \$58,000. Then someone with 25 years of experience says, "I was thinking closer to \$90,000," and the recruiter reacts like they requested naming rights to the building. "Unfortunately, your expectations are outside our range." Outside the range? Your job description is outside the range. You want Batman, an accountant, a therapist, and an Excel wizard, but your budget is one dependable guy named Gary with a Groupon.

Yes, younger workers may sometimes accept less. That does not mean experienced workers expect too much. At 25, a smaller paycheck may still feel like progress. At 55, there is a

mortgage, insurance, retirement, property taxes that arrive like ransom notes, and at least one appliance making a noise that sounds financially devastating. That is not greed. That is adulthood.

The funniest part is when companies proudly announce they found someone cheaper. "Great news! We saved \$25,000 on the hire!" Wonderful. Three months later, the new employee needs an outside consultant, emergency training, and someone from IT nearby because the forecasting spreadsheet disappeared. Congratulations. You saved \$25,000 and somehow spent \$71,000 celebrating. Finance is asking for medical attention.

Experience is not just knowing how to do the job. It is knowing which problem matters, recognizing the customer who is about to leave, seeing when a project is heading toward a brick wall while everyone else admires the PowerPoint, and hearing a manager say, "I have an idea," while instinctively hiding the company credit card. That knowledge came from mistakes, restructures, bad bosses, budget cuts, acquisitions, layoffs, and meetings where someone said "circle back offline" with a straight face.

Companies love seasoned leadership until seasoned leadership sends over salary expectations. Then suddenly they want high potential talent. Translation: we wanted experience until we discovered experience has a checking account. Brilliant people exist at every age. The problem starts when someone is labeled too expensive before anyone asks what they would accept.

So when somebody tells me workers over 50 are losing opportunities because they expect too much money, I smile. Maybe some do. Or maybe after decades of solving problems, surviving corporate chaos, and cleaning up disasters they did not create, they know what their time is worth.

Experience may cost more upfront. Fixing preventable disasters has never been cheap.

POST 38 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

AGEISM & GENDER

The Cost of Trying to Look Younger

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A private message described changing a resume and appearance to avoid age judgments.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to show the emotional and practical cost of bias, particularly for women.

There's something I need to say out loud, because someone messaged me privately and it hit me like a ton of rejection emails (the ones that start with "We regret to inform you" but somehow arrive at 2:14 a.m. like they're drunk texting).

They said, "Alex, your post on ageism was right on the money. I shaved ten years off my resume, deleted my graduation date, my LinkedIn headshot is from 2013, and I spend ridiculous amounts of time and money just trying to look younger than I am. But then again, as a woman, I've been judged on my looks since the fourth grade. Those who are surprised by that are clueless."

Let that sink in. Fourth. Grade. While some of us were busy learning long division and pretending to care about the Oregon Trail, others were already being told their worth came down to appearance.

And it hasn't stopped. We're living in a job market where your hairstyle gets judged harder than your skill set, where "energetic culture fit" is code for "don't look like you've lived through dial-up internet," and where the magical solution to discrimination is apparently just... lying on your resume until you resemble a recent college grad who

somehow already has 15 years of experience.

Meanwhile, men like me can walk around with the same haircut since 2006 and call it "personal branding." Here's the truth nobody likes to admit, ageism is one of those unspoken HR filters. You can't see it in the job description. You can't hear it in the interview. But you feel it, like the moment the recruiter's smile tightens when you mention your "decades" of experience, or when they remind you the company culture is "young and dynamic," as if wisdom is contagious and must be quarantined.

But here's the thing, your years are not baggage. They are receipts. Proof that you've survived broken printers, impossible bosses, dial-up modems, and team building exercises that should've been classified as war crimes. Every wrinkle is a plot twist. Every gray hair is a trophy. And every rejection you've faced just proves you've been brave enough to keep showing up.

If you're spending energy trying to erase yourself to fit into the market, I see you. And I get it. But hear me when I say, the very things you think you need to hide are the things that make you legendary. Because when the bots

and the biases finish swiping left, the people who remain, the ones who choose you, are the ones who will see the real story.

So here's my invitation to all of us, stop apologizing for surviving. Stop hiding the years you earned. Every wrinkle, every scar, every line on your resume is proof you've made it through faxes, floppy disks, bad bosses, and breakroom coffee that tasted like motor oil. That's not baggage, that's experience.

And the next time someone says you're "not a culture fit," smile and remind them, culture changes every year, but legends never go out of style. Stay strong. Stay funny. Stay visible, because the world needs real stories.

POST 39 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

HIRING SATIRE

The Job Market as an Unscripted Reality Show

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another sequence of portal hoops, repeated resumes and interviews exposed the absurdity of job hunting.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted laughter to open a serious discussion about unnecessary obstacles.

This job market is beyond wild. I mean, every time I think I've seen it all, it invents a new way to test my patience, dignity, and sense of humor.

Applying for jobs used to be simple, you saw a posting, sent a resume, maybe got a call, maybe not. Now? It's like auditioning for a reality TV show where the prize is the opportunity to sit in meetings that should have been emails.

First you wrestle with the job portal, which feels like trying to file your taxes in hieroglyphics. Upload your resume? Sure. But then you also have to manually retype every line of your resume into 47 separate boxes. By the time you're done, you start wondering if the job is worth it or if you should just go live in the woods and barter with squirrels.

And let's talk about the interviews. Oh, the interviews. Back in the day, one or two rounds and you were done. Now it's seven rounds, two panel interviews, a PowerPoint presentation, and a personality test that asks if you consider yourself "a jellybean or a giraffe." You nail all of that, you walk away thinking, I crushed it! And then... silence. Weeks of silence. Finally, you get an email that starts with the most

cursed phrase in the English language, "After careful consideration..." At this point, "careful consideration" feels like code for "we flipped a coin and it wasn't you."

And if you're lucky enough to make it through all that? Congratulations, now you get to negotiate salary. Except "negotiation" means they'll ask for 10+ years of experience in software invented last Tuesday, three master's degrees, fluency in five languages, and in exchange they'll generously offer... exposure. Maybe a pizza party. And don't even ask about benefits unless you're cool with "unlimited PTO" that you'll be guilt tripped out of ever using.

It's exhausting, humiliating, and somehow hilarious. Ghosted by recruiters, rejected by bots, congratulated by systems like you cured cancer, the only consistent thing in this job market is disappointment in business casual.

But here's the emotional part, we keep going. Even after 50, 100, 300 rejections, we keep showing up. We dust ourselves off, tweak the resume again, practice our answers again, psych ourselves up for another Zoom interview with strangers who will say "we're like a family" (spoiler: they're

not). Why? Because deep down, we believe there's something better out there. A role where our skills are valued, where our paycheck doesn't bounce, where "culture fit" means more than free LaCroix in the fridge.

This market is brutal. It will chew you up, spit you out, and then ask you to rate your application experience on a scale of 1 to 10. But it's not stronger than us. If you're reading this, if you're in the grind, if you're exhausted but still applying, you're not alone. We're all out here fighting the same absurd battle.

One day those "wtf" rejection calls will turn into a real offer. Until then, we laugh, rant, meme, and keep going, because what else can we do?

POST 40 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

INTERVIEW PANELS

Seven Panelists and My LinkedIn in Evidence

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A panel interview turned toward my public writing rather than my professional qualifications.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviewers to discuss the actual job instead of prosecuting a candidate's humor.

You ever walk into a Zoom panel interview thinking it's going to be your big career moment, only to realize halfway through you've accidentally joined your own roast?

That was me last week. Seven people on screen, all with serious faces, one sipping coffee like they were about to read my Miranda rights and the very first question wasn't "Tell us about yourself." Nope. It was: "So... about your LinkedIn posts."

You could feel the HR energy shift immediately. The hiring manager leaned forward like I was a flight risk. One panelist had clearly been scrolling my profile at 2 a.m. because they came armed with quotes. Actual quotes. "Alex, in one of your posts you wrote, 'Corporate America is like dating someone who leaves you on read but still watches your stories.' What did you mean by that?" Ma'am... I meant what I said.

At that point, I realized this wasn't an interview, it was a vibe intervention. They weren't hiring, they were trying to determine if I could be deprogrammed before onboarding. One guy smiled and said, "You're very... expressive online." Which is recruiter code for "You scare the beige out of us."

I tried to stay composed. I really did. But then someone asked, "Would you be this funny at work?" I said, "Only if things get dark." They didn't laugh. So I clarified: "You know... which they usually do." Still nothing. I've seen livelier reactions from the DMV. By then, I half expected someone from legal to appear and ask me to step away from the keyboard immediately. And you know what kills me? These are the same companies that write on their careers page: We celebrate authenticity! Sure you do, right up until someone actually demonstrates it. Then it's like, "Whoa, easy there, personality. Let's keep this workplace emotionally gluten free."

By the third question, I was no longer interviewing for a job, I was defending my right to be a functioning human with a sense of humor. "Would you say your posts represent your professional values?" they asked. I said, "Yes. I believe in honesty, sarcasm, and not crying during PowerPoint presentations." They nodded. It was the kind of nod that says, "He's self aware... dangerous." And don't get me wrong, I get why they were nervous. Most companies want "innovators" just not the kind that innovate sentences. They

want "big energy" as long as it fits inside a 12 point mission statement.

So yeah, I didn't get the job. But honestly? It was worth every second. Because nothing beats the look on their faces when they realized they'd invited the very same chaos they've been reposting about under "We value creative thinkers." And if any of them are reading this, hi again. Thanks for the inspiration. You didn't hire me, but you did give me today's content. Consider it my thank you note.

Lesson learned: if your humor makes it into the interview, you're already winning. Because if they can't handle a few jokes over Zoom, imagine how they'd react when I start fixing their broken processes and their morale.

POST 41 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

SPEAKING UP

A Fortune 500 Warning About My Posts

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A senior leader's warning about my public criticism prompted a sarcastic response.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to defend honest conversations about workplace practices without turning silent.

The other day, I received one of those messages that instantly lets you know you've crossed into a new tax bracket of visibility.

Not a job offer. Not a collaboration. Not even a passive aggressive "circling back." No. A Fortune 500 senior leader reached out to personally inform me that my job hunting rants have officially burned my chances with certain companies and, somehow, single handedly caused a \$100,000 manager to quit after reading my posts.

First of all, congratulations to me on discovering my superpower this late in life. Because for years, I couldn't even get a recruiter to acknowledge my existence. Emails vanished. Applications went unanswered. Follow-ups evaporated into the corporate abyss. But now? Now my writing is apparently strong enough to overpower compensation packages, bonus structures, and leadership loyalty.

That's growth. According to this message, the manager didn't leave because of burnout, endless restructuring, unrealistic expectations, or the slow erosion of joy that comes from being told "we're like a family here" while your calendar is booked

solid until 2047. No. They left because they read a LinkedIn post where someone said, "The hiring process is broken."

Imagine being paid \$100k a year and thinking, "I was fine... until I read that one sarcastic paragraph written by a stranger in sweatpants." That's not feedback. That's corporate folklore. I also deeply enjoy the implication that the system itself is flawless, but my posts are the unstable element. Not ghosting candidates. Not posting roles that aren't real. Not six round interviews for jobs that pay in vibes and pizza parties.

No, the real threat to organizational stability is someone saying the quiet part out loud with decent grammar and a caffeine problem. If my content truly has the power to cause high earning professionals to reevaluate their lives, I'd like to formally request a title. Maybe "Director of Existential Crises." Or at least a LinkedIn badge.

But here's the thing: if honesty about job hunting burns bridges, those bridges were already on fire, I just pointed out the smoke, the flickering warning signs, and the people quietly standing there pretending they don't feel the heat while holding a company

branded water bottle and insisting everything is "fine." And if someone quits because a post validated feelings they've been suppressing for years, maybe that wasn't sabotage. Maybe that was permission, permission to admit they were tired, permission to stop normalizing misery as success, permission to choose themselves instead of another calendar invite labeled "quick sync" that slowly eats their soul.

So yes, apparently my chances are burned. Yes, someone important is mad. And yes, I'll keep writing, because comfort never changed anything, and honesty still matters more than approval.

Because if telling the truth causes that much disruption, the problem isn't the rant. It's what people recognized themselves in it.

POST 42 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

INTERVIEW DESIGN

The Job Description That Read Itself on Zoom

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A multi-person video interview spent time reciting a contradictory job description.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted companies to create clear roles and ask useful questions instead of rehearsing jargon.

The other day I was on a Zoom interview with four people, which is already a strong signal that whatever is about to happen will be slightly unhinged but presented as “very standard.”

Everyone was muted except the HR manager, who had the calm, confident tone of someone reading from a document that has been approved by legal, leadership, and someone named “Culture.” She starts walking through the job description. Not summarizing. Not highlighting. Reading it. Line by line. And as she went on, I felt recognition. The kind you get when you realize you are watching a nature documentary about a species that does not exist.

We needed someone who could lead cross functional teams but also execute independently. Someone strategic but tactical. Visionary but detail oriented. Calm under pressure but endlessly passionate. A self starter who thrives on collaboration. A data driven storyteller. A hands on leader who never needs direction but loves feedback. Available across time zones. Deep expertise in five systems that barely talk to each other. Ten years of experience. Entry level energy. Startup hustle. Enterprise polish. Minimal ego.

Maximum output.

At one point she said, completely seriously, “We’re looking for someone who can do it all.” That’s when my mouth betrayed me. “So” I said, smiling politely into the camera “it sounds like you’re looking for a unicorn ninja.” Silence. Not awkward silence. Sacred silence. The kind where everyone freezes, including the Zoom boxes. One interviewer blinked slowly. Another looked down, possibly to write “problematic” in their notes. The HR manager tilted her head like I’d just introduced a foreign concept such as boundaries.

I clarified, because apparently I value chaos. “You know,” I said. “Rare. Magical. Highly trained. Appears when needed. Works nonstop. No visible weaknesses. Possibly fictional.” A nervous laugh escaped someone. It might have been me. To her credit, the HR manager smiled and said, “We just have high expectations.” Of course you do.

Every company does. No one ever says, “We’re looking for a competent human who does good work, asks reasonable questions, and logs off occasionally without guilt.” No, we aim higher. Mythical. Agile. Slightly caffeinated.

Emotionally resilient but not emotional. Independent but loyal. Replaceable but irreplaceable.

The modern job market isn’t hiring people. It’s assembling a Marvel character using a spreadsheet. And look, I get it. Everyone wants excellence. But when the role requires one person to be a strategist, operator, therapist, analyst, cheerleader, firefighter, and occasional wizard, maybe the issue isn’t talent availability. Maybe the issue is the job description was written by four departments who never spoke to each other but all wanted to feel seen.

I didn’t get the job. Which is fine. Because somewhere out there, a unicorn ninja is late for standup, exhausted, underpaid, and quietly updating their LinkedIn headline to “Open to Work.”

POST 43 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

LINKEDIN CULTURE

Please Formally Acknowledge My Unfollow

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Someone felt the need to announce they were unfollowing rather than quietly moving on.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to satirize the unnecessary drama around ordinary social-media choices.

I still don't understand why, in the year 2026, when unfollowing someone requires the same level of effort as blinking, there are people who feel compelled to message you and announce it like this is a legally significant event that needs to be documented, acknowledged, witnessed, and emotionally processed by both parties.

Not just unfollowing. Not just quietly moving on with their life. They need to send a direct message. A farewell note from someone who was never formally involved in anything. "Just wanted to let you know I'm unfollowing you." Thank you. I appreciate the transparency. I was moments away from filing a missing persons report, checking my notifications, and notifying the algorithm of your sudden, brave disappearance.

It's fascinating because unfollowing is specifically engineered to be silent. It is the digital equivalent of leaving a party without saying goodbye, grabbing your coat, slipping out the door, and disappearing into the night without knocking over a chair. And yet some people look at that perfectly functional exit and think, no, this needs an audience.

This message is never really for you. It's for them. It's closure. It's performance. It's the need to be acknowledged for leaving, like a toddler announcing they are "going to their room" and then standing in the hallway to see if anyone follows.

And the tone is always incredible. Never aggressive. Never warm. Always politely dramatic. "I don't really align with your content anymore." Okay. This was never a binding alignment agreement. "I'm unfollowing for my mental health." Respectfully, my posts are words on a screen, not a clinical diagnosis. "I just wanted to be honest." About clicking a button. What they're really saying is: I want you to feel this. I want this decision to land. I want a reaction. I want a response that confirms I mattered enough to announce my departure instead of simply disappearing like a well adjusted adult.

There's always a pause after the message too, a suspenseful silence, like they're waiting for you to reply with concern, regret, or a handwritten apology promising personal growth. But here's the part they never consider: you were never required to stay. And you were definitely not required to

announce it. This is not an airport. You do not need to declare your departure.

Unfollowing is not a breakup. It's not a boundary setting ritual. It's not brave. It's not feedback. It's a button. A very small one. On a phone. Usually pressed while standing in line, sitting on the couch, or half watching television. The algorithm will not notice. History will not record it. And I will not spiral.

But thank you for letting me know. I'll place this information carefully between spam emails, unsubscribe confirmations, and out of office replies that say "limited access" and mean absolutely nothing. Safe travels. May your feed be perfectly curated, your exits dramatic only in your own head, and your future unfollows beautifully, gloriously silent.!

POST 44 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

AGEISM

Forty Under Forty, Experience Not Invited

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

An interview at a youth-branded company made age and “energy” feel like unspoken criteria.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to challenge the idea that being young is itself a qualification.

Last week, I interviewed with one of those “40 Under 40” companies, you know, the kind that acts like youth is a skill you can list on your resume.

Everything about it screamed “modern innovation,” from the exposed brick wall to the motivational neon sign that said Hustle Harder, which felt less like inspiration and more like a cry for help.

I showed up excited, genuinely ready to impress. I had prepped my answers, checked my lighting, and even switched from my “wise and mysterious” glasses to my “young and hireable” pair. The moment the call started, I could tell I was about to become a sociology experiment.

There they were, a panel of bright, fresh faces, all armed with oat milk lattes and confidence only possible before your first tax audit. The first interviewer said, “We’re really looking for someone who brings youthful energy to our team.” I smiled and replied, “Perfect. I bring caffeine and sarcasm, both renewable resources.” Their smiles froze like a bad Wi-Fi connection.

Then another one chimed in with, “You’ve had quite an extensive career... do you think you’d be able to keep up

with our pace?” I leaned in and said, “Sweetheart, I’ve survived dial-up internet, faxes, and Windows Vista. Your Slack notifications don’t scare me.” The silence that followed could’ve powered a small car. Someone else nervously added, “We’re looking for someone who really gets Gen Z humor.” So I said, “Oh, absolutely. I too enjoy self-diagnosing on TikTok and ironically hating capitalism while buying \$8 iced coffee.” You could feel HR’s soul leave their body.

By the midpoint, I knew I wasn’t there to get hired, I was there to test their ability to handle authenticity in 1080p. Every question became a small act of rebellion. When they asked how I adapt to fast changing environments, I said, “I’ve adapted to aging, so I think I’ll manage.” When they asked what motivates me, I said, “Health insurance and fewer meetings.”

At one point, a recruiter muttered, “You remind me of my dad,” which was my cue to mentally pack up my dignity and my coffee mug. But instead, I smiled and said, “He sounds like a great hire.”

By the end, they thanked me for my “perspective,” which is corporate for “please never do that again.” I logged off, took a sip of coffee, and laughed,

because if there’s one thing I proved that day, it’s that confidence makes people far more uncomfortable than age ever will, especially when it walks into a Zoom call, smiles at their neon signs, and refuses to shrink itself to fit their Wi-Fi connection.

So to my “40 Under 40” friends, thank you for the experience. You may have your kombucha and your Slack channels, but I’ve got something better: the ability to make an entire panel question their youth, their choices, and their Wi-Fi connection in under 45 minutes and I didn’t need a ring light, a startup hoodie, or a buzzword bingo card to do it. Just caffeine, confidence, and the audacity of experience. Apparently, experience still bites back.

POST 45 / SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

INTERVIEW EXPERIENCES

The Recruiter Interview With No Steering Wheel

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recruiter arrived late, lost the thread and repeatedly interrupted their own interview.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted recruiters to prepare with the same seriousness they expect from applicants.

You ever have an interview with a recruiter who is so all over the place that you're not sure if you're being evaluated for a job or accidentally participating in a live stress test?

Because I did. And I'm still not convinced I survived the same conversation they think happened. It started normally enough. Calendar invite. Title. Time. Confidence. I showed up prepared, caffeinated, and emotionally available for professional discourse. They showed up late, breathless, and immediately began apologizing to someone who was not on the call. First red flag. Second red flag was when they asked me to "just give them a second" and then muted themselves for what felt like a full commercial break.

When they came back, we did not pick up where we left off. We started a brand new thought. Not a follow-up. Not a clarification. A fresh idea, as if the first five minutes had been erased by a cosmic Etch A Sketch.

Questions arrived out of order. Context arrived never. At one point I was explaining my leadership style and they interrupted to ask about salary, then immediately pivoted to culture, then apologized again because they "lost

their notes." Which notes, I do not know. I suspect they were notes for an entirely different human.

They asked if I'd worked with a certain system. I said yes. They nodded confidently, wrote something down, and then asked me the same question again five minutes later with less enthusiasm, like the system and I had both betrayed them.

The real magic happened when they started answering their own questions. "So tell me about a time you handled conflict. Or actually, never mind, because this role doesn't really have conflict. Except when it does. Which is often. But not really." At this point I was no longer interviewing. I was witnessing a live internal debate.

Every answer I gave was met with "Interesting," which is recruiter for "I heard noise but did not process meaning." Then they would pivot again, mid. sentence, to something else entirely. Location. Team size. Timeline. Budget. Back to salary. Back to culture. Back to a story about another candidate that I definitely did not need to hear. Somewhere around minute thirty, they said, "I think this went really well," which was fascinating, because nothing measurable had occurred. No

clarity. No structure. No sense of what the role actually involved. Just vibes, caffeine, and chaos.

The call ended with, "We'll follow up soon," which in recruiter language can mean tomorrow, next quarter, or never. I closed my laptop and sat there in silence, replaying the conversation, trying to determine whether I had just interviewed for a job or been briefly trapped inside someone else's workday.

If you've ever left an interview unsure what role it was for, who you spoke to, or which version of reality would be used to evaluate you later, congratulations. You've met the recruiter who is all over the place. I wish them peace. And a checklist.

POST 46 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

TOXIC WORKPLACES

My Former Boss, Now Head of Dream Operations

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A dream about an old boss reminded me how long difficult experiences can linger.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted people to recognize the lasting weight of unhealthy management—and laugh a little.

Toxic bosses have an incredible talent for leaving the company while refusing to leave your nervous system.

The other night, I was sleeping peacefully, enjoying what I assume was a normal dream involving no emails, no performance reviews, no surprise meetings titled “Quick Chat,” and nobody asking me to explain a number from six months ago. Then suddenly, there he was. My old toxic boss. Not in a conference room. Not on Teams. Not lurking near the coffee machine pretending to “just check in.” Nope. He had somehow gotten promoted to Head of Dream Operations.

There I was, standing in some imaginary office, and he appeared with the exact same facial expression he used whenever he was about to ruin a perfectly good Tuesday. He looked at me and said, “Got a minute?” Even asleep, my blood pressure knew what that meant. In the dream, he started asking why a report was late. I did not know what report. He did not know what report. There may not have even been a report. But somehow, I was still responsible for it.

Then he told me we needed to “circle back,” which is impressive because we were already inside my dream. I tried to

walk away, but the hallway got longer.

Every door led to another meeting. Every meeting had no agenda. Every agenda also included “other duties as assigned.” At one point, I opened a door and found managers there, asking me to explain something that happened in 2019. That is when I realized this was not a dream. This was corporate purgatory.

He reminded me of one mistake I made years ago, ignored everything I had done right, and connected it to a KPI that did not exist. Then he said, “We just need more ownership.” Sir. I am asleep. How much more ownership do you want? Would you like me to clock into the dream? Should I submit PTO before waking up?

The most insulting part was that dream me was still trying to be professional. I was nodding, taking notes, and saying things like, “I understand.” Apparently, even unconscious me has bills. Finally, I looked at him and said, “You know you do not work here anymore, right?” He stared at me. I stared at him. Then he said, “That attitude is exactly what we need to discuss.” And I woke up at 3:17 in the morning, wide awake, angry, confused, and somehow feeling like I owed somebody a follow-up email.

That is the thing about toxic bosses. They do not always disappear when you leave. Sometimes they live rent free in the back of your mind, wearing a company polo, carrying a clipboard, waiting for the exact moment you finally relax. But eventually, they do fade. One day, you stop hearing their voice every time you make a decision. You stop second guessing everything. You stop feeling guilty for resting. You stop believing every small mistake deserves a courtroom trial.

And eventually, even your dreams realize that person no longer has authority over you. Until then, if my old boss shows up again tonight too, I am prepared now. I am scheduling a mandatory one on one. In his nightmare.

POST 47 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

WORKPLACE CHANGE

What Happened to Company Loyalty?

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I compared old promises of pensions and long careers with today's frequent restructurings.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted discussions of loyalty to include what employers owe their people.

The days of loyalty to one company are over. There was a time when sticking with the same employer for thirty years meant something.

You got a pension, a plaque, maybe a gold watch that ticked louder than your aching knees. Your entire identity was tied to your employer. "That's Bob, he's been at the plant forever." "That's Carol, she's with the bank." Work and loyalty were inseparable.

Fast forward to today, and that world feels like a rerun nobody bothers streaming. Loyalty didn't vanish because employees stopped caring. It vanished because companies traded it for quarterly earnings and "strategic realignments." The pension disappeared. The job security went missing. The gold watch turned into an HR email, "We thank you for your service, but your position has been eliminated. Please return your laptop by 5:00."

Now, if you stay too long, you're "stale." If you move too often, you're a "job hopper." It's corporate comedy at its finest, you can't win either way. The ladder of success they promised? Missing half the rungs, with the rest greased by buzzwords like "agility" and "efficiency." And yet people still give

everything. Nights, weekends, holidays, birthdays, treating loyalty like it's alive and well. The reality? One layoff can erase twenty years of sacrifice. Imagine your actual family trying that line, "We love you, but to improve efficiency, you've been cut from Thanksgiving. Please clear your seat at the table. Don't forget to leave the cranberry sauce." Families don't downsize you. Corporations do.

So what do employees do now? They adapt. Resumes no longer look like neat, loyal monuments. They look like survival maps, two years here, three years there, a startup flameout, a "temporary restructure." Outsiders call it instability. Insiders call it staying alive. We've stopped giving our loyalty to corporations and started giving it to ourselves, our families, our communities, the places where it's actually returned.

Yes, it stings. Many of us grew up believing the myth: find a good company, stay put, and you'll be rewarded. But that myth was discontinued, right alongside pensions and free coffee that didn't taste like burnt rubber. In its place, something new is rising: smarter loyalty. Loyalty to teammates who cover your shift when life happens. Loyalty to mentors who

invest in your growth. Loyalty to your craft, your skills, your humor. And most importantly, loyalty to yourself. Because at the end of the day, you're the only one carrying your story from one job to the next.

The corporate world thought ending loyalty would make us weaker. But it made us sharper. We learned to reinvent, to laugh at rejection, to survive ghosting, to turn cardboard layoff boxes into coffee tables. The days of blind loyalty are gone, but the days of true loyalty, loyalty to people, to purpose, to ourselves, are just beginning.

Stay legendary, my friends. The gold watch era is gone, but your grit, humor, and story outlast any logo on a paycheck.

POST 48 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

The Toxic Boss Who Celebrated Too Early

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A conversation about a boss relieved to lose someone prompted a look at the aftermath.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to see that losing experienced people often creates hidden costs.

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

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

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

Meanwhile, you? You’ve moved on. You’ve found a better job, or a healthier team, or at the very least a place where

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

But toxic bosses never admit fault. No, no—they spin the story. “Oh, they weren’t the right cultural fit. They weren’t passionate enough. They had unrealistic expectations.” Translation: They refused to work 60 hours for free and still smile about it. And the irony? These bosses start to hate from the sidelines. Suddenly, your name pops up in meetings as the gold standard for the very things they once criticized. “We need someone like Alex, remember how they always kept projects moving?” Or, “We could use someone with their experience on this client

account.” The same traits that were once “a problem” are now sorely missed.

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

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

POST 49 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

UNEXPECTED STORIES

Terminal C: A Toast to Getting Fired

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

At an airport I saw a newly fired woman buying strangers drinks as an unusual celebration.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explore how people reclaim humor and agency after painful job news.

The other day I was at the airport waiting on my flight, and I noticed a brewery restaurant tucked between a newsstand and a gate full of people pretending not to panic about boarding groups.

Inside, there was a woman buying shots for random strangers. Not friends. Not coworkers. Complete strangers. Curious, I asked someone what the occasion was. Turns out, she had just been fired. And instead of crying in her car or updating her resume at 2 a.m., she came straight to the airport and decided to turn Terminal C into her personal happy hour. Honestly? Legendary.

She wasn't just buying drinks, she was buying freedom. Every shot she poured was a little toast to the nonsense she no longer had to endure, "Here's to pointless meetings that could've been emails." "Here's to bosses who said 'we're like family' right before sending me packing." "Here's to performance reviews that praised my teamwork while denying me a raise."

The bartender was shaking his head, but the rest of us were silently applauding. What struck me most wasn't that she got fired, it was how she celebrated. No bitterness. No quiet

sulking. Just a woman raising a glass to the absurdity of corporate life. She even joked with the crowd, "At least I don't have to update the Slack status anymore. Cheers!"

And here's the thing, that little brewery turned into the most honest career seminar I've ever attended. Everyone at the bar started sharing their own stories. The guy on my left had been laid off three times in two years. The woman across from me had just quit after being told she was "overqualified." Even the bartender confessed he'd been ghosted by a company after four interviews. We were a random collection of travelers, united not by destination but by rejection.

In that moment, it hit me, this is the real job market. Not the polished LinkedIn announcements, not the corporate press releases about "strategic restructuring." It's people like us, fired, laid off, ghosted, finding ways to laugh at the madness. Sometimes the only severance package you get is the ability to turn pain into comedy (and maybe a couple of free tequila shots).

So here's your takeaway, legends, whether you're flying out, logging in, or starting over, don't underestimate the power of a little celebration. Getting

fired isn't the end of the story. Sometimes it's the beginning of the funniest chapter you'll ever write. And if you can face that chapter with a toast in one hand and a smirk in the other, you're already winning.

So let's raise a glass, to the jobs that didn't work out, the bosses we outgrew, the interviews that ghosted us, and the courage to laugh through it all. Because in the grand scheme of things, a paycheck is temporary, but a good story lasts forever.

And if you ever find yourself in an airport brewery with a stranger buying shots because she just got fired, don't feel sorry for her. Join her. Because that's not rock bottom, that's how legends are made.

POST 50 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

PUBLIC VOICE

Megan Says My Posts Are Hurting My Chances

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A LinkedIn direct message warned that public workplace criticism could deter recruiters.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to explain why honest storytelling matters even when it makes some people uneasy.

Every once in a while, LinkedIn drops a DM that's basically a Hallmark card from the corporate Twilight Zone. Today's came from Megan. (We'll call her Megan because that's her actual name.)

Megan, bless her HR coded heart, wanted to help, "Hi Alex. While you regularly speak the truth and capture the angst of being an older adult looking for work, I hope you understand you are killing your chances of finding employment with every post... recruiters will avoid individuals who are controversial and cynical... Save it for a book! Write it down to vent and keep it for yourself."

Ah yes the ancient wisdom of "shhhh, don't upset the algorithm." Look, I get where Megan's coming from. For decades we were taught the secret to employability was to be polished, neutral, pleasant. Don't rock the boat. Don't mention layoffs or ageism. Smile through unpaid overtime. Pretend everything's fine while you quietly rewrite your resume for the seventh time.

But here's the thing: silence didn't fix the system. It just kept everyone quietly frustrated and alone. The truth is, a whole lot of people are angry,

exhausted, and scared and they feel invisible until someone says out loud what they've been whispering. That's why I post. Not because I'm trying to burn bridges, but because maybe if we talk about the dumpster fire, we can put it out.

And let's be honest: if a company is so fragile it runs from someone saying "ghosting is bad" or "ageism exists," maybe it's not the dream job we think it is. If my posts scare away recruiters who prefer polite silence, good! Saves me the trouble of interviewing at places allergic to candor. Also, Megan, the "write a book instead" suggestion? Cute. Already on it. (Multiple books, actually.) But books take time and caffeine. LinkedIn is free therapy with a comment section and sometimes the comment section even claps back with solutions.

What we're really fighting is the idea that telling the truth equals career suicide. Spoiler: companies worth working for don't fear honesty. They crave it. They want people who can spot broken processes, name hard things, and still show up ready to fix them. That's not cynical; that's leadership.

So to my fellow job seekers: if you've

been told to shrink, to hush, to stop "hurting your chances" by naming what's broken, breathe. You're not broken. You're not unemployable for speaking out. The right places will see your honesty as strength, not risk.

To the Megans of the world: thanks for caring, really. But the world changed. Transparency is survival now. The best candidates and the best companies are the ones unafraid to have real conversations in public. We'll keep building networks out of shared scars and sharp humor. We'll write the books and the posts. If honesty scares off quiet employers, good. We're not applying there anyway.

If telling the truth means fewer wrong doors and faster paths to the right ones, I'll take that trade every day. I'll keep saying the truth out loud anyway.

POST 51 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

COMEDY & CRITICISM

A Sunday Roast of My Own Sarcasm

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader told me to leave a job-market discussion because my writing sounded too harsh.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to make space for humor without losing sight of the people suffering.

Every time I post something sarcastic about the job market, there's always at least one person who jumps in with, "Alex, please drop out of this discussion. You're cruel. You're rude. Go back to your Sunday, your leftovers, and your sweatpants."

And honestly? They're not wrong. Because let's face it, this is LinkedIn, not Sunday brunch. If you came here for sunshine and empathy only, you clicked into the wrong feed. The corporate circus we're all stuck in doesn't exactly hand out comfort blankets. It hands out rejection emails that start with "We regret to inform you" and end with "We wish you the best in your future endeavors."

Translation: Good luck out there, champ, we're never calling you back.

That's why I choose sarcasm. Not because I don't believe in kindness, I do. But because sometimes, kindness alone doesn't cut it. Sarcasm is the seasoning that makes the bitter pill of job hunting slightly easier to swallow. Without it, we'd all be crying into our resumes wondering if the 74th "culture fit" rejection means we should start a candle making side hustle.

Here's the truth, empathy and sarcasm aren't enemies, they're siblings.

Empathy says, "I know this is brutal, and I feel for you." Sarcasm says, "This is ridiculous, so let's laugh before it eats us alive." And together? They keep us sane. Because if you can't find humor in being ghosted by a chatbot named "RecruitBot 3000," you'll lose your mind before you ever get an offer. Now, as for leftovers and sweatpants, guilty as charged. Yes, I will gladly reheat last night's pizza while wearing sweatpants that have seen better decades. Because rejection stings less when you're dressed like you've already given up on corporate fashion week. And if that's rude? Well, then I guess I'll keep being rude, one microwaved slice at a time.

But here's what I've learned from all of this back and forth, job seekers don't need more empty phrases. They don't need more posts that say, "Keep your chin up, your time is coming." They need real talk. They need stories that remind them they're not the only ones fumbling Zoom interviews, being ghosted after round five, or getting rejection emails that sound suspiciously like copy paste. They need someone to say, "Yeah, this process is broken but you're not."

So if sarcasm makes me the villain in someone else's LinkedIn soap opera, so

be it. At least I'm the villain wearing sweatpants, eating leftovers, and handing out comic relief while we all wander through this hiring maze together. And for the record, sarcasm isn't cruelty. Cruelty is pretending a broken process is normal while people quietly blame themselves for struggling through it. Humor gives that frustration somewhere to go.

Because here's the bottom line: empathy comforts, sarcasm heals, and leftovers sustain. And until someone figures out how to fix the job market, I'll be here every week serving all three, hot, reheated, and with just enough spice to make rejection a little easier to digest.

POST 52 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

NETWORKING

A LinkedIn Connection Is Not a Marriage Contract

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I noticed how a simple connection request can be treated like an elaborate personal commitment.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted professionals to be more generous with networking, especially toward job seekers.

You know what's wild about LinkedIn? People act like hitting "accept" on a connection request is the equivalent of signing a lifelong marriage contract.

Like relax, you're not adopting a child, you're just adding someone to your digital rolodex where 90% of us will never talk again.

But no, instead of clicking a single button, folks will hover over your profile like FBI analysts reviewing classified files. "Hmm, unemployed? That's suspicious. Why would someone without a job want to network on a professional networking site? Better decline before they spread their unemployment cooties." Meanwhile, the same people who judge others by their job titles are the ones posting inspirational quotes about kindness. "Be the change you want to see in the world." Yeah Brenda, you can start by accepting Dave's connection request instead of treating him like he's applying for a mortgage.

And don't even get me started on the "I only connect with people I know" crowd. Oh really? Because your 37,000 connections look like you personally know every middle manager in Ohio. Newsflash: if your barista connects with you tomorrow, you don't "know"

them either but I guarantee you they've had more impact on your life than that random VP you added because they had a cool title.

Then, of course, there's the LinkedIn "quota is full" flex. You ever notice how only the ultra popular people hit the 30,000 limit? Suddenly they're on here like rock stars, saying, "Sorry folks, connections are sold out, but don't worry, you can still follow me from the cheap seats!" Oh, thank you so much, Your Highness. Can I also buy a T-shirt from the merch table on my way out?

Here's the truth: unemployment is temporary, but arrogance can last a lifetime. Today's "unemployed" connection might be tomorrow's hiring manager, investor, client or worse, your boss. Imagine ghosting someone's connection request only to have them show up three months later at your team meeting saying, "Hi, I'm your new Director. Remember when you ignored my invite? Yeah, let's circle back on that."

So here's my unsolicited advice: just accept the connection. Worst case? They never message you. Best case? They send you something helpful, funny, or introduce you to someone that changes your career. Either way, it

costs you absolutely nothing. Well, except your pride, and let's be real, LinkedIn has already taken plenty of that.

Because at the end of the day, we rise by lifting others. But apparently on LinkedIn, some people rise by gatekeeping connection requests like they're VIP access to Area 51.

So go ahead, accept that unemployed connection. Who knows, they might be the one writing your next recommendation... or firing you with a smile. And if the universe really wants to teach you a lesson, they'll also be the one deciding your bonus, rejecting your vacation request, and sitting across from you in the final interview. Funny how one tiny click can become a corporate plot twist nobody on LinkedIn expected?!

POST 53 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

AGEISM

The Recruiter Who Catalogued Older Workers

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A recruiter messaged me with a list of negative claims about people hired in their fifties.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted individual behavior assessed fairly instead of stereotypes attached to age.

So a recruiter slid into my messages today with a field report that basically read like National Geographic: Observing Older Workers in the Wild.

It started with, "I've hired three people in their 50s, maybe older..." and then came eight bullet points about how complicated it's been, slower, not "tech sauevy," expect more pay, picky about tasks, harder culture fit, need more management. You know, the usual anthropological notes before someone says, "Fascinating species, but high maintenance." Let's pause and unpack that.

First, imagine openly telling someone, "Hey, we hired experienced humans, but it was tricky because they didn't move at TikTok speed and wanted to be paid fairly." The horror! Next thing you know, they'll want health insurance and respect too.

Second, "tech sauevy." Please. Some of us learned DOS, lived through every Windows release, mastered email when it was witchcraft, survived seven "must learn" project management platforms, and taught three bosses how to share a Google Doc. Not being obsessed with the latest chat app isn't a flaw, it's a sanity feature.

Third, "culture fit." Translation: "We built a culture for 25 year olds who communicate exclusively in emojis and GIFs, and now we're confused why someone who's managed multi million dollar projects doesn't instantly vibe with our Slack banter." Maybe culture could stretch instead of staying frozen.

Fourth, "expect higher pay but don't want to work as hard." That's a cute myth. Most veterans are already doing three jobs but don't advertise it. The difference? They've also learned boundaries, that magical word that terrifies hustle culture but keeps people alive.

And yes, sometimes seasoned folks talk about experience. Sorry if "I've seen this exact mistake before" feels condescending, it's actually just... knowledge. But we can all do better there, communicate without accidentally lecturing. (Though if you're about to walk into the same flaming pit we once fell in, we're going to shout.) Here's what I love, though, the recruiter admitted this wasn't easy but still tried. That matters. That's how we get somewhere better, by hiring outside the same age band and actually wrestling with the messy parts instead of avoiding them.

So, to my fellow over 40, 50, 60 job seekers remember this, yes, some people will see your decades of skill as "extra management." Some will confuse "steady" with "slow," "experienced" with "expensive." Don't shrink for that. Adapt where it's fair (learn the tech, play nice with the memes), but don't apologize for wisdom, boundaries, or wanting fair pay. And to the employers and recruiters watching, the future workforce isn't just one generation. If your culture can only hold people who think and move one way, maybe the problem isn't them, maybe the culture needs an upgrade.

Scar tissue and skill in hand. Hire outside comfort zones, keep showing up when the welcome mat's wobbly. We're better when experience isn't exotic but rocket fuel.

POST 54 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

TOXIC CULTURE

The Corporate Sin of Speaking Honestly

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

I remembered working in a company that preached family while punishing frank questions.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted leaders to understand that transparency cannot survive without psychological safety.

A while back, I did the unthinkable. I committed a corporate sin so unspeakable it still echoes through the breakrooms of America, I told the truth.

See, I worked for one of those companies that loves the word “family.” You know the type. The word gets slapped into every town hall, every career page, every “Why Work Here?” section of the website. Family, family, family. Except this family didn’t come with Sunday dinners or warm hugs. It came with unpaid overtime, pizza parties instead of raises, and a PTO policy that felt like asking permission to borrow your own car.

And here’s the kicker, every year, like clockwork, they’d trot out this glossy photo of “the team.” Happy people smiling in polos, the kind of picture that screams community, stability, togetherness. Except there was one tiny problem, almost everyone in the photo had already quit. The picture wasn’t a family portrait, it was a missing persons poster.

Naturally, I pointed this out in a post. Just a casual observation that maybe, just maybe, it’s a little misleading to advertise your company with a picture of people who all escaped. That maybe the only “family resemblance” here was

how fast everyone ran for the door.

Enter the Head of Legal, stage left. Suddenly, my inbox lights up with the corporate equivalent of a love letter, a cease and desist. Nothing says “we’re one big happy family” like a threat from Legal signed with the kind of warmth you normally reserve for tax audits. But wait, it gets better. Not long after, I get a call. Not from my boss. Not from HR. From... an intern in the legal department. Yes, they unleashed a summer intern on me like I was a mid level mob boss. I could almost hear the poor kid sweating on the other end of the line, practicing their lines from the company script, “Uh, hi Alex, so, like, could you not tell people the truth anymore? It’s, um, bad for the brand.”

Here’s the thing, though, you can threaten, you can posture, you can send junior interns with clipboards, but you can’t erase reality. People talk. Stories spread. And the truth has a funny way of leaking out faster than free coffee on a Monday morning. That company wanted to be seen as a family, but in practice? It was more like that one uncle who borrows money and never pays you back. They preached loyalty but practiced layoffs. They promised community but delivered compliance. And then they got mad

when someone dared to say it out loud.

So here’s my takeaway, if your company has to lean on a stock photo of smiling ex employees and a legal team on speed dial just to protect its image, maybe the problem isn’t the post. Maybe the problem is the culture you’re trying so hard to wallpaper over.

And to the legal intern who called me that day, I hope you’ve found a job where you don’t have to cold call people for telling the truth. Because no matter how many cease and desist valentines corporate sends out, one thing is guaranteed, the stories will always outlast the slogans.

POST 55 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

INTERVIEW PANELS

The Zoom Panel That Looked Like Jury Duty

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

Another crowded video panel highlighted how intimidating and ineffective interviews can become.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted interviewers to ask better questions and avoid making candidates feel on trial.

You ever log into a Zoom interview and wonder if you joined the wrong meeting, like instead of talking about your skills, you accidentally stumbled into jury duty?

That was me last week. Because in 2026, the “panel interview” has mutated into a full blown circus. I log on and boom, seven panes staring at me like the Brady Bunch intro went corporate. Except instead of sunshine and theme music, I get six strangers in business casual looking at me like they’re about to decide my fate. Jury of my professional peers. Verdict pending.

The first one introduces themselves like the judge, “Hi, I’m Karen, Director of Something Vague, and I’ll be leading this call.” The rest nod in solemn silence, as if they’ve just been sworn in. And I’m sitting there wondering if I should stand up and say, “Your honor, I plead not guilty to being a bad culture fit.”

Then it begins. The questioning. The interrogation. Each pane comes alive, taking turns lobbing the same question in slightly different disguises. “Tell me about a time you worked in a team.” “Describe how you collaborated with others.” “How do you function in group settings?” By the fifth version of the

same question, I feel like I’m in a game show called How Many Ways Can You Reword Teamwork Before the Candidate Snaps?

And the faces. Oh, the faces. One person freezes mid smile because their Wi-Fi gave up. Another is clearly on mute but laughing at something on Slack. One guy is nodding so hard I’m not sure if he’s agreeing with me or just headbanging to music off screen. And then there’s always the mysterious black square with initials, camera off, microphone muted, supposedly “evaluating my answers,” but probably making a sandwich.

At some point two panelists unmute at the same time. Chaos. “Oh, sorry, you go.” “No, you go.” “No, really, you go.” Meanwhile, I’m sitting there, silently pleading, “Please, somebody just ask me if I know Excel so we can move on.” By minute forty five, the whole thing has devolved into a trial. I’m the defendant. The job description is the charge. And this Zoom jury is deliberating, Do we find the candidate guilty of not having ‘senior level synergy’ experience?

And here’s the kicker, after all this effort, after smiling into a webcam for 90 minutes like a hostage in business

attire, you can still get ghosted. No verdict. No closure. Just silence. You survived digital jury duty, but the court never bothered to file the paperwork.

Zoom panels in 2026 aren’t interviews, they’re psychological endurance tests. Can you smile without cracking, recycle your resume seven times, and resist ending with, “Ladies and gentlemen of the panel, I rest my case”? At this point, I’m convinced the only way to prep for these is to watch courtroom dramas and ending every answer with “Beyond a reasonable doubt, I’m qualified.”

Zoom interviews in 2026 aren’t about skills, they’re about survival. If you can outlast seven panes of judgment without losing Wi-Fi or sanity, you’ve earned the job

POST 56 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

RESCINDED OFFERS

A Signed Offer, Then the Ground Disappears

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

A reader described making life plans around a signed offer that the employer later pulled back.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted employers to recognize the real damage caused when a commitment suddenly vanishes.

I read something tonight that made me laugh for about three seconds, then immediately made me angry enough to need a walk.

Someone reached out to me after doing everything job seekers are told to do. She interviewed, stayed positive, made it through the process, got the offer, SIGNED the offer, and had a start date on the calendar. Mentally, she had already left unemployment behind. She allowed herself that dangerous luxury called relief.

Then, just days before she was supposed to start, the company suddenly discovered something incredible: they did not have the budget. Apparently the budget had been hiding behind the printer during the entire interview process. I am sorry, but how do you interview someone, approve the position, send the paperwork, receive the signed paperwork, establish a start date, and THEN suddenly look at the bank account like, "Wait... who authorized employment?" That is not a hiring mistake. That is corporate hide and seek with somebody's livelihood.

And somehow it gets better. The hiring manager did not even tell her himself. He had the recruiter deliver the news.

Nothing says leadership quite like tossing the emotional grenade to somebody else and backing out of the room. This is the part companies forget when they say, "Unfortunately, circumstances have changed." Your circumstances changed. Their mortgage did not. Their groceries did not. Their childcare did not. Their bills did not suddenly send an email saying, "No worries, we understand."

People make decisions based on signed offers. They stop interviewing. They turn down other opportunities. They give notice. Families celebrate. Anxiety eases. Then one phone call can throw them back into the mess they thought they had escaped. She joked that she was close to jumping off a bridge, and even though she said she was half kidding, that part is not funny to me. Job searching can beat people down in ways hiring teams never see. Rejection after rejection, ghosting, fake urgency, endless interviews, silence, hope, disappointment, repeat.

So when someone finally receives a signed offer, it should mean something. A signed offer should not feel like a corporate scratch off ticket where you find out days later whether the company actually has the money to employ you. To anyone going through

this right now, remember this: a company changing its mind does not change your value. Their poor planning is not a performance review of you. Their budget problem is not proof that you failed.

And to companies, if the position is not funded, maybe figure that out before collecting resumes like Pokemon cards and asking people where they see themselves in five years. People are not pipeline inventory. They are people. They have families, bills, fears, hopes, plans, and a nervous system that can only survive so many "quick updates from the recruiter."

Do better. Because behind every canceled offer is a person who had already started believing life was finally getting a little easier.

POST 57 / SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

THE INTERVIEW GAMES

The Hiring Thriller That Refuses to End

[VIEW ORIGINAL POST >](#)

WHAT TRIGGERED IT

The unpredictable cycle of disappearing vacancies, shifting roles and repeated rounds felt surreal.

WHY I WROTE IT

I wanted to close this stretch by asking for a hiring process grounded in reality and respect.

I swear the modern job search has more plot twists than a television show that should have ended three seasons ago.

You start out thinking the story is simple. Find a job. Apply. Interview. Get hired. Somewhere along the way, Corporate America hired writers who specialize in thrillers. Suddenly the job you applied for disappears, reappears with a different title, gets reposted while you are interviewing, and somehow requires two more rounds because Finance would “love to meet you.” By round four, you have met people who did not know the position existed, answered the same question six different ways, completed a personality assessment that determined you enjoy breathing, and created a presentation explaining how you would fix problems the company has ignored since 2017.

Then comes the big finale. The recruiter calls and says, “We are excited to move forward.” Birds sing. Your family celebrates. You finally allow yourself to imagine life without checking job boards before your feet hit the floor. Maybe you stop applying. Maybe you turn down another interview. Maybe you start figuring out your commute, your bills, and how much coffee it will

take to survive the company’s 47 Slack channels.

And then... PLOT TWIST. The position has been placed on hold. The budget changed. Leadership decided to restructure. Somehow the job has vanished into the corporate Bermuda Triangle. My favorite is when they say, “We decided to go in another direction,” and then repost the exact same job twelve hours later. Apparently the other direction was a circle. You are left staring at your screen wondering whether you were rejected from a position, a concept, or a hallucination shared by six recruiters.

There is humor in all of this because sometimes laughing is the only alternative to launching your laptop into the nearest body of water. But underneath the jokes is something companies need to remember: candidates are human beings living real lives between those emails. Hope costs something. People rearrange schedules, take time off, prepare, research companies, practice answers, complete assignments, turn down other opportunities, and quietly start believing that maybe this one will finally work out. When the story suddenly changes, it is not simply another requisition being closed in a

spreadsheet. Someone on the other side may have been counting on that opportunity to pay bills, support a family, rebuild confidence, or simply breathe again.

So yes, laugh at the ridiculousness. Make the jokes. Tell the stories. I certainly will. But if you are living through one of these plot twists right now, do not confuse a badly written corporate storyline with the ending of your own story. Sometimes the job disappears. Sometimes the recruiter disappears. Sometimes the entire department disappears.

You are still here. And if Corporate America insists on turning hiring into a drama series, the least they could do is stop canceling people one episode before the season finale.

ONE MORE THING BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A last thought.

THE HUMAN BEING BEHIND THE APPLICATION

Eight days. Fifty-seven posts. Thousands of words about the extraordinary lengths we ask ordinary people to go just to earn a living. There is something both funny and unsettling about that. We have managed to turn sending a resume into a complicated ceremony. A person wants a job. The company says it needs someone. You would think those two statements could start a direct conversation. Instead, a password reset appears. Then a personality test. Then a scheduling link. Then a panel. Then a second panel, because apparently the original panel forgot to invite someone with access to the budget.

I joke about all of it because I know what happens when people stop laughing. They start thinking the chaos is a personal failure. They wonder whether they are too old, too expensive, too experienced, not experienced enough, too direct, too quiet, too funny, or somehow responsible for a recruiter's inbox. They rewrite their resume until it stops sounding like their own career. They practice interview answers in the mirror. They change their photos. They remove dates that once represented proud achievements. And still, sometimes, the response is silence.

I cannot fix the entire labor market by writing a sarcastic paragraph. My LinkedIn account does not control compensation plans, hiring budgets or the people who keep reposting a job they are not ready to fill. But storytelling can make bad habits harder to hide. If somebody recognizes the absurdity and says, "We do that. We should stop," then the joke was useful. If a candidate reads a post after their third rejection of the day and laughs instead of blaming themselves, then the joke was useful in a different way.

The person behind the application is not an applicant-tracking-system number. They are somebody's partner, parent, child, friend or neighbor. A simple status update can change an evening in their household. A careless promise can change far more. This should not be a radical idea, but here we are, having to remind organizations that the "human resources" department has a word before "resources."

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

THE PRICE OF EXPERIENCE

This week kept returning to ageism, not because I have run out of jokes but because the underlying problem keeps showing up with new packaging. One company celebrates your twenty-five years of experience. Another quietly treats those same years like a warranty that expired. The interview begins with admiration for your accomplishments and eventually produces a question about whether you are comfortable learning new technology. I want to ask whether the interviewer is comfortable learning from somebody who used software before it had a subscription fee.

A reader described disguising her age on a resume and in photographs because she believed it was necessary to reach the interview stage. Sit with that for a moment. A professional can spend years collecting knowledge, earning credibility and helping organizations succeed, then spend money and energy trying to make evidence of that history disappear. That is not a motivational transformation story. That is an indictment of the way assumptions can interfere with opportunity.

There is nothing wrong with hiring a young professional. There is nothing wrong with looking for adaptability, technical skill or a certain pay range. The problem begins when an employer uses age as a shortcut for an individual assessment. “Older workers want too much.” “Older workers cannot learn.” “Older workers will retire tomorrow.” Those are stereotypes, not interview notes. Younger employees deserve opportunities. So do older employees. Hiring should determine who can do the work, work with the team and grow with the job.

And please stop treating salary expectations as a moral defect. If an employer cannot afford a certain level of experience, it can say so honestly. If a candidate needs more, they can decline. That is a business conversation between adults. We do not need to invent a personality disorder called “asking for enough money to buy groceries.” The title of this edition could almost be: Experienced, Still Learning, and Apparently Terrifying to Someone Who Just Discovered Microsoft Teams.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHAT A PROMISE IS WORTH

A signed offer is not just a corporate document. To the person receiving it, it can mean the end of a long and frightening stretch. It may mean they can finally stop checking job boards before breakfast. It may mean telling a spouse that the bills will be easier next month. It may mean calling a parent, making plans, buying work clothes, arranging childcare or declining another opportunity. When the offer disappears, the damage rarely fits inside the apologetic email announcing the decision.

I wrote this week about a candidate whose offer was withdrawn after they had already made plans. I also wrote about layoffs delivered as impersonal scripts and people being asked to complete complicated handovers under the shadow of severance agreements. Organizations will always face hard choices. Markets change; roles disappear; budgets tighten. None of that requires treating the affected people as if they are merely inconvenient rows in a spreadsheet. The way you handle somebody when there is bad news reveals more about company values than twelve posters in the lobby.

If you are a manager, your words carry weight. “We are excited to have you.” “Your job is secure.” “There may be a place for you in another department.” “The survey is anonymous.” Each statement creates an expectation. People make decisions around expectations. If leadership is not certain, honesty about the uncertainty is kinder than false confidence. A difficult truth offered early is often more respectful than a pleasant promise withdrawn late.

And if somebody has just lost a job, resist the urge to hand them a motivational slogan before hearing what happened. They may need a referral, a phone call, an honest recommendation, a practical lead or simply a person who answers their message. You do not have to rescue them. You can still refuse to make the hardest week of their life feel like a customer-service ticket. Compassion is a management skill. Unlike “synergy,” you can tell when it is actually present.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

THE CULTURE PEOPLE REALLY REMEMBER

This issue also had a parade of bosses, coworkers and corporate declarations about being a family. I have learned that the word “family” can mean very different things depending on who is holding the scheduling spreadsheet. Sometimes it means people genuinely take care of one another. Sometimes it means you should miss your child's dinner because your manager wants to discuss a report after eight. If a workplace wants to borrow the language of family, it should begin with basic consideration for employees' real families.

Good leadership does not require grand performances. Read what your employees send. Know what they contribute. Give people credit when the work goes well and a fair hearing when something goes wrong. Do not turn a single mistake into a dramatic rewrite of their career. Do not make somebody beg to be compensated for new responsibilities while telling them how invaluable they are. And if your employee survey promises anonymity, understand why someone might laugh nervously while it asks for their exact position, team, shift and tenure.

Trust is a strange thing at work. It is easy to spend in inspirational meetings and difficult to earn back after it breaks. People remember the boss who defended them when it mattered. They also remember the boss who smiled at their exit because they thought the problem had walked out the door. Sometimes that employee was the person quietly holding the place together. The costs show up later, when the new hire asks where the instructions are, and the answer is: “Well, we used to have somebody who knew.”

You cannot force people to love their employer. You can create a place where they do not dread opening the laptop. You can let people disagree respectfully without labeling them disloyal. You can make it safe for someone to tell the truth before the problem becomes a crisis. A company culture is not the wording of the careers page. It is what people experience on the days when nobody is taking a promotional photograph.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHY I WILL KEEP WRITING

I hear the warnings. I should be quieter. I should worry about what a recruiter might think. I should stop making jokes about interviews. I should stop mentioning salary ranges, ageism, toxic management and mysterious company procedures. Perhaps I should post a photograph of a sunrise with a quote about staying positive. That would be much safer. It might even pass through every corporate communications department without a single legal review.

But the people who write to me are not asking for another sunrise. They are asking whether anyone else sees what they see. They tell me about years of effort reduced to one vague rejection. They describe interviews that turn into unpaid consulting, a job opening that seems to have no urgency after all, a panel that focuses on public posts instead of professional experience. Sometimes they tell me stories so painful that I need to sit with the message before answering. And then there are the readers who write simply to say that they laughed. I take that seriously too.

I am not trying to convince people that every organization is broken. I have met excellent recruiters and thoughtful leaders. I hope they recognize themselves in the standards I keep calling for. Clear compensation. Honest job requirements. Questions connected to the work. A process that does not demand eleven interviews. Prompt updates when plans change. An understanding that candidates and employees have lives beyond the company website. These are not revolutionary expectations. They are the basic manners of professional adults.

A LAST THOUGHT / CONTINUED

WHAT COMES NEXT

If you are looking for work, do not let a portal define your value. If you are employed, do not forget your former colleagues who are searching. Answer a message when you can. Make an introduction. Share something useful. If you lead a company, walk through your own application process once and ask whether you would recommend it to someone you love. If you are a recruiter, remember that five minutes of clear communication can mean more than a hundred lines of employer-branding copy.

As for me, I will keep applying, listening, asking questions and writing. I will keep laughing at the corporate circus, even on the days it is not funny, because making the absurd visible is one way to change it. The goal was never to win an argument with the comment section. The goal is to remind people that every hiring decision touches a real life.

See you in the next issue. Unless the interview process schedules an additional final interview. In that case, I should be free sometime after the next fiscal year.

THE POINT OF ALL THIS

Behind every application is somebody's real life.

ALEX PYATKOVSKY

THE INTERVIEW GAMES