THE OFF-MARKET METHOD

Stop ~~Applying~~, Start Getting Hired

Get hired through people, not job boards.

GRANT KRATZ

BE READY · BE CONNECTED · BE SEEN · GET HIRED

Stop Applying, Start Getting Hired

Get hired through people, not job boards

Grant Kratz

Stop Applying, Start Getting Hired: Get hired through people, not job boards

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Apart from the author's own story, the stories and examples in this book are illustrative. Where a person or situation is described to make a point, it is a composite and does not depict any specific real individual.

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How to use this book

This book is built to be used, not just read. It follows one path, the same path the best job searches follow, and it teaches you to run it for yourself.

The path has four moves, and they are in order on purpose. First, Be Ready: you signal your value, so that when anyone looks you up, what they find makes them want to talk to you. Then, Be Connected: you turn connections into opportunities, starting with the people who already know you, then targeting the companies you want and reaching the right people directly, before a job is ever advertised. Then, Be Seen: you show your expertise, so the right people notice you without you chasing them. Finally, Get Hired: you win the role. You judge which roles are worth your time, tailor the few that matter so they get read, prepare so the interview goes your way, and close the offer on the right terms. Each move feeds the next. Your resume feeds your profile, your profile feeds your outreach, your outreach feeds your interviews.

The first time through, read it in order. After that, treat it as a manual and jump to whatever you need most. Every chapter stands on its own.

Each chapter follows the same simple rhythm, so the whole book feels like one system rather than a pile of tips:

- **Why it matters.** What getting this wrong costs you, and what getting it right opens up.
- **What good looks like.** The standard to aim for, in plain terms.

- **Best practice.** The dos, the don’ts and the costly mistakes, often as quick side-by-side tables so you can see weak next to strong.
- **Your move.** One small action to take before you turn the page.

That last part matters most. Reading about a job search does not change anything. Doing one small thing does. If you take the single action at the end of each chapter, by the end of the book you will not just understand the system; you will have built it.

The system at a glance

Here is the whole system. Four moves, in order, each building on the one before, spread across thirteen chapters.

Move 1. Be Ready: signal your value before you apply

What you build	The steps
A presence that makes the right people want to talk to you before you apply for anything.	1. Your resume 2. Your LinkedIn profile 3. Your career assets

Move 2. Be Connected: turn connections into opportunities

What you build	The steps
Real relationships inside the companies you want, so you reach the right people before a role is ever advertised.	4. Build real relationships 5. Your target list 6. Work the job boards 7. Stay on the front foot

Move 3. Be Seen: show your expertise

What you build	The steps
A name the right people link with what you do best, so they think of you before a role even exists.	8. Your content plan 9. Show up and publish

Move 4. Get Hired: win the role

What you build	The steps
Offers on roles worth having: each one judged honestly, applications that get read, interviews won, and the offer closed well.	10. Is it worth it? 11. The application that gets read 12. Win the interview 13. The offer

The moves run from top to bottom, but a real search loops. You will be signalling your value while you build relationships, and publishing while you prepare for the interview. Start at the top, get the foundations right, and let each move feed the next.

A note from me

I should tell you that I am not a recruiter. I am a hiring manager, and for this book, that matters more.

I have never worked in HR, and I do not have a certificate in careers advice. What I have done is hire a great many people, let a great many go, and build and run teams around the world. A recruiter's job is to find people who match the brief and put the strongest of them forward, and a good one is worth their weight in gold. But the final call is not theirs. It sits with the hiring manager: the person who wrote the brief, knows why it says what it says, and picks one name from the shortlist. That has been my seat, many times over. I know what makes me say yes, and it is rarely the words in the job description. And I have been the candidate too, more times than I'd like, out of work and starting again, because that is part of a long career.

For a long time, being out of work did not frighten me. I had a network, I knew how to use it, and a role always came. From my first jobs, working in bars and tutoring at university, every role came through people: a referral, a recommendation, or knowing the hiring manager, even at IBM. Partway through the hiring process, I noticed the hiring manager shared a surname with a colleague I was working with then. So I asked him, "Any chance you know him?" It was his brother. I asked if he would put in a good word for me, and he did. By the time I walked into the interview, the hiring manager already knew who I was and had a recommendation from someone he trusted. All I had to do was not blow it.

Years later, when I left IBM after a serious health issue and found myself out of work, it was a previous manager I had worked for there who trusted what I could do and handed me

my next opportunity. Another business I came to co-own began with an old client walking past a coffee shop. Every job I have had but one came through someone I knew, not a job board.

Then came the period that changed everything.

Over a few months, everything came apart at once. My marriage ended. I was separated from my children. I was in the United States with no family around me and no friends nearby, a long way from home and suddenly completely alone. I withdrew. I got depressed. My work suffered, and I lost my job. I had hit rock bottom. Then COVID hit, and it forced a decision: stay, alone and unemployed in a foreign country, or get on what turned out to be one of the last flights home to Australia. I decided to come home.

What pulled me out was not clever. It was my kids. I wanted to be the kind of man, and the kind of father, they could be proud of, and that meant getting up and showing up. So I dug deeper than I ever had and reached for the one thing I knew worked: a system.

I often say IBM has the best systems, processes and methods of any company in the world. It taught me to sell the way it does everything: deliberately, step by step, with nothing left to chance, and those disciplines sit behind whatever success I have had since. Somewhere along the way, without ever deciding to, I had turned them on my own career. Decide exactly who you want to work for. Find the people who matter inside those companies. Reach out, ask for their time, and get in front of them. Prospecting, applied to your own life. I had been using it for years without ever naming it. Now, at the bottom, I used it on purpose, and it brought me back. It got me my next role, and the one after that.

Then, a few years later, I missed out on two jobs I really wanted. Somewhere in that frustration, I thought: enough. I am going to write down every step I take and build a system that gets me back into the market faster, with less of the stress I had come to know too well. I was my own guinea pig. And then a simple thought stopped me. If this is going to help me, why wouldn't I share it with everyone else going through the same thing?

That is what this book and the system behind it are.

Here is what I have come to believe. Getting a job is one of the most stressful things most of us ever do, and almost nobody is taught how to do it. Not at school, not at university, not anywhere. We are left to work it out alone, by trial and error, usually at the exact moment we can least afford to. The parent returning to work after years at home. The person who has been in the same role for twenty years and suddenly has to start again. The leader made redundant, who has not looked for a job in a decade. I have watched capable people flounder at every stage of a career, not because they lacked ability, but because no one ever showed them how. Many of them, like me, are good at the job but not natural at selling themselves.

I want to be the person who shows you how.

What follows is everything I learned the hard way, simplified and organised, from a blank page to the offer. This book will teach you exactly how to do every step of it, by hand, from wherever you are starting. The goal runs through every page: to take you from overlooked to obvious.

I have been where you might be right now. Let me help you get out.

Grant

Introduction

From overlooked to obvious: why the way you were taught to find a job stopped working, and what to do instead.

You found the role. It fit. You tailored the resume, wrote the cover letter, took a breath, and clicked apply. And then nothing. Not a no. Not a "we'll be in touch." Nothing at all. So, you tried again, and again, and the silence only grew louder.

And the silence does something to you. After the tenth unanswered application, you start to wonder. After the twentieth, you start to edit yourself down. Maybe I am aiming too high. Maybe I am too old for this. Maybe I have been out of work too long. The confidence you built over a whole career starts to slip with every quiet week. It follows you home, into the "any luck yet?" conversations you have started to dread, and into the 3 am arithmetic about how long the money will last. Nobody sees the hours you put in. They just see that you are still looking.

Psychologists have a name for what that silence trains into you. They call it learned helplessness: when effort and outcome come unhooked, when nothing you do seems to change the result, you slowly stop trying. That is a predictable response to a broken system, not a weakness, and this book aims to reconnect effort and outcome so that what you do matters again.

If that is where you are right now, I want to say one thing before anything else. It is not you.

You are being ignored because you are playing a game by rules that no longer apply, and that has nothing to do with how good you are. The way most of us were taught to find work has

stopped working, and almost nobody has been told. This book is about the way that actually works now, and how to run it from wherever you are starting.

And here is the part that should make you angry, because it made me angry. The search now rewards the best positioned over the best-qualified. You can be the strongest, most capable person for a role and still lose it to someone who was simply more visible and better connected when it mattered. That is not a fair fight, and nobody handed you the playbook for the fight that is actually happening. This book is that playbook.

The front door is broken

For most people, “looking for a job” means one thing: find postings, send applications, wait to hear back. That was a reasonable plan once. Today it is close to the worst use of your time, and it helps to understand why, because the why is not your fault.

Start with the postings themselves. The hiring platform Greenhouse found that roughly one in five job posts on its platform had no active hiring behind them, the so-called ghost jobs, and that about 3 in 10 jobs closed in 2025 without anyone hired. Some roles are left up to collect resumes. Some make a company look like it is growing. Some are simply forgotten. Whatever the reason, a real share of what you apply for will never end in a hire, and from the outside you cannot tell which.

Then there is the machine. Before a human ever reads your application, software reads it first and filters it based on what it can parse and match. We go deep on that in Chapter 1. Add the sheer volume, which Greenhouse puts at 244 applications for the average job in 2025, up from 116 in 2022, and you get the experience you already know too well: hours of effort poured

into applications that vanish without a trace. You're not imagining it. More than half of job seekers were ghosted by an employer in the last year, according to Criteria's Candidate Experience Report.

The cruel part is that the harder you work this way, the worse it feels. You are trying, and trying hard, at the one approach that has stopped working. And it is not only the hours. Losing your job is one of the ten most stressful things that can happen to you. The Holmes and Rahe stress scale ranks being let go eighth of 43 life events.

Where the jobs actually go

So where does the hiring happen? Increasingly, somewhere you cannot see from the job boards. Through people. Ashby, the recruiting software company, looked at 38 million applications. People who were referred got an interview 40 per cent of the time. People who applied cold, 3 per cent.

Recruiters no longer sit and wait for applicants. They search for candidates and approach them directly. Hiring managers fill roles from people they already know, or who arrive recommended, often before a posting ever goes up, and sometimes instead of one. A name with a warm introduction is treated completely differently from a name in a stack of hundreds. This is what people mean by the hidden, or off-market, job market: the large amount of hiring that happens through visibility, relationships and direct approach rather than through the apply button.

Picture two doors into the same building. The front door, the public posting, is crowded, slow, and half the time opens onto a room where nobody is hiring. The side door, the one where someone inside already knows your name, is wide open, and

hardly anyone is using it. The people who get hired quickly are often no better than you. They just use the side door.

None of this means the front door never works, or that you should stop applying altogether. It means you stop depending on it and put most of your energy where the hiring actually happens.

Who this book is for

When I say this book is for career builders, here is exactly who I mean: anyone in the corporate or professional world who is looking for a job or trying to move their career forward. That is deliberately wide, because the problem is wide.

Take Bill. Fifteen years at the same company, then one Tuesday morning it was gone; his role was cut in a restructure he never saw coming. He is fifty-four, married, with two kids and a mortgage of half a million dollars. There is not much in the bank, a few months if they are careful, and the bills do not pause while he works it out. So, he does what everyone does. He polishes the resume, and he applies. Twenty roles, thirty, forty, several hours of his evening each, and back comes almost nothing. Every silent week the worry gets louder, the confidence takes another knock, and he starts to dread the question at the dinner table: any luck yet?

Take Priya. Thirty-eight, a manager for eight years, and back home for two years with her children. Her resume stopped two years ago, her LinkedIn profile has not changed since, and she has no idea how far the job market has moved while she was away. She is applying into the same silence as Bill, and starting to wonder if the gap has cost her more than she thought.

Take Maria. She has a job. She is good at it, well paid, and fairly sure she has outgrown it. She wants the next level: more scope, more challenge, a company that is going somewhere. But she has always been found, never had to go looking, and she has no idea how to make the next move happen on purpose instead of waiting to be tapped on the shoulder.

Different people, one trap. All three are working hard at the single approach that has stopped working. This book is for every one of them, and by the end, all three have a way out. So will you.

You do not need to be senior. You do not need to be a natural networker, or "good at LinkedIn," or comfortable selling yourself. I am not an extrovert, and this method works for me. Every one of those is a skill, not a personality trait, and this book teaches each of them. What you do need is to be willing to stop waiting and start building. Which brings me to the single idea everything else rests on.

Be a builder, not a waiter

There are two ways to run a job search. You can wait: scroll the boards, fire off applications, and hope that someone, somewhere, picks you. Or you can build: decide what you want, go and find the people who can make it happen, and put yourself in front of them on purpose.

Almost everyone waits. It feels safer, and it is what we were taught. But waiting hands all the power to a broken system and a stranger's inbox. Building takes that power back.

A career builder treats their search the way a good salesperson treats their market. You do not sit and wait for customers to wander in. You decide who you want to work with, find the

right people, reach out, and start a conversation. Run your own career that way and the whole thing changes. You are no longer one of hundreds of applications in a queue. You are one person having a conversation with another person. That is a different game entirely, and it is one you can win.

That is the shift this book is built to make: from waiting to building, and from overlooked to obvious.

What you will be able to do

By the end of this book, you will be able to run a complete, modern job search as a deliberate campaign, in four moves:

- **Be Ready:** signal your value before you apply, so that when anyone looks you up (and they will), what they find makes them want to talk to you.
- **Be Connected:** turn connections into opportunities, starting with the people who already know you, building a target list of the companies you want, and reaching the right people directly, before a job is ever advertised.
- **Be Seen:** show your expertise, so the right people begin to notice you without you having to chase them.
- **Get Hired:** win the role. Judge honestly which roles are worth your time, tailor the few that matter so they get read, prepare so the interview goes your way, and close the offer on the right terms.

Done well, this is how you get hired faster, with far less stress, and in control of the process instead of at its mercy. And speed matters more than most people admit. After all, every extra month out of work is a hard month, and a month of income you never get back. The goal is the right job, sooner.

And it is worth being clear about what winning this way actually feels like, because it is not only a number on a payslip. The 3 am arithmetic about how many months the savings will last, that stops. The flinch when someone asks how the search is going, that stops too, because now you have something real to say. You stop refreshing the inbox, because the search is no longer happening to you; you are running it. Your name starts coming up in rooms you are not in. A conversation you began weeks ago turns into an interview, and you walk in prepared. The confidence comes back because you are finally playing the game the way it is really played, and it is working. That is the promise of this book: not just a job, but the version of you that goes and gets one.

You are starting from here, with a system and someone who's used it to climb out of far worse than a tough job market. Let's begin.

Before you start: get clear on what you want

You cannot ask for help finding something you cannot describe.

Most people skip this step, because it feels obvious. You want a job. But "a job" is not something anyone can help you find. Sooner or later, someone in your network will ask you the simplest question in the world: what are you after? If the answer is "anything, really", the conversation ends there. Not because they don't want to help, but because you haven't given them anything to help with.

I have sat on the other side of that question many times. When someone tells me exactly what they want, and why, I take them seriously, and I start thinking about who I know. When someone tells me they are open to anything, I hear that they haven't thought about it yet. Being clear is what makes you easy to help.

It also sets up everything that follows. The headline on your resume, the first line of your LinkedIn profile, what you ask your network for, and the companies on your target list all come from this one decision. Get it vague, and every one of them goes vague with it.

Before you touch your resume, get these six things down on one page:

- **The role and level.** The job title you would type into a search, and the level you are aiming for.

- **The money.** Your target, and your floor: the number below which you walk away. Decide it now, not at the offer, when you are tired and grateful.
- **The work.** What you want to spend your days doing, and what you want less of.
- **Where and how.** The location, how far you will travel, and whether you want the office, hybrid or remote.
- **The kind of company.** Size, industry, stage and culture. This becomes the brief for your target list in Chapter 5.
- **Your deal-breakers.** Two or three things you will not accept, whatever the offer.

If you are torn between two directions, that is fine. Pick a main one and a second. More than two, and you are back to "anything".

And write it in pencil. This page will sharpen as you talk to people and learn what is out there. That is the point. You can change it later. For now, it gives you, and everyone who wants to help you, something to aim at.

Your move

Write your one page today, six headings and a few lines under each. Then read your role and level out loud. If it would make sense to a friend outside your industry, you are ready for Chapter 1.

THE OFF-MARKET METHOD

You've read the start. Now run the method.

That's the opening of *Stop Applying, Start Getting Hired*. The rest of the book is the four moves, step by step, with what to say and what to do each day.

In the full book

- Build a resume and profile that make people read on.
- Start with the people who already know you.
- Reach the decision-maker before the job is advertised.
- Get known for what you do best, no extroverts needed.
- Pick the few roles that matter, win the interview, and negotiate the offer.

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