

10,000 Interviews

Kyle Mau

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Chapter 1: You've Already Lost

"You got 99 problems and the main one... is in fact, your interview. Good thing I'm here."

— Kyle Mau

You walk into a room.

You shake the hiring manager's hand. Firm but not too firm. You read somewhere that matters.

You take a seat.

You fidget a little. Adjust yourself in the chair. Cross your legs. Uncross them. You're nervous. That's normal. Everyone's nervous.

You ask how they are.

"Good."

One word. No follow-up. No warmth. Just "good."

Now you have no idea what to say.

So you sit there. Awkwardly. While they shuffle papers, open their laptop, pull up your resume that they haven't looked at until this exact moment. You can see them scanning it for the first time. The document you spent 6 hours perfecting. They're reading it in 6 seconds.

They look up.

"So... tell me about yourself."

You take a breath and launch into it. "Well, I graduated from Michigan State in 2017 with a degree in Business Administration, and after that I joined Company X as a Junior Analyst where I was responsible for..."

You've already lost.

You just don't know it yet.

Let me solve that for you right now.

I'm going to show you in one page how to make sure this never happens again. And more than that — how to make yourself stand out in a room full of people doing exactly what you just did.

Here's the thing:

That scene I just described? The awkward silence. The "good." The shuffling papers. The "tell me about yourself" followed by a resume monologue.

That's 90% of interviews. Worldwide. Every industry. Every seniority level. Every country I've placed people in.

The candidate sits. The hiring manager asks a lazy question. The candidate gives a lazy answer. Both people suffer through 45 minutes of theater. Nobody connects. Nobody stands out. Nobody remembers anything.

And then the hiring manager turns to their recruiter and says, "Another one of these. Next."

It doesn't have to be that way.

Let's rewind to the moment you sat down.

Instead of "How are you?" followed by awkward silence when they say "good," try this:

"How are your interviews going today?"

That's it. Seven words.

Watch what happens.

The hiring manager's eyes lift from their papers. They weren't expecting that. Every other candidate sat there quietly while they shuffled. You just treated them like a human being.

"Oh, you know. You're number five today."

Now you have a thread to pull.

"Five? Any front runners?"

They laugh. "Not yet, honestly."

Another thread.

"How long has this position been open?"

"About two months now."

Pull it again.

"Is your boss on your case to fill it?"

"Oh yeah. Completely."

One more:

"What would make the boss say yes to a candidate right now?"

And there it is. They just told you exactly what to say for the rest of the interview. You extracted the hiring brief — what they need, how urgent it is, what the decision maker actually wants — and you did it before a single interview question was asked.

While every other candidate sat there fidgeting.

That took 60 seconds. And it changed the entire trajectory of the next 45 minutes.

Let me explain what just happened.

You didn't ask those questions because you're nosy. You asked them because every answer is ammunition.

"You're number five" — now you know four other people came before you. You know they're tired. You know the bar for standing out is just being different from the last four people who read their resume out loud.

"Not yet, honestly" — now you know nobody has impressed them. The position is wide open. You're not competing against a strong frontrunner. You're competing against mediocrity.

"About two months" — now you know they're desperate. Two months of interviews with nobody good enough. That changes your leverage, your tone, and your confidence for the rest of the conversation.

"My boss is on my case" — now you know WHO the real decision maker is. It's not the person sitting across from you. It's the person breathing down their neck. Everything you say from this point should be designed to give the interviewer ammunition to sell YOU to their boss.

"What would make the boss say yes right now" — and now they literally told you the answer. Maybe it's "someone who can start immediately." Maybe it's "someone who doesn't need hand-holding." Maybe it's "someone with experience in our specific industry."

Whatever it is, you now have it.

And when "tell me about yourself" comes — you don't monologue about Michigan State in 2017.

You say, "Sounds like you need someone who can hit the ground running. That's exactly what I did at my last role. Started Monday, had the first deliverable by Wednesday."

You just answered the question behind the question. Using intelligence they gave you voluntarily. Because you treated the interview like a conversation instead of a performance.

Let me give you the actual formula for answering this question. Not the threading version above — that's for when you've successfully extracted intel in the first 60 seconds and can tailor your answer to what they just told you.

This is for when they skip straight to "tell me about yourself" before you've had a chance to thread anything. Cold. No intel. Just you and the question.

Here's the formula:

Go through every job on your resume. Give each one a single sentence with one highlight that matters. If a job is super relevant to the role you're interviewing for, you get two sentences. Connect them if you can. Then stop.

That's it. One sentence per job. One highlight per sentence. Done.

Watch. I timed myself doing this once. 58 seconds:

"Got my first internship at 14 at a computer shop where I built hundreds of computers. Got hired at 16. After that, went to the movie theater — lasted about 4 months, cleaning popcorn off the floor wasn't for me. Moved to Best Buy, really enjoyed sales, discovered I liked that more than fixing things. Went to Bose in college, liked the high-end environment and the competitive instinct. Graduated, got my first job at Hitachi as a computer engineer — high-level enterprise troubleshooting. Then got poached by a Hitachi client."

Under a minute. Every job is one beat. Every beat has one detail that sticks.

"Built hundreds of computers."

"Popcorn wasn't for me."

"Got poached."

And each of those details is a thread. The interviewer can pull any of them. Whatever they ask next tells you what THEY care about. Now you know what to talk about for the rest of the interview.

The Michigan State version? "Well, I graduated from Michigan State in 2017 with a degree in Business Administration, and after that I joined Company X as a Junior Analyst where I was responsible for..." — the interviewer zoned out before you finished the first sentence. You're reading the textbook to the professor who wrote it. They have your resume. They can read it themselves.

Rich men don't need to tell you they're rich. And good candidates don't need five minutes to walk through a resume the hiring manager is staring at.

And by the way — when I interview candidates for my own agency, I literally tell them: "Walk me through your resume. You have 60 seconds." Because I don't have time for a monologue. And neither does any other hiring manager on earth. The ones who don't give you a time limit are still timing you in their head. They're just too polite to say it.

One sentence. One highlight. Move on. Let them pull the threads.

Let me show you what this looks like for normal people with normal careers.

Marketing manager interviewing for a senior role:

"Started in social media at a small agency — learned to do everything because there was nobody else. Moved to a mid-size e-commerce brand where I ran paid ads and took their Facebook spend from \$10K to \$80K a month. Got recruited by a SaaS company to build their content team from

scratch — hired four people, built the blog from zero to 50,000 monthly visitors. Now I'm looking for something where I can own the full funnel."

Four jobs. Four sentences. One number per job that sticks.

"Nobody else."

"\$10K to \$80K."

"Zero to 50,000."

"Own the full funnel."

The interviewer is going to pull the thread on whichever number impressed them most.

Accountant interviewing at a growing company:

"Started at a Big Four firm out of college — mostly audit work, learned the fundamentals on Fortune 500 clients. Moved in-house to a tech startup that grew from 20 to 200 people while I was there. I built the financial reporting from scratch because nothing existed when I arrived. Left when the company sold, and now I want to do it again somewhere earlier stage."

"Nothing existed when I arrived."

That's the thread. The interviewer who's hiring an accountant for a messy, growing company just heard exactly what they need. And "I want to do it again" tells them this person isn't running from something — they're running toward the chaos.

Software developer interviewing for a senior position:

"Self-taught. Built my first app in college because I was bored — it got 10,000 downloads and I realized this was what I wanted to do. Joined a startup as employee number three, wore every hat. Moved to a bigger company for the engineering mentorship — worked under a CTO who'd built systems at Amazon. Now I'm looking for somewhere I can lead a small team and build something from zero again."

"Employee number three."

"CTO who'd built systems at Amazon."

"Build something from zero again."

Three threads. Each one tells a different story about what this person values. The interviewer picks the one that matters to them.

Now:

There's a reason I could write that scene from both sides.

I've been in that chair — the candidate's chair — seven times in my life. And I've been offered every single job.

Granted, the list isn't exactly Fortune 500 material:

Computer shop internship at 14. Talked my way in. Got hired at 16.

Bagger at a grocery store.

Movie theater.

Best Buy computer department.

Bose.

Valet at the US Grant Hotel in San Diego. Five stars. Rich people. You had 15 seconds to make them feel taken care of before they walked through the door.

Hitachi Data Systems. Computer engineer. Six figures. The one where I napped in the parking garage.

RAND Corporation. Government think tank. The one that made me quit and buy a one-way ticket to Eastern Europe.

Seven interviews. Seven offers.

Not because I was the most qualified applicant every time. I was 14 at the computer shop. I was a teenager at the grocery store. I was a kid who liked movies at the theater.

But I understood something about interviews that most people never figure out.

And then I spent the next decade on the other side of the table proving it

My name is Kyle Mau. I run a staffing agency called HireUA. We've placed thousands of people into remote roles for companies across the US, UK, and beyond.

I have personally overseen more than 10,000 interviews.

That's not a made-up number. Multiple candidates screened per placement. Multiple rounds per candidate. Client interviews. Internal screenings. Debriefs. Follow-ups. Every role you can think of — Virtual Assistants, Executive Assistants, Social Media Managers, Developers, Operations Managers, Bookkeepers, Video Editors, Designers, Architects, Engineers, AI Specialists, everything. I've hired for all of them.

And across those 10,000 interviews, I've seen the same patterns over and over and over again.

The same mistakes. The same dead phrases. The same awkward silences. The same resume monologues. The same "tell me about yourself" followed by the same 3-minute chronological walkthrough that puts everyone in the room to sleep.

And the same result:

"Next."

But here's what most people miss:

I've also seen the opposite. The candidate who walks in and the energy shifts. The one who makes the hiring manager put down their pen and actually listen. The one where the hiring manager turns to the recruiter after the call and says:

"That's the one."

The difference between "another one of these" and "that's the one" is not talent. It's not experience. It's not qualifications.

It's how you show up in the first 30 seconds. And what you do with the next hour after that.

This book is full of the patterns I've observed from both sides. Actionable, specific, and honest — even when the honesty is uncomfortable. Especially when the honesty is uncomfortable.

Every step of the interview process. Every question you'll face. Every situation where most candidates fumble and a few candidates win.

I'll show you what the winners do.

And I'll show you what the losers do, too. Because odds are, my little job seekers, you're currently doing some of the loser things without knowing it.

That's okay. That's why this book exists.

Let's fix it.

Back to The Chair.

So you know the disarming move now. You know how to walk in, treat the hiring manager like a human, and extract the information you need before the interview officially starts.

But let me tell you why it works. Because the technique alone isn't enough. You have to understand the psychology behind it.

Here's what's happening on the other side of the table:

The hiring manager is tired.

Not metaphorically. Genuinely exhausted. They've been in interviews all day. Or all week. Or all month. Or heaven forbid, the quarter. They've heard the same answers to the same questions from dozens of candidates who all blur together like when you mish-mash leftovers from the fridge together.

Their boss wants the role filled yesterday. Their team is understaffed. The work is piling up. And instead of doing their actual job, they're sitting in interview after interview listening to people read their resumes out loud.

They don't want to be there either.

And then candidate after candidate walks in and makes it worse. Sits down. Says nothing. Waits to be led. Answers on command. Asks "what does a typical day look like" at the end. Leaves. Forgotten in 30 seconds.

Now you walk in.

"How are your interviews going today?"

You just acknowledged their reality. You said, "I see you. I know this is hard. I know you've been doing this all day. I'm different."

That's not a technique. That's empathy. And empathy is the single most disarming force in any human interaction. Interview, date, sales call, negotiation — doesn't matter. The person who makes the other person feel seen wins.

Career roaches don't teach empathy. They teach STAR method answers and power poses. They teach you to *perform* instead of *connect*.

And that's why their clients keep getting forgotten.

Let me give you an analogy for what most candidates do wrong.

Imagine you're in a college lecture. 200 students. The professor walks in, opens the textbook, and starts reading from it. Word for word. Page by page. The same textbook that's sitting in front of every student in the room.

We've all been there.

Paying \$100,000 for an "education" and the person who is the expert is reading from the mandatory book they wrote that you had to pay \$150 for at the beginning of the semester.

And of course, attendance is mandatory. And yes, they call roll.

You'd be furious. You showed up. And this person is reading the book TO you. The book you already have. The book you could read yourself at home in your pajamas.

You didn't come to the lecture for the textbook. You came for what's NOT in the textbook. The professor's experience. Their opinions. Their stories from the field. The thing they know that the book can't teach.

Now:

When a candidate walks into an interview and reads their resume line by line — *"So in 2017 I started at Company X as a Junior Analyst, and then in 2019 I moved to Company Y..."* — they are the professor reading from the textbook.

The hiring manager already has the resume. It's on their screen. They can read.

The resume was supposed to tell the story. That's what it's for. You wrote it, formatted it, and submitted it specifically so the hiring manager could read it before the interview.

And then you showed up and read it to them.

That's not just boring. It's actually worse than boring. Because it tells the hiring manager, "Everything I have to offer is already on this piece of paper. There is nothing beyond what you can read for yourself."

That's the opposite of what you want.

You want the hiring manager thinking, "There's more here than what's on the CV. I need to explore this person further."

You want curiosity. Not confirmation.

The resume walkthrough kills curiosity. Dead. In 30 seconds.

Here's what you do instead:

Rich people don't need to tell you they're rich.

And a great candidate doesn't need to read their resume out loud.

When the hiring manager says, "Tell me about yourself," they're not asking you to narrate a document they can see.

They're saying, *"Please, Dear God, save me from the next hour of boredom. Please don't be a dud."*

That's the desire (or prayer) behind the question.

Here's how you answer it:

Don't tell your story. Give them the headline.

"I'm an Operations Manager who inherited a broken team of 12 and cut turnover to zero in 18 months. I'm here because your job description read like someone wrote it about my last three years."

Done. Ten seconds. Specific. Interesting. Now THEY ask the follow-up questions. You're not monologuing. You're having a conversation.

Or, redirect it:

"My experience is pretty extensive — would you prefer I focus on my most recent role or the one most relevant to this position?"

You just demonstrated that you're structured, you respect their time, and you're not going to ramble. And you forced THEM to reveal what they care about most. Now you know exactly what to talk about.

Finally, you can flip it:

"I could give you the full background, but I'd rather make sure we spend time on what matters most to you. What's the biggest challenge you're trying to solve with this hire?"

Now you've flipped the entire interview. They're talking. You're listening. And when you respond, everything you say is tailored to the problem they just told you about. You didn't need to prepare for this. You just needed to listen.

Every single one of these options accomplishes the same thing:

You didn't read the textbook. You showed them something the textbook couldn't contain.

And finally...

I'm only going to say this once, because I don't want to beat it to death. But it needs to be said:

Interviewing for a job is exactly like dating.

Be boring and you don't get the second date.

A bad first date is rapid fire generic questions. "Where are you from? What do you do? What's your favorite movie?" No chemistry. No connection. Two people going through the motions. You leave thinking "that was fine" and never text each other again.

A bad interview is the same thing. "Tell me about yourself." Resume walkthrough. "What are your strengths?" Corporate answer. "Any questions for us?" "What does a typical day look like?"

Fine. Forgettable. No callback.

A good date, you tease. You laugh. You ask something unexpected. You're present. You're not performing. You're connecting.

A good interview is the same thing. You disarm. You thread. You extract. You show them something the resume can't contain. You make them feel like this was a conversation, not an interrogation.

The people who succeed at dating and the people who succeed at interviewing share one trait:

They make the other person feel like the most interesting person in the room. Even when they're the one being evaluated.

That's the last time I'll use the dating analogy directly (editor: this is a lie). But keep it in the back of your mind as we go through the rest of this book. Because every technique I teach works for the same reason:

People hire people they connect with. Not people who perform the best.

Connection beats performance. Every time. In every room. In every country. Across 10,000 interviews.

Let's wrap this up.

Here's what happened in this chapter:

The first 30 seconds of an interview determine more than the next 45 minutes combined. Most candidates waste those 30 seconds sitting in silence, fidgeting, and waiting to be led.

Small talk isn't filler. It's the most important part of the interview. It's where social intelligence gets evaluated. And it's where the best candidates extract the information that wins them the job.

"Tell me about yourself" is not an invitation to read your resume out loud. It's a test. The question behind the question is "give me a reason to care." Answer that question, not the literal one.

The hiring manager is tired, overworked, and dreading another cookie-cutter interview. Acknowledge that. Connect with them as a human. You'll be the only candidate that day who did.

And most importantly:

You're not performing for the hiring manager.

You're having a conversation with a tired person who desperately wants to find someone worth hiring.

Be that person.

That's the first 30 seconds. You either won the room or lost it. Everything after this point is either building on a foundation you just laid, or trying to dig out of a hole that gets deeper with every answer.

Most candidates are digging.

Let's make sure you're building.

Chapter 2: The 6-Second Rule

"Don't judge a book by its cover. Yeah forget it, we're all shallow bastards."

— Kyle Mau

Let me give you some math.

A single job posting on a platform like LinkedIn, Indeed, or any of the dozens of international job boards generates between 400 and 1,000 applications. For popular roles or well-known companies, it can be more.

Here's the brutal math.

A recruiter needs to turn that pile into 10 interviews. That's the job. 1,000 people in. 10 people out. By the end of the week.

Do the math on how long each application gets.

If you said 6 seconds, you're generous.

Here's what nobody in the career advice world wants to tell you, because it sounds ugly and unfair and politically incorrect:

The first thing the recruiter looks at is your photo.

Not your experience. Not your skills. Not your carefully crafted summary paragraph that ChatGPT helped you write.

Your face.

And yep, it's not politically correct, and yep, it's probably breaking some sort of discrimination law, but good luck proving it. You're not going to change it, so let it go.

Does this person have their shit together? Does this person look professional? Does this person look like someone I'd put in front of a client?

That's the first filter. And it happens in under 2 seconds.

I'm not going to sit here and pretend the world is fair. It's not. People are shallow. People judge books by covers. Recruiters are people.

But here's the thing:

This isn't a recruiter sitting there actively thinking, "Am I discriminating?"

They're thinking, "I have 500 applications and it's 9am and I need to get this down to 20 by lunch." They're doing a job. They're processing a mountain. And the human brain processes visual information faster than anything else.

That's how we're wired. We're animals. Every single one of us. We make snap visual judgments about people within milliseconds. It's biology. It predates resumes by about 200,000 years.

How do you think anything in life works when a human being evaluates another human being for the first time?

Visually. Instantly. Subconsciously.

You can fight that reality. Or you can accept it and use it to your advantage.

I recommend the second option.

Remember in chapter 1 when I said I'd only use the dating analogy once?

I lied. Because this IS dating. It's not an analogy. It's the literal mechanic.

The recruiter is scrolling through a feed. On LinkedIn, on their ATS, on whatever platform the applications came through. And what they see is a stream of small photos next to names next to headlines.

It looks exactly like a dating app.

They're swiping. Not with their thumb, but with their eyes. Left. Left. Left. Wait. Let me look at that one. Left. Left. Left.

500 applications. Down to 20 by lunch. That's 480 left swipes and 20 right swipes. In three hours.

That's a left swipe every 22 seconds.

And here's the number that should wake you up:

95% of candidates are eliminated on photo and headline alone.

Ninety-five percent.

950 out of 1,000 people. Gone. Before a single word of their resume is read. Before their experience is considered. Before their skills section is glanced at.

Gone.

Because their photo looked like a passport picture from 2014, their LinkedIn headline said "Passionate Problem Solver ✨ | Synergy Enthusiast | Living My Best Life," and the recruiter had 499 more to get through before noon.

A good CV photo is a delicate balance. And most people get it wrong in one of two directions.

Too formal: A full suit. Studio lighting. Corporate backdrop. It screams "trying too hard." You look like you're running for local office, not applying for a job. Unless you're interviewing at a Wall Street bank, dial it back. The suit photo signals that you think the photo matters more than it does — which, ironically, makes you look like you don't understand the game.

Too casual: T-shirt. Cropped travel photo where you can still see someone's arm around your shoulder. Selfie in the car. Gym mirror pic. (Yes, I've seen gym mirror pics on CVs. Multiple times. From adults.) The vibe is "I grabbed the first photo on my phone." And the recruiter thinks, "If this is how much effort you put into your application, imagine how much effort you'll put into the job."

What works:

Casual professional. A collared shirt. A clean background. Natural light. You look put together without looking like you hired a photographer. You look like a person who has their shit together. That's it. That's the bar.

Color can help. A subtle color — a blue shirt, a burgundy top — makes you stand out in a sea of white-background headshots. But don't overdo it. Neon isn't subtle.

And for the love of all that is holy:

No passport photos. I'm looking at you, Europeans. That dead-eyed, white-background, DMV-style photo might be standard for government documents in your country. It is not standard for a professional application. It makes you look like a suspect, not a candidate.

No travel photos. Nobody cares that you went to Bali. Not here. Not now.

No photos with other people cropped out. We can see the arm. We can see the hand on your shoulder. We know this was a group photo at a wedding. It's lazy and it signals laziness.

The recruiter isn't consciously scoring your photo on a rubric. They're having a gut reaction. Two seconds. Does this person look like a professional? Does this person look like someone I'd put in front of my client?

Yes or no. Left or right. That fast.

If you applied on LinkedIn — which, let's be honest, most of you did — your headline got glanced at right alongside your photo.

And most of your headlines are terrible.

I'll tell you what works first because it's simpler:

"Mechanical Engineer | 10 Years | Automotive Manufacturing"

"Video Editor | 6 Years of YouTube Retention Editing"

"Bookkeeper | QuickBooks & Xero | 200+ Small Business Clients"

That's it. Who you are. How long you've been doing it. One proof point.

The recruiter reads that in 2 seconds and knows exactly what they're looking at. If the role is for a mechanical engineer, they keep reading. If it's not, they move on. No time wasted. Clear signal.

Now here's what most people write instead:

"Passionate Problem Solver | Innovative Thinker | Driving Impact Through Synergy ✨"

"Helping Brands Tell Their Story | Open to Opportunities | My Spirit Animal is a Wolf 🐺"

"Dynamic Professional | Thought Leader | Disrupting the Paradigm"

I'm not making these up. I see these every single day.

And every single one communicates the same thing to the recruiter:

"I have no idea who I am or what I do, so here are some adjectives."

The recruiter doesn't know what you do. They don't know what role you fit. They don't know anything about you except that you think you're a wolf. They're literally hiring for a Senior Engineering role and they have no way to tell that you are an Engineer. You're a wolf.

Weird emojis. Spirit animals. Buzzword soup. "Open to opportunities" — which, by the way, is the LinkedIn equivalent of "I'm desperate, please someone hire me."

All of it goes in the same pile. The reject pile.

Your headline is not a place for self-expression. It's not your Twitter bio. It's not your dating profile bumble prompt.

It's a label. A tag. A sign on your forehead that says, "I am a [specific thing] and I am good at it. Read further if you need this specific thing."

That's it. Anything beyond that is noise. And noise gets swiped left.

Alright. Let's say you survived. Good photo. Clean headline. You're in the 5%.

Congratulations. Now a human being is actually going to read your CV.

And this is where 95% of the survivors get themselves killed.

Because most people do not understand basic "conversion psychology".

Let me give you an example.

You bought this book from a page like <https://BecomeUnfair.com/10000-interviews>. Go look at it, right now.

What do you see?

If You Have a Resume, a Pulse, and the Stomach to
Hear Some Uncomfortable Truths, Then My Book
"10,000 Interviews" Will Show You What The

"CAREER ROACHES"

Can't Share — Because They've Never Been on the
Other Side of the Table.

Look, let me be straight. These methods won't do a lick of good for people who blast 500 AI-generated applications a day and then whine on LinkedIn that "nobody is hiring." But if you have the talent to back it up and the spine to hear what's actually happening on the other side of the hiring table — this will be the most important thing you'll read in your career.



Kyle Mau — Destroying "Career Roaches" — the ones who get laid off and then turn to coaching

While this is *marketing* and is not a CV, you can see I have wasted no space whatsoever. I make a bold claim. I share exactly what you're going to get in it. It's hideous, on purpose, but I have your attention. That is the goal here.

The goal for your CV is to get the person reading your CV...to keep reading.

And a CV is a website. The top third of the first page — what a web designer would call "above the fold" — is the most valuable real estate on the entire document.

It's the homepage. The landing page. The first thing a visitor sees before they decide to scroll or bounce.

And what do most candidates put above the fold?

A paragraph about what THEY want.

"Dedicated and results-oriented professional seeking a challenging opportunity in a dynamic, fast-paced environment where I can leverage my diverse skill set to drive meaningful impact and contribute to organizational growth."

Let me translate that for you:

"I want a good job. Please give me one."

The recruiter doesn't care what you want. They care what you can do for them.

Read that line above again. Sear it into your brain.

Same as a website. Nobody visits a homepage to read the company's mission statement. They visit to find out if this company solves their problem.

The hiring manager has a problem. An open role. A pile of work that isn't getting done. A boss breathing down their neck. They opened your CV to find out one thing:

Can this person solve my problem?

And instead of answering that question, you gave them a paragraph about YOUR goals. YOUR aspirations. YOUR desire to "leverage diverse skill sets."

Guess what?

They don't give a fuck.

You just wasted the most valuable real estate on the entire document talking about yourself instead of talking about them.

Here's what's making this worse:

Three years ago, people wrote bad CV summaries themselves. At least those had the charm of being uniquely bad. You could tell a real human being sat there and typed "I thrive in fast-paced environments" with their own two hands.

Now everybody's using ChatGPT. And ChatGPT writes the same summary for everyone.

"I am a results-driven professional with a passion for innovation and a track record of delivering high-impact solutions in cross-functional environments."

That sentence was either written by AI or by a human who has become indistinguishable from AI. And the recruiter can't tell the difference. And more importantly, doesn't care. Because it says nothing.

Strip out the adjectives from that sentence. What's left?

"I am a professional."

That's it. That's all you communicated. "I am a professional." Congratulations. So are the other 999 people in the pile.

None of you are copywriters. Stop acting like you are.

The best CV summaries I've seen in 10,000 interviews aren't summaries at all. They're headlines. Same as the LinkedIn headline. Short. Specific. What you do. How long. Proof.

"Operations Manager. 8 years. Scaled teams from 5 to 40 across 3 countries. Reduced turnover by 60%."

"Full-Stack Developer. React and Node. 6 years. Built and shipped 4 production apps. 2M+ users."

"Executive Assistant to C-suite. 5 years. Managed calendars, travel, and communications for a CEO running a \$50M company."

No adjectives. No "passion for innovation." No "fast-paced environment." Just the facts.

The recruiter reads that in 4 seconds and knows exactly what they're looking at. They know your role, your level, your experience, and one thing you've actually accomplished.

That's above the fold done right. That's a landing page that converts.

Moving on...

So the photo was professional. The headline was clean. The summary was specific. The recruiter is still reading. You're in the top 5% now.

Here's where the last round of cuts happens.

And it's almost always the same thing:

No proof.

The CV is full of responsibilities. "Managed a team of 8." "Responsible for social media strategy." "Oversaw quarterly reporting."

Great. What happened? What changed because you were there?

"Managed a team of 8" — and? Did the team grow? Did turnover decrease? Did output increase?

"Responsible for social media strategy" — and? Did followers grow? Did engagement improve? Did it generate revenue?

"Oversaw quarterly reporting" — and? Did you streamline the process? Did you catch an error that saved the company money? Did you build a system that still runs today?

Responsibilities tell the recruiter what your job title was. Results tell the recruiter what you actually did.

And here's the kicker:

The recruiter doesn't need big results. They don't need "increased revenue by 400%." They need specifics. Real numbers. Even small ones. Because small specific numbers are infinitely more credible than big vague claims.

"Grew Instagram following from 2,000 to 11,000 in 8 months" is better than "significantly grew social media presence."

"Reduced onboarding time from 3 weeks to 5 days" is better than "improved onboarding efficiency."

"Managed \$40,000 monthly ad budget across 3 platforms" is better than "experienced in digital advertising."

Specific beats impressive. Every time. Because specific is believable and impressive is what everyone claims.

Remember what I said:

Rich people don't need to tell you they're rich.

And good candidates don't need to tell you they're good. Their results do the talking. Their numbers do the bragging. Their proof is the flex.

Here's the reality of what just happened:

1,000 applications came in for a role.

950 were eliminated on photo and headline. Before a word was read.

Of the remaining 50, another 30 killed themselves above the fold with a ChatGPT paragraph about leveraging synergies in dynamic environments.

That leaves 20. Those 20 had clean photos, specific headlines, and above-the-fold content that told the recruiter what they could do — not what they wanted.

Of those 20, maybe 10 had actual results and proof on their CV.

10 people. Out of 1,000. That's who gets the interview.

And all 10 of those people got there by doing the same thing:

Being specific. Being clear. Respecting the recruiter's time. Understanding that a CV is not a memoir, not a journal entry, not a place to express your personality. It's a landing page. It has 6 seconds to convert.

Treat it like one.

In chapter 1, I showed you how to own the first 30 seconds of an interview. How to disarm. How to thread. How to extract the hiring brief before the first question is asked.

But none of that matters if you never get in the room.

The CV gets you in the room. That's its only job. It's not supposed to get you hired. It's not supposed to tell your life story. It's not supposed to express who you are as a human being.

It's supposed to survive 6 seconds. And get you a seat at the table.

If your photo looks like a passport picture, your headline says "Passionate Problem Solver ✨," and your above-the-fold summary is a ChatGPT paragraph about thriving in fast-paced environments — you will never get the chance to use anything I taught you in chapter 1.

You'll never disarm anybody. You'll never thread a conversation. You'll never extract a hiring brief.

Because you got swiped left at 9:07am on a Monday while a recruiter ate a granola bar and processed the next 500 applications before lunch.

Fix the photo. Fix the headline. Fix the fold.

Get in the room.

Then make the first 30 seconds count.

Chapter 3: Momentum

"The few. The proud. The fast responders."

— Kyle Mau

A recruiter messages you on LinkedIn.

"Hi, I came across your profile and I think you could be a great fit for a role we're working on. Would you be open to a quick chat?"

This is the moment. Right here. This is the thing you've been waiting for. You've been applying for weeks. Maybe months. You've been sending resumes into the void. You've been refreshing your inbox. You've been complaining to your friends about how nobody responds.

And now someone responded. A real human. Reaching out to YOU.

What do you do?

If you're like 90% of candidates, you see the notification, think "I'll get to that later," and go back to whatever you were doing.

Three days pass. You finally respond. "Hi! Thanks for reaching out. I'd love to learn more!"

Too late. The recruiter has already messaged 50 other people, gotten 15 responses, scheduled 8 calls, shortlisted 3 candidates, and presented them to the client. Your name means nothing to them now. You're not late to the party. The party is over.

And you did it to yourself.

I am consistently amazed — after processing thousands and thousands of candidates, still amazed — at how slow people are to respond when I reach out to them.

We're not talking about a day late. We're not talking about "I was in a meeting."

I'm talking about candidates who applied for a job. Who supposedly want the job. Who went through the effort of submitting an application. And then when we reach out to move them forward in the process, they take a week to respond.

A week.

You applied for the job. You said you wanted it. We said, "Great, let's talk." And you disappeared for 7 days.

That's not "busy." That's not "playing hard to get." That's not "I had a lot going on."

That's self-elimination.

No recruiter killed your application. No ATS filtered you out. No hiring manager rejected you.

You rejected yourself. By being a turtle.

In my experience, roughly 10% of candidates fall into this category. One in ten people who applied for a job can't be bothered to respond within a reasonable timeframe when someone reaches out about that job.

And here's what those candidates don't realize:

Speed is a signal. It's not just logistics. It's information. When a candidate responds in 5 minutes, the recruiter's brain registers "this person is enthusiastic, organized, and pays attention." When a candidate responds in 5 days, the recruiter's brain registers "this person doesn't really want this, and if they're this slow now, imagine what they'll be like on the job."

Fair or not, that's the reality.

(Actually, screw that last line, it's totally fair)

Let me explain this from the other side of the table.

When a recruiter sends you a message, it means they are at their computer doing candidate outreach at that exact moment. Right now. They're in the zone. They've got the job spec open. They've got a list of profiles to contact. They're moving through that list quickly because they have a deadline and a client waiting.

Your response lands while they're still in that mode? They see it immediately. They click your profile. They read it more carefully than they did the first time. They respond. A conversation starts. Momentum builds. You feel real to them. You're not a name on a list anymore. You're a person who's engaged, responsive, and clearly interested.

That's the kill window. The first 30 minutes to an hour after they reach out. You respond inside that window, you're in a completely different category than everyone who responds tomorrow.

Same principle as sales:

If a lead calls you right now, you pick up the phone. You don't call back next Tuesday. The lead is hot RIGHT NOW. In 30 minutes they've called your competitor. In 24 hours they've forgotten your name. In a week they've signed with someone else.

Same principle as dating:

Someone you're interested in texts you. You respond in 5 minutes, the conversation flows. You respond in 3 days, they've matched with someone else and the window is closed. Nobody is sitting around waiting for you to play it cool.

Same principle with jobs.

The opportunity has a temperature. It's hottest the moment they reach out. Every hour that passes, it cools. Every day, it gets colder. By a week, it's dead.

Respond as fast as humanly possible. If you can do it in 1 minute, do it in 1 minute. If you can do it in 5 minutes, do it in 5. The absolute maximum is one business day. Anything beyond that and you've told the recruiter everything they need to know about your work ethic without saying a word. There is no playing hard to get in this world. This is just stupid. Over-enthusiastic is good for a job.

Next...

I can't believe I have to write this in a book in 2026, but:

Check. Your. Email.

If you are actively applying for jobs and you are not checking your email multiple times a day, I don't know what to tell you. You're standing in line at a restaurant, and when they call your name, you're off shopping.

Check your email. Check your LinkedIn messages. Check your spam folder, because recruiter messages end up there constantly. Check whatever platform you applied on.

You went through the effort of applying. You wrote the CV. You tailored it. You submitted it. You did all the work. And now the one thing you need to do is be available when someone reaches back. And you can't be bothered.

And for the love of God:

Answer your phone.

I know nobody answers calls from unknown numbers anymore. I know we've all been conditioned to assume every unknown call is a scam. But if you are actively in a job search and an unknown number calls you during business hours — answer it.

It might be the recruiter. It might be the hiring manager. It might be the call that changes your career.

Or it might be a prince from a foreign country telling you about the great inheritance you're about to receive if you hand over your social security. Fine. Hang up. You lost 3 seconds.

But if it was the recruiter, and you didn't pick up, and they called the next candidate on the list, and that person DID pick up — you just lost a job to someone who answered their phone.

Alright, so you responded quickly. Good. You answered the phone. Even better.

Now the recruiter says, "Great, I'd love to schedule a call to tell you more about the role. When are you available?"

And this is where a shocking number of candidates turn a simple scheduling exercise into an obstacle course.

"Hmm, this week is really tough for me."

"I'm pretty slammed at my current job."

"I could maybe do next Thursday? Or the week after?"

My little job seekers...someone is trying to give you a job. And you're telling them you're too busy to talk about it.

I understand you have a current job. I understand you have commitments. I understand your calendar is full.

And again...nobody cares.

The recruiter's job is to fill a role. They have a timeline. They have a client waiting. If you can't make time this week, they'll find someone who can. Not because they're impatient. Because they have 15 other responsive candidates who said, "I'm available tomorrow at 2pm. Does that work?"

Here's how you handle scheduling:

"When are you available? I'll make it work."

That's the answer. Seven words. You just told the recruiter you're flexible, you're eager, and you're not going to make this process difficult. You positioned yourself as the easy candidate in a sea of complicated ones.

If their proposed time genuinely doesn't work, you don't say "I'm busy." You propose alternatives immediately. "That time doesn't work for me, but I'm free Wednesday at 10am, Thursday at 3pm, or Friday any time. Would any of those work?"

Three options. Specific times. No ambiguity. No "let me check and get back to you." No "this week is tough."

The recruiter has 15 candidates to schedule. The one who makes scheduling effortless gets moved to the top of the list. Not because they're more qualified. Because they're less annoying.

And in a competitive job market, being less annoying is a legitimate advantage. I've watched candidates get moved forward purely because they were easier to work with than someone who was slightly more qualified but a nightmare to schedule.

Here's what most candidates don't realize:

Speed in the initial response isn't just about getting the first call. It sets the tone for the entire process.

The candidate who responds in 5 minutes also tends to be the candidate who shows up 2 minutes early to the interview. Who sends the follow-up email within an hour. Who completes the trial task a day before the deadline. Who replies to the offer letter the same day.

And the candidate who takes 5 days to respond? They're the same candidate who reschedules the interview twice. Who takes a week to complete a 2-hour trial task. Who goes silent for 3 days after receiving the offer and then asks for another week to "think about it."

Speed is a character trait. Not a scheduling preference.

Recruiters know this. Hiring managers know this. I've watched this pattern play out thousands of times. The fast responder is almost always the better hire. Not because speed equals skill. But because speed signals engagement, organization, and respect for other people's time.

Those are exactly the traits every hiring manager is looking for.

And you demonstrate them before the interview even starts. For free. Without any special skills or qualifications. Just by being fast.

In chapter 2, I showed you the funnel:

1,000 applications. 950 eliminated on photo and headline. 50 get their CVs read. 20 survive above the fold. 10 get interviews.

Now add momentum to the filter:

Of those 10 who get contacted for interviews, 1 will take a week to respond and eliminate themselves. Another 1-2 will make scheduling difficult and get deprioritized.

That leaves 7-8.

And of those 7-8, the ones who responded fastest are already the recruiter's favorites before a single interview question has been asked. Not consciously. But the bias is there. The candidate who responded in 3 minutes and said, "I'm available whenever you are" has a head start that the candidate who responded in 3 hours and said, "This week is tough" will never overcome.

Momentum isn't a bonus. It's a filter. It works for you or against you from the very first interaction.

Right now, today, do this:

Turn on notifications for LinkedIn messages and email on your phone. Check your inbox at least 3 times a day. Answer calls from unknown numbers during business hours. When someone reaches out, respond within minutes. When someone proposes a call, say yes immediately and offer flexible times.

That's it. That's the chapter. No special skills required. No interview techniques. No resume overhaul.

Just be fast. Be available. Be easy to work with.

You'd be amazed how few people manage to do this. And how big of an advantage it gives the ones who do.

Chapter 4: Courage

"Bold is favored by fortune."

— Kyle Mau

I called my parents. December 15th, 2015.

I was about to fly home for the holidays — I'd been traveling, taking trips, figuring things out — and I needed to tell them something before I showed up at their door for Christmas.

I had a job at the RAND Corporation. Government think tank. I was making nearly 6-figures. I was 24. I had it figured out. This was the kind of place people spend their whole career and retire from with a pension and a plaque on the wall.

I also had a dating blog called *This Is Trouble*. It was making \$500 a month.

And I'd decided to leave RAND and go all in on the blog.

I called my parents and said, "Just so you know — I'm leaving my job. I'm moving to Eastern Europe in April. I'm going to build an online business. I'll be home in a couple days and I don't want to talk about it right now. But you can ask me anything when I get there."

Then I hung up.

When I got home, they asked what the plan was. I told them. They said they supported me. Said they trusted me to figure it out.

Much love to them for that.

Here's what made that phone call possible.

It wasn't bravery. Not the Hollywood kind, anyway. It wasn't some moment of inspiration where the fog lifted and I suddenly felt fearless.

It was a decision about terms.

I had \$17,000 in savings. About a year and a half, maybe two years of runway if I was careful. And my exact thought was:

"If I can't make this work in that time, I don't deserve to make it as an entrepreneur."

That's it. That was the whole plan. A clean bet on myself with a defined timeline. I knew what I was risking. I knew what winning looked like. I knew what losing looked like. And I decided the potential upside was worth the defined downside.

Most people never get there because they never define the terms. They just sit with vague fear indefinitely. "What if it doesn't work out?" — okay, what specifically? What does that look like? How bad is it actually?

When you force yourself to define the worst case, it's almost never as catastrophic as the anxiety makes it feel.

The worst case for me was: I spend 18 months building something, it doesn't work, I'm 26 years old with a killer resume, and I have nothing to regret. I gave it my all.

That's survivable. That's not even that bad.

The dating blog made seven figures and I went on to found two more companies (and counting) that hit the 7-figure mark .

I'm not telling you this to brag. I'm telling you this because of what it required before any of that happened: Courage.

And most people don't have it. You may, or you may not.

But you're going to acquire it by the end of this book.

Back to you:

You're sitting in an interview right now — or you will be soon.

And somewhere in that interview, you're going to get a question that has two possible answers.

The safe answer. The one that sounds professional. The one that career coaches rehearse with you for \$200 an hour. Structured. Sanitized. Forgettable.

And the real answer. The one that's actually interesting. The one that requires you to say something specific, something personal, something that exposes a little of who you actually are.

Most people choose the safe answer.

Not because it's better. It isn't. Not because it's more likely to get them hired. It won't.

They choose it because standing out feels dangerous.

And here's the thing:

It's supposed to feel that way.

For most of human history, standing out from the group was how you died.

Not metaphorically. Literally.

The person who dressed differently, acted differently, spoke differently, challenged the tribe's way of doing things — that person got exiled. Ostracized. Left outside the camp. Where, you know, things ate you. Nom-nom.

Conformity wasn't a weakness. It was survival technology. Blend in, stay safe, live another day. The instinct to not stand out is baked into your DNA at a level you can't even imagine.

The modern world — the one where being different is celebrated, where "authenticity" is a brand strategy, where the weird kid from the garage becomes a billionaire — that world is maybe 50 years old.

You don't undo hundreds of thousands of years of wiring in 50 years.

You just don't.

It's the same reason we're so sick as a society — our bodies haven't caught up to all the junk we shovel in our mouth and shit we rub on our skin. You don't adapt to thousands of years of biology in 50 years.

So when you're sitting in that interview chair and the question lands and your brain screams "say the safe thing" — that's not weakness talking. That's ancient survival software doing exactly what it was designed to do.

The problem is:

Everything's pretty cushy now. You're sitting in an air-conditioned office. You're applying for a white-collar job with benefits. Your life is not at risk. The only risk you have right now is sounding like every other candidate.

There is no threat.

Nobody is getting exiled from the tribe for telling an interesting story about a conflict they had. The hiring manager isn't going to leave you outside the camp to be eaten by a woolly mammoth for saying something unexpected. The worst case scenario is they don't hire you — and they weren't going to hire you anyway with the safe answer anyway because you sound like everybody else.

But your nervous system doesn't know that. It just knows that standing out = danger. Play it safe. Blend in. Survive.

And so you do. And so does every other candidate that day. And the hiring manager goes home having interviewed eight people who all sounded identical, and the role stays open another two weeks.

That hiring manager who interviewed eight identical people?

There's another unfortunate biological mechanism in there — deferral to authority.

And speaking of biology — it's human nature to assume competence by title. Probably a protection mechanism, honestly. You wouldn't be able to trust anyone to do anything if you weren't a little naive about it. Hitler gave himself the fancy title of "Chancellor of the Reich" and people followed him without question.

You see the lawyer's office, the degree on the wall, the business card, and your brain says, "This person knows what they're doing." You don't question it. You just hand over the retainer and trust the process.

But here's the thing:

That interviewer sitting across from you. The one with the title. The one behind the desk with the list of questions and the laptop open and the serious look on their face.

You're treating them like an expert.

They're probably not that good at their job, to be honest.

In fact, a lot of people...actually kind of suck at them.

I've had lousy accountants in America. Ones who've read maybe a few hundred pages of a tax code that's over 100,000 pages long. Gave me advice that cost me money. Missed deductions. Made errors I didn't catch until years later.

I've gotten poor legal advice from American lawyers. The cautious kind. The kind who tell you what you CAN'T do instead of figuring out how to get you a result. Playing defense when you're paying them to play offense.

Doctors. Same thing. Prescribe a pill. Fifteen minutes. Next patient.

And here's one that should really hit home:

Professors. I already mentioned them today, but, while my memory is a bit hazy, I'm fairly certain that 80% of my college lectures were them reading the books they're written verbatim.

The people who literally "taught" you how the world works.

How many of your business professors ever started a business? How many of your entrepreneurship professors ever made a payroll? At my university, there were two entrepreneurship professors. Neither one had ever started a company. Not one. They were teaching the theory of something they'd never done.

But here's what most people miss:

The person interviewing you might BE that professor. Or the lousy accountant, the clueless doctor, the incompetent lawyer. They might be reading from the textbook right now. Asking questions they Googled. Running a checklist someone in HR handed them. Going through the motions of a process they've never been trained on and don't fully understand.

Credentials don't mean competence. A title doesn't mean expertise. A desk and a list of questions doesn't mean the person behind them knows what they're doing.

This is true of lawyers, accountants, doctors, professors, and yes — the person interviewing you for a job.

And unfortunately for you, they can actually make it worse.

Let me explain.

Every single one of you has had a bad meal at a restaurant.

Not a "the fries were cold" bad meal. A genuinely bad meal. Overcooked steak. Bland sauce. Something a professional cook — a person whose entire job is to make food — put in front of you and expected you to pay for.

There are bad mechanics who make the problem worse. Bad teachers who make the subject harder. Bad hairdressers who send you home looking like a parrot.

And as we've just established — bad lawyers, bad accountants, and bad doctors. People with degrees and offices and titles who are simply not good at what they do.

Having the job title doesn't mean you're good at the job.

Why would interviewers be any different?

They're not.

About 90% of the interviewers you'll face are running a checklist. Same questions. Same order. "Tell me about yourself." "What's your greatest weakness?" "Where do you see yourself in five years?" "Tell me about a time you showed leadership."

They're not pulling threads. They're not listening for specifics. They're not creating space for you to be interesting. They're processing you. Filling in boxes. Getting through it.

And that means the interview is two people stumbling around together. Two people who don't know what they're doing, trying to evaluate each other in 45 minutes.

The career roaches don't tell you this. They let you believe the interviewer is some all-knowing authority figure who holds your fate in their hands. Makes you more scared. Makes you more likely to buy another coaching session.

But here's what I need you to understand:

The power dynamic is way more even than it feels.

You're not performing for an expert. You're sitting across from someone who's probably as uncomfortable as you are, running a process they don't fully understand, hoping one of today's candidates says something interesting enough to move them down the hiring pipeline.

And your job — on top of everything I've already taught you — is to carry that person.

And yes, you will be carrying scrubs.

That's you in the interview.

The interviewer gives you a checklist question — a lemon. Your job is lemonade.

They ask, "What's your greatest weakness?" — one of the laziest questions in the history of interviewing. You don't give the lazy answer back. You don't say, "I'm a perfectionist" like every other candidate that day. You tell a real story. A short one. A moment where you actually struggled with something and what you did about it. You carry them past their own bad question into an actual conversation.

They ask, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" — a question that has never produced a useful answer in the history of employment. You don't recite a career plan. You pivot. "Honestly? I don't know exactly. Five years ago I never would have predicted I'd be here. But what I do know is the kind of work I want to be doing and the kind of problems I want to be solving. Can I tell you about that instead?"

You just turned a dead-end question into a thread they can pull.

That's carrying. That's turning lemons into lemonade. That's taking a checklist interview that was going to produce eight identical, forgettable conversations and making yours the one that actually felt like a conversation.

The interviewer won't know you did it. They'll just know that the third candidate of the day was somehow different. More interesting. Easier to talk to. More memorable.

They won't realize you were the one driving. They'll think the conversation just happened to be better.

And that's exactly how it should feel.

I'm going to be honest with you about something.

Everything I'm about to teach you in the next few chapters — the storytelling, the threading, the moves that make interviewers put down their pen and actually listen — it comes naturally to me.

I don't think about it. I've never really thought about it. I just do it.

And I've watched thousands of people who can't.

Not because they're not smart. Not because they don't have good stories. But because the courage required to actually use those techniques in a room full of judgment — with a job on the line, with bills to pay, with their self-worth tied to the outcome — is a different thing entirely from understanding them intellectually.

Reading about how to do it and doing it are two different problems.

So here's what I want you to understand before we go any further:

I'm handing you a supercar.

Most of you can't possibly push it to the limits right now. That's fine. That's honest. But by the end of this book, we'll have mastered how to get the most of your bright red spankin' new Ferrari (more on red Ferraris later) — how to brake late, how to take the perfect line, how to carry speed through the corner when everyone else is lifting off the gas.

It's harder. It's scarier. It requires you to override a nervous system that has been running the same protective software since before civilization existed.

And now you know the secret:

The person judging you from behind the desk probably can't drive either.

I'm not going to tell you the fear goes away.

It doesn't. Not for most people. Not fully.

What changes is your relationship to it.

You feel the pull toward the safe answer. You recognize it for what it is — old software, wrong program, misidentified threat. And then you choose anyway.

That's the move. That's the whole thing.

Not fearlessness. Just the decision that the risk of standing out is smaller than the cost of blending in.

I made that decision from a car on a California highway with \$17,000 in a savings account and a blog making \$500 a month.

You get to make it in a room where the worst that happens is you don't get a job you don't currently have. Across from someone who's probably winging it just as hard as you are.

Chapter 5: STARologues

"Four STARologues and seven minutes ago, you brought forth upon your interviewer great boredom..."

— Kyle Mau

Let me tell you about a bake sale.

A sports team in the UK needed to raise money for new equipment. One of the members organized a meeting. Worked out the dates. Clarified everyone's tasks. Made sure everyone who wanted to be involved got involved.

They raised £200.

Standing ovation. Let's move to the offer stage immediately.

This is a real example. From a real government website — the UK's National Careers Service — that ranks at the top of Google when you search "how to prepare for an interview".

That bake sale is the example they give for a leadership question.

In a professional context.

For a professional interview.

The internet is teaching you to walk into a room and tell a hiring manager about a bake sale.

And the career coaches charging \$200 an hour to prep you for that interview? They're nodding along like it's perfectly fine.

But it gets worse. Because at least the bake sale was written by a human. A clueless human, sure. But a human.

Now ask ChatGPT how to answer a behavioral interview question and you get this:

"When answering behavioral questions, use the STAR method to structure your response in a clear, concise manner. Remember to be specific about your role and contributions, quantify your results where possible, and keep your answer to approximately two minutes."

Thanks. Revolutionary. Truly groundbreaking advice. Nobody has ever heard this before.

Or Google "how to answer tell me about a time you showed leadership" and the first three results will give you something like:

"In my previous role as a Marketing Coordinator, I noticed our team lacked a clear process for content approvals. I took the initiative to propose a new workflow, organized a meeting to discuss it with key stakeholders, and implemented a tracking system that improved turnaround time by 20%."

You know what that sounds like?

Every other answer. To every other question. In every other interview. On every other day of every other week of the hiring manager's life.

This is what most candidates are learning from. This is the material. This is the level of advice that's ranking at the top of Google and getting shared on LinkedIn by people with "Career Expert 🚀" in their headlines.

And they wonder why nobody gets callbacks.

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Every career website. Every HR department. Every LinkedIn "Career Expert 🚀" who has never personally hired anyone in their life will tell you this is the framework. Your career coach almost certainly built an entire coaching program around it.

Think of a situation. Define the task. Describe the action. Share the result.

= "STAR"

It sounds structured. It sounds professional. It sounds like something that would produce useful information.

It produces fake sale bullshit.

I call the answers STARologues. Because that's exactly what they are — STAR answers delivered as monologues. A log. An entry. A recorded event with a timestamp and a tidy resolution, performed at the interviewer while they hope you shut up. Soon.

"Situation: Newsletter subscribers were low. Task: Increase them. Action: Social media campaign. Result: 25% growth."

Yawn.

The interviewer nods. Writes something down. Asks the next question. You launch into another STARologue.

Forty-five minutes of this. And at the end, you've delivered nothing but this generic slop, and given them zero reason to remember you.

That's the trap.

You're going to get asked STAR questions. There's no avoiding it.

"Tell me about a time you handled conflict."

"Describe a situation where you had to meet a tight deadline."

"Give me an example of when you led a team."

The interviewer has a list. They're going to run through it. You can't stop that. And as we covered in chapter 4 — they probably Googled those questions 20 minutes before you walked in. They're not great at their job either.

What you CAN control is whether you're boring.

That's the rule.

Do not be boring.

You do not want to be boring. You do not want to fall into the trap of delivering another story about handling conflict that sounds exactly like every other story about handling conflict the interviewer heard that day. That week. That month.

Boring is death. Not rejection. Death. Because boring doesn't even get remembered long enough to be rejected. It just... evaporates.

The interviewer nods. Writes something down. Looks at the next question.

Gone.

You need to not be that.

Now, I use lame STAR questions myself sometimes, as a test.

"Tell me about yourself."

Same question the interviewer will ask. Same open-ended prompt. Same opportunity to be interesting.

And some candidates — grown adults with professional experience and bills to pay — will take that as an invitation to monologue for seven straight minutes about which university they went to, what their first job was, what their second job was, their cat they acquired on their "gap year", what their responsibilities were at each one, and how excited they are about this opportunity.

Seven minutes. Reading their resume to me. The resume I already have. The resume that's open on my screen while they're talking.

That's not a STARologue. That's something even worse. A complete lack of awareness.

Chapter 1 covered this. The professor reading from the textbook. But it shows up here again because the same instinct — "I should comprehensively present my background" — is what turns STAR answers into STARologues. The instinct to be thorough kills the ability to be interesting.

Nobody needs seven minutes. Nobody needs five. Nobody even needs two.

You need 30 seconds. And a story worth telling.

Here's the actual goal when a STAR question lands:

Tell a story worth remembering. In 30 seconds.

Not a STARologue. A story. With a real moment in it. A real tension. A real person. Something that makes the interviewer actually look up from their notes.

Let me show you the difference.

I interviewed at Hitachi Data Systems when I was in my early twenties. Computer engineering role. Six figures. Corporate. Serious.

At some point in the interview they asked me something about the most challenging thing I'd dealt with recently. Standard question. The kind of question that produces STARologues about process improvement and cross-functional alignment.

Here's what I told them:

I'd just gone through a breakup. Bad one. And I needed something to pour myself into. So I got into road cycling. Within a year, I was racing. Not recreationally — competing. I went from zero to racing in under twelve months because I decided that suffering on a bike was better than sitting around feeling sorry for myself. And what I learned from that was that I could handle pain and still show up. Every day. At 5am. Regardless of how I felt.

That's not a STARologue. That's a real story about a real person that revealed something the resume couldn't contain.

The hiring manager didn't learn about my technical qualifications from that answer. They already had the resume for that. They learned I'm the kind of person who picks something up and goes all in. Who processes difficulty by getting harder, not softer. Who doesn't quit when it hurts.

That's what got me hired. Not a structured answer about a time I demonstrated initiative.

(I got the job.)

I want to show you something about storytelling. About how the best answers in interviews work — and why they don't look anything like what the career roaches teach.

Someone once challenged me to connect five random topics to hiring. One of them was volcano eruptions. No obvious link. No logical bridge. Just a random word and a dare.

Here's where my brain went:

A volcano exploded → Pompeii → The most famous eruption in history → Near Naples, Italy

My parents became obsessed with Neapolitan pizza a few years ago. Absolutely obsessed. To the point where my dad decided to build a pizza oven in the backyard. From scratch. No contractor. No kit. He watched YouTube videos and figured it out. Designed it, sourced the materials, built the whole thing himself.

My dad is not a mason. He's not a pizza oven specialist. He's an engineer with a knack for figuring things out.

And that — right there — is exactly the talent people are often looking for.

People who figure it out. Who don't wait for instructions. Who see a problem, go find the answer, and build the thing. Whether it's a pizza oven or a CRM migration or a client deliverable at 2am.

Now:

What does that have to do with interview technique?

Everything.

Because that story — volcano to Pompeii to Naples to my parents to the pizza oven to my dad's engineering instinct — doesn't follow STAR. It doesn't follow any framework. It follows a thread. One thing leads to the next leads to the next, and the person listening can't help but follow along because they have no idea where it's going.

And then it lands somewhere real. Somewhere unexpected. And the listener thinks, "That was interesting. I want to hear more from this person."

That's the goal when you're sitting in the interview chair. Not to deliver a formatted entry for the interviewer's filing cabinet. To take them somewhere they weren't expecting to go and arrive at a point they didn't see coming.

The STARologue version of my dad building a pizza oven would be:

"Situation: My father wanted a pizza oven. Task: Build it without professional help. Action: He researched online and constructed it himself. Result: A functioning pizza oven."

Yawn.

See how that kills it? Same story. All the life sucked out. Nobody's leaning forward for the STARologue version.

Your interview answers work the same way. The format kills the story. The structure removes the surprise. The framework produces bake sale slop.

A recent candidate I interviewed had an interesting story.

I asked a basic question – “Tell me a time you just had to figure it the hell out?”

The kind of question that produces STARologues about "prioritizing stakeholder communications during an escalation event."

This candidate told me about a power outage at 2am. The business was down. Critical systems offline. And instead of calling their manager, instead of logging a ticket, instead of sending a Slack message and going back to sleep — they got in their car, drove around town, found a generator, brought it back, and got the business running before sunrise.

That's it. That was the story. Maybe 30 seconds.

It was captivating.

Because I wasn't hearing a STARologue about incident response protocols. I was hearing about a person who, when the lights went out, got in their car at 2am and solved the problem. Didn't ask permission. Didn't wait for instructions. Didn't escalate. Drove around in the dark until they found the answer and then fixed it themselves.

That's my dad and the pizza oven. That's me and the road bike. That's the quality that can't be taught, can't be faked, and can't be communicated through a structured STAR response.

It's a story. It shows something about the person. And it's completely within professional bounds, unless you're a dud who does literally *everything* by the book (and that brought you right here to this book, my little seeker).

The career roaches would have coached this candidate to say:

"Situation: A critical systems outage occurred outside business hours. Task: Restore service with minimal downtime. Action: I identified the need for backup power, sourced a generator, and implemented a temporary solution. Result: Systems were restored before the start of business, preventing revenue loss."

Every word of that is accurate. And every word of it is completely, hopelessly forgettable.

"I got in my car at 2am and found a generator" is unforgettable.

Same story. One version hits the reject pile...the other gets hired.

Here's the move that separates the people who pass from the people who get remembered:

Make your point in 30 seconds. Then invite them to go deeper.

"There was a conflict with the marketing department — I'll give you the short version, but happy to elaborate on any part of it. We disagreed on subscriber targets. I thought their approach was going to miss the actual revenue goal even if the numbers looked good. I pushed back, we tested it my way for 30 days, and the

subscribers we brought in converted at 3x their previous rate. Would you like me to get into how we measured that?"

What just happened:

You gave them a real result with a real number. You demonstrated that you understand what actually matters — revenue, not vanity metrics. And you handed them a thread to pull.

Now they're running the interview instead of checking boxes. They ask, "What was the backend revenue on those subscribers?" And you show them you can connect your actions to business outcomes. The exact thing chapter 2 told you to put on your CV. The thing most candidates never do in the room.

They asked. Which means they're interested. Which means you're no longer being processed.

You're being considered.

Remember chapter 4:

The interviewer probably isn't great at this. They're running a checklist. They might not pull threads on their own. Opening the door is how you carry them — you create the thread for them to pull. You do the work of making the conversation interesting. You turn their checklist question into a real exchange.

That's lemonade from lemons.

That's you driving the interview while the person across the table thinks it was their idea.

One more thing on the "tell me about a conflict" question specifically — because it's on every list, and almost everyone answers it wrong.

Most people default to a safe, professional, completely forgettable story about a coworker who disagreed on a project direction and how they "facilitated a productive conversation to reach alignment."

I need you to sit with this question instead:

What's the biggest conflict you've actually ever had?

Not the most professional one. The biggest one. The one where you were genuinely nervous. The one where something real was at stake. It doesn't have to be from a job. It could be a business partner. A family member. A client who tried to blame you for their own failure.

The details protect you — you can anonymize, compress, adjust. But the emotional reality underneath the story? That's what makes it land.

Interviewers spend entire days absorbing sanitized professional conflict stories. They've heard thousands of them. They stopped listening somewhere around candidate three.

But when someone tells a story that feels real — where you can feel the tension, where the outcome wasn't guaranteed, where something was actually on the line — the interviewer wakes up.

You don't have to share your deepest darkest moment. But "biggest conflict I've ever handled" puts you in a completely different category than "here's a time a coworker and I saw things differently and we talked it out."

Real is memorable. Sanitized is forgettable.

Pick your story accordingly.

After three or four STARologues, there's one more move available.

The good interviewers — the ones who are actually paying attention — will have pulled threads themselves. Asked follow-ups. Gone deeper on something that interested them. If that happened, you're already in good shape. The conversation is real.

But plenty of interviewers will just run the checklist. Question, STARologue, nod, next question. They're not pulling anything. They're processing. Filling in boxes. Getting through it.

When that happens — at the end of the formal question block, when they ask, "Do you have any questions for us?" — you flip it.

"Yeah — what's the biggest conflict this department has dealt with recently?"

Or: "What's the hardest part of this role that doesn't show up in the job description?"

Or: "What would actually make someone fail in this position?"

You're not being aggressive. You're showing that you think in terms of real problems and real outcomes — not job description bullet points. And you're doing exactly what chapter 1 taught you: extracting the hiring brief. Same principle. Different moment in the process.

If they answer honestly, you just learned something that every other candidate who asked "what does a typical day look like?" will never know.

And you asked it last. Which means it's the thing they remember when you walk out the door.

The STAR method was designed for candidates. For nervous people who need a structure to organize their thoughts under pressure so they don't blank out.

As a tool for not blanking out? Fine. It's better than silence. Use it if you need it.

But the trap — the one your career coach set for you without knowing it — is believing that a clean, well-delivered STARologue is a good answer.

It isn't.

It's a passing answer. It gets you through the filter. It does not get you the offer.

The offer goes to the person who told the story worth remembering. The person who got in their car at 2am. The person who turned a breakup into a racing career. The person who took the question somewhere unexpected and made the interviewer put down their pen.

That person left something behind in the room.

And that — *that* is what gets you hired.

Chapter 6: Pull the Thread

"The next time you try to seduce anyone...don't read your resume out loud."

— Kyle Mau

I know nothing about anime.

Not a thing. Couldn't name a single show. Couldn't tell you the difference between shonen and whatever else exists. The entire genre is a blind spot the size of Japan.

And that's exactly why I chose it.

I was running a coaching session with my recruiting team. Teaching them how to follow conversational threads — how to take one piece of information someone gives you and pull it deeper and deeper until you're somewhere real.

I told everyone to pick a personal topic. Something they knew well. One of my recruiters picked anime. Which I know nothing about.

Here's how it went. My threading in bold.

"What kind of anime do you like?"

"I watch everything. My guilty pleasure is romantic comedies, but generally anything — horror, shonen, whatever."

"Are they all Japanese?"

"Every single one."

"Do you have a special affinity for Japan?"

"It started because of anime. I can actually understand Japanese pretty well now."

"So if you went to Japan and needed to use the Shinkansen trains, you could navigate around?"

"No — I can't read. Just understand."

"Got it. Do you have a specific Japanese food you like?"

"Sushi, but I'm actually more into Chinese food."

"What kind of Chinese food?"

"Anything with rice, spicy, sweet things."

"What's the spiciest thing you've ever eaten?"

"A crab soup in Thailand. I love spicy food and this was so hot I couldn't eat it."

"Did you eat anything weird in Thailand? Like a scorpion?"

"I ate crocodile."

Nine questions. Started at anime. Ended at eating crocodile in Thailand. I had no idea where any of it was going because I knew nothing about the subject.

And then I went all the way back to the top.

"You said romantic comedy anime. Are you a secret romantic?"

That's threading.

You take what someone gives you, pull it one level deeper, then another, then another. You go narrow until you hit something personal. Then you go back up to the top and pull a completely different thread from the same starting point.

I've been doing this my whole life.

At Hitachi, handling crisis calls from panicking bank executives — "What's the problem? How long? What's the cost right now? Who is on your case about this?"

At Bose, selling \$300 headphones — "What are you using them for? Travel? How often? Long flights? Do you sleep on planes?"

Same skill. Different room.

But here's the thing:

In sales and in recruiting, I'm the one asking the questions. I control the conversation. I decide where the threads go.

In an interview, you're the one answering.

So how do you thread when you're not in control?

You don't. You plant the threads instead.

This is what nobody teaches. Not the career roaches. Not the LinkedIn "Career Expert 🚀" crowd. Not the STAR method. Nobody.

Because they're all teaching you how to answer. I'm teaching you how to answer in a way that turns the interviewer's checklist into a conversation.

The principle is simple:

Give a short, specific, real answer with one detail that begs a follow-up. Then stop talking.

That's it. That's the whole technique from the candidate's side.

The short answer proves you can communicate. The specific detail proves it's real. And the thing you leave dangling — the thread you planted — is so interesting that the interviewer abandons their checklist to pull it.

Now you're having a conversation. And the person having a conversation is the person who gets hired.

Let me show you how this works on real questions.

"What would you do in your first 90 days?"

Bad answer: "In my first 30 days, I would focus on learning the systems and processes. In the next 30 days, I would begin implementing improvements based on my observations. And in the final 30 days, I would be fully ramped up and contributing independently."

Yawn.

The interviewer just heard the same 30-60-90 framework that every coached candidate recites. It says nothing. It commits to nothing. It's a calendar with no events on it.

Here's what I would say:

"What would make YOU say this hire was a success after 90 days? Because if I have a map but you don't tell me where to drive, we're both going to end up disappointed."

(This is an aggressive take, not for beginners, more on that later)

I just flipped the question. Now they're answering. And whatever they say — "we need someone who can take over the reporting by week 6" or "honestly, if you could just stop the bleeding in customer support" — I now have the real answer. Not the job description answer. The real one.

And then I'd say, "Based on that, here's exactly what I would do."

Now my answer is tailored to what they just told me. I didn't prepare it. I didn't rehearse it. I listened to what they needed and matched my experience to their pain. In real time. Right in front of them.

The career roaches teach you to prepare a 90-day plan in advance. I'm teaching you to build one live using intelligence the interviewer just handed you.

That's threading from the candidate's chair.

"Walk me through your resume."

I timed myself on this one. Fifty-eight seconds. Here's what I said:

"Got my first internship at 14 at a computer shop where I built hundreds of computers. Got hired at 16. After that, went to the movie theater — lasted about 4 months, cleaning popcorn off the floor wasn't

for me. Moved to Best Buy, really enjoyed sales, discovered I liked that more than fixing things. Went to Bose in college, liked high-end product and a competitive sales environment, #1 sales rep in California, left when they cut commissions. Graduated, youngest person ever hired at Hitachi as a computer engineer — high-level enterprise troubleshooting. Then got poached by a Hitachi client."

Under a minute. Every job is one sentence. Every sentence has one detail that matters.

Many of them are humble brags.

- "First internship at 14."
- "Built hundreds of computers."
- "#1 sales rep"
- "Youngest person ever hired"
- "Got poached."

Each one of those is a thread. The interviewer can pull any of them. "You built hundreds of computers — tell me more about that." "What do you mean you got poached?" "What was it about Bose that you liked?"

But I'm not choosing which thread they pull. They are. Which means whatever they ask next is what THEY care about. And now I know what to talk about for the rest of the interview.

The dull version that lands you in the reject pile: Three to five minutes. Chronological. Every responsibility listed. Every transition explained. The interviewer zones out at minute two and starts thinking about lunch.

A good candidate doesn't need five minutes to walk through a resume the interviewer can read for themselves.

"How do you handle pressure and tight deadlines?"

Bad answer: "I prioritize my tasks, communicate with stakeholders about realistic timelines, and focus on delivering the most critical items first while maintaining quality standards."

That answer could be generated by ChatGPT in three seconds. Because it was. That's the default output. Every word is accurate and every word is forgettable.

Here's what I would say:

"I'll tell a story...my wife was pregnant when the war started in Ukraine. We had to leave Kyiv in February 2022. Air raid sirens, tanks rolling down the street, the works. When stuff has to get done, it just has to get done. What I do is look at the problem and ask: What's critical and non-negotiable? What's bad but survivable? What's uncomfortable but won't kill me? My wife and unborn daughter's safety — non-negotiable. Frostbite on my feet — horrible, but survivable. Going without food for a few days — uncomfortable, won't kill me. I prioritize down that list and I execute. Sometimes you have to pick the best bad choice."

That's not an interview answer. That's *life*.

Every single one of you has an answer where you had a horrible or shitty situation happen to you and you had to scramble and figure it out. Maybe someone in your family was horribly sick. Maybe it was a crazy travel story where you were lost. Maybe a crisis for your child.

All of these are real pressure, real stakes. It shows more about you than a generic, "We had a tight deadline and a project and I figured it out", kind of story.

And the interviewer is never going to forget the candidate who escaped a war zone with a pregnant wife and still laid out a prioritization framework while telling the story.

A career coach would coach you to use a work example. "Don't bring up personal things, keep it professional." And their client would deliver a forgettable answer about stakeholder communication and realistic timelines.

The real story is the one the coach would coach out of you. That's almost always the one you should tell.

"If you didn't need money, what would you do with your time?"

I'd answer: "I'd be trying to break 80 in golf."

That's it. One sentence. Then silence.

Now the interviewer has to come to me. "You play golf? How long? Why golf?"

And each follow-up is a thread I planted. Golf opens into discipline, patience, learning curves, competitiveness, dealing with frustration, the mental game. All from one sentence that I forced them to pull.

Most candidates would answer this with a paragraph. "Well, I think I'd probably travel and maybe start a nonprofit and I've always been interested in..." — they give everything away. There's nothing to pull. Nothing to ask. The interviewer nods, writes something down, moves on.

But here's what most people miss:

One sentence signals confidence. It signals that you don't need to fill silence. It signals that you're comfortable letting the other person drive. And paradoxically, by saying less, you create more conversation. Because the interviewer has no choice but to engage.

Whoever says less generally has the power dynamic in a conversation.

That's true in sales. It's true in negotiation. And it's true in interviews.

"What would you do if you disagreed with a direct order from your boss?"

Most candidates fumble here. They either sound like a pushover — "I'd do what the boss says, they know best" — or they sound like a rebel — "I'd stand my ground no matter what."

Here's what I'd say:

"I'd ask them flat out: Are you open to hearing another opinion on this, or is your mind made up?"

Two options. Both benefit me.

If they say "my mind is made up" — I've transferred the responsibility. The outcome is now on them, not me. I've covered myself by asking, and I'll execute their decision knowing it was fully their call.

If they say "I'm open" — I just earned permission to disagree. Now I present my case. And we either compromise or I've at least put my perspective on record.

One question. Two paths. Both lead somewhere useful. And I made the decision theirs, not mine. That's not insubordination. That's leadership disguised as a question.

"What would your worst enemy say about you?"

"That I'm ruthless."

Then silence. Let that word hang in the room.

The interviewer's brain is already softening it. "Well, he said ruthless, but he's probably just competitive." That's the trick — when YOU name the extreme, they moderate it in their head. If you'd said "a little too driven sometimes," they'd think, "What's he hiding? It's probably worse."

Own the biggest version of the criticism. Then pull it somewhere safe.

"I've been competitive since I was five years old playing baseball. I hate losing. Always have. It's served me well in my career — it's also gotten me in trouble a couple of times. These days I try to make sure that energy is pointed at results instead of people."

Ruthless just became driven. And the interviewer didn't change their mind. They were led there by a thread you planted.

"I'll be honest — you're not the strongest candidate we're considering."

Most candidates crumble. Start over-selling. Start apologizing for their resume. Start sweating.

Here's what I'd say:

"What does the strongest candidate have that I don't?"

Seven words. And now they have to answer.

Whatever they say — "more years managing people" or "direct industry experience" — is intelligence. They just told you exactly what's standing between you and the offer. For free.

Now you address it directly. "You said they have seven years of management experience and I have five. What have they accomplished in those seven years? I'm happy to walk you through exactly what I accomplished in mine. Is this about the number, or about what you did with it?"

You just turned a pressure question into a closing argument. And you did it by making them justify the pressure first.

I do this on sales calls all the time when people are hiring.

"We're considering hiring XYZ recruiting company instead."

"Cool, what do they have that you didn't hear on this call today?"

Then they literally just tell me what the objection is and I handle it.

"Cheaper prices." → "Got it, is price the most important thing in the hire?"

"Faster process." → "Got it, do you really think hiring something is to be rushed?"

etc.

I've been doing these things instinctively since I was 14 years old. I never named them. I never wrote them down. I just walked into rooms and made people like me.

But after 10,000 interviews watching candidates succeed and fail at this, after answering every one of these questions myself and then watching thousands of other people answer them — the patterns are clear.

There are moves. They're not frameworks. They're not scripts. They're instincts that can be learned.

Plant threads instead of delivering monologues. Flip questions back before you answer. Use the real story, not the safe one. Say less, not more. Anchor to something specific they'll remember at dinner. Corner them with binaries. Name your weaknesses before they can. Make them justify their pressure. Turn their concerns into proof of your ambition.

Every one of these moves does the same thing:

It turns a checklist interview into a conversation.

And the conversation is where the hiring happens.

Nobody gets the offer because they delivered perfect STARologues. Nobody becomes "that's the one" because they had the cleanest framework or the most polished delivery.

They get it because the interviewer felt something. A connection. An energy shift. A moment where they stopped processing and started listening.

You create that moment by planting a thread so interesting that the interviewer can't help but pull it.

That's the technique. That's the skill. And now you know it exists.

The next few chapters will teach you exactly how to deploy it — from the close, to the follow-up, to the salary negotiation. Every one of them builds on the same foundation:

Thread. Connect. Be remembered.

That's how you get hired.

Chapter 7: The Warning

"With great power comes great responsibility. Don't be an asshole. There's not a single asshole on this planet that doesn't stink."

— Kyle Mau

My little seekers: I have just handed you a nuclear bomb.

Please don't set it off around someone.

Everything I taught you in the last two chapters — the threading, the flipping, the binaries, the one-sentence-then-stop, the "ruthless" move, the real stories, the planted threads — all of it can backfire. Spectacularly.

The flip can sound arrogant. The binary can sound aggressive. The one-sentence-stop can sound dismissive. The real story can sound unprofessional. Naming your worst trait can sound like a warning label on a human being.

Every single one of these moves has a version that gets you hired and a version that gets you thrown out of the building.

The difference isn't the words.

It's the delivery.

When I say, "Are you open to hearing another opinion, or is your mind made up?" — it lands because there's a warmth underneath it. A slight smile. A "we're both adults here" energy that invites the other person in instead of pushing them against a wall.

When someone reads that line in this book, rehearses it in the mirror, and deploys it in an interview with the wrong tone — it sounds like a challenge. Like, "Are you even capable of listening, or are you one of those bosses?"

Same words. Completely different effect.

One gets you the job. The other gets you walked to the door.

When I say, "My worst enemy would say I'm ruthless" — there's a pause after it. A self-awareness. Almost a laugh underneath. A cheeky grin. The interviewer reads it as honesty from someone who knows themselves. Confidence with a sense of humor. If you say it without the tongue-in-cheek then you just sound like someone might be a serial killer.

When someone without that calibration says it, it sounds like they're bragging about being an asshole. Or worse — warning you that they are one.

The words are not the move. The energy underneath them is the move.

And I can't teach you energy in a book.

Here's what you need to understand:

There is a very thin line between having an edge and being an asshole.

Edge gets you hired. Edge makes you memorable. Edge is the difference between "another one of these" and "I want that one."

Being an asshole doesn't get you the job. Obviously.

The line between the two is thinner than you think. And you can tip from one to the other with nothing more than a shift in tone. A slightly wrong inflection. A pause that's too long. A look that reads as smug instead of confident.

Here's the thing:

Assholes smell.

You know it. The interviewer knows it. Everyone in every room everywhere knows it. You can feel the difference between someone who's confident and someone who thinks they're better than you. It's visceral. It's instant. And once the interviewer smells it, nothing you say after that will fix it.

So don't be an asshole. Simple as that.

Before you deploy any of the moves in this book, run it through one test:

Would you say this to someone you genuinely respect and like?

Not someone you're trying to impress. Not someone you're trying to outsmart. Not someone whose approval you're performing for.

Someone you actually respect. A mentor. A friend who runs a business. A person you admire and want to have a real conversation with.

If yes — the tone will take care of itself. Because when you're talking to someone you respect, you're naturally warm, honest, and curious. The cheeky comes through as playful, not combative. The flip comes through as collaborative, not challenging. The real story comes through as trust, not oversharing.

If no — if it feels like a tactic you're deploying ON someone instead of WITH them — pull back. Drop the move. Give the simpler answer. Tell the story straight. Answer the question directly.

A straight, honest, real answer is always better than a badly delivered clever one.

Always.

I told you in chapter 4 that I was handing you a supercar. Most of you can't push it to the limits right now. That's fine. That's honest.

Here's the more honest version:

Some of these moves, I've been doing since I was 14 years old. I don't think about them. I don't rehearse them. They come out calibrated because I've had thousands of conversations — sales, recruiting, dating, negotiations, crisis calls — where I learned, through repetition, exactly how far to push and when to pull back.

You haven't had those thousands of conversations. You're going to try the flip and it's going to feel weird. You're going to try the binary and you're going to deliver it too hard. You're going to try the one-sentence-stop and the silence is going to terrify you and you're going to fill it with a STARologue about team synergy because your nervous system screamed "say something."

That's fine. That's the process.

But here's what I need you to hear:

Start soft. Not safe — soft.

There's a difference. Safe is the STARologue. Safe is "I'm a perfectionist." Safe is reading your resume for five minutes. That's what you were doing before this book and it wasn't working. Don't go back to safe.

Soft means: Use the moves, but dial them back. Instead of "my worst enemy would say I'm ruthless" — try "my worst enemy would say I push too hard." Same move, lower voltage.

Instead of flipping the 90-day question completely — try "I have some ideas, but I'd love to know what success looks like from your side first." Same principle, gentler delivery.

You can always turn the dial up. You can never unsay something that landed wrong.

Start at a 6. Not a 10. If the interviewer responds well — if they laugh, lean in, ask a follow-up — you're reading the room correctly. Turn it up to 7. Then 8. Feel your way into it.

If they stiffen up, go quiet, or give you a flat look — you overshot. Pull back. Ask a genuine question. Show some warmth. Reset.

The best salespeople in the world do this. They read the room and adjust in real time. It's not a script. It's a conversation. And conversations have dynamics that shift from moment to moment.

Every other career book on earth promises you that their method works. Follow the STAR method. Use these power words. Strike this pose. Do what I say and you'll get the job.

I'm telling you that my methods work AND that you can hurt yourself with them if you're not careful.

Why?

Because I'd rather you go into that interview with your eyes open than your guard down.

The techniques in this book are real. They come from 10,000 interviews. They come from watching what actually separates the people who get hired from the people who get forgotten. I didn't make them up. I observed them. Over a decade. Across thousands of candidates.

But the candidates who wielded them best — the ones who made the hiring manager say "that's the one" — they all had one thing in common:

They were warm.

Not polished. Not perfect. Not performing.

Warm.

They made the interviewer feel like a person, not a gatekeeper. They made the conversation feel like a conversation, not an audition. They were interesting without being intimidating. Confident without being arrogant. Cheeky without being a dickhead.

That's the line.

Walk it carefully. Start soft. Read the room. Adjust.

You're going to mess up. Not if. When.

So here's how to recover.

You're mid-answer and losing them. You can feel it. Their eyes glaze. They shift in their chair. You're three sentences too deep into a story that isn't landing.

Here's the move: Sum it up.

Right freakin' now.

Mid-sentence if you have to.

"Long story short — we solved it in two weeks and the client renewed."

Done. Get out of the hole. The worst thing you can do is keep digging because you feel like you need to finish what you started. You don't. A short answer that lands is always better than a long answer that loses them.

You gave a terrible answer.

You know it. They know it. The room knows it. The career roach would tell you to let it go and move on. Don't. Call it out.

"That was a terrible answer, my goodness. Let me try again."

Then go. Don't actually wait for permission. Don't sit there looking sheepish. Smoothly pivot into the better answer. What this does is show self-awareness, honesty, and the ability to course-correct in real time. All three of those are things the hiring manager wants in an employee. Your bad answer just became a demonstration of a good trait.

The interviewer doesn't like you.

Cold energy. Short responses. No follow-up questions. You can feel the interview dying.

Here's the play: "Can I ask YOU a question?"

That phrase interrupts the rhythm. It shifts the power dynamic. It wakes them up. Then go somewhere personal: "Why did YOU choose to work here?" or "What's the most interesting project you've worked on this year?" You just turned their checklist interview into a conversation about themselves. People love talking about themselves. And you might learn something that saves the rest of the interview. But be ready to explain why you're asking — "I like to understand the people I'd be working with, not just the company" works perfectly.

You have zero experience in something they asked about. Not "I can spin this." Genuinely zero.

"Have you managed a P&L?"

No. Never touched one. Don't lie. You will get cornered and it will be worse. Say: "No, I haven't. But I'm ready to learn." That's it. Short. Honest. Forward-looking. No elaborate story about how your lemonade stand taught you financial fundamentals. Just the truth and a signal that you're not afraid of the gap.

A joke or cheeky move landed wrong.

You can see it on their face. The slight recoil. The pause that's a beat too long. You overshot. Here's the reset: "Apologies — did that come off wrong?" Let them confirm. Then: "I try to push things a bit, because I'm sure you hear a lot of rehearsed answers and sometimes the best way to stand out is to be a bit bold. I'm very sorry if that landed wrong. Can we move past it?" What you just did is own it, explain the intent, and ask to continue. That's mature. That's self-aware. And honestly, the recovery itself might impress them more than the original move would have.

The interview is boring. Polite. Professional. But flat. No energy. No connection. You're being processed, not talked to. Two options. First: ask them a question. Same as the cold energy play above — break the rhythm, get them talking about themselves. Second: ask if you can share something specific. "Can I tell you something about my experience at Hitachi that I think is really relevant to what you just described?" Now you're launching into a real story instead of waiting for the next checklist question. You just took control of a boring interview and turned it into a conversation.

The common thread in all six of these:

Don't freeze. Don't pretend it's not happening. Address it. Directly. With warmth.

The candidate who freezes after a bad moment looks shaken. The candidate who calls it out and pivots looks human. And human is the whole game.

And for the love of God — don't be an asshole.

Assholes smell.

Chapter 8: The Close

"That's totally fine. After all, closing is not for everybody."

Every career blog on the internet teaches you to prepare 3-5 "thoughtful questions" for this moment. Company culture. Growth opportunities. What does a typical day look like.

And every hiring manager on the planet has heard those questions a thousand times and learned absolutely nothing from them. They're filler. Both sides know it. The candidate asks because they feel like they have to. The interviewer answers on autopilot because they've said the same words to the last 50 candidates.

Here's what nobody tells you:

"Do you have any questions for us?" is not Q&A time.

It's your closing argument. You need to shove your argument down the jury's throat.

(Not literally, please.)

Everything you've gathered over the interview — every thread you pulled, every piece of intelligence you extracted, every signal about what they actually need — this is where you use it.

If you've been doing what I taught you in this book, you've been running a mental simulation the entire interview.

From the small talk in chapter 1 — "how are your interviews going, any front runners, what would make the boss say yes" — you know the situation. The role's been open two months. Nobody's impressed them. The boss is breathing down their neck.

From the threading in chapter 6 — every answer they reacted to, every time they leaned forward, every follow-up they asked that wasn't on their checklist — you know what they care about.

And from their questions — the things they kept coming back to, the topics they spent the most time on, the concerns they voiced or hinted at — you know their pain.

Now you use it.

Not by asking "what does a typical day look like." By going straight at the thing that's been hurting them.

Here's the move.

You've been listening for 45 minutes. Somewhere in there, they told you what the real problem is. Maybe directly. Maybe between the lines. But they told you.

Let's say it was ownership. The last hire didn't take ownership. Waited to be told what to do. Needed hand-holding. And the hiring manager is terrified of making the same mistake twice.

When they say, "Do you have any questions?" — you don't ask about the PTO policy.

You say:

"Yeah — you mentioned earlier that ownership has been a challenge with previous hires. What does ownership specifically look like in this role? Like, what would I be expected to own end-to-end from day one?"

They'll answer. They'll lay it out. And now you have the blueprint.

Then you do something most candidates would never dream of:

You ask them to evaluate you.

"Based on this conversation — the stories I've told you, the experience I've walked you through, how I've handled your questions — do you believe I have the ownership traits you just described?"

They'll say yes. Because if you've been threading and telling real stories for 45 minutes, the answer IS yes. They've seen it. They've felt it. You just made them say it out loud.

And then the close:

"Is there any reason I wouldn't get an offer?"

Seven words. And the room changes.

Because now they have to either say "no, I can't think of one" — which in this case, excellent, you're at least not going to get ghosted — or they surface the ONE thing standing between you and the job.

And if they surface it? You address it. Right there. Right now. In person. While you still have their attention.

"Well, honestly, we were hoping for someone with more experience managing remote teams."

"Understood. I haven't managed remote teams in a corporate setting, but I've been working remotely for the last three years and I've coordinated with teams across multiple time zones on every project I've been on. Would it help if I walked you through how I handled that?"

You just handled the objection live. The candidate who asked about company culture and walked out with a smile? They never found out the objection existed. They went home thinking it went great. Two weeks later, they got the rejection email. They never knew why.

You know why. Because you asked.

At some point — either in this interview or the next one — someone is going to ask what you're looking for in terms of compensation.

Here's what the internet teaches:

"Never give a number first. Let them make the offer. You lose leverage the moment you say a number."

Here's the problem with that:

You don't have leverage to begin with.

As we've discussed, you are one of 1,000 people who applied to this job and you are one of the 10 interviewing. They can just post the job and do it all again. Most serious companies aren't going to haggle with you over 10 or 15 percent if you're the right fit.

It makes you look evasive. The interviewer asked a direct question. You're dancing around it. And in a conversation built on directness and honesty — which is what this whole book has been teaching you to have — suddenly dodging a question breaks the energy.

Here's what I'd say:

"I'm making X right now, and I'd like to make at least Y if I make a move."

That's it. One sentence.

"I'm making X" — that's the anchor. They now know the floor. They're not going to offer you less than what you currently make because that would be insulting.

"I'd like to make at least Y if I make a move" — that's the direction. It's aspirational, not demanding. And "if I make a move" is the subtle leverage. It implies you're not desperate to leave. You're only leaving if the number makes it worth it.

The "at least" is doing a lot of work here, because it leaves it open for some room to go higher. Maybe they're blown away by you and want to make sure you take the offer, so they add a few percentage points more. Or maybe they find a way to add another perk to entice you — maybe an extra few days of vacation starting or a few remote days a month.

You've set the anchor. You've established direction. You've implied leverage. And you left room for them to negotiate without feeling like they hit a wall.

If they come back with "that's above our range" — don't panic. Don't immediately drop your number. Don't say "well, I'm flexible."

Just ask: "What is the range?"

Now you have their number. And you can decide whether it works or doesn't. But you didn't negotiate against yourself by dropping first.

And if the range genuinely doesn't work? Be honest. "I appreciate you being upfront about that. That's below where I'd need to be to make a move. Is there flexibility, or is that firm?"

You'd be amazed at how quickly things can get flexible if it's the right person.

Direct. Respectful. Not desperate. You're having a conversation about money the same way you've been having a conversation about everything else — like two adults figuring out if this works for both sides.

The interview is over. You've closed. You've handled the salary. You've asked if there's any reason you wouldn't get an offer. The energy is good.

Most candidates stand up, shake hands, say "thank you for your time," and walk out.

And then they go home and wait. And wait. And check their email 30 times a day. And wonder. And stew. For days. Sometimes weeks.

Don't do that to yourself.

Before you stand up, ask one more question:

"When should I expect to hear from you regarding this role?"

Simple. Professional. And it does two things.

First, it gives you a timeline. If they say "by Friday," you know. If they say "probably two weeks," you know. You're not sitting in limbo wondering if silence means rejection or just bureaucracy. You have a date.

Second, it creates accountability. They just told you when they'd have an answer. If Friday comes and goes with nothing, your follow-up email isn't "just checking in." It's "you mentioned I'd hear back by Friday — any update for me?" That's a completely different energy. You're not chasing. You're holding them to their word.

The deadline is the last thread you plant. And it's the one that carries into whatever comes next.

Handshake. Firm. Warm. Eye contact.

"Thank you for your time. I really enjoyed this conversation."

Mean it. If you've been having a real conversation for 45 minutes — not performing, not reciting, not running through a checklist — then you should mean it. Because it should have actually been enjoyable. For both of you.

That's it. No grand exit. No final pitch. No "I just want to reiterate how excited I am." The close has already happened. The deadline is set. The last impression was the strongest card you played.

Walk out clean.

I've been offered every job I've ever interviewed for. I have never once sent a follow-up email.

Not because I'm too good for it. Because by the time I walked out, the decision was already made. The threading did the work. The close did the work. The conversation did the work.

If you do everything in this book correctly, there is no follow-up. There is no "just checking in." There is no morning-after text. There's the hiring manager turning to their partner over dinner and saying, "I think we found the one."

The follow-up is a career roach invention. It exists to make you feel like you still have control after the interview is over. You don't. The decision was made in the room. No email changes it. No "just wanted to reiterate my enthusiasm" changes it. You either won in the room or you didn't.

That said:

I will give you one piece of advice for following up. Call back one of the highlights. Reference a specific moment from the conversation — something you both laughed at, a problem they mentioned that you have an idea about, a thread that you started but didn't finish.

One line. Specific. Personal. Proves you were actually in the conversation and not running a checklist.

If you need more advice than that on following up, you're not getting the job.

Let me tell you what happens on the other side of the table after a candidate does what I just described.

The hiring manager closes their laptop. They sit for a second. They turn to whoever else was in the room — or they pick up their phone.

And they don't say "that was a solid candidate with relevant experience and strong answers."

They say:

"That one was different."

Or: "I really liked that person."

Or, if you nailed it: "That's the one."

That moment doesn't come after a good resume. It doesn't come after polished STARologues. It doesn't come after someone who asked about company culture and growth opportunities.

It comes after a conversation. A real one. Where the interviewer felt heard, felt alive, felt like they were talking to someone who understood their problem and could solve it.

You created that conversation. From the first 30 seconds of small talk to the last 7 words of the close. You threaded. You planted. You were real. You were warm. You were cheeky without being an asshole.

And you asked the question nobody else had the guts to ask:

"Is there any reason I wouldn't get an offer?"

Most candidates are too scared to ask because they're afraid of the answer.

But you're not most candidates anymore.

You read this book.

Chapter 9: The Prep

"We talkin' 'bout preparation? Yes, Al, we are."

— Kyle Mau

I'm going to let you in on a secret.

The best interviews you've ever been on — the ones where the conversation flowed, where you felt like you clicked, where the hiring manager seemed to actually like you — those interviews were probably engineered.

Not by you.

By someone behind the scenes who prepped both sides before you ever got on the call.

I know this because we do it every week. It's one of the most important things my agency does. And it's the thing that nobody — not the career roaches, not the LinkedIn experts, not the STAR method evangelists — ever talks about. Because they've never been in a position to see it.

Here's how it works.

Before one of my candidates gets on a call with a client, we do something very simple.

We pull up the client's website. We pull up the hiring manager's LinkedIn. I pull up any YouTube videos, podcast appearances, social media posts — anything where this person has talked publicly about themselves or their business.

And then we tell the candidate everything I know.

Not a dossier. Not a 10-page brief. Just the real stuff.

"This guy is intense. He talks fast. Get to the point."

"She just posted a video about scaling her team from 5 to 20. Watch it. If you can reference it naturally in the conversation, she's going to love you."

"The last person in this role didn't take ownership. That's the hot button. Everything you say should signal that you take initiative."

"The CEO is an engineer. He respects specifics. Don't give him vague answers."

That's the prep. Not "research the company" — that's what career roaches say. That's obvious.

This is: Understand the PERSON you're about to talk to. What do they care about? What annoys them? What's their communication style? What are they scared of based on their last bad hire?

And then one more thing. I tell the candidate to find one or two personal details about the interviewer that they could mention naturally. Not in a creepy way. In a "I saw your talk about X and it really resonated with me" way.

People are flattered when you've paid attention to them. Especially normal people who aren't famous. The founder of a 15-person company who posted a video that got 200 views — if you mention that video, they're going to light up. Because nobody watches those videos. And you just told them you did.

That's not manipulation. That's preparation. And it's the difference between walking into a room cold and walking in warm.

Here's the part nobody tells you about.

We also prep the other side.

Before a client interviews a candidate, we record a Loom walking through the candidate's resume and LinkedIn. We highlight the things that matter.

"This person worked at a software company similar to yours — they'll understand your tech stack."

"She's got e-commerce experience from a DTC brand. That's directly relevant to what you're building."

"His English isn't perfect but his portfolio is outstanding. Give him a minute to warm up."

"She's quiet at first but she opens up. Don't mistake that for lack of confidence."

It's not just presenting a resume. I'm framing how the client should see this person. I'm pre-answering objections before they form. I'm setting up the candidate to be received in the best possible light.

And I'm also managing expectations. "This candidate has 5 years, not 7. But look at what they accomplished in those 5 years." I'm anchoring the client on quality, not quantity. Before a word is spoken.

That's the engineering. Both sides go in knowing what to expect. Both sides go in with context. Both sides go in warm.

And the result is a conversation. Not an interrogation. Not a checklist. A real conversation between two people who already have a baseline of understanding about each other.

That's how good placements happen. Not by accident. By design.

When neither side is prepped, the interview defaults to the worst version of itself.

The candidate walks in cold. Knows nothing about the interviewer except their name and title. Gives generic answers because they have no idea what the hiring manager actually cares about. Asks "what does a typical day look like" because they can't think of anything specific.

The hiring manager opens the resume for the first time during the interview. Scans it in 6 seconds. Asks "tell me about yourself" because they haven't prepared a better question. Runs the checklist. Nods. Writes things down. Forgets the candidate by lunch.

Both sides phoned it in. Both sides got exactly what they deserved. Which is nothing.

I've watched this happen thousands of times. And the frustrating part is — the candidate might have been perfect for the role. The hiring manager might have been a great boss. But neither one did the work to create the conditions for a real conversation. So they defaulted to theater. And theater produces "another one of these."

You probably don't have a recruiter prepping you. Most people applying for jobs are going in cold. No insider briefing. No one whispers in your ear about what the hiring manager cares about.

So you have to do it yourself.

Here's the thing:

Almost everything we tell candidates before their interview, they could have found on their own.

The hiring manager's LinkedIn is public. Their posts are public. Their videos are public. The company's website is public. Their Glassdoor reviews are public. Their recent job postings — which tell you what they're building and what gaps they're trying to fill — are public.

All of it is sitting right there. Nobody looks.

Here's your prep checklist. Not the career roach version — "research the company's mission statement." The real version. Here's what to do.

Find the person, not the company.

Google the interviewer's name. Find their LinkedIn. Read their posts. Watch their videos if they have any. Find out what they care about. What they've built. What they've said publicly about the role, the company, or the industry.

You're not researching a company. You're researching a PERSON. Because the person is who you're going to be talking to. And if you can reference something specific they've said or done — naturally, not like a stalker — you're already ahead of every candidate who showed up knowing the company's founding year and nothing else.

Find the pain, not the perks.

Look at the job description. But don't read it like a checklist of requirements. Read it like a diagnosis. What problem is this company trying to solve by hiring for this role?

If they're hiring a marketing manager and the job description mentions "own the full funnel" — that means nobody is currently owning the full funnel. That's the pain. Walk in ready to talk about how you've owned full funnels before.

If they're hiring an operations manager and the description says "build processes from scratch" — that means there are no processes. That's chaos. Walk in ready to talk about how you've handled that before.

The job description isn't a wish list. It's a confession. It's the company telling you what's broken. Read it that way.

Find the thing.

This is the move that separates good prep from great prep.

Find one specific, personal, interesting detail about the interviewer or the company that you can reference in conversation. Not the company's revenue. Not their founding year. Something human.

The CEO posted a video about why they switched to remote work. The hiring manager wrote a LinkedIn post about a lesson they learned from a bad hire. The company blog has a case study about a project that went sideways.

Find it. Mention it. Not as a performance — "I noticed on your LinkedIn that you..." — but as a genuine connection point. "I actually read your post about the hiring mistake. That resonated with me because I went through something similar."

I'm going to be honest about something.

When we prep both sides well — when the candidate knows what the hiring manager cares about and the hiring manager knows what to look for in the candidate — the interview almost always goes well.

Not because it's magic. Because both people walk in warm. Both people have context. Both people have a starting point for a real conversation instead of cold theater.

The chemistry is engineered.

Not faking it. Engineering it. The same way a good host introduces two people at a party. "You two should talk — you both spent time in Japan and you're both into photography." Now those two people have a conversation starter that feels natural even though someone manufactured it.

That's what good prep does. It manufactures the conditions for a natural conversation.

When you prep yourself — when you find the person, find the pain, find the one thing — you're doing the same job. You're walking into a room where you know something about the other person that they don't know you know. And that knowledge gives you the starting point for a real conversation.

The hiring manager who posted about their bad hire? When you reference that, they're going to think, "This person gets it. They understand what I'm dealing with." They're not going to think, "This person Googled me." They're going to feel understood.

And feeling understood is the most disarming force in any human interaction.

I said that in chapter 1. It's still true. It'll always be true.

The prep is how you manufacture that feeling before you walk through the door.

Chapter 10: The Other Side of the Table

"Hello, it's me. I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet. To go over... your CV. Hello from the other side... I must've cried a thousand times... to tell you... your CV sucks and you're not getting the job. Sorry."

— Kyle Mau

I'm going to show you something no career book has ever shown you.

I'm going to let you inside my head during real interviews.

These are real candidates. Real questions. Real answers. And I'm going to tell you exactly what I was thinking at every moment.

Not what I wrote on the scorecard. Not what I told the recruiter afterwards. What I was actually thinking. In real time. While the candidate had no idea.

I asked a candidate what was stupid and useless at her last job. Simple question. Every company has something dumb — a process that wastes time, a rule that makes no sense, a meeting that should be an email.

She froze.

"That's a tricky one. Is there another question? I can come back to this one."

I gave her time. She still couldn't answer. Eventually, she gave me someone ELSE's complaint — her sales team thought follow-up emails were pointless.

That wasn't her answer. That was her employee's answer.

In that moment, I knew. An operations manager who has never identified waste — who has never looked at a process and thought "this is dumb and we should stop doing it" — that's not someone who improves things. That's someone who accepts things. I need builders. I need people who break what's broken. She couldn't break anything because she'd never tried.

And here's what she didn't realize: every other candidate that day answered this question in under 10 seconds. Because everyone who's ever worked anywhere has experienced something stupid. The question isn't hard. The inability to answer it is the red flag.

I asked every candidate for this role if they could read a profit and loss statement. Basic business literacy question. P&L. Do you know what it is?

Most candidates who couldn't read one said some version of: "I would need a little guidance, but I'm sure I'd adapt quickly."

That's a non-answer dressed up as optimism. It tells me nothing except that you're uncomfortable saying no.

One candidate said: "What is that?"

Three words. No hedging. No "I'm sure I could figure it out." Just: What is that?

I explained it. Revenue. Expenses. Profit. The standard financial report.

"Oh — like a business report. Revenue, expenses, profit. Yes, I've seen those."

She knew it. She just didn't know the acronym. And her honest "what is that?" got us to the real answer in five seconds, while every other candidate's optimistic hedge left me wondering if they actually knew anything or were just performing confidence.

She's the one I hired.

"No, but I'm ready to learn" is always better than "I'm sure I could adapt." Because one is honest and the other is a costume.

A candidate opened our interview by telling me she'd found my wife, my daughter, my dog, and my olive oil business online. Before I even asked a question.

When I asked how she found all that, she said, "Don't ask me. I'm the FBI. You can find anything online with the right motivation."

I laughed. She laughed. And in that moment, the interview was already different from every other one that day.

Because she'd done the thing nobody else did. She found the PERSON, not the company. She didn't read our mission statement. She didn't memorize our service offerings. She Googled ME. Found my social media. Found my side business. Found details about my family that she referenced naturally and warmly — not in a creepy way, in a "I actually care who I'm going to work for" way.

Twenty-something other candidates for this role researched the company. She researched the human. And by the time we were five minutes in, she knew more about me than any of them — because she'd looked at the parts that matter. Not the website. The person.

A candidate opened with this: "I bring a proven track record of excellence in supporting senior executives with discretion, precision, and strategic foresight. My role extends far beyond traditional administrative support. I act as a trusted partner, ensuring that executive priorities are seamlessly executed..."

It went on for about three minutes. Every sentence was polished. Every word was perfect. Every phrase sounded like it was copied from a LinkedIn profile generator.

I stopped her and asked: "Were you reading that?"

She laughed. "I'm going through a lot of interviews right now. I practice it a lot. I know everything about myself and I know how to explain it."

And then she added: "I know what executives want to hear."

In that moment, the STARologue became something else entirely. She KNEW it was a performance. She did it deliberately. And when caught, she didn't get defensive or embarrassed. She owned it instantly and even told me the strategy behind it.

That recovery told me more about her than the rehearsed script ever could. She's self-aware. She's strategic. She reads the room. And she can pivot in a heartbeat when the situation changes.

A bad candidate delivers a script and doesn't know it's a script. A great candidate delivers a script, knows it's a script, and can drop it the second you call it out.

When you name the extreme, the listener moderates it. When you name the moderate version, the listener assumes the extreme. If she'd said "a little too intense sometimes," I'd have thought, "She's probably way worse than she's letting on." But she said ruthless, and I thought, "Probably just competitive."

Same person. Same trait. The version she named determined how I received it. And she knew. Because after the silence, she pulled it into a sports analogy, and ruthless became driven, and driven became exactly what I wanted for the role.

I was describing the role to a candidate — what the job entails, what I need, what the challenges are. Standard stuff that I tell everyone.

She interrupted me.

"You all say that you want someone to push back. But in my experience, not really."

I stopped. Nobody had ever said that to me in an interview. Nobody. Not in 10,000 interviews.

She continued: "I don't have a problem pushing back. I'm super opinionated. But I've learned that when bosses say they want pushback, they mean they want it until they disagree with you. And then they want compliance."

She was challenging me. In the interview. About the very quality I said I wanted. She was testing whether I actually meant it by doing the thing right in front of me.

And she was right. Most bosses DO say they want pushback and don't mean it. She'd been burned before by believing them. So she called it out — directly, honestly, without apology — and watched my reaction.

That answer told me she would absolutely push back. Because she just did. Before I even hired her.

In the lightning round — the fun, casual, one-sentence-answer section at the end — one candidate did something I'd never seen before.

She asked ME lightning round questions back.

"On an airplane, which seat — aisle, window, or middle?"

"Do you pack early or right before you leave?"

"When faced with a full restaurant menu, do you stick to the classics or try something new?"

"Do you hit snooze or get up on the first alarm?"

I answered without thinking much about it. Aisle. Last second. Classics. Get up immediately.

It wasn't until later that I realized what she'd done.

She was building my user manual. During the interview. Every answer told her how to work with me. Aisle seat means I want freedom to move. Last-second packing means I procrastinate on certain tasks. Classics on the menu means don't surprise me with experimental approaches. No snooze means I'm disciplined and I expect responsiveness.

She turned a throwaway section of the interview into an intelligence-gathering operation. And she did it so smoothly that I didn't realize I was being interviewed until it was over.

She was prepping for the job while we were still deciding whether to offer it.

These moments aren't random. There's a pattern underneath every single one.

The candidates who stood out — the ones who triggered the "I want that one" — they all did the same thing in different ways:

They were honest instead of polished. "What is that?" instead of "I'm sure I'd adapt."

They were prepared in ways that mattered. They found the person, not the company. They came with ammunition, not just research.

They pushed back in real time. They challenged me during the interview instead of waiting until they were hired to show personality.

They recovered instantly when something went wrong. The rehearsed script got called out and became a demonstration of self-awareness in three seconds.

They said less and let the silence work. "Ruthless." Then nothing. And the silence did more than a paragraph of explanation ever could.

They turned every moment into intelligence. Even the throwaway questions became tools for understanding the person across the table.

And the candidates who disappeared from my memory by lunch?

They conformed. They performed. They gave the approved answers. They didn't question anything. They couldn't identify what was stupid at their own company. They said "yes, every day" to sunscreen in January in Latvia.

They followed the script.

The script is what kills you.

Everything in this book is designed to help you throw the script away. Not recklessly. Not without calibration. But deliberately, honestly, and with the confidence that comes from knowing what the person across the table is actually looking for.

Which is not a script.

It's a person.

Chapter 11: The Lightning Round

"Tell me your favorite pizza topping and I'll tell you if you're hired. Just kidding. But also not really."

— Kyle Mau

At the end of every interview, I do something that confuses candidates.

I stop asking about their experience. I stop asking about their skills. I stop asking about their five-year plan and their management style and their greatest weakness.

And I start asking about pizza.

"Is pineapple on pizza acceptable?"

"What did you want to be as a kid?"

"Ferrari or Lamborghini?"

"What's the craziest thing you've ever done?"

"Do you wear sunscreen?"

The candidates relax. They smile. They think the real interview is over and now we're just chatting. Getting to know each other. Fun stuff.

They have no idea that this is the most important part of the interview.

After 10,000 interviews, I can tell you that the first 30 minutes show me competence. The last 10 minutes show me character.

Competence is whether you can do the job. Can you manage a project? Can you read a spreadsheet? Can you push back on a client? Those are skills. They're important. And they're what every other interviewer spends the entire interview evaluating.

Character is who you are when you're not performing. What do you care about? How do you think? What makes you laugh? What risks have you taken? Are you interesting? Are you real?

Skills get you considered. Character gets you hired.

The lightning round is designed to see the person behind the performance. Because for 30 minutes, you've been on your best behavior. Structured answers. Professional tone. Sitting up straight. And I've been doing the same thing — asking structured questions, taking notes, evaluating.

But now I say "Ferrari or Lamborghini?" and the dynamic shifts. You're not being interviewed anymore. You're being talked to. And the person who shows up in that moment — relaxed, unguarded, real — that's the person I'm deciding on.

This question isn't about cars.

Most people say Ferrari. It's the safe answer. The default. The one everyone knows. Saying Ferrari is like saying "I'm a team player" — it's technically fine and tells me absolutely nothing.

One candidate said, "I don't really care — Lamborghini." Fast. Decisive. Didn't overthink it. Didn't try to figure out what I wanted to hear. Just picked and moved on. That's a person who makes decisions without agonizing.

Another said, "Nardo gray Ferrari." Not red. Not black. Nardo gray. A specific, unusual, opinionated choice. At 26 years old. That told me this person has taste and confidence in that taste that most people twice her age don't have.

Another said, "I'm a Mercedes girl." Rejected both options entirely. Gave me her own answer instead. That's someone who doesn't accept the framework she's given if it doesn't fit her.

The question takes three seconds to answer. But in those three seconds, I see how you make decisions, whether you have opinions, and whether you perform or just respond.

An astronaut. A neurosurgeon. A race car driver. A ballerina. A florist. A star.

Every answer is a window. And the follow-up is where it gets interesting.

"An astronaut." Okay. "Did you ever come close?" "No, it kind of faded as I got older." — That tells me about someone who had big dreams but is practical.

"A neurosurgeon. And I'm still sorry I didn't go that way." — That tells me about someone with lingering ambition and maybe some regret. Interesting.

"A race car driver." "What series?" "I don't know, I just wanted to get in a car and go." — That tells me about impulse, speed, and a personality that runs toward excitement.

"A florist. I wanted to own a flower shop." — That tells me about someone who values beauty, creation, and independence. A florist is a small business owner. She wanted to build something of her own since she was a child.

Nobody rehearses this answer. Nobody asks ChatGPT what they should have wanted to be as a kid. It's the most honest answer you'll give in the entire interview because there's nothing to optimize. It's just you.

The sunscreen question is my favorite.

This is my favorite question. And not for the reason you think.

Everybody is thrown by it. It comes after Ferrari or Lamborghini and ocean or mountains. They're in a rhythm of fun, light answers. And then: "Do you wear sunscreen?"

There's a pause. A recalibration. And then they answer.

"Yes, every day."

"Not really. When I go to the beach."

"I do now. I used to not."

"No."

Here's what I'm actually listening for:

If someone tells me they wear sunscreen every day, in January, while living in Latvia or Estonia or Poland — where there are approximately four hours of gray daylight and the UV index is literally zero — they're not answering from experience. They're answering from what they've been told is correct.

Some dermatologist on TikTok said "SPF every day, no exceptions." And this person absorbed it as a rule and follows it without questioning whether it makes sense for their actual situation. In January. In the Baltics. Where the sun doesn't exist.

That's conformity. That's a person who downloads rules from authority figures and runs them without evaluation.

And in my experience, that's the same person who uses the STAR method because Indeed told them to. The same person who says "I'm a perfectionist" because a career blog said that's a safe weakness. The same person who sends "just checking in" because a career coach said that's how you follow up.

They follow the script. Even when the script makes no sense.

Now — the person who says "not really" or "at the beach, sure, but not in January, obviously" — that's a person who assesses the actual situation. Who applies their own judgment. Who doesn't blindly follow consensus when the consensus doesn't match reality.

That's the person who also says, "Kyle, this is a stupid idea." That's the person who pushes back on unrealistic client requirements. That's the person who identifies what's dumb and kills it.

I'm not anti-sunscreen. I'm anti-blindly-following-rules-you-don't-understand. And I can find that out in four words.

And the craziest thing they've ever done:

This is where I find the real person.

"I moved from Hawaii to Amsterdam with \$2,000 in my bank account, a suitcase, and a dream."

"Every Saturday and Sunday I dress in very tight spandex and ride a bicycle." (Me)

"I cut my hair really short when my parents told me not to."

"I'm so boring. I'm sorry."

Each of these tells me something a resume never could.

The \$2,000 move tells me about risk tolerance. This person bet on themselves with no safety net. They'll bet on your company the same way.

The €60,000 car tells me about ambition and maybe some impulsiveness. But it also tells me about someone who was earning serious money at 24 and had the guts to enjoy it.

The spandex answer is humor plus vulnerability plus an opening for a deeper story about resilience and competitive drive. One sentence that becomes a five-minute conversation about breakups, physical transformation, and racing.

The haircut is small-scale rebellion. A person who tests boundaries in safe ways. That's someone who will push back — gently, but they'll push.

And "I'm so boring" — that broke my heart a little, honestly. Because she wasn't boring. She was just someone who had never given herself permission to be interesting. She lived inside a box and she knew it. She just hadn't figured out how to leave.

None of these answers are right or wrong. They're all real. And real is what I'm looking for. Because I've heard enough rehearsed answers for 10,000 lifetimes.

Here's what I've never told a candidate:

The lightning round is where I stop evaluating your skills and start evaluating you as a human.

Skills can be trained. I can teach someone to read a P&L. I can teach someone how to push back on a client. I can teach someone the language standards I want. I can build SOPs and processes and rubrics that turn a junior hire into a solid performer in 90 days.

But I can't teach someone to be interesting. I can't teach curiosity. I can't teach independent thinking. I can't train someone to have opinions, to take risks, to say what they actually believe instead of what they think I want to hear.

That's character. And character is what I'm hiring.

The person who answers "nardo gray Ferrari" has character. The person who says "I moved to Amsterdam with \$2,000" has character. The person who says "not really" to sunscreen in January has character. The person who asks ME lightning round questions because she's secretly building my user manual has character.

These are the people who become "that's the one."

Not because of their resume. Not because of their STAR answers. Not because of their five-year plan.

Because of who they are when they think the interview is over.

That's when it actually begins.

Now, I told you this not because you're going to get asked these questions. If you're not interviewing with me, you're not going to. But I told you this because I engineer these moments to get to know someone as a person. This is what people mean when they say "culture fit".

These are the moments that allow you to be seen.

You will not be given a nice lightning list question round to show your personality. It is your responsibility to inject it throughout. This book has given you the tools to do exactly this.

Chapter 12: Beyond the Interview

"Steal it like you're gonna drive it."

— Kyle Mau

I need to tell you something.

Everything I taught you in this book is not an interview technique.

I know that's how I framed it. I know every chapter is about interviews. Resumes, STARologues, threading, closing, the 90-day flip, the binary corner, "is there any reason I wouldn't get an offer."

But here's the truth:

I was doing all of this before I ever sat in an interview. Before I ever recruited anyone. Before I ever started a staffing agency. Before I ever heard the word STARologue — because I made it up.

I was doing this at 14 years old behind the counter of a computer shop.

I was doing this at Bose, reading a customer in 10 seconds and knowing which \$300 headphone to put in their hands.

I was doing this at Hitachi, defusing panicked bank executives at 2am by threading their crisis into a solvable problem.

I was doing this on dates.

I was doing this last Thursday with a traffic cop in Warsaw.

The interview is just the room where most people realize they need this skill. But the skill itself is bigger than any interview. It's how you talk to people. All people. In every situation. For the rest of your life.

Before I started my recruiting company, I ran a dating coaching business. Over a million unique readers per year. Over \$1M in lifetime revenue.

I know what you're thinking. Bear with me.

The entire business was built on one skill: Teaching people how to have real conversations. Not scripts. Not pickup lines. Not "what to say when she says X." How to listen. How to follow what someone just said into something deeper. How to not just wait for your turn to talk.

But here's the thing I didn't fully understand until years later:

I wasn't teaching a dating skill. I was teaching a human skill. The same skill that made me good at sales. The same skill that made clients at Hitachi trust me with their crises. The same skill that later made me good at recruiting.

I just happened to discover it in the context of dating because that's where most young men first realize they can't hold a conversation and they don't want to live their life as a monk.

On dates, I used to play what I called The Questions Game. It sounds dorky. It is dorky. And it worked every single time.

Here's how it went:

You trade questions. I ask one, you ask one. One skip each for the whole night. And I'd start simple.

"What's your dream car?"

"Is pineapple okay on pizza?"

"When did you first kiss a boy?"

And she'd answer. And I'd pull a thread on the interesting ones — "Do you still think about him?" — and then I'd bounce to something light again. Dream car. Pineapple. Then back to something personal.

The rhythm was the key. Light, personal, light, deeper, light, intimate. Never two heavy questions in a row. Never staying too long on one topic. Always bouncing. Always threading. Always making it feel like a game even when the questions were getting real.

The skill wasn't the questions. It was the threading. It was the ability to take someone's answer and follow it one level deeper, then pull back, then go deeper on a different thread. The same thing I taught you in Chapter 6.

I didn't learn this from a book. I didn't learn this from a course. I learned it from thousands of conversations with real people where I figured out — through trial and error and a lot of awkward silences — what makes someone open up.

And then I spent a decade watching 10,000 candidates try to do the same thing in interviews. And most of them couldn't. Not because they're bad people. Because nobody taught them that the skill even exists.

Now you know it exists. And you can use it in an interview.

But you can also use it everywhere else.

Let's say you've been at your job for a year. You've crushed it. You want more money. Your boss hasn't brought it up.

The career roach tells you to "research market rates, schedule a meeting, and present your case professionally."

Here's how I'd do it:

Start with contributions. Not feelings. Not "I feel like I deserve." Contributions. Specific ones.

"I led the campaign that brought in \$100,000 in revenue."

"I restructured the onboarding process and cut ramp-up time by two weeks."

"I took over the account that was about to churn and saved it."

Then do what I taught you in Chapter 8.

Ask them to confirm.

"Do you feel like these contributions helped the company?"

They'll say yes. They have to. The evidence is right there.

"Do you have a sense of how much that campaign made us?"

Now they're saying the number. Not you. They're anchoring themselves on the value you created.

And then:

"I'd like to talk about adjusting my compensation to reflect that."

If they push back, you have the ammunition already loaded. "You just said the campaign made \$100,000. I'm asking for \$10,000. That's a 10x return on the investment."

That's the flip. That's the binary. That's the close. All in a salary conversation that has nothing to do with a job interview.

Same moves. Different room.

A few months ago I was in Warsaw.

I parked somewhere, a cop told me to move within 5 minutes. Some diplomats having a last second meeting at the hotel I was staying at. Fine. I went to move my car. And as I was pulling out, a different cop pulled me over.

Now. Let's talk about traffic cops for a second.

Nobody — and I mean nobody on this planet — has ever said, "You know what, I really respect the work that traffic cops do."

Nobody has ever looked at a traffic cop directing cars in the rain and thought, "That's the career for me." Nobody has ever gone on a date and said, "I'm a traffic cop" and watched the other person's eyes light up.

Traffic cops are the hall monitors of adulthood. They peaked in middle school when they got to wear the orange vest. And now they stand on corners with the full authority of the state behind them and they are desperate to flex their power as much as possible.

So this traffic cop — this guy whose entire professional existence is defined by standing at intersections and pointing — decides that Thursday afternoon is when he's going to feel important. He's got a foreigner in a car. No witnesses. Maximum power trip opportunity. Christmas came early for this man.

Wanted to see my license. It wasn't the "right" driving permit — but I also hadn't been able to get the "right permit" for 3 years due to bureaucracy. So, legal to drive — technically. I had the full paper trail from a lawyer explaining this, an entire folder.

And Officer Traffic Cop wanted to make it a thing.

Here's what I wanted to say:

"Your own government is so useless and incompetent, why don't you go do something useful and fix that?"

That's the flip. That's the move. In any other context — an interview, a client call, a negotiation — I'd push.

But this is a man who has been waiting his entire career for this moment. A foreigner without papers. In his jurisdiction. On his corner. This is his Super Bowl. His World Cup Final. The one story he tells his wife at dinner tonight. "You should have seen the American. I got him."

So I did something I almost never do.

I played dumb.

Full dumb American. Confused face. Broken attempt at Polish. "Sorry, I don't understand, I'm American, I live here but my Polish is terrible, I'm so sorry about this." Maximum harmless tourist energy. Big dumb smile. Lots of hand gestures. The international language of "I am not worth your time."

He gave me a \$20 parking ticket. Conveniently, in Poland, you can pay that right on the spot with a credit card. Which I did. While maintaining the dumb smile. Twenty bucks to make this man's Thursday afternoon and get on with my life.

He's going to go write parking tickets on a Thursday afternoon and I was going to play golf.

Guess whose life is better?

Here's why I'm telling you this:

Every chapter in this book teaches you to push. Be bold. Flip questions. Corner with binaries. Take control of the conversation.

This story teaches you when to do none of that.

There are moments in life where the smartest move is to shut up, absorb whatever power trip is happening, and walk away with the win. The win in that moment wasn't proving I was right. The win was paying \$20 and driving home.

I could have argued. I could have flipped. I could have deployed the binary: "You can either look me up in the system or you can call your supervisor. Which would you prefer?" And I'd have been right. And I'd have been standing on a sidewalk in Warsaw arguing with a traffic cop for hours minutes instead of driving home to my family.

Some fights aren't worth winning. Some people aren't worth impressing. And some conversations are best won by losing on purpose.

The same instinct that tells you when to push in an interview tells you when to back off in life. It's the same calibration. The same social radar. The same read of the room.

After all...

He was a freakin' traffic cop.

There is one skill underneath everything in this book.

It's not threading. It's not flipping. It's not the binary corner or the 58-second resume or "is there any reason I wouldn't get an offer."

Those are moves. Specific applications of a deeper thing.

The deeper thing is this:

The ability to read a human being in real time and adjust your approach based on what they need in that moment.

The bank executive at 2am needs calm competence. You give them calm competence.

The hiring manager who's bored needs something unexpected. You give them the cycling story in spandex.

The date who's nervous needs lightness before depth. You give them pineapple on pizza before asking when they had their first kiss.

The traffic cop who needs to feel important needs you to let him feel important. So you let him.

The boss who's about to say no to your raise needs to hear himself say the number first. So you make him say the number.

Every interaction. Every person. Every room. The question is always the same:

What does this person need from me right now?

And then you give it to them. Not in a manipulative way. Not in a performing way. In a human way. The way you'd naturally adjust if you were talking to your best friend versus talking to your grandmother versus talking to a stranger at a bar.

You already do this. Everyone does, to some degree. The difference is that most people do it unconsciously and inconsistently. They're good with friends and terrible in interviews. Comfortable at dinner and frozen in a salary negotiation. Natural with strangers and stiff with their boss.

This book taught you to take the version of yourself that's best in your most comfortable setting and bring that person into the rooms where it matters most.

That's all this is.

You were always capable of having a real conversation. You just forgot how to do it in the rooms that scared you.

Now you remember.

And it doesn't stop when the interview ends.

Chapter 13: The Machine

"I think, therefore I am. Unfortunately, so does ChatGPT. And it thinks exactly like everyone else."

— Kyle Mau

I need to talk to you about AI.

Not because I'm scared of it. Not because I think it's going to replace you. Not because I'm one of those people who thinks robots are coming for all our jobs and we should all learn to code or die.

I need to talk to you about it because it's making you worse.

And you think it's making you better.

I watch my recruiters screen CVs every day. Hundreds of them. And something changed in 2023.

They all started sounding the same.

Not similar. The same. The exact same phrases. The exact same structure. The exact same hollow, polished, corporate nothingness.

"Results-driven professional with a proven track record of leveraging cross-functional collaboration to drive strategic initiatives and deliver measurable business outcomes."

You know what that sentence is?

It's shit.

I know because I've asked ChatGPT to write a resume summary and that's almost word for word what it produces. Every time. For every person. Regardless of industry, experience, or personality.

And now every resume that lands on my desk sounds like it was written by the same robot. Because it was.

The cover letters are worse. They used to be bad — generic, boring, full of "I'm passionate about your company's mission." Now they're bad AND identical. Because everyone is pasting the job description into ChatGPT and saying "write me a cover letter for this role." And ChatGPT is producing the same enthusiastic, professional, utterly forgettable letter for every single one of them.

The hiring manager's inbox is now a wall. A smooth, polished, perfectly grammatical wall of indistinguishable AI-generated sameness. And they're scrolling through it thinking one thing:

"Next. Next. Kill me. Next. Next. Next."

It's not just resumes.

Candidates are walking into interviews with AI-coached answers.

They asked ChatGPT, "How should I answer 'tell me about a time you handled conflict?'" And ChatGPT gave them a perfect STAR-formatted answer about cross-functional alignment and stakeholder management and finding a mutually beneficial compromise.

Which is the same answer it gave the last person who asked. And the person before that. And the 50,000 people who asked that same question this week.

So now the hiring manager is sitting through back-to-back interviews where every candidate sounds like the same corporate AI chatbot wearing a different face.

You know what this is?

It's the STARologue problem from Chapter 5, except now it's automated. The career roaches used to teach you to be boring manually. Now AI does it for you at scale. You don't even have to practice being forgettable anymore. A machine does the work.

Congratulations. You've outsourced the worst possible version of yourself to a robot.

Here's what ChatGPT cannot do:

It cannot tell the story about the time you were drunk at Hitachi and ran the service center alone for a while.

(True story.)

It cannot tell the story about escaping a war zone with your pregnant wife and prioritizing frostbite below your child's safety.

It cannot say "my worst enemy would say I'm ruthless" and then pause with a slight smile while the interviewer processes it.

It cannot say "what does the strongest candidate have that I don't?" in seven words and change the energy of the room.

It cannot thread. It cannot flip. It cannot read the room and calibrate whether to push or pull back. It cannot decide in real time that this interviewer needs humor before depth, or that this hiring manager is exhausted and needs a short answer, or that this question is a trap and the right move is "I'd prefer not to answer that."

It cannot be cheeky without being an asshole.

It cannot be you.

And that's the point. The entire point. Of this entire book.

Everything I've taught you — the threading, the real stories, the 58-second resume, the moves, the calibration, the warmth — all of it is designed to make you sound like a human being having a real conversation with another human being.

AI is designed to make you sound like everyone else.

The career roaches have now been replaced by a robot that does their job faster, cheaper, and with the exact same quality of output — which is to say, zero.

Here's what's actually happening in the job market right now:

95% of candidates are using AI to write their resumes, cover letters, and interview prep. They all sound the same. They all get the same results. Which is: ignored, rejected, or forgotten.

5% are doing something different.

They're writing their own stories. In their own voice. With real details that no AI could generate because no AI lived their life. They're walking into interviews and being human — messy, honest, specific, funny, real. They're saying things that make the hiring manager stop scrolling. Stop processing. Start listening.

(This doesn't mean they don't format their resume perfectly with perfect grammar, *let's be really clear!*)

Those 5% are getting the calls. Getting the offers. Becoming "that's the one."

And the gap between the 5% and the 95% is getting wider every day. Because as more people use AI to sound polished, "polished" becomes the new baseline. The new normal. The new invisible. And the people who sound like actual humans stand out more than ever.

The STAR method used to be the thing that made you forgettable. Now AI-generated STAR answers are the thing that makes you invisible. There's a difference. Forgettable means they kind of remember you but chose someone else. Invisible means they never registered you existed.

You want to be in the 5%.

The way into the 5% is not a better prompt. It's not a more sophisticated AI tool. It's not "use Claude instead of ChatGPT" or "try this new resume optimizer."

The way into the 5% is to be the person in the room who sounds like a person.

AI can't help you there.

Only you can.

Chapter 14: "Career Roaches"

"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen."

— Brené Brown

Alright. I know what you've been doing.

You've been Googling every quote in the book trying to catch me. And yes, I stole lyrics from Jay-Z and Adele, proverbs from the Bible, quotes from Abe Lincoln, Kobe Bryant, James Bond, and Spiderman, and even a marketing tagline from the Marines.

I stole them all. Changed a few words. Put my name on them. And you loved it.

But this one I'm not going to joke about.

Brené Brown said this. And she was right. And for the first time I'm not being cheeky, but because I believe it. Because I've seen it. 10,000 times.

Every chapter in this book has been about one thing: The courage to show up as yourself. In a room full of people performing. In an industry that taught you to hide behind frameworks and rehearsed answers and polished nothingness. Against advice from people who've never sat in the chair that decides.

Showing up — real, honest, messy, cheeky, direct, human — and letting yourself be seen.

That's what gets you hired. That's what makes the hiring manager say "that's the one." That's what separates you from every other candidate who walked in rehearsed and walked out forgotten.

The career roaches taught you to hide.

I'm teaching you to show up.

Now...let me tell you about the career coaching industry.

I've been polite about this long enough. I've dropped hints. I've made jokes. I've called them roaches and you laughed and we moved on.

But now we're at the end of the book. And I need you to understand what was done to you. What's been done to millions of people. And why I wrote 10,000 Interviews.

Here is the career advice you've been given your entire adult life:

Tailor your resume to the job description. Research the company before the interview. Use the STAR method. Send a thank you note. Believe in yourself. Network. Follow up. Be confident but not arrogant. Prepare 3-5 thoughtful questions. Dress professionally.

You've heard all of this. You've done all of this. You've paid for courses that teach all of this. You've hired coaches who charge \$200 an hour to repeat all of this to you with a warm smile and sweet nothings.

And none of it worked.

Not because the advice is wrong, exactly. Most of it is fine. The same way "eat less and exercise more" is fine advice for losing weight. It's technically accurate. It's not useful. It doesn't tell you anything you don't already know. And it doesn't address the actual reason you're not getting results.

The actual reason is that the people giving you this advice have no idea what happens on the other side of the table.

None.

Zero.

They have never sat in the chair that decides.

They've been on one side of the table their entire career. The same side as you. The candidate side. The side that wonders and guesses and hopes.

And then they got laid off. Or they couldn't find their next role. Or they decided that coaching sounded better than job hunting.

And they hung a shingle. "Career Coach." And they started charging money for guesses.

They've never hired a person in their life. Why would you listen to their advice?

Let me paint the picture.

Go on LinkedIn right now. Search "career coach." Look at what comes back.

A wall of headshots with practiced smiles. Every single one has a variation of the same headline: "Helping Professionals Land Their Dream Job" or "Career Strategist | Interview Expert | Resume Writer | Your Biggest Cheerleader 🙌."

Click on any of them. Read their About section. Count how many times they mention their own struggle.

"After being laid off in 2019, I discovered my passion for helping others navigate their career journey."

They got fired. Couldn't find a job. And their response was to charge other people money to teach them how to find a job. Despite having just demonstrated that they themselves could not find a job.

That's a fat personal trainer selling you a workout plan.

A broke financial advisor managing your portfolio.

A divorced marriage counselor saving your relationship.

Now look at their credentials. Not the ones they claim. The ones you can verify.

How many people have they hired? Not coached. Not "helped." HIRED. With their own money on the line. With their own reputation at stake. With a real business depending on whether the person they selected could actually do the job.

The answer, for almost every career coach on the internet, is zero.

They have never hired anyone.

They have never sat in a debrief after an interview and heard a hiring manager explain exactly why they said no. They have never seen the pattern across a thousand placements. They have never watched, in real time, what makes someone get the offer versus what makes someone get forgotten.

They're guessing with your money, and your livelihood.

Here's the part that should make you angry.

They didn't just waste your money. They wasted your time. And time is the one thing you can't get back.

Every hour you spent rehearsing a STAR answer in front of a mirror was an hour you could have spent developing a real story.

Every dollar you spent on a resume review from someone who's never screened a resume was a dollar you could have invested in yourself.

Every interview you walked into armed with "tailored" answers from a career coach was an interview where you sounded exactly like every other coached candidate — polished, forgettable, and invisible.

Every rejection you received and blamed on the market, the economy, the algorithm, or bad luck — some of those rejections were caused by the advice you were following. Advice that was designed to make you safe. And safe is invisible.

The STAR method didn't help you. It hurt you. It turned your most interesting stories into formatted entries in a database that no hiring manager would ever remember.

"Research the company" didn't help you. It gave you surface-level knowledge that every other candidate also had, and none of it told you what the hiring manager actually cares about.

"Believe in yourself" didn't help you. And no one has ever been hired because they believed in themselves really, really hard.

The career coaches sold you a system that was optimized for one thing: Making you feel like you were doing something productive. Not making you actually get hired. Making you FEEL like you were on the right track.

That's the lie. The coaches don't sell results. They sell comfort. The comfort of feeling prepared. The comfort of having a plan. The comfort of paying someone who sounds confident to tell you things that sound right.

And when it doesn't work, they don't refund you. They tell you to keep going. More practice. More tailoring. More networking events. More \$200 sessions.

The roaches never run out of advice.

You just read a book written by someone who's been on the other side of the table for 10,000 interviews.

Not theory. Not guesses. Not "I think this is how it works."

You read what actually happens. From the person who watched it happen. For a decade.

And now you know:

The first 30 seconds matter more than the next hour. You knew that after Chapter 1.

Your resume has 6 seconds. Your photo matters. Your headline matters more than your summary. You knew that after Chapter 2.

Speed is a character trait. Responding in 5 minutes puts you in a different category than responding in 5 days. You knew that after Chapter 3.

The interviewer is probably not good at their job. 90% are running a Google checklist. Your job is to carry the conversation, not wait for them to lead it. You knew that after Chapter 4.

Nobody ever got hired because of a perfectly structured STAR answer. Stories — real, honest, specific stories — are what make people remember you. You knew that after Chapter 5.

You don't ask threads. You plant them. Short, specific, real, with something dangling that the interviewer can't resist pulling. You knew that after Chapter 6.

Every move in this book can backfire if you deliver it wrong. Start at a 6, not a 10. Assholes smell. You knew that after Chapter 7.

The interview isn't over when the questions stop. "Is there any reason I wouldn't get an offer?" is the most powerful question a candidate can ask. You knew that after Chapter 8.

The best interviews are engineered. Find the person, find the pain, find the one thing. You knew that after Chapter 9.

These aren't interview techniques. They're life techniques. The interview is just the room where you realized you needed them. You knew that after Chapter 10.

AI is making everyone sound identical. The way to win is to sound like a human. You knew that after Chapter 11.

And the career roaches — the industry that was supposed to help you — was the thing holding you back. You know that now.

This book is the beginning.

Not the middle. Not the end. The beginning.

I wrote it because someone had to say what nobody in the career advice industry has the credentials or the courage to say. And I wrote it because I've watched too many good candidates — talented, smart, capable people — get filtered out by a system that rewards performance over substance and coaching over instinct.

But a book can only do so much.

A book can teach you the moves. It can show you the patterns. It can give you the stories and the frameworks and the philosophy. It can make you angry at the right things and fired up about the right things.

What it can't do is watch you practice. It can't hear your tone. It can't tell you that your delivery of the binary question was too aggressive or that your 58-second resume was actually 3 minutes and you lost them at minute two. It can't tell you that the real story you told was perfect but you talked for 30 seconds too long after the landing.

That's what comes next.

I started this book with you sitting in a chair, across from a hiring manager, about to blow your interview with a 5-minute monologue about Michigan State.

You've already lost. You just don't know it.

That was Chapter 1. That was the version of you that walked in unprepared, coached by roaches, armed with STARologues, sounding like every other candidate on earth.

That person is gone now.

The person closing this book knows things that person didn't. Knows how the other side thinks. Knows what makes them lean forward and what makes them check their phone. Knows that threading is the skill, courage is the prerequisite, and the real story is always better than the safe one.

The person closing this book has 20 moves that no career roach has ever taught. Has a 58-second resume. Has a close that most candidates would never dream of attempting. Has the calibration to know when to push and when to pay the traffic cop \$20 and drive home.

The person closing this book is dangerous. In the best possible way.

So go be dangerous.

Go walk into that room. Thread. Flip. Plant. Close. Be warm. Be cheeky. Be real. Be "that's the one."

And for the love of God — don't be an asshole.

They. All. Smell.

Now go get hired, my little job seekers.

I'll be on the other side of the table.

Waiting to hear from you.

