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## "If You're Not Working, We Won't Hire You!"

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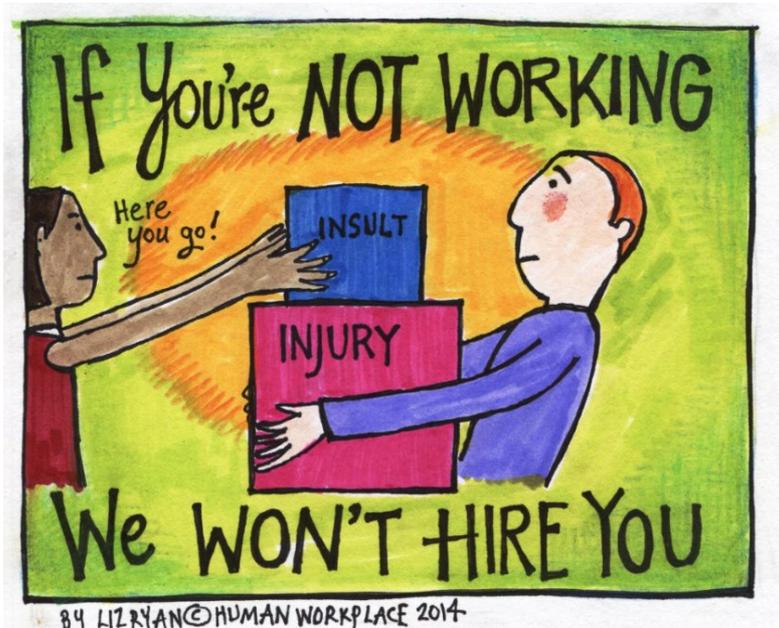
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Since I write about the workplace I hear a lot of hair-raising stories. I hear them from job-seekers, recruiters, HR folks and hiring managers. There is a lot of craziness in the job search and recruiting arena. I've heard about outrageous behavior on all sides.

One job-seeker told us about an interview scheduled over the lunch hour. The company ordered sandwiches for the four people interviewing the candidate, but didn't ask the job-seeker himself what he'd like for lunch - so he sat there being interviewed while his four interviewers chomped on their sandwiches.

Stay classy, San Diego!

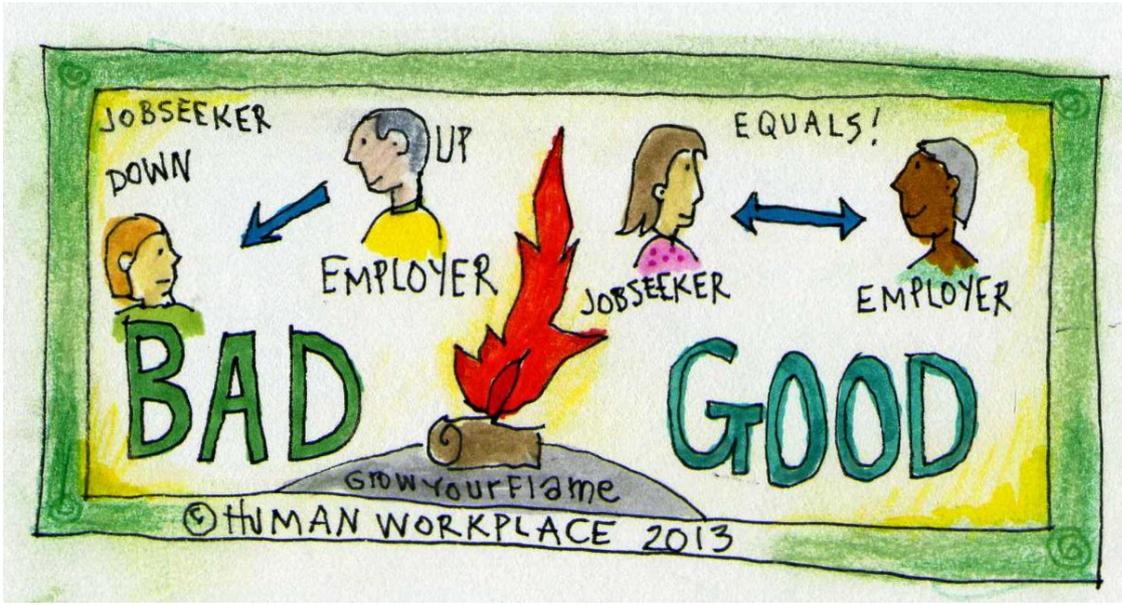


A recruiter told me about a job candidate who went on a job interview that she, the recruiter, had set up for him. Once he got there, the candidate abandoned the job-interview part of the conversation and talked to the hiring manager about his sideline business as an IT consultant, instead.

Give that man two awards -- one for tackiness and one for biting the hand that got you a job interview!

The worst recruiting horror story I've heard since the start of the latest recession is the policy adopted by certain employers that restricts their hiring pool to people who are currently working. When I heard about the idea, I thought it was an urban myth. I couldn't believe that any organization could be so stupid or so cruel.

In a recession, people get laid off. That isn't their fault. They haven't done anything wrong. To make the blanket statement "If you're not currently working, we won't hire you" is beyond ignorant - it's bad business, and the ultimate "Screw you" to people who have already taken some hard knocks.

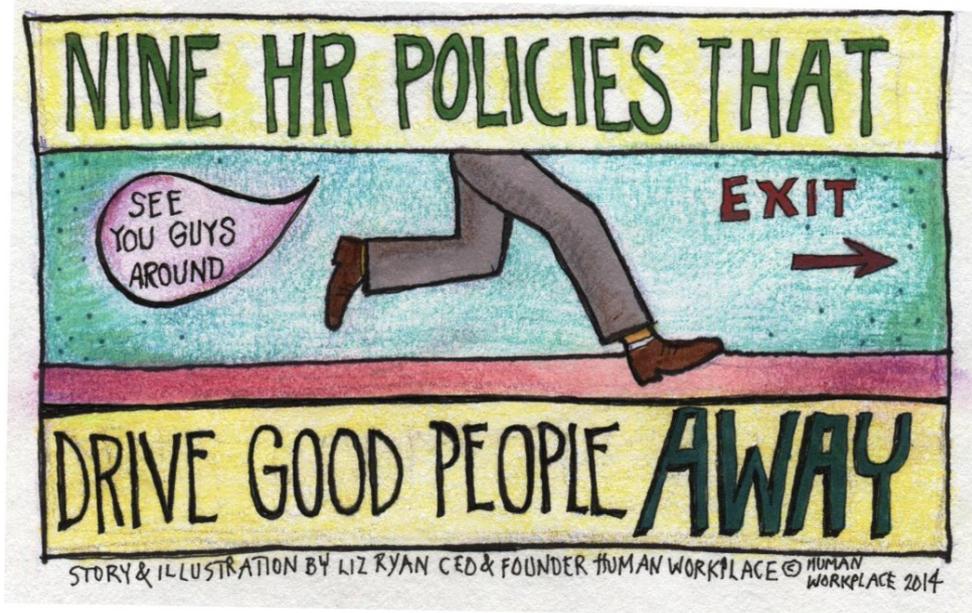


Sadly the urban myth is true. I have talked with HR leaders whose organizations routinely screen out job applications and resumes from unemployed job-seekers.

The HR people don't like it, but the practice stands. "It's a fast way to screen people out," they are told.

If employers are looking for fast, arbitrary ways to screen out applicants, I can think of twenty ways that are just as effective as screening out job-seekers who aren't working. They could interview only the candidates whose last names start with K, or screen out everyone whose application arrives on Monday or Wednesday.

These are idiotic ideas, but no more idiotic than the idea that a person's current employment status could somehow be a clue to his or her value as an employee.



Great people get laid off from jobs every day. Sometimes the best people in an organization are the first to go. During the boom times, their terrific performance got them boosted up the compensation schedule.

Now they're at the top of the earnings pile, and money is tight, so they're laid off. Sometimes people end up on a redundancy list because they've been out in front of the business, trying new things and exploring new territory.

When the ax falls, it falls on them first because their work isn't directly attached to day-to-day revenue. That's the opposite of a poor employee. That's a person whose talents could make a company's future!

If you run into the bias that suggests that an unemployed person is somehow tainted or less than desirable, I wouldn't blame you if you thought evil thoughts about the people on the hiring side of the equation. Your emotional energy would be wasted in that exercise, because a business that hires that way is already doomed.



Its leaders cannot succeed with such a Neanderthal mindset.

Tough as it is to encounter the offensive bias that favors currently-employed job-seekers over unemployed folks, you're better off knowing who's a toad in your job search earlier rather than later.

I have seen suggested remedies meant to overcome the obstacle "We won't hire you unless you're already employed," but they all amount to deception.

Various articles suggest ways to keep the bad news ("I actually left that company a month ago") out of the job-search conversation. Do you really want to get a job by artifice, by pretending to be someone you're not?

It's a great idea to start your own business - a consulting business, for instance - while you're job-hunting.

I'd love for you to start a consulting business while you're between jobs. I'd love for you to start a consulting business on the side at any point in your career, but doing that won't

appease someone who can't get past the caveman logic "Working - good! Not working -- bad!"



You're better off leaving an organization like that in your rear-view mirror. Go for the people who get you and therefore deserve you.

How do you find them? It isn't hard. When you spot an organization that sounds like it's doing interesting things (in your LinkedIn browsing, in your local paper, through friends or anywhere), zero in.

You can reach your hiring manager directly with a [Pain Letter](#), and ignore the dreaded Black Hole auto-recruiting portals. Those things will screen out an unemployed job-seeker's application.

A real, live hiring manager who has real problems won't ask "Is this person employed?"

When your [Pain Letter](#) and [Human-Voiced Resume](#) arrive in the mail and make it clear that you've solved a hiring manager's pain in other circumstances, your current employment status will be the last thing on the hiring manager's mind!

To employers, my message is that great employees come in all shapes and sizes. They come with every imaginable story and background. Blanket policies like "No unemployed candidates will be considered" hurt your ability to hit your goals.

Your problems are big and complex. You need smart and energized people to solve them.

Your problem is not that you have too many resumes to screen. If that looks like the primary problem in your recruiting program, then your recruiting process is broken.

Your recruiting practices should attract a small number of very qualified and switched-on people and quickly move them through the pipeline, with respect and dignity for everyone.

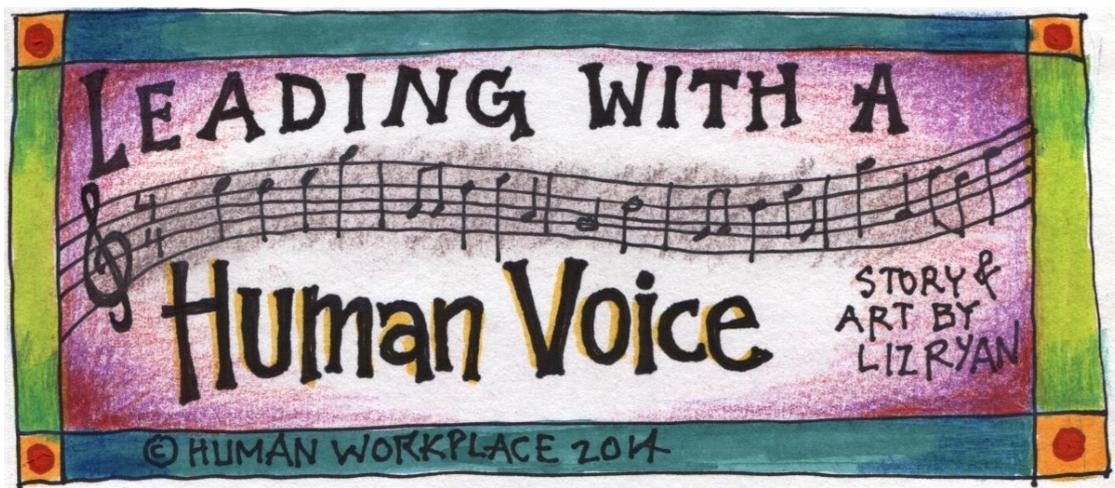
If you are struggling to design a recruiting program that works that way, there is a resource list at the bottom of this column.



We know it is illegal and immoral to systematically exclude women, minorities, people over 40 or folks with disabilities from our hiring pool. It is just as immoral to exclude people from consideration because they happen to be between jobs at the moment, and it is bad business to boot.

We get to choose every day whether to be human at work or to let zombie juice flow through our veins and overpower our humanity.

That is a personal choice, and one that we make over and over throughout the workday. If you succumb to pressure to be less than human at work, you cannot blame your boss or anybody else. You picked the job and you keep it.



Every few months we hear about a monumental failing in government or business that sprang from greed mixed with the misuse of power. People step down. Sometimes they go to jail.

Lower-level functionaries embroiled in these scandals always defend themselves the same way.

They always say the same thing: "I was just following orders."

You can lean on that weak excuse for awhile, but your bathroom mirror will be there to greet you in the morning. What sort of life do you want to live? What sort of legacy do you want to leave? It is your life and your career.

Your ethical compass will guide you. As I told the HR people who reported their organizations' "Not working? Not eligible for employment here" policies to me, the universe throws curveballs at us all the time.



We get to decide how to respond, and we must decide. No decision is a win for Godzilla, the mascot for bureaucracy and fear. Can your integrity be bought so cheaply, for a paycheck and a business card?

*Our company is called Human Workplace. Our mission is to reinvent work for people.*

*Here are resources for CEOs, hiring managers and HR leaders looking to hire, motivate and keep great people on their teams.*

*Here are resources for job-seekers, career-changers and people who aren't sure what to do next career-wise!*

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