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Neil: Hello everyone and welcome to this webinar on *The 2-Hour Job Search at 20: What's Changed and What's Next* with Steve Dalton. Welcome Steve.

Steve: Great to be here. Thank you all for joining.

Neil: You can see Steve. That's me. I'm managing director of Sensible Media. Also on the call, Luke Jackson and Suze Cooper. Suze is going to be dealing with your questions. Say hello, Suze.

Suze: Hi there. I'll be reading through those questions. So, put them into the Q&A box and you'll hear me drop into the conversation to put some of them to Steve as we go along.

Neil: And just one more thing on that, when we get to the end, if you want to ask questions live, you just stick your hand up with the react button, and we'll try and get you on live.

So, let's quickly talk about some survey data and then we can talk about the new edition. I'm going to show three slides and then ask Steve about his reaction. We asked, "How familiar are you with *The 2-Hour Job Search*?" 75% of you are familiar, 25% not. Then we asked, "Which audience do you work with most often?" Top two answers, MBA students and undergraduate students. And now this was interesting. We asked, "Thinking of the people you advise, has AI made their job search easier or more difficult?" What do you say, Steve?

Steve: I'd hate to be wishy-washy. You know that. But I would go neither easier nor more difficult. I think it's definitely made it more bewildering. There are more things a job seeker could do, but none of them seem to work is the problem. So to me, I've long advocated for networking as the best return per hour of effort invested. AI has not significantly impacted that equation. It's just made networking better in comparison to applying online. So I'd go right in the middle. Neither easier nor difficult.

Neil: Well, let's see what our survey said. According to you in the audience, AI has made the job search somewhat easier. That's the big answer. And yeah, I was intrigued by that.

Steve: It definitely makes prepping CVs and cover letters easier, but that still doesn't seem to move the needle, but I get, and it makes research before informationals, as we'll discuss, easier. So really interesting, a great range of responses. So thank you all for sharing that.

Neil: Okay. Right. You're here to hear about *The 2-Hour Job Search*. Maybe we'll do a tiny bit of history. So I forced Steve to say it was 20 years. It kind of has been 20 years because there was an original method, Steve, before you wrote the book. There was a kind of prototype when you were with Duke.

Steve: Absolutely. It was called The Prepared Method. The first step was to create a list of 100 companies - way too many. Students hated it. There were eight steps to do what's now four, now in the LAMP list. But yes, the earliest documented recording of me having the insight that this should be done through instructions rather than tips dates back to 2006.

I was surprised myself, because I thought in retrospect that it was really inspired by the '08 financial crisis. But even before that crisis hit, I was working primarily with NUS students, international students at the time, and I still saw that they benefited more from specific instructions rather than tips or a consultative approach in addition to a coaching one. But that dates back to 2006.

Neil: All right. Now, I believe you said to me, Steve, the book's bestselling year was 2024.

Steve: Yes.

Neil: It's kind of weird that a book which is 12 years old in 2024 is still achieving its best sales. Why is that do you think?

Steve: Yeah. Why? I've obviously been doing this a while, but I thought when I came out with *The 2-Hour Job Search*, it would kick off a VHS versus Beta format war where someone else would come out with a different set of instructions and we would compete to have the best set of instructions and steel would sharpen steel, but that never really happened.

So, I think to me the three things that really keep *The 2-Hour Job Search* as a unique and differentiated product in the market is that first and foremost, it provides recipes rather than tips. So, it doesn't say sell yourself. It gives you exact instructions. It's like a recipe for baking a cake. If you give people tips for baking a cake, there are so many ways they can go wrong. But if you give them a recipe for baking a cake and they follow it, they will get a cake. And that's important to me as a former chemical engineer turned strategy consultant. I like precision and replicability. The advice to "sell yourself and put yourself out there" was counterproductive to me in my chemical engineering days. And many of my classmates would not have done well with following that advice either because it's not accountable. People would interpret it in different ways. So recipes not tips.

The second one acknowledges that job seekers have finite energy and time and the job search is a full-time job. That maxim, for example, does not do that. How else would people with full-time jobs find new jobs? So it's all about maximizing that return on finite energy. There are tradeoffs. It's not that this is the right thing or not that that thing I'm telling you not to do isn't great. It's just not as good as doing a different activity for that same amount of time.

And the final element is that it centers job seekers as selectors rather than supplicants. So job seekers are in control in *The 2-Hour Job Search*. They can control how fast or slow

they go, how much time they devote to doing it. Although it's meant to be a finite process, they are not victims of *The 2-Hour Job Search*. They are proactively targeting organisations they find most appealing, which fundamentally turns what they're feeling right now on its head where they are constantly submitting applications into a void where they probably will never hear back and even less frequently will hear good news that will debilitate them over time. I want them to become stronger over time and for their odds to improve. *The 2-Hour Job Search* is the only process I know that ensures people's odds of success improve over time.

Neil: All right. Now this is, I think, a new element of your thinking about who it's for and I suppose who it's not for. Do you want to say something about that? And then I want to ask a question about Belgium.

Steve: Yes, it is. Perhaps the most frustrating thing for me to hear is that *The 2-Hour Job Search* is great for early career job seekers. It's not really great for experienced professionals because I want to ask those people who say that, why is this not great for experienced professionals? And they would say, "Well, the way you would reach out to someone is different when you have great experience." And for those of you who are familiar with the book, I know 25% of you are not, but a big tenet of the middle portion of the book is the effectiveness of social norms versus market norms. Basically, how much more effective it is to ask for a favour than it is to try to prove yourself to someone.

When you're asking a stranger off the street to help you move a couch, you're just as likely to get their help if you offer them \$0 as if you offer them \$50, but if you offer them \$5, you're far less likely to get their help. And that's shifting from social norms to market norms. So that said, it's not a coach's fault. That was on me for not really making this case clear and for all the examples in the book being more towards mid-career and early career professionals.

But after 15 years, I finally figured out who this book is for and who it is not for because marketing demands that you purposely exclude people. For a target market to be valid, it's got to exclude. It can't be for everybody because then it's for nobody. And I realise that it's a psychographic market, not a demographic market. It is for people who are or who can become vulnerable and humble. That's way easier for an early career professional than an experienced professional, though. The longer you have that teacher hat on, the harder it is to take it off and put the learner hat back on. But a fundamental disconnect is that people think if they don't talk about their experience when they have all this great experience.

When they're reaching out to a stranger, they think they're implying that they lack experience or knowledge. And that's not the signal you send at all. You just are sending the signal you have the confidence to not lead with your qualifications. Instead, you have the confidence to be genuinely curious and interested in the experience of another. Your experience will come up, but you just don't have to lead with it. That's not what makes a stranger want to engage with you.

Neil: All right, Steve. Now, this is a question that came up in the pre-event survey. In the US context, this kind of cold outreach is culturally normalized. In markets like Belgium and the Netherlands, there's more reserve around unsolicited contact. They say, "How do you adapt the method for more formal professional cultures?" What would you say?

Steve: I would say that I hear a variation of this not just for cultures but also job functions. It's a very common sentiment. "This won't work for my position" and it's never asking for other people's cultures or professions. It's always for the individual involved. So what I would say, a couple of quick points, we are dealing with least bad alternatives. So it's not that there's a great alternative. It's that this is your best option among unappealing options. This will improve your odds over time. So even as you said in the question, this would be less effective in Belgium, for example, than in the US perhaps, but it's still going to be more effective than the alternative of using that same amount of time towards your other two options of job searching, which are applying and attracting, which is that brand building on LinkedIn that people say to do, but never tell you exactly how to do.

So I would say least bad alternatives. This per hour invested is still your best bet. The other thing I would say is the reason I hear it for so many different professions and cultures is because your brain is fighting you when you're doing this process. This process exposes you to things your brain doesn't like, namely rejection, vulnerability, pain, embarrassment. It's just our tendency, our brain will create elaborate infrastructure to help us avoid situations we don't want to be in, and a lot of people don't want to be in a situation where they're asking strangers for the gifts of their time and knowledge. So, thank your brain for its time. It's trying to keep you safe. So thank it for its service, but I would say don't commit to this. Don't treat it as a commitment. Treat it as a test. Try this process.

I'm amazed at the number of people who say this will not work without even trying it. So if you've tried it and you're not seeing a 20% response rate as I teach and you're following the recipe as designed, then we can draw some conclusions perhaps, especially if multiple people are saying that. That will be corrected on my website and in future versions of this book. But if people say that without trying it, the people without built-in networks being born to the right family or having gone to the right schools, they need an alternative. This is the best alternative.

Neil: All right. So we're going to talk about what's new but much hasn't changed. 25% of the audience are new to the whole idea. Can you explain the method in two minutes?

Steve: Yes. So, the method is built to systemise the key bottleneck for the job search. What I call the squishy middle, which is getting the first interview. There's lots of intellectual capital on the front end about preparing CVs and cover letters and on the back end about interviewing well. I have my own takes on those things, too, but where my job seekers consistently failed or felt most frustrated was getting a first interview with a human being. All of the data that I found supported that networking was simply the only reliable way to predictably get a first interview.

So how do you turn that tip-oriented knowledge base into something more systematic and instructions-based? To me, I broke that beast into its three component parts. First is prioritisation. Before we spend dozens of hours reaching out to strangers, let's spend one hour figuring out who we should even reach out to. That's the prioritise step, which is built around a technique called the LAMP list. So a systematic 80/20 approximate way to order the universe of all possible employers.

The second piece is once we know our top targets, who do we reach out to at those targets and how do we reach out to them to maximise the odds of getting a response from an actual helpful person instead of just someone who's trying to check a box for their employer. And then finally, once we get someone's attention who's sympathetic or potentially sympathetic, what do we say to them in an informational meeting that maximises our odds of turning a total stranger into an advocate or a mentor or a champion within their organisation. So I set instructions to each one of those three steps and those became *The 2-Hour Job Search*.

Neil: So many people will have heard of this, will understand it. Let's look at what's new because as we saw in the survey, things have happened, the world has moved on, technology's moved on. So maybe you could talk us through these.

Steve: Yes, I would say these are the highlights. I think AI is on everybody's mind. Just bad luck, the last edition of *The 2-Hour Job Search* came out in March 2020. Not like anything happened in the world right about then! But it was based on a process that was built for the 2008 financial crisis. So the 2012 edition, the first edition was built for bad economies. So the 2020 edition is essentially going back to the future. But how has AI impacted *The 2-Hour Job Search*? How has the era of permanent layoffs impacted *The 2-Hour Job Search*?

I think in a few key ways, a lot having to do with AI. AI has actually made this process easier in my opinion. It makes the LAMP list much faster. It used to take 40 minutes to make a list of employers and now you can do it much more accurately and in a customised fashion to your preferences as a job seeker using AI. So, feed it a bright spot and give it feedback on its other suggestions. Give me 10 companies like X and then give it feedback.

The middle portion, outreach emails. I often use the analogy of baking versus cooking. Baking is a science and cooking is approximate. You can add salt and pepper at the end and save a dish. Outreach has become much more like baking than cooking. There is no room for freedom here. There are four blanks that I recommend changing and nothing else because of the proliferation of spam on the internet. We get so many unsolicited inquiries on LinkedIn and in our email that we need to change it.

And the final point, outreach, the informational meetings in the convince step. AI has made prepping for those meetings, for sounding smart in those meetings or sounding informed in

those meetings much much easier. But it is a lot more about systematic follow-up over time. And this new edition has really clarified how to do that easily and most productively.

Neil: All right, so we're going to go through these. Thank you very much Steve, that was a very good top level summary. The famous LAMP list. Can you talk to us about this middle point, maybe about the way AI is speeding this up?

Steve: Yeah, I teased this a little bit earlier. Basically, just to recap, feed it. A lot of people already know the companies they want to see at the top of their LAMP list, the companies they most are hungry to network with. My position is to feed that. Just use AI. Lean into that. That's where your motivation is. Ask AI for 10 companies just like that. And it may give you companies all over Europe, for example, and you know you want to live near London. Okay, great. Thank you for those companies. Now, give me 10 autonomous vehicle companies that are based within an hour's commute of London. Great. And it'll give you a different set.

Okay. Well, those are mostly on the IT side. I want to work with the hardware. I want to work with actual vehicle parts. And it will give you 10 more. So, starting a conversation about a company that you idealise, being specific about why you like that company. A common constraint I see job seekers run into is they have a list that has Meta and Amazon and Apple, giant companies that are big brand names but have very little in common beyond being mega corporations. That's going to be a hard column to brainstorm. So my recommendation if you're working with job seekers is to allow them no more than one of the magnificent seven companies.

But then really force them to try to pick three sectors that they enjoy learning about. They're not committed to those but that focus will help them have meaningful conversations where they get smarter over time. They can apply to companies outside of that top six, those three sectors after they do their 15 minutes of work on *The 2-Hour Job Search* each day because it's not a big time commitment. But getting people to really focus on topics they enjoy learning about and get smarter at over time because they care. That's really a recipe for success. AI will help you find company options that aren't top of mind already.

Suze: Steve, can you just break down that LAMP acronym for us?

Steve: Certainly. So LAMP, the name comes from the four columns that I boiled the prepared model down to. So L is your consideration set. It's a list of possible employers. You want it to be a LAMP list and you need to have at least 40 employers. The insight really comes from getting from 30 to 40. The first 20 or 30 are easier. But really what are you willing to concede on brand name, location, company size. What are you willing to concede on in terms of ideals to get to 40? That itself is very instructive but it flips the equation, you see that you're not the commodity, the company's the commodity. Which ones you're choosing to approach first is really the big question.

And then A, M and P are just three pieces of data which are easy to find and predictive of success. So the presence of Alumni or Affinity group members, that's your first column, is this company familiar with people like you?

Motivation, your hunger to reach out to people even when the response rate on a perfectly done email is about 20%. It's easier to keep following up with your dream companies than your backups. So, that's where we capture that.

Postings is a proxy for urgency. Are they looking for people like you right now as far as what you can see on an online job search engine like Indeed or LinkedIn jobs? So it captures urgency. Might as well target the urgent ones before the less urgent ones.

Neil: The posting is are they hiring? Does it look like they're actively hiring?

Steve: Essentially, and if they are announcing they're hiring, even if it's a ghost job that they have no intention of filling. You know they're hearing from your competition, people like you, if it's a good-looking posting. So, it's a more time-sensitive target to get advocacy at just in case it's not a ghost job.

Suze: And Sue is saying in the question box, finding it difficult to get beyond 10 on a LAMP list, let alone 40. Have you got any advice there?

Steve: That is absolutely where AI shines most in this process. Feed it one or two of those 10 and ask for 10 more just like it. And then how it interprets what's just like it will be in the eye of whatever AI you're using. So correct it. Say actually of those 10, these three are most interesting to me and here's why and those other seven, here's why I don't like those as much, and ask it for 10 more and have this iterative conversation.

But a lot of people don't know what they're targeting or they go the other direction. They say they're open to anything because that in their minds optimises their odds. But networking doesn't work like that. It optimises the number of postings you can apply to. But according to an Ashby study from last year, the likelihood of getting an offer from a single online application is 0.2%. One out of 500. And if you're spending 90 minutes to find that posting, customise your CV, write the essays, and apply, three hours a night of an activity with 0.2% odds of success, it would take you 13 months just to have an 80% chance of having an offer through applying alone.

So, feed it the ones you're most interested in. Of those 10, ask for 10 more like it. Give it feedback and you'll get to 40. You have to err on the side of including companies that you've never heard of before. That's the one trade-off that *The 2-Hour Job Search* essentially demands. So, brand name will have to be something that people can't be quite as focused on, otherwise you get the magnificent seven list, which is a bad list to create.

Neil: Okay. Keep the questions coming, but I want to talk about the six point email. Is there anything you want to say about this before we show people the new version?

Steve: For those of you who are not familiar with *The 2-Hour Job Search* process. This is built around targeting one of three types of people. There are people who will never respond to this email no matter what. I call them curmudgeons. There are people who will respond to outreach emails to the network, but only out of a sense of obligation, but they're just looking to save face before they ghost you. I call them obligates. They're dangerous. They will have lots of feelings about why this email is not effective. They are not our target audience because they don't want to be there in the first place.

This is a message optimised for what I call boosters, people who want to help you because it's a good deed and it feels good to help others. They're only about 20% of the population, but they give 80% of the assistance that you're going to get. So, this is meant to be something that a job seeker can send with minimal effort, but maximum appeal and maximum appeal from their target audience of boosters.

Neil: And the obviously missing thing here is that it doesn't say anything about the person who's writing the email.

Steve: Nope. It's not about you. It's actually about the reader and their knowledge and their experience. And that's why this email is so challenging for experienced professionals to write and why experienced professionals want to believe that this does not apply to them when in reality the ability to demonstrate humility and vulnerability is exactly why this works. That's the best way to overcome any ageist stereotype that you'll encounter in the workplace that experienced professionals don't learn as well as junior professionals. They don't adapt to technology as well. What better way to prove that's not true than by leading with humility and vulnerability.

Neil: You see, we know everything already, Steve.

Steve: I know I suffer from this too. The gray gives me away.

Neil: If only that were true. I just want to direct people's attention to the subject line of this email. And then let's talk about the seven-point email.

Steve: Yep.

Neil: Subject line is "...your senior product manager experience at Waymo."

Steve: This was becoming increasingly common and that's why the six-point email is now becoming the seven-point email. That phenomenon of "your senior product manager experience at Waymo." The challenge is that the subject line looks like it's a mail merge. It looks like it's a form letter where you just copied their LinkedIn title and put it in the subject line of your email.

So the seventh point is to put their experience into your own capitalised words. So "Senior Product Manager," how would you describe their job experience? That's a step of

synthesis that job seekers don't want to take because it puts them at risk of being wrong or being criticised or not using the right terminology. But AI exists to help you figure out that terminology, you can just ask AI, how would you generally describe a senior product manager's experience? Oh, it's product management experience. How would you describe a CEO's experience? Oh, it's management experience. But you have to have a certain amount of confidence and savvy to know how to put their job title into your own uncapitalized words. That's exactly why it works.

So, if they're a senior product manager and they get your product management experience at Waymo, that's going to seem like it's coming from a human. Whereas your senior product manager experience at Waymo gives the impression that this is a form letter and you're not actually very informed. You just had the ability to look in LinkedIn.

Neil: Am I inferring that people are becoming hyper-aware about sort of spammy AI-generated emails?

Steve: Yes, recipients are being hyper-aware and writers are being hyper-anxious about making a mistake because everything they've tried to date has not seemed to work. So getting out over their skis and using terminology that might be criticised gives them great anxiety, but this is essential for conveying that this is a human making this request, not a bot.

Neil: It's better to be human and wrong than...

Steve: Absolutely.

Suze: Steve, we've got a question here from Rosie regarding the seven-point email saying if you send this email, despite not mentioning you want a job, the recipient will know that's what you are after. So how do you send this email without sounding disingenuous?

Steve: I think they absolutely know that you're looking for a job. But again, what is the less bad alternative to that? Is it to be explicit that you're looking for a job? I think we would all agree that won't go over well, especially with our target audience of boosters who just want to give us help, but don't want to pre-commit before they know whether or not we'll embarrass them or blow up their social capital if they advocate for us.

So to me, it's not about great options, it's about least bad options. To put it front and center explicitly that you're looking for a job is going to alienate the very people we need on our side. This is very rare for Americans because we like to be blunt about everything. But we have a couple weird exceptions. One is negative feedback. We like to do the sandwich method and dance around what we're trying to say. And the second is job searching. But that's pretty common amongst all cultures. To make that less explicit is to just reassure people that if they advocate for you, you're not going to be too forward and too blunt and make people feel put on the spot. If you say you're looking for a job in this email, it signals

that you're probably going to ask them who you should speak to next at the end of an informational, which I do not recommend.

That is a terrible piece of advice because it makes this person feel like their advice wasn't good enough for you. It makes them feel like this was a setup and the whole point of you asking about their experience was just so you could upsell and get to someone else. So to me, it's not that it's an ideal solution. It's just the least bad alternative you have and people will appreciate that you didn't put them on the spot.

Suze: And how do we get people to stick with the recipe? Hillary says she teaches this method quite often. People come back and say it hasn't worked. When she looks at what they've written, it's something very different from what they've been shown. Any idea why this is or teaching tips to get them to understand they really have to stick with this method?

Steve: We'll revisit this in the wrap-up of this event but this is a common phenomenon. People will say they've tried the LAMP list and then what they present as a LAMP list is not a LAMP list. They'll say they are using a six-point email but not actually using a six-point email.

The way that I teach that now is that this is a fill-in-the-blank exercise. There are four blanks that a job seeker will change and no more. It's far more efficient than using AI to customise an outreach message and it differentiates you from people who are using AI because it's humble and vulnerable whereas AI will suggest more salesy approaches.

Neil: Steve, can you talk about the meeting preparation advantages or the new way that you're advocating for meeting preparation.

Steve: This is just faster. So you used to have to go into PitchBook to say what's the SWOT analysis for this company that I'm reaching out to. There was no way to find out "what jargon do I need to know if I'm talking to a product manager at an autonomous vehicle company?" or "what projects would I need to do?" AI makes this so much easier.

So, in 15 minutes of prep, what are 10 terms I need to be familiar with if I'm speaking to someone who does X at company Y? What are 10 projects I would be expected to complete if I were hired as a product manager for Waymo? What is the SWOT analysis for Waymo right now? For example, if you're conscientious about using the right terms or knowing the promotion schedule, you can ask AI that too. So these questions are easy to address. You just need to kind of have some infrastructure.

These are the four questions I want to cover before I go into that meeting. People tend to use AI for what it's bad at in the job search, which is writing cover letters and updating CVs endlessly. They tend not to use it for what it's great at, which is brainstorming less obvious companies where there's going to be less competition and researching for their conversations to make them just more productive conversations where you can represent genuine knowledge and synthesise the information these experts give you.

Neil: Okay. Now, TIARA, which is your formula for having these conversations, has this changed or is this a change of emphasis? What's going on?

Steve: It's just much easier to understand conceptually now with the TIARA wheel if you will. That's kind of what I informally call it. So TIARA, and even this is again on me. I didn't explain why the questions were ordered the way they are, I spoke to it, but I think it's important to know that these questions are in a very specific order. This is a professional intimacy building algorithm. And the way you ask questions and the order you ask questions matter.

So TIARA has not changed but the explanation has changed. So we use small talk before an informational to turn a stranger into an acquaintance. There's no single question you can ask a stranger that would turn them immediately into a mentor. So we use small talk to turn a stranger into an acquaintance. We use Trend and Insight questions to ask people "how did you get so smart at your job?" in various different ways that deepen the relationship that turns them from an acquaintance to a subject matter expert.

And then we ask the Advice, Resources, and Assignments questions to our subject matter expert to maximise the odds we turn them into a mentor, someone who will champion us. So it's important to note that the way you ask these questions matters. So if you say what trends are impacting your business right now, you are asking for a list of facts. It's better to ask for a superlative opinion. "In your opinion, what trend is most impacting your space right now?", "How do you predict the space will be most different five years from now?" So even if you're an experienced professional, you can feel very comfortable asking this person to project into the future how they think it will change. But it's just a more fun way to ask the question, more engaging so that you will engage them creatively so that when you start asking them for advice, research shows that creativity can be primed.

If they really think about their answer that they give you about the biggest trend that's impacting their space or how they think it will change most five years from now, you're more likely to get useful advice, especially if you cast them as the protagonist in your job search. "What would you be doing right now to maximise your chance of making a career switch if you were in my position?" Is much more effective than asking, "What should I do to maximise my odds of success?"

Neil: Okay, This is new. This is an end-of-meeting question...

Steve: This is not an end-of-meeting question. It's a pause on the relationship question if you feel like, okay, because there's something called the harvest cycle in *The 2-Hour Job Search* that was introduced last time about how to systematically harvest these informationals that you put so much effort into to maximise the odds that they lead to what I call a second degree referral.

A referral to another human being who doesn't know you as a stranger, they know you as a friend of their colleague. This person spent social capital to introduce you to them. But if

you feel like you're not there, you're not sure, is this person going to give me a referral? Are they even on my side? Are they going to be there a month from now when I check back in with them? Because that's when the intimacy really builds.

They've known you for a while now. You're low risk. The golden question, who's about to ghost me and say goodbye or are they a booster who genuinely cares about my outcome. So the golden question is a way to do that test very elegantly at the end before you hang up for the last time and you are about to switch them into that monthly check-in process that the harvest cycle recommends. I would ask, "If you were in my position, is there anything else you'd do to maximise your odds of success of getting an interview the next time a spot opens up?"

If they say, "Nothing comes to mind, but keep doing what you're doing and something will turn up. Good luck with your search. Nice meeting you." That is vague next steps and a seeming goodbye. That's an obligate. We'll need to restart. We can't trust this person to advocate for us in the future. So, a new seven-point email to a new person.

If they give us concrete next steps though and want to keep in touch, that's a signal it's probably a booster. You're probably good at this company. Just check back in systematically with them and move on to the next company down on your LAMP list.

Neil: Yeah. "Nothing I can think of." It's kind of cold, isn't it?

Steve: That's a bad outcome. I would call that a bad outcome.

Neil: Let's talk about follow-up. And this I believe is new. So we've had our informational meeting. They seem like they want to help. What's the best practice for continuing conversations over time once we've made a connection?

Steve: Yes. So that is absolutely 100% the harvest cycle. So all of these pieces work together. All of these pieces don't work in isolation. They synthesise. So your three-part thank you is the most important. And Neil and I collaborated on a wonderful Harvard business piece. I'm still very proud of.

Neil: Yeah.

Steve: Where we discussed and showed data for how thank you notes can be deployed strategically rather than tactically in a job search to set up long-term relationship growth. And the key element of that is to highlight the best piece of advice that they gave you during the conversation.

A lot of people will say, "Thank you for the great insight." But they won't be specific and that doesn't hit the pleasure center of your potential mentor's brain. The added benefit of that though is it gives you a foundation to follow up with them a month later. "I followed that advice you gave me and here's how I'm a better candidate now as a result. Here's how I've

benefited from that as a professional," which literally casts them as a mentor, makes them feel more allegiance to you.

Your success in your job search becomes a reflection of their ability to provide good mentorship and everyone likes to think they give good advice. So, by getting them to give you an insight, by capturing that in a thank you note, and then following up over time with the harvest cycle, that's essential. The 3B7 is still the technique that I recommend to find that booster as quickly as possible before you land your first informational. But the harvest cycle is the follow-up routine. The 3B7 is the routine we use to get in touch with the booster as quickly as possible at our target companies.

Neil: And let me just say one thing about these thank you notes is that what we found in our research was people actively went out of their way to say how nice it was that someone kept in touch. They were delighted to hear repeatedly from people who they already saw in some sense as their kind of mentee. They wanted to hear back, and you have to tell people that they want to be updated.

Steve: It costs nothing. Yeah. It's not about sending them a free coffee after the fact. Gifts don't move them as much as simply acknowledging the magnitude of the benefit you enjoyed from this informational conversation.

Neil: All right. So, we've got one more slide and we've talked a bit about this, but this is going back to the survey. What is the hardest part of teaching job search or networking? Top three answers. Tough job market, low response rates and the number one is fear or discomfort about networking. Have you got the solution Steve on what career coaches who are facing that discomfort in their audience, what can they do?

Steve: I think fear and discomfort around networking... I think what they're afraid of is getting rejected in their job search. And you're not asking for a job anywhere in this process. Literally, in *The 2-Hour Job Search*, you do not ask for a job. So being able to clarify that upfront for job seekers, you don't ask for a job in this process. You ask people for the gift of their knowledge and time. And you're using Steve's recipe. So if you send an email and no one responds, they're not rejecting you. They're rejecting Steve's recipe. Totally fine. I'm happy to provide that service and be that whipping boy. Because the stakes are too high here.

So fear, discomfort, we're not asking them for a commitment. We're asking them to test this. Send one email. See how it feels. Try one informational meeting. See how that feels compared to just endlessly shooting off CVs to the void. Low response rate from outreach. They're probably not following the outreach as designed. So go in, ask to see that email, compare it to the model. Are they only changing the four blanks that I recommend? Are they following the canonical approach?

And tough job market. This is actually a reason to be more optimistic about changing your approach because people are trying to fight to optimise applying, which means people are

spending even less time on networking than they should. Networking by comparison is even a better option now than it was five years ago. So if they can adapt, if they can prove that they are a future leader of their organisations because we expect future leaders with advanced degrees to walk the talk. True leadership is being able to adapt to times. This is the best way to prove that they have that ability to adapt to circumstances and lead for their organisations. They can do it in a meta sense through their job search.

Neil: Okay. So moving the question to what should career coaches do? It came up again and again. Lots of people said, "Our students show less interest in attending events. less interest in attending events with employers, less interest in career programming...." I don't know, how do we help people?

Steve: I would say challenge them to demonstrate the leadership that they know they possess because they possess it but they need to walk the talk as well. So this is a chance for them to demonstrate that they are a future leader of their organisation is adapting to current times and trying something different if they know what they're doing now is not working. So highlight the correct comparison.

If you compare doing *The 2-Hour Job Search* to not doing *The 2-Hour Job Search*, the brain will always find not doing *The 2-Hour Job Search* more appealing. It keeps you safe. It's the devil you know. You won't be embarrassed or vulnerable or rejected. Your brain is trying to do you a service. This is our lizard brain from thousands of years ago trying to keep us psychologically and physically safe. But the correct comparison is networking to applying more. Spending that same amount of time applying to more jobs. Are you getting smarter tomorrow as a result of that? No. So this is not a commitment, it's a test.

Try one email using this method. Try one informational using this method and then you can walk away. So trial it, don't commit to it. Apply online. I'm not telling you not to apply. I'm saying do the 15 minutes of networking that *The 2-Hour Job Search* recipe demands first. Then you can spend another 15 minutes or 3 hours if you'd like applying to your heart's content after the fact. But the bottleneck in this process is getting strangers to agree to talk to you. You have to start that clock initially.

Operations theory determines you have to put the bottlenecks first in a difficult process. So do the 15 minutes of *The 2-Hour Job Search* first. It's not much. And make it compulsory whenever possible. I hate that this is not a required course, but statistics is. You can get AI to help you with statistics. You cannot get AI to help you reach out to strangers. That is something that you need to put the elbow grease and sweat equity into. So make this look like any other subject that they have. They're used to being required to do stuff they don't enjoy. The fact that this is left optional is a moral and ethical failure on the part of universities. I will argue that to any of your deans. So making it compulsory. We owe it to these students morally and ethically to prepare them for life after the university goes away.

Neil: I'll hand over to you Suze. Have we got anyone wanting to speak? Anyone live?

Suze: Yeah, we've got Ros who's raised their hand and also I'm hoping that Kira might come and talk to us.

Kira: Hi Neil. Hi Steve. Hi Suze. Thank you very much. I work at London Business School. We're big advocates of *The 2-Hour Job Search*. I work specifically with our early career students, so less than two years experience, and you might have just spoken to this, but we do find that one of the hardest things to convince that population in particular, is how reaching out to someone that's not actively recruiting really is the best use of my time. Do you have any further thoughts you have on how we can make that message land better?

Steve: I think the rejections that they're afraid of, these personal rejections are already happening every time. The way I open my talks now is I ask everyone, "Have you ever spent more than an hour on an online application? Put your hands up." Everybody puts their hands up. "Now, keep your hands up if you didn't hear back from that application." And all the hands stay up. They know this isn't working. They know they're playing a rigged game that is not teaching them anything. It feels wrong.

So giving them a chance to acknowledge themselves like this is not, "I'm not telling you I'm right and they're wrong." I'm just saying, "You know something's off here, right? Okay, let's explore an alternative to that." But even reaching out to employers that are not hiring, the best analog and this is a great question might be that I hear the same thing from senior professionals like, "I want to be a CFO, but why would I reach out to the CFO of a company?" Well, you'd reach out to the CFO for a company because they'll make you smarter. They're probably hearing from headhunters that know about other CFO openings whether they choose to pursue them or not. They know if they're leaving before anyone else does. What better gift to give their former organisation than a lead on a great replacement opportunity. So you're getting smarter at time. You're building sets of eyes and ears at the organisations you want to work for. So even if they don't have an opening, they know who does and they know people who are in need of other people and they will introduce you to friends and you're not a stranger to them.

You're a friend of their friend at a different organisation. But the point is you just exponentially increase your odds of success when you have more sets of eyes and ears looking out on your behalf. And it's not always going to be at that specific organisation. You just don't know which frog that you kiss is going to be the one that gives you the offer, but it is going to improve your odds tomorrow versus today in a way that applying, spending another three hours applying online simply will not.

Neil: Okay, so we have one more live question. Who's up?

Suze: I'm just trying to get Ros on the line.

Ros: Fantastic. Steve, I love your process. I wasn't clear whether this is only for early careers people or what the differences are for people who are mid or towards the end of their careers like in their 50s. Could you tell me what the differences are for people who

are in that sort of mid to end point of their career? What are the changes and also when is your third version of your book coming out?

Steve: Third version comes out September 22nd. The key difference for experienced professionals is that it's just a harder process for them to embrace because it requires embracing humility and vulnerability. There used to be an alternative model of the seven-point email that experienced professionals were recommended to send, but the response rates to that email dropped precipitously because of COVID and AI. And then I realised, "oh, it's the humility and vulnerability. That's exactly why it works because the ageist stereotype is that experienced professionals don't learn as readily as a junior professional does."

What better way to dispel that myth? Have the LinkedIn shortcut to your profile at the bottom of your email so they can see your great experience. You're just not leading with it. But this is absolutely for experienced professionals, but it's not for all experienced professionals. Some people don't have the capacity to be or become vulnerable and humble. And that's fine if you're working with a client or a student who is in that boat - this might not be the best process for you. Instead say, "It seems like you have a pretty good idea of what you want to do - try that. But just know that this process is here. If you want to try something different." But it does require a psychographic shift.

Neil: Someone said in the pre-event survey, "bearing all this in mind do you think companies are turning to other methods?" Is the whole online process dying out or is that too strong a word?

Steve: Referrals are becoming more appealing as applications become faster and higher quality like their points of parity. The same AIs are writing all the same essays. No human being is going to look at a thousand different applicants for an entry-level job. So the easiest way to cut through a thousand applications online is to not look at any of them. It's to simply ask people who they like and recommend for that position first.

If that candidate doesn't work, they can blame the person who made the referral. It's not their fault as a hiring manager. They had a good recommendation for that person. So, it's the way they can wash their hands of any bad downside, but enjoy the benefits of any upside from finding a good candidate. We are so starved for human contact right now and so skeptical of AI that any human being that is vouched for is an instant human interview candidate compared to the thousand nameless, faceless CVs that came through an online posting.

Neil: Okay. What's your view on formal versus informal language? In the six-point email you say "Hi, Jeff." We have someone asking whether that's a bit informal. Wouldn't "Dear Jeff" be better - or is that a generational issue? What are your thoughts?

Steve: I think especially if you're working with undergraduates, that will be a great source of tension, but this is a very practical matter in 2026. You simply don't know the genders

that people align to. So to say Mr., Miss or Mrs. is not all that great. It's not inclusive. It makes this more stressful and harder. It also inserts formality into what you want your reader to see as being an informal chat. You're just sharing knowledge with someone who's curious.

If you use a lot of formality, it seems like this is clearly a tryout for an interview. So even though we know you're looking for a job, you want to remove that expectation from the equation. So for simplicity, for kindness, inclusivity's sake, I recommend first names. The one exception to that is if you are reaching out to an MD level doctor or they really care about whether they're referred to as doctors. So, make sure that you call medical level doctors or anyone who would take offense to not being called a doctor, which is usually medical space, use doctor for that.

But otherwise, a first name is the safest, kindest, most inclusive way to go about this. Even if it's uncomfortable at first, the people who would not respond to you because you use their first name were not likely to be helpful in your process anyway.

Suze: We've got Katarina, on the line with a question.

Katarina: Thank you so much. Thanks, Neil and Steve. I've really enjoyed this. Really great advocate of *The 2-Hour Job Search*. I teach about TIARA all the time from Edinburgh University Business School. So, thank you for that. Steve, I agree wholeheartedly with all of this. I wanted your thoughts on the fill-in-the-blank approach to the initial emails and I'm thinking are we not creating an army of people who will be sending out identical messages and therefore be identified as samey or spammy. What are your thoughts?

Steve: I would have a private island if that ever became the situation. I don't foresee that happening. No, to me it's a form in its ideal world where everybody is taught this at a junior level. It helps people receiving those emails know what they're getting. It's a standardized product. This is a person who's going to use my time wisely, who's not going to put me on the spot and ask me for a job. They've been trained to do this and I know they're not going to embarrass me.

So, to me, it's a form of credentialing in that ideal world where everybody is taught it. And I do wish everybody was taught this basic recipe by default. And then they can innovate from there. But right now, they're being given tips and told, "You're on your own. Figure it out for yourself. Find what works for you." But if you want to bake a cake, you follow a recipe. You don't try to synthesise tips into a novel format. That's just not efficient, not wise. So we'll cross that bridge when we get there. I'm not concerned about it, frankly. I think it will put people at ease more than it will upset them.

Katarina: All right. Perfect. I love that positioning. Thank you.

Neil: Thank you for all these cool questions. Thank you to the people who asked questions live. I want to move on because we want to tell you about some stuff. Steve, tell us about Contact to Colleague quickly.

Steve: Yeah, it's my corporate services firm. So, a funny thing happened. People successfully using *The 2-Hour Job Search* started reaching back out to me after they got hired and said, "Can you teach this proactive networking framework to my employees?" And I thought, "That's brilliant." That is so great that there are forward-thinking organisations that want to level the playing field. Teach everybody how to build internal advocacy. That way, you're rewarding effort and proactivity rather than pre-existing knowledge or pedigree, people who knew this was important to get advocates outside of their immediate boss.

So if you know any organisations who are looking for novel training to help level the playing field, to help get their junior employees in particular to do the walking around leaving their desk to go socialise and talk to other people in their organisations. I teach that, it looks very familiar to this but it is reskinned for a corporate audience. That is what Contact to Colleague does. Hopefully I'll have more news on this front in terms of a possible book that may be coming out but that's down the road.

Neil: All right. So someone asked, *The 2-Hour Job Search* is out on the 22nd. You can't actually order it yet but if you want an email when it's live to order, we're going to have a tick box in a second. Steve, do you want to talk about the 2HJS potential certification?

Steve: So, I'm doing some market testing right now and looking to hire up a small team to create a certification program. There's been demand for a dozen years, but when I had two full-time jobs working at Fuqua and writing and speaking on top of that, I just didn't have the capacity for it. But now that I'm writing and speaking full-time, I can hire a team. And I want to ensure people are able to teach this process to maximise its benefits and to just feel like they have expertise in a way that has not been available before.

So we'd love to talk to you. If you're in any way interested in doing this, please respond to the survey. Express your interest in which elements of *The 2-Hour Job Search*, Contact a Colleague, whatever, however you'd like to be involved. Please let me know and contact Neil for the details on that.

Neil: And I would just say obviously we'd love to discuss with individual coaches. We'd also love to discuss with an institution if you have many coaches who all might get certified, we'll tell you how to do that.

And then the final thing is Steve has agreed to do some live lecture streams for '26-'27 at this sort of time, European time zone, so three streams: 2HJS for undergrads, 2HJS for MBAs (that 2 to 9 years), and 2HJS for working professionals. Please contact me.

We would love to have people join in with that. Thank you so much, Steve, for your generosity over this hour.

Steve: My pleasure to be here.

Neil: There's a feedback survey in your inbox. Connect with me and Steve on LinkedIn. We will have a recording for you and various resources hopefully tomorrow.

Steve: My pleasure. Thank you all for coming.