



Beat the Machine, Win the Human

The 2026 field guide to getting hired when AI is on both sides of the table.

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By UnchartedCareer

The cover, and why it looks like this

Picture five flat layers stacked like glass shelves, lit from the side. Four of them glow the same cool grey. One, the middle one, is cyan. That cyan shelf is the human.

The whole book is in that picture. Hiring is not a single gate with a robot at it. It is a stack of layers, and software only touches some of them. The cyan layer is where a person decides, and that layer is the one nobody can automate around. Beat the machine layers so a person can see you. Then win the person, because the person is who hires you.

The 60-second argument

AI rewired the front of hiring, not the verdict. Today it sorts your application, surfaces you in a recruiter's search, and summarizes your resume for someone short on time. A human still decides who advances, who interviews, and who gets the offer.

Almost every piece of bad job-search advice comes from one mistake: confusing the machine layer that sorts with the human layer that chooses, or pretending one of them does not exist. People game keywords for a parser that does not judge them, and skip the interview reps and the salary number that actually move their life.

Here is the promise. By the end of this book you can map any hiring process into five layers, know which layer each fear belongs to, and act on the four a human controls instead of grinding on the one machine you feared. You will

get a readable resume, a short list of right-fit roles with a warm path in, an interview skill that holds up under a follow-up, a salary number you say first, and a plan to keep your skills current. Every claim is dated, attributed, and carries a source id you can check. None of it draws on private data about the people who use our tools.

One argument. Five layers. Read it once and the noise drops out.

How to use this book

Every chapter is built the same way, so you always know where you are.

It opens with the answer, in the first line. Then it kills the one myth that keeps people stuck on that layer, works the real mechanics in a handful of question-shaped sections, and ends with one action you can do today, one fill-in worksheet, and a single quiet line about the tool that chapter earned, after the manual method, never as a sales pitch.

Four callout types repeat through the book, and only these four.

Myth vs reality. The false belief that controls a layer, and the verdict that replaces it.

Data point. One dated, attributed number you can quote, with its source id in brackets.

Do this now. The single action for that layer. If you do nothing else, do this.

Try it with UC. A thin line, not a box, naming the one tool that fits the manual method you just learned.

Two ways to read it. Cover to cover, if you are early and want the whole map, because the chapters follow the order a real hire happens and walk you up the stack. Or jump to your layer: stuck getting seen, start at Chapter

1 and 2; getting interviews but no offers, go to Chapter 4; sitting on an offer right now, go to Chapter 5 today. The 30-Day plan in the back sequences all six actions if you would rather be told what to do first.

The worksheets are real fill-in pages, not decoration. Print them or copy them into a doc. The book works when you write in it.

The Hiring Stack, on one page

This is the spine of the whole book. Five layers, bottom to top, in the order a hire actually happens. Software touches the bottom layers. A human owns the top of every decision, and one layer is human all the way through.

Layer	What happens here	Who runs it	Your job
Surface	Your application is stored, your file is parsed, a recruiter searches and ranks	The machine	Be findable and parseable
Screen	First human pass, often AI-assisted, six seconds per resume, knockout questions	Human, AI-assisted	Be obviously relevant in the recruiter's words
Signal	The interview, sometimes recorded or scored by software	Human, sometimes AI	Be defensible out loud, live
Settle	The offer and the negotiation	Human	Capture the value you earned
Sustain	Your career after you land, where skills go stale	You	Stay ahead of skill decay

The cyan layer on the cover is Screen, the first human pass, because that is the layer the whole machine exists to feed. The machine's only job is to hand a person a shorter, sorted pile. A person reads that pile and chooses.

Most of the public panic clusters at the bottom of the stack, at Surface.

Most of what actually decides your offer and your pay sits two layers up, at Signal and Settle. That mismatch is the single most expensive habit in the job search, and the rest of this book is built to fix it.

How we know this

This book is assembled from six research reports, each one sourced, dated, and checked before a word of it landed here. The rules below held for every chapter.

Every number is dated and attributed in the line that carries it, with a bracketed source id like ¹ you can trace to a published study, a government table, a primary statute, or a vendor's documentation. If a claim has no datable source, it is not in the book. Two figures from different surveys stay apart and are never blended into one average, because averaging two samples with different methods produces a number nobody measured.

Sources are weighted on purpose. Peer-reviewed research and government statistics carry the heaviest claims. Vendor figures, from the companies that sell recruiting and interview software, are labeled as such and read as directional, not independent. Single-practitioner estimates are framed as the anecdotes they are, and when a number carried only medium confidence, the doubt is named instead of rounded away.

What was left out, and why. Round scare statistics with no named source ("a percent of jobs will be automated away") are cut, because a number you cannot trace is noise. The famous resume auto-rejection claim is kept, but

only to debunk it once, in Chapter 2. And nothing in this book draws on private data about the people who use UnchartedCareer's products.

One piece of original data runs underneath Chapter 2. Rather than repeat what resume vendors say about parsing, we tested the reading step ourselves: 48 synthetic resumes from three fabricated personas, no real people and no private data, across nine layouts, each saved as PDF and DOCX and read with three local open-source text extractors, for 600 scored field reads². We call it the ATS Autopsy. It is deterministic, reproducible from a clean checkout, touched no commercial product, and is the closest honest look in this book at what a parser can and cannot read.

A last-updated date sits in every chapter's sources. Regulation and pay law move fast in 2026, so treat the legal and salary material as dated and confirm your own situation before you bet on it.

Chapter 1, Surface: the new rules of a machine-gated hunt

Understand how AI actually rewired hiring and you stop fighting robots that were never there. The machine added three jobs at the top of the funnel and changed none of them into the decision. Once you see hiring as a stack of layers instead of one black box, most of the fear and most of the advice fall apart, because almost all of it aims at the software that sorts rather than the person who chooses.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: AI auto-rejects most resumes before a human ever sees them.

Reality: the front of hiring is a sorter, not a judge. A parser reads your file, a recruiter searches the pile, a model summarizes you for someone in a hurry.

A person still decides. The instant rejection emails that feel like a robot's verdict are a rule a recruiter wrote, fired at an answer you gave.

DOES AI AUTO-REJECT MOST RESUMES BEFORE A HUMAN SEES THEM?

No, and the mechanism is the proof. When your file lands, a parser reads the document and tries to lift your name, titles, and dates into searchable fields. When that read fails, you are not dropped. The resume stays attached to your record and a recruiter enters the details by hand³. A broken parse routes to manual entry, not to the trash.

So where do the instant rejections come from? Recruiter-configured knockout questions. Someone sets a hard line in the application: work authorization, a required license, the right city, a minimum number of years. Answer outside the line and the system fires the rejection. That is a person drawing a boundary in software, applied to an answer you typed, not an algorithm judging your worth.

The fear and the fix point in different directions. Believe a robot judges your worth and you game keywords and hide white text. Understand that a parser reads a file and a recruiter sets the knockouts, and you do the boring thing that works: make the file readable, answer the screening questions honestly and in range. Chapter 2 takes the famous auto-reject number apart. Wholesale auto-rejection is not how the system runs.

WHAT DID AI ADD, AND WHAT DID IT LEAVE ALONE?

Three jobs at the top of the funnel, and the list is plainer than the headlines. Software sorts applications faster than a person can. It surfaces candidates from a database when a recruiter runs a query. It summarizes resumes and profiles so someone reading a packed queue can move quickly. Useful work, and none of it is the verdict.

DATA POINT

AI use in HR roughly doubled in a year, from 26% of organizations in 2024 to 43% in 2025, with recruiting the most common use (SHRM, 2025)¹.

Inside recruiting, writing job descriptions led the use cases at 66% while resume screening trailed it at 44%¹. Read that order. The top use of AI in recruiting is drafting the posting, not judging you.

HOW MUCH HAS ACTUALLY CHANGED SINCE 2023, AND FOR WHOM?

Adoption climbed fast, and it is still lopsided. A separate SHRM reading frames the present and the near term: about 39% of organizations have AI in their HR functions now, with roughly 46% expecting to by 2026⁴, and recruiting is again the single most common use⁴. Those two readings come from different SHRM surveys with different samples, so hold them as two camera angles on one trend, not one figure.

Company size decides whether any of this touches you. About 60% of the largest organizations, those with 5,000-plus workers, use AI in HR⁵, against roughly 35% of midsize and 33% of small employers⁵. Apply to a small company and the odds that software ever reads your file are lower than the discourse implies. Apply to a giant and the machine layer is real and worth preparing for.

Your side of the table moved too. About four in ten candidates, 39%, already used AI somewhere in the application process⁶. Yet only 30% say they are open to an AI-led interview, and just 31% were told in advance they would be in one⁶. People adopted AI for themselves faster than they accepted being judged by it. And trust runs thin: only 26% of candidates trust AI to evaluate them fairly, though 52% believe AI screens their application (Gartner 2025)⁷.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE ON BIAS ACTUALLY SHOW?

The honest version is narrow, and it is the only one worth holding. A peer-reviewed controlled experiment tested three open large-language-model text-embedding systems on a simulated resume-retrieval task, using identical resumes with swapped names, and measured which ones the models ranked higher⁸. The disparity was large. White-associated names were preferred in 85.1% of comparisons versus 8.6% for Black-associated names (Wilson and Caliskan, AIES 2024)⁸. The effects were intersectional and did not add up cleanly from race and gender alone⁸.

It is a measured output disparity from open models on controlled inputs. It is not a court ruling, and it does not prove any deployed hiring system treats you unfairly, because real systems wrap these models in business rules, human review, and audits the experiment did not include. The study puts a number on a risk that used to be argued by anecdote. Take any vendor's "fairness" claim as something to verify, not believe.

WHAT DOES THE REGULATION REQUIRE, AND IS IT WORKING?

Two regimes matter, and they sit at different stages. The United States has a flagship local law that is largely unenforced in practice. New York City's Local Law 144⁹, in effect since July 2023, requires a bias audit and candidate disclosure for automated employment decision tools⁹. A December 2025 audit by the New York State Comptroller found the enforcing agency ineffective, with broken complaint routing and only two complaints received across two years⁹. A peer-reviewed first-year study found just 5% of audited employers posted the required bias-audit report and 3% posted the required candidate notice⁹. Researchers call the structural gap "null compliance," because the law lets employers decide for themselves whether their tool is even in scope¹⁰.

Europe went further. Under the EU AI Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689¹¹, Annex III point 4(a) classifies AI used to recruit or filter applications and evaluate candidates as high-risk, which triggers heightened obligations on providers and deployers, phasing in across 2025 and 2026¹¹. A high-risk label in Brussels and an unenforced audit law in New York show how unsettled the rules still are, so you cannot count on regulation to protect you in any single application¹¹.

FRAMEWORK: THE HIRING STACK

Here is the reframe the whole book runs on. Stop fighting an imaginary robot at the front of the funnel. Hiring is five layers stacked on top of each other, the Hiring Stack on the one-page diagram earlier, and software only touches some of them.

Surface is the machine that stores and parses your file and lets a recruiter search and rank, so your job there is to be findable. Screen is the first human pass, six seconds and the knockout questions, so your job is to be relevant in the recruiter's own words. Signal is the interview, sometimes recorded or scored by software, so your job is to be defensible out loud. Settle is the offer, where the value you earned gets captured or left on the table. Sustain is the career after you land, where you stay ahead of the work most exposed to automation.

The panic clusters at Surface and Screen. The payoff sits at Signal and Settle. The industry grinds on the machine layers as if they decided anything, and candidates copy the habit. Clear the machine so a person can see you. Then win the person.

One quieter advantage most candidates skip: across nine large firms in three industries, referred workers were 12% to 30% less likely to quit¹², with call-center referrals 13% less likely and high-tech hires around 30%¹². A

referral routes you past the cold Surface layer and lands you in front of a human with a vote. Chapter 3 builds the search system around it.

DO THIS NOW

Map the Hiring Stack for one role you actually want. Five lines, one page.

Surface: name the file format you will send and the two or three must-have keywords from the posting, in the posting's own words. Screen: name the likely recruiter and the six-second impression you want to leave. Signal: name the two skills the interview will probe hardest. Settle: name one component beyond base salary you will negotiate. Sustain: name the one part of the role most exposed to automation over the next two years.

The map is plain on purpose. In one glance it shows you that four of the five layers are won by a human reading your work, and only one is the machine you were afraid of.

WORKSHEET: THE STACK MAP

Fill one column for one target role. Keep it to a single page.

Layer	My line for this role
Surface (findable)	File format: _____. Must-have keywords from the posting: _____
Screen (relevant)	Likely recruiter or team: _____. Six-second impression I want: _____
Signal (defensible)	Two skills the interview will probe: _____
Settle (capture)	One component beyond base I will negotiate: _____

Layer

My line for this role

Sustain (stay
current)

Most automatable part of this role in 2 years: _____

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

Adoption figures are SHRM survey data, demand and sentiment are WEF and Gartner, the parsing mechanism is Greenhouse documentation, and the bias finding is a peer-reviewed AIES 2024 experiment reported as measured output disparity, not adjudicated discrimination. Full ids, publishers, and dates are in the back-matter sources, by chapter. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

After you map the stack by hand, if you want the machine read of your own resume against a real posting, UnchartedCareer's free ATS scan covers the Surface layer for one role. Chapter 2 teaches the manual version first.

Surface decides whether you exist in the database at all. But being in the pile is not the same as being read. The next layer is your resume meeting the same machine up close, where a clean read is the whole game and the tricks people sell you do nothing.

Chapter 2, Surface continued: your resume versus the machine

An applicant tracking system does not reject you. It files you. Make your resume findable, then relevant, then defensible, in that order, and ignore the trick advice that promises to beat a system you misunderstand.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: 75 percent¹³ of resumes are auto-rejected by an ATS before a human ever sees them.

Reality: the number is invented, traced to a 2012 sales pitch by a vendor that folded in 2013. An ATS is a database with a recruiter workflow on top, and a failed parse creates a manual-entry task, not a rejection.

WHAT IS AN ATS, REALLY?

A database with a recruiter workflow on it. It collects your application, files it under the job requisition, and lets a recruiter search, sort, and move people through stages¹⁴. A parser lifts your name, email, phone, titles, and dates into searchable fields.

That parse can fail, and a failed parse is not a rejection¹⁵. When a resume fails to parse in Greenhouse, the candidate record still gets created and the recruiter fills in the missing details by hand¹⁵.

THE MYTH THIS CHAPTER EXISTS TO KILL

Some version of "75 percent of resumes are rejected by an ATS before a human ever sees them"¹³ gets cited as 70 percent, or inflated to 88 percent¹³.

The figure traces to a 2012 sales pitch by Preptel, a resume-optimization vendor with every incentive to make the machine sound scary¹³. Preptel folded in August 2013 and never published a study or method behind the number¹³, and the citation chain dead-ends there¹³.

Defenders cite a real study: the Harvard Business School and Accenture report "Hidden Workers: Untapped Talent," from September 2021¹⁶. More than 90% of surveyed employers used a recruiting system to screen or rank applicants¹⁶. But read what it blames: 88% of employers agree qualified

high-skills candidates get screened out for not matching the job description's exact criteria^{,16}. The exclusion comes from rigid recruiter-configured filters, employment gaps, hard degree requirements, narrow credentials, not from a parser auto-rejecting resumes^{,16}. Its own fix is to pick six to eight minimum skills that filter applicants in^{,16}, recruiters setting must-haves, not a robot deleting three quarters of applicants.

FRAMEWORK: THE RELEVANCE RULE

Three jobs, in order. Be findable. Be relevant. Be defensible. A miss at any one kills the next.

Findable means the parser reads you clean. Your name, contact details, titles, and dates land in the right fields, in reading order.

Relevant means the must-have terms from the job post show up where they are actually true, in the recruiter's words rather than your own coinage. Some systems assign a match score, a number like 80 percent in Workday or a band in Greenhouse¹⁷.

Defensible means you can back every line out loud in an interview, because the keywords that get you found are the ones that get you questioned.

DATA POINT

In our June 2026 test of 48 synthetic resumes across nine layouts, single-column resumes lost 0 percent¹⁸ of field reads while text-in-image resumes lost 37.5 percent^{,19}, the worst of any layout. On those image resumes the extractors dropped the name, email, and phone every time^{,20}.

WHAT ACTUALLY BREAKS THE READ, AND WHAT IS A FAKE RULE?

Our test, layout by layout, ran on local open-source extractors².

Start with what is safe. Single-column resumes, the clean baseline, lost 0 percent of 72 reads¹⁸. Nonstandard section headings lost 0 percent too, so calling a section "Where I've Worked" instead of "Experience" cost nothing; the parser reads the content underneath, not the label²¹. Two-column resumes came through nearly clean at 1.4 percent²².

Now the layouts that break. Text rendered as an image lost 37.5 percent, the worst in the test¹⁹. Contact details in a page header lost 25 percent²³, the same in a footer lost 25 percent²⁴; the extractor skips those bands. An unusual display font lost 20.8 percent, its glyphs extracted as garbage²⁵. Three side-by-side columns lost 14.6 percent as reading order interleaved²⁶. Work history in a bordered table lost 12.5 percent as the cells collapsed into the wrong fields²⁷. Greenhouse names the same culprits: multi-column layouts, tables, headers and footers, contact info in a text box, graphics, and image-based files²⁸.

Now the rule everyone repeats that our test breaks. Across every layout, PDF files lost 19.9 percent²⁹ and DOCX files lost 0 percent³⁰. That looks like proof you should never send a PDF. The opposite is true: most of the PDF loss came from the hard layouts above, and a clean text-based single-column PDF loses nothing. The "always PDF, never Word" rule and its mirror both miss the real failure mode, a resume saved as an image rather than text³¹. Greenhouse recommends PDF, treats DOCX as equally acceptable, and flags the image upload as the breaker³¹.

WHAT ACTUALLY AUTO-REJECTS YOU, AND WHAT ONLY RANKS YOU?

If a rejection email lands within minutes, the parser did not send it. A recruiter-configured knockout question did. Work authorization? The required license? The right city? The minimum years of experience?³² Answer one in a way that fails and the system fires the automated rejection.

That is a recruiter's hard line in software, an opt-in setting per job post, with nothing to do with your layout³².

The newer AI scoring layer is the one people confuse with a gatekeeper. These systems hand back a match number or band, and recruiters work the list top-down¹⁷, but they rank, they do not delete. Greenhouse states its Talent Matching is assistive AI that does not auto-advance or auto-reject anyone, and that recruiters stay responsible for every call¹⁷.

WHY DOES KEYWORD-STUFFING BACKFIRE?

Because the white-font trick actively hurts you. When an ATS parses your resume it strips formatting and reads only the underlying text, so keywords you hid in white font show up in the parsed output a recruiter reads³³. Recruiters catch it with a select-all highlight, and some systems auto-flag the manipulation, so the trick gets you eliminated³³.

Free "ATS checker" sites deserve the same skepticism. The popular open-source ats-screener simulator states plainly that its scoring is an approximation from public documentation and does not reflect any platform's proprietary algorithm³⁴. Run one for a rough smoke test, but do not treat its score as a recruiter's verdict.

HOW DO YOU TAILOR WITHOUT REWRITING YOUR LIFE?

Tailoring is not inventing a new persona for every posting. It is making the true parts of your history match the words the recruiter searches for. Pull the must-have terms from the posting, find where each is genuinely true of your experience, and write that line in their phrasing. If the posting says "incident response" and you ran incident response, say "incident response," not your team's internal nickname.

DO THIS NOW: THE TWO TESTS THAT BEAT ANY CHECKER

Ten minutes, no tool required.

The parse test. Paste your resume into the plainest text editor you have, then read what lands. If your name, email, phone, and titles come through in order, a real parser will too. If the contact line vanishes or two columns weld into a word soup, you have a layout problem a human never sees past. Our scorer counts that scramble as the failure that trips a field-mapper².

The six-second test. Hand your resume to someone for six seconds, then take it away. Ask what role am I going for, and what makes me plausible for it. If they cannot answer both, a recruiter working a packed queue will not either.

WORKSHEET: THE RELEVANCE RULE CHECKLIST AND A TAILORING MINI-TEMPLATE

Three passes, in order. Do not move on until the one before is clean.

Findable: one column, standard section order, contact details in the body and not a header or footer, saved as a text-based PDF or DOCX, never as a scan or image.

Relevant: the posting's top five must-haves each appear once, in the recruiter's words, only where they are true, with a summary line that names the target role.

Defensible: every bullet could become an interview question and you have the number or the story ready to answer it.

Tailoring mini-template, one line per must-have:

Posting's exact phrase	Where it is true for me	My resume line, in their words
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

The ATS Autopsy is our own deterministic test of synthetic resumes through local open-source extractors, run June 2026²; we tested no commercial ATS and make no claim any product rejects or discriminates. Vendor behavior is sourced to Greenhouse documentation, and the myth's origin to the Preptel record and the 2021 HBS and Accenture "Hidden Workers" report. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

Run the two tests by hand at least once; they teach you what the machine is blind to. For the two-minute version that flags which sections did not parse, run your file through UnchartedCareer's free ATS scan and resume-to-job match score. Same logic, faster.

A readable resume gets you into the database and up the sort. It does not tell you which database to be in. The Surface layer is about being seen at all. The next stretch is about where you point that energy, because the most common job-search mistake is not a bad resume, it is a hundred good ones fired at the wrong doors.

Chapter 3, Surface to Screen: searching smart in the age of auto-apply

Stop sending more applications. The math everyone repeats, that volume wins, is wrong: across thousands of cold applications, the mean callback rate was 10.4%³⁵, and that was before auto-apply tools flooded the queue. Use AI to find and tailor a short list of right-fit roles, and lean on referrals, where the hit rate is structurally higher.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: more applications equals more offers.

Reality: a cold application's response rate is low, and adding volume does not raise it. A talent-acquisition expert sent more than 700 applications through Easy Apply and got zero responses³⁶.

WHY DOES SENDING MORE APPLICATIONS NOT WORK?

Because volume does not move the rate. An audit study sent 12,224 tailored resumes³⁵ to 4,594 real postings across eight US cities and saw a mean callback rate of 10.4%³⁵. Customized to each market, they drew about a 10% response³⁷.

The queue got longer. LinkedIn reported an average of 11,000 job applications submitted per minute, up 45% year over year (eWeek, 2025)³⁸. One headhunter estimated a 25%³⁹ rise in AI-submitted applications, blaming auto-apply tools that send mass mis-targeted resumes. The yield collapses on the other end too: on Ashby, the offer rate for inbound cold applicants fell from about 7 in 1,000 to 2 in 1,000⁴⁰.

DATA POINT

A US resume audit found a mean callback rate of 10.4% across cold applications to posted openings (NBER, 2015)³⁵. That is the number spray-and-pray bets against.

HOW DO YOU USE AI IN A SEARCH WITHOUT GETTING BURNED?

Use it to aim and tailor, not to mass-blast. Targeting AI reads a job post, finds the roles that fit you, and helps you write a tailored application for each; blasting AI fires a padded resume at every opening. The first beats the 10.4% reality one role at a time³⁵; the second manufactures the volume recruiters are drowning in³⁹.

Most already reached for it: just over 53% of US job seekers⁴¹ said they used ChatGPT or a similar tool in Q1 2024, more than double the 25% in Q2 2023⁴².

The spam path fails predictably. A senior recruiter says AI-written resumes are easy to spot because every keyword from the job description shows up⁴³. Even when one slips past a junior recruiter, the gap shows on the first phone screen⁴⁴.

There is a hard line under the blasting path, unrelated to quality. Many auto-apply tools scrape a site or drive a bot through it, and the platforms forbid exactly that. LinkedIn's User Agreement, effective November 3, 2025, prohibits using software, scripts, robots, crawlers, or browser plug-ins to scrape or copy its services⁴⁵, and bars bots or unauthorized automated methods to access the site, send or redirect messages, or drive inauthentic engagement⁴⁶. Both clauses cover the common auto-apply extension, and the account at risk holds your referrals.

APPLYING THE AI USE LINE TO SEARCH

The line is one test. Use AI to do the homework and build the application, never to be you against a platform's terms. The full version, for the interview, lives in Chapter 4. For a search, aim and write with it.

WHAT IS THE HIDDEN MARKET, AND WHY DO REFERRALS BEAT THE PORTAL?

The hidden market is hires that happen through people, not the public form. SilkRoad's analysis of more than 14 million applications found employee referrals delivered over 30% of all hires and 45% of internal hires in 2016 (SilkRoad via SHRM, 2017)⁴⁷. For many roles, that is the main door.

Referrals convert better at every step. Ashby's data, from more than 38 million applications, shows 40% of referred candidates move from application to interview⁴⁸, and 16% of those who interview reach an offer stage⁴⁹. The earliest filter is cleanest: 52% of referred candidates passed initial screens versus 35% overall (Ashby, 2026)⁵⁰.

The reason is not favoritism. Across nine large firms with millions of applicants, referred workers faced a lower hiring bar and were more likely to be hired given a quality signal⁵¹. The tests pointed to referrals selecting workers who fit the specific job, not workers of higher overall quality⁵².

The strongest evidence is three field experiments where referrals carried information on performance and persistence that observable traits missed⁵³. In the authors' simulation, when employers could see who was referred, 79% of referred applicants would be hired against just 9% of non-referred ones (Harvard LEAP, 2015)⁵⁴. That sample sat in the Philippines on oDesk, so read it as mechanism, not a number you will reproduce⁵³.

WHAT DOES A SEARCH SYSTEM THAT BEATS VOLUME LOOK LIKE?

It is narrow on purpose. Instead of a hundred applications you never follow up on, you work a short list deeply. If a referral clears the first screen at 52% against 35%⁵⁰, and a cold portal application converts to an offer at roughly 0.2%⁴⁰, your time buys more on the warm channel.

Four moving parts. First, fit before volume: AI surfaces the postings that match your skills, so you aim where a response is plausible. Second, a warm

path for each target: find the one person who could refer or introduce you. Third, a tailored application written by you with AI as an editor, a resume that survives the phone screen. Fourth, follow-up you can sustain: ten roles you track and nudge beats hundreds you fire and forget.

HOW DO YOU READ A JOB POST LIKE A RECRUITER?

Assume a machine reads it first, and write for the machine and the human at once. About 63% of employers use a Recruiting Management System, 75% in the US⁵⁵. More than 90%⁵⁶ use it to filter or rank candidates before a person looks, 94% for middle-skills roles and 92% for high-skills roles⁵⁶.

The filters are blunter than most people expect. Almost half of surveyed companies automatically screen out a resume with an employment gap of more than six months⁵⁷. The same research found 88%⁵⁸ of employers believed qualified high-skills candidates were screened out for not matching the exact wording, rising to 94% for middle-skills roles⁵⁸.

So read the post in two passes: first name the hard requirements you meet, including dates that close any gap; then read for the actual job behind the buzzwords and write to that in your own words. The cost is concrete: hidden workers in the same study applied to 44.2 positions on average over five years⁵⁹ and got just 1.2 offers, because the screens stopped them before anyone read the fit.

DO THIS NOW: BUILD YOUR TARGET TEN

Pick ten roles, not a hundred. Choose them for genuine fit, where you can point at the requirement and the experience that meets it. For each, do four things: find the one person who could refer or introduce you, tailor the resume to the real job and not the keyword list, name any dates that close a gap a filter would catch⁵⁷, and set a follow-up reminder. Work that list for two weeks before adding a single role.

The reframe to keep: volume is the trap, the channel is the lever. You do not beat a 10.4% cold callback rate by sending more applications³⁵; you beat it by changing the door you walk through.

WORKSHEET: THE TARGET TEN TRACKER AND A JOB-POST DECODER

Job-post decoder, run on each posting before you apply:

Pass	What I am looking for	What I found
Pass 1, hard gates	Required years, license, location, must-have terms the system filters on	_____
Pass 1, gap check	Any date gap a six-month filter would catch, and the line that closes it	_____
Pass 2, the real job	What this team actually needs, in plain words behind the buzzwords	_____

Target Ten tracker, ten rows:

#	Role and company	Fit evidence (my experience meets which requirement)	Warm path (the one person)	Tailored?	Follow-up date
1	_____	_____	_____	Y / N	_____

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

The cold-application baseline is a 2015 NBER field experiment, and the referral mechanism rests on a nine-firm Quarterly Journal of Economics study plus three Harvard lab experiments. Funnel and referral-conversion numbers come from ATS vendors Ashby and SilkRoad, who report from their

own platform data, so treat them as directional. The oDesk split shows the size of the referral effect, not a rate you should expect, and two volume figures are single-practitioner estimates framed as anecdotes. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

Build the list yourself first, because the thinking is the part that wins. When you want help with targeting and matching, that is what UnchartedCareer's AI job search and match score are for.

Targeting gets you into rooms worth being in. Whether the room holds a person, a camera scored by software, or both, the next layer is where you stop being a document and become a candidate. Surface and Screen were about getting seen. Signal is about being good once you are seen.

Chapter 4, Signal: the two-sided interview

Win the interview by being good in the room, whether the room holds a person, a camera scored by software, or both. The skill is what holds up under the follow-up, and employers are writing live AI assistance out of bounds. Anthropic tells candidates there is no AI assistance during live interviews unless it indicates otherwise⁶⁰, and take-home work should be done without its model unless permitted⁶¹. The protective line: build the skill with AI before the room, never be you in it.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: a live AI copilot gives you an edge in the interview.

Reality: it wins the question you saw coming and collapses on the follow-up, because reading words is not the same as defending them. The downside is

one-sided: a pulled offer and a burned door.

WHAT DOES AN AI-ERA INTERVIEW LOOK LIKE FROM BOTH SIDES?

Software moved into hiring fastest at recruiting, the HR function with the highest AI adoption, at 27% of US organizations (SHRM, survey fielded December 2025)⁶². You may now record an asynchronous video interview, an AVI, answering set questions reviewed later by human judges or algorithms⁶³, so you may not know whether a person or a model watches.

The tooling arrived on the candidate side too. In Gartner's 4Q24 survey of 3,290 job candidates, 39%⁶⁴ said they used AI during the application process. Some of that crosses a hard line: in a separate Gartner 2Q25 survey, 6% of candidates⁶⁵ admitted to interview fraud, posing as someone else or having someone pose.

FRAMEWORK: THE AI USE LINE, THE FULL 2X2

Run every use through one test. Can you defend the output without the tool in the room? If yes, the AI built a capability that is now yours. If no, it stands in for your judgment, and that gets caught.

	Builds your capability	Replaces your judgment
Before the room	Mock interviews, answer drafts you rehearse from memory, company research, delivery feedback on your own recording	Memorizing a script you cannot adapt, generating answers you do not understand
During the room	(almost nothing legitimate lives here)	A live copilot feeding you answers to read, someone or something else posing as you

The safe quadrant is the top-left: practice AI builds recall and fluency, and there is nothing to detect. The bottom-right ends with a closed file.

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS ACTUALLY DETECT AND BAN?

The category employers name is the live one. Anthropic prohibits candidate AI use during live interviews⁶⁰ and on take-home assessments⁶¹, both dated to its July 10, 2025 candidate guidance. The model's own maker tells you not to use one.

Detection is not flawless, and not every interview is monitored, but the downside stays one-sided. The US EEOC launched its Initiative on Artificial Intelligence and Algorithmic Fairness on October 28, 2021⁶⁶, and its chair said anti-discrimination laws apply to AI and algorithmic hiring tools⁶⁷.

HOW DO YOU DO WELL WITH AN AI INTERVIEWER OR AN ASYNC VIDEO?

Treat the camera as the interviewer: what reads as competence to a person gives a model clean signal too. Answer in specifics, in your own words from memory: the situation, what you did, what happened, and hold your framing through the follow-up.

The format is still unsettled. A 2025 editorial in the International Journal of Selection and Assessment⁶⁸ flags fairness and automated-scoring efficacy as open research themes, concluding AVIs still need validity evidence and equitable access⁶⁹.

DATA POINT

AI-scored interview personality assessments had weak, statistically nonsignificant relations with later supervisor job-performance ratings (Stevenor et al., 2024, Study 2, N=25)⁷⁰. The scorer you might want to game cannot reliably tell whether you would do the job.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS WHEN A MACHINE READS YOUR FACE?

The privacy group EPIC filed a complaint with the US Federal Trade Commission against HireVue on November 6, 2019, over its AI-based facial-analysis assessments⁷¹. The complaint cited HireVue's then-CTO that 10% to 30% of a candidate's score came from facial expressions, the rest from language⁷². On January 12, 2021, HireVue said it would stop facial analysis on candidates⁷³.

Why regulators care shows up in measured accuracy, not guilt. SIOP, the main US industrial-organizational psychology body, notes that some computer-vision algorithms assess facial expressions less accurately for darker skin, harming minority subgroups⁷⁴. SIOP separates psychometric bias from adverse impact, the legal concept, warning that subgroup mean differences are not bias⁷⁵.

Your rights depend on where the job is; expect fewer than headlines imply. New York City's Local Law 144, effective July 2023⁷⁶, was the first to mandate bias audits for commercial hiring algorithms: a tool must be audited within the prior year, the summary posted publicly, and candidates notified⁷⁷. A FAccT study across 391 NYC employers⁷⁸ found roughly 5% had posted a bias audit and 3% a transparency notice (FAccT, data collected Oct to Nov 2023). It runs on complaints, with penalties of \$500 to \$1,500 per violation per day, no proactive investigatory power, no private right of action⁷⁹. A 2025 New York State Comptroller audit covering July 2023 to June 2025 found the agency received only two complaints⁸⁰. The same audit measured the gap directly: the city agency had reviewed 32 companies and flagged one issue⁸¹, while the Comptroller, reviewing the same 32 companies, found at least 17 instances of potential non-compliance⁸².

Illinois went earlier and narrower. Its Artificial Intelligence Video Interview Act took effect January 1, 2020⁸³, covering employers that use AI to analyze video interviews for an Illinois-based position, a term the statute leaves undefined⁸⁴. AIVIA requires notifying applicants in advance that AI is used⁸⁵, explaining how it works and the general characteristics it evaluates⁸⁶, and obtaining consent⁸⁷. Illinois then widened it: House Bill 3773, effective January 1, 2026, amends the state Human Rights Act to bar AI, including generative AI, in hiring or promotion decisions that discriminate on protected characteristics⁸⁸.

So what can you ask for? In a covered Illinois interview you have a statutory basis to be told AI is in use, how it works, and to consent before proceeding. Outside those places, including the EU and most US states, check your jurisdiction's AI-in-hiring and biometric-privacy rules, not a universal right to an explanation or human reviewer.

WHY IS GAMING THE SCORER THE WRONG GOAL?

Because the machine cannot reliably predict whether you would do the job. The same Stevenor et al. (2024)⁸⁹ nonsignificant relation with supervisor ratings showed in Study 2, N=25⁷⁰. Those models trained on verbal data and ratings from low-stakes interviews, then ran on high-stakes ones⁹⁰.

The most-cited prior study never tested that link. Hickman et al. (2022)⁹¹ never examined whether its assessments predict job performance, and found validity better from interviewer observations than self-reports⁹². SIOP's read: proceed cautiously with AI personality assessment given mixed findings⁹³, and AI hiring assessments must meet the same validity standards as traditional tests, including scores that relate to job performance⁹⁴.

The honest counter-evidence: HireVue's own researchers report automated video competency assessments at an uncorrected, sample-weighted validity of $r\text{-bar} = .24$ with job performance across five US samples totaling 1,124 (Liff et al., HireVue, Jan 2024)⁹⁵. That validity ranged from .20 for maintenance workers to .27 for call-center workers⁹⁶, placed below but comparable to human-rated structured interviews at an uncorrected $r\text{-bar} = .32$ ⁹⁷. So competency scoring of what you say has defensible signal, while personality scoring of how you come across does not yet.

Confidence trains through reps. Your first scored mock will read low. That is the point of doing it early, when the score is feedback, not a verdict.

DO THIS NOW: ANSWER ONE HARD QUESTION ON CAMERA

Open your laptop camera and answer one question aloud, no notes: "Tell me about a time you owned something that broke, and what you did." Then watch it back. Look for the three tells that survive into any AVI: where you reached for filler, where your pace ran away, and the moment your eyes left the lens.

Run that drill until the follow-up stops rattling you. That is the skill a human reviewer rewards, the substance an algorithm scores best⁹⁵, and what no copilot fakes live.

WORKSHEET: THE AI USE LINE SELF-CHECK AND A STORY BANK

AI Use Line self-check, for each way you plan to use AI this week:

What I am using AI for	Before or during the room	Could I defend the output with no tool present?	Verdict (preparation / crutch)
_____	_____	Y / N	_____

Story Bank, build six before any interview. One row per story, drawn from real experience:

Story (one line)	Situation	What I did	Result, with a number if I have one	Hard follow-up I would dread
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

The claims on whether AI scoring predicts job performance rest on peer-reviewed psychology, with a tiny Study 2 sample we call out rather than smooth over, and a prior study that never tested job performance at all. The competency-scoring counter-evidence comes from HireVue's own researchers, so it is a vendor result reported against its human-rater benchmark. Facial-analysis history is sourced to EPIC as allegations, not adjudicated findings. Regulation moves fast, so verify current rules for your jurisdiction before betting a high-stakes decision on them. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

A mirror won't ask the follow-up. UnchartedCareer's AI interview practice throws that unseen follow-up at you on demand, after the manual drill. Do the bad first one this week, not the week of your interview.

A strong interview earns you an offer. What happens next decides what that offer is worth, and most people give the answer away in the first ninety seconds by accepting the opening number. Signal proves you can do the work. Settle is where you get paid for it.

Chapter 5, Settle: know your worth, then close the gap

Most people accept the first number, and that silence costs them for years. The fix is arithmetic: find what the role actually pays, name a target inside that range, and ask once. In one classic study, those who negotiated gained 7.4% on average over their first offer⁹⁸. Ask once. The information gap is the enemy, and pay-transparency law is shrinking it state by state in 2026.

This chapter is informational, not legal or financial advice. Wage and pay-transparency rules vary by state and change often, so treat every legal claim here as dated and confirm your current state law before you rely on it.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: negotiating is greedy, or a risky move that could cost the offer.

Reality: in the Pew data, among workers who asked for more, 28% got exactly what they asked for⁹⁹ and another 38% got more than the first offer but less than their ask (Pew Research Center, April 2023)⁹⁹. Two in three who asked beat the opening number, so the risk is silence.

WHAT IS THE WORTH GAP, AND WHY DOES IT COMPOUND?

The Worth Gap is the distance between what a role actually pays and what you know it pays. When you do not know the range, you anchor on the first number you hear, and whoever frames the first credible number tends to set the price.

The cost does not stay small. A starting salary is the base every raise, bonus, and offer builds on, so a number a few thousand low drags every later one down. One conversation at the start outweighs years of asking later.

The Worth Gap has two halves, information and compounding. Close the information half before the conversation, and the compounding half follows.

WHAT DOES THE SILENCE ACTUALLY COST, IN REAL NUMBERS?

It costs the gap between offer and ask. In a 2023 Pew Research Center survey of 5,775 U.S. adults¹⁰⁰, most did not ask for more at their starting salary, 32% of men and 28% of women¹⁰⁰. The classic version is starker, only 7% of women versus 57% of men⁹⁸ among graduating professional-school students negotiating a first offer (Babcock and Laschever 2003)⁹⁸.

Why stay quiet? Discomfort, unevenly spread. Women were more likely than men to say they felt uncomfortable asking, 42% versus 33%, while men were more likely to say they were satisfied with the offer, 42% versus 36%¹⁰¹.

A 2007 paper by Bowles, Babcock, and Lai found across four experiments that evaluators penalized women more than men for initiating pay negotiations¹⁰². In one experiment of 236 college-educated adults, attempting to negotiate barely affected willingness to work with a male candidate but sharply reduced it for a female one, the negative effect more than 5.5 times greater for women than men¹⁰³. This documented social cost is sometimes called backlash, and the script below blunts it.

HAS THE PICTURE CHANGED SINCE "WOMEN DON'T ASK"?

Yes, and large enough to rewrite the advice. The phrase comes from "Women Don't Ask," the 2003 book by Babcock and Laschever, arguing a dramatic gender difference in the propensity to negotiate¹⁰⁴.

The data moved. A 2023 peer-reviewed study in Academy of Management Discoveries found women now report negotiating at least as often as men, 54% of women versus 44% of men among roughly 990 MBA graduates,

2015 to 2019¹⁰⁵. A second alumni study found 64% of women and 59% of men tried to negotiate for promotions or pay¹⁰⁶. The authors concluded negotiation propensity cannot account for the pay gap in those alumni data¹⁰⁷.

The problem shifted from asking to getting: more women than men attempted to negotiate, and more women were turned down¹⁰⁸. The job is to ask in a way that is hard to refuse.

HOW WIDE IS THE GENDER PAY GAP, AND WHAT IS IT MEASURING?

It is a measured disparity, not an adjudicated finding of discrimination. In 2024, women age 16 and older who usually worked full time had median weekly earnings of \$1,043 against \$1,261 for men, 83% of men's, per U.S. BLS¹⁰⁹. A Pew analysis of the same survey, by hourly earnings for full- and part-time workers, put women at 85% of men's pay in 2024, a 15-cent gap¹¹⁰. These are group averages, not a measure isolating discrimination from hours, occupation, or experience.

The gap is narrower early in careers, women aged 25 to 34 earning 95 cents for every dollar men earned in 2024¹¹¹. Progress has been slow, women at 81% of men's pay in 2003 against 85% in 2024¹¹².

WHAT DOES PAY TRANSPARENCY REQUIRE IN 2026, AND WHERE?

A growing list of states now puts the range in the open, handing you an anchor before you speak. Read a posted range as a starting point, never the cap.

Everything below is dated and high-volatility. States differ on who is covered and amend these rules often, so check your state agency as of the date you read this and treat any specific local threshold as one that may have changed. This is informational, not legal advice.

New York. As of September 17, 2023, New York State Labor Law Section 194-B¹¹³ requires covered employers to post compensation ranges^{113,114}.

Washington. As of January 1, 2023, RCW 49.58.110¹¹⁵ requires employers to disclose the wage scale or salary range plus benefits in each posting, amended in 2025^{115,116,117}.

New Jersey. As of June 1, 2025, New Jersey requires employers to post the wage or salary or a range, plus benefits, for new positions and transfers^{118,119}.

Illinois. As of January 1, 2025, an amendment to the Illinois Equal Pay Act, HB3129, requires employers with 15 or more employees to include pay scale and benefits in postings, on a good-faith standard^{120,121,122,123}.

Colorado. Under the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, C.R.S. Section 8-5-101 and following¹²⁴, Part 2 requires disclosing compensation and benefits in all job postings^{124,125}.

Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Wage Transparency Act, signed July 31, 2024, requires employers with 25 or more employees to disclose pay ranges as of October 29, 2025, on a good-faith standard^{126,127,128}.

DATA POINT

State laws requiring salary ranges in job postings raised wages by 1.3 to 3.6% across three datasets (NBER working paper, November 2025)¹²⁹.
Transparency informs your ask and moves the floor.

WHAT DOES THE SCRIPT THAT WORKS ACTUALLY SOUND LIKE?

Say your number first. Anchoring is the most documented force in negotiation, the first credible number pulling the final figure toward it, often explaining over half the variance in simulated price negotiations among

managers¹³⁰. The same research notes a tradeoff: an aggressive first offer tends to improve your result while lowering your satisfaction with it¹³⁰. Aim high, grounded in the range.

When they anchor first, neutralize it with your own information. A 2001 peer-reviewed study found the first-offer advantage vanished when negotiators focused on facts contradicting the opening offer, like their own target or the other side's alternatives¹³¹. So if their number lands first, do not argue it on its terms; restate your target and the market range supporting it. That also blunts the backlash above, keeping the talk on shared facts rather than on you¹⁰².

WHAT CAN YOU NEGOTIATE BEYOND BASE PAY?

Base salary is one lever, rarely the only one. Sign-on bonus, equity, title, and start date often have more give than base pay, especially when a manager has hit a band ceiling. A higher title can reset the band you are measured against for years, the compounding the Worth Gap runs on. Treat each like base pay, and ask once.

WHY IS THIS A MUSCLE, NOT A MOMENT?

Because the same skill that gets the offer is the one you reach for at every review, scope debate, and hard conversation after. Asking is uncomfortable for most, but that discomfort means you have not done the rep.

DO THIS NOW: FIND YOUR RANGE AND WRITE YOUR NUMBER

Find your range. Pull the posted range if the state requires one, and cross-check public salary data for the title, level, and city. Write the low, midpoint, and high.

Write your number. Pick a target near the top, write one sentence naming it tied to the range and what you bring, and rehearse it out loud until it sounds

like a fact, not a plea.

WORKSHEET: THE WORTH GAP CALCULATOR AND A COUNTER-OFFER SCRIPT

Worth Gap calculator:

Field	My entry
Posted range (if any)	_____
Public salary data for this title, level, city	low _____ , mid _____ , high _____
My target (near the top, grounded in the range)	_____
One component beyond base I will also ask for	_____

Counter-offer script, fill the placeholders and rehearse it out loud:

"Thank you for the offer, I am excited about [role]. Based on the range for this work and what I bring in [your strongest evidence], I am targeting [your number]. Can we get there?" Then stop talking.

This chapter is informational, not legal or financial advice, and pay-transparency and wage rules vary by state and change often. Confirm your current state law before you rely on any specific entitlement described here.

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

Negotiation behavior comes from the 2003 "Women Don't Ask," a 2023 Pew survey, and a 2023 Academy of Management Discoveries study. The social-cost and anchoring findings are controlled experiments reported as measured differential treatment, not proof any employer discriminates.

Gender pay gap figures are measured national disparities from U.S. BLS and Pew, not adjudicated. Pay-transparency claims cite each state's own statute and are high-volatility, so each is dated and flagged to confirm against current law. This chapter is informational, not legal or financial advice. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

Write your number by hand first, because the number is yours to own. To rehearse the exact words, UnchartedCareer's career coaching includes difficult-conversations practice.

A captured offer settles what this job pays. It does not settle the next decade, because the role you just accepted will change under you while you do it. Settle is the one-time event. The last layer is the long game, where staying employed means staying current.

Chapter 6, Sustain: future-proof without the panic

AI is not coming for all the jobs, and it is not too late to pivot at 30, 40, or 50. The best data shows turnover, not collapse. The World Economic Forum projects a net gain of 78 million jobs worldwide by 2030¹³², and US employment is set to grow 3.1 percent by 2034¹³³. The real threat is standing still: the WEF estimates 39 percent of the average worker's skill set will be transformed or outdated by 2030¹³⁴. Stay ahead and your next career change becomes a choice you time.

MYTH VS REALITY

Myth: AI is coming for all the jobs, and it is too late to pivot at 30, 40, or 50.

Reality: the WEF for the world and the BLS for the US both land on net employment growth^{132,133}, with automation hitting routine roles. The deck reshuffles regardless of age, so a mid-career switch is the normal response.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF WORK ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE IN 2026?

It looks like turnover set to net growth. The World Economic Forum, surveying 1,000-plus employers and 14.1 million workers across 55 economies¹³⁵, projects that by 2030 the global economy creates 170 million jobs and displaces 92 million, a net gain of 78 million¹³². That is 22 percent structural turnover against 1.2 billion formal jobs¹³².

The US picture agrees at a calmer pace. BLS projects the economy to add 5.2 million jobs¹³³ from 2024 to 2034, lifting employment to 175.2 million, a 3.1 percent rise, well under the 13.0 percent of the prior decade¹³³.

Now the part the headlines skip. BLS assumes technological change including AI follows its historical pattern, with displacement slower than predicted¹³⁶. It expects AI to dampen demand in sales, design, and admin support rather than cause net job loss¹³⁶. The agency admits its methods cannot model a sudden disruption¹³⁶.

DATA POINT

The WEF projects 170 million new jobs and 92 million displaced by 2030, a net gain of 78 million worldwide (WEF 2025)¹³². The headline was never robot apocalypse. It is turnover plus skill decay, and only one is yours.

WHICH CAREER PIVOTS ARE ACTUALLY GROWING?

The growth is concentrated. The 15 fastest-growing US roles for 2024 to 2034¹³⁷ are led by wind turbine service technicians at plus 49.9 percent¹³⁷ and solar photovoltaic installers at plus 42.1 percent, then nurse practitioners at plus 40.1 percent, data scientists at plus 33.5 percent, and

information security analysts at plus 28.5 percent¹³⁷. Five of the 15 are computer and mathematical work¹³⁷.

Two engines drive most of it. The first is healthcare. BLS projects healthcare and social assistance the fastest-growing US sector and the largest source of new jobs, at plus 8.4 percent through 2034 (BLS 2025)¹³⁸. Nurse practitioners grow 40.1 percent at a \$129,210 median in 2024¹³⁹, while home health and personal care aides add 739.8 thousand jobs, the largest numeric gain, at a low \$34,900 median in 2024¹⁴⁰.

The second engine is computers and math. BLS projects it to grow plus 10.1 percent over 2024 to 2034¹⁴¹, more than three times the total-economy rate, on demand for AI and more data to analyze¹⁴¹. Data scientists grow 33.5 percent at a \$112,590 median¹⁴².

The WEF sees the same shape worldwide. Its fastest-growing roles are big data specialists, fintech engineers, and AI and machine learning specialists, with strong growth for energy-transition roles, care, and delivery drivers¹⁴³.

WHICH JOBS ARE ACTUALLY SHRINKING, AND WHY?

The decline is just as concentrated. BLS projects office and administrative support to fall the most of any US group, down 3.9 percent or 761,900 jobs, with sales and related down 2.0 percent¹⁴⁴. The fastest-declining occupation is word processors and typists, down 36.1 percent¹⁴⁵, then telemarketers, down 22.1 percent¹⁴⁶. Cashiers lose the most jobs of any occupation, roughly 314,000, which BLS ties to self-checkout and retail automation¹⁴⁷.

The WEF reads its global data the same way, expecting clerical and secretarial roles to decline most in absolute numbers, with bank tellers, postal clerks, and data entry clerks among the fastest-falling¹⁴⁸. The roles

under pressure are routine and rules-based, task content, not your age or worth.

FRAMEWORK: THE WORTH GAP MEETS THE SKILLS HALF-LIFE

Chapter 5 framed money as a gap you close with information. Sustain runs on a different gap, between your skills and what your field rewards next, and it widens while you do nothing. The WEF estimates that 39 percent of the average worker's skill set¹³⁴ will be transformed or outdated over 2025 to 2030, its closest proxy for skill half-life¹³⁴. That figure has fallen from 44 percent in 2023 and a 57 percent peak in 2020¹³⁴, so the turnover is slowing.

The WEF estimates 59 percent of the global workforce will need training by 2030¹⁴⁹. In the 100-worker picture, employers expect 29 upskilled in place¹⁴⁹, 19 upskilled and redeployed, and 11 unlikely to get needed reskilling¹⁴⁹.

In the WEF survey, 86 percent expected AI and information-processing to transform their business by 2030¹⁵⁰. Employers also expect the human share of tasks to drop from 47 percent toward 33 percent by 2030, 82 percent of that shift from automation¹⁵¹.

IS IT TOO LATE TO CHANGE CAREERS AT 30, 40, OR 50, AND WHAT TRANSFERS?

No. With 39 percent of the average skill set turning over by 2030¹³⁴ and 59 percent of workers needing training¹⁴⁹, a 45-year-old retooling and a 25-year-old starting out face the same task. Age is not the gate. Skill recency is.

What carries across a pivot is the durable layer. The WEF lists the fastest-growing skills as AI and big data, then networks, cybersecurity, and technological literacy, alongside human skills like creative thinking,

resilience, flexibility, and curiosity¹⁵². Those last ones automation does not touch: judgment, communication, and managing ambiguity do not reset. What decays is the routine, tool-bound knowledge you refresh, so you carry the human skills into a market that rewards them and top up the technical layer¹³⁴.

CAN AI HELP YOU LEARN FASTER WHILE IT CHANGES YOUR JOB?

Yes. The technology reshaping the work is the cheapest tutor you have had. The skill in shortest supply is AI and big data fluency, the top of the WEF growth list¹⁵², and you can build the early rungs with the tools themselves.

Point it at the gap, not busywork. Use an AI model to explain a concept from your field, drill you with questions, and turn a job posting into plain requirements. The 11-in-100 left without reskilling¹⁴⁹ are mostly waiting on an employer. You do not have to.

One caution. AI is a fast tutor and a poor judge of whether you have internalized something; it will happily tell you that you understand a topic you only skimmed. The reps that hold up are the ones you do out loud and under pressure, not where the model fills the silence.

WHERE THIS SITS IN THE HIRING STACK

This is Sustain, the last layer. Surface and Screen get you in the door once; Sustain is whether you keep choosing your own doors. WEF turnover and skill instability^{132,134} and the BLS forecast^{133,137} describe one thing: the job you hold is a moving target, and staying employed means staying current.

DO THIS NOW: NAME THE RISK, BUILD THE HEDGE, BOOK THE HOUR

First, name one skill at risk. Find the most routine, rules-based task in your week, the kind the data flags as exposed^{136,144}, and write it down.

Second, name one skill to build. Pick one capability from the growth list, AI and data fluency for most knowledge work, or a credential for a healthcare or green-economy pivot^{152,137}. One, not ten.

Third, book one hour this week. Put a real sixty-minute block on the calendar and spend it on the skill you named, with an AI model as tutor. A booked hour beats a plan admired.

Employment grows and skills turn over^{132,134}; the only part you control is whether your skills age faster than your field.

WORKSHEET: THE SKILLS HALF-LIFE AUDIT AND A 90-DAY RESKILL SPRINT

Skills Half-Life Audit:

Question	My answer
Most routine, rules - based task in my week (the decay risk)	_____
One skill to build from the growth list (the hedge)	_____
The durable human skills I already carry into a pivot	_____

90-day reskill sprint:

Window	Goal	The one weekly hour goes to	How I will prove I learned it (out loud, under pressure)
Days 1 to 30	_____	_____	_____
Days 31 to 60	_____	_____	_____

Window	Goal	The one weekly hour goes to	How I will prove I learned it (out loud, under pressure)
Days 61 to 90	_____	_____	_____

SOURCES FOR THIS CHAPTER

Global numbers come from the WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025 and its 2030 horizon. US numbers come from BLS Employment Projections for 2024 to 2034 and a BLS Monthly Labor Review overview. We kept the two scopes apart and did not blend a global figure with a US figure in any sentence, because their samples and methods differ. Last updated 2026-06.

TRY IT WITH UC

Name the risk and book the hour yourself first; the choice of what to defend is yours. For a second set of eyes on which skill to build, that is what UnchartedCareer's coaching is for.

Back matter

The 30-Day Beat-the-Machine plan

Six chapters, six actions, sequenced across four weeks. This is the order to do the work if you would rather be told where to start than decide. Each week climbs one part of the stack. Do the manual version first every time, and let the tool be the shortcut only after you have done it by hand once.

Week 1, get findable and seen (Surface). Map the Hiring Stack for one target role using the Chapter 1 worksheet. Then run the Chapter 2 parse test and six-second test on your current resume and fix the layout until both pass. By

Friday you have a readable resume and a one-page map of where your effort should go. If you want the machine read, the free ATS scan checks the parse for you after you have done it by hand.

Week 2, aim instead of spray (Surface to Screen). Build your Target Ten with the Chapter 3 tracker. Ten right-fit roles, each with one warm path named, each tailored with the job-post decoder. Do not add an eleventh until the list is worked. By Friday you have ten real targets and a person to reach for each, not a hundred cold submissions.

Week 3, get good in the room (Signal). Run the Chapter 4 camera drill on one hard question and watch it back. Build a Story Bank of six real stories with the follow-up you would dread written next to each. Fill the AI Use Line self-check so you know which of your habits is preparation and which is a crutch. By Friday you have done the bad first mock on purpose, while the score is still feedback. One scored mock turns the watch-it-back into a follow-up you did not see coming.

Week 4, capture and sustain (Settle and Sustain). Find your range and write your number with the Chapter 5 Worth Gap calculator, then rehearse the counter-offer script out loud until it sounds like a fact. Then run the Chapter 6 Skills Half-Life Audit, name one skill at risk and one to build, and book a real sixty-minute block to start. By the end of the month you can ask for what you are worth and you have your first reskill hour on the calendar.

Each layer feeds the next, so order matters. A readable resume is wasted on the wrong roles. A great Target Ten is wasted if you fall apart in the room, a strong interview is wasted if you accept the first number, and the best offer ages if you stop learning. Walk the stack in order and nothing upstream goes to waste.

All worksheets in one place

The Stack Map (Chapter 1).

Layer	My line for this role
Surface (findable)	File format and must-have keywords from the posting
Screen (relevant)	Likely recruiter or team, and the six-second impression I want
Signal (defensible)	Two skills the interview will probe
Settle (capture)	One component beyond base I will negotiate
Sustain (stay current)	Most automatable part of this role in two years

The Relevance Rule checklist (Chapter 2). Findable: one column, standard section order, contact in the body, text-based PDF or DOCX. Relevant: top five must-haves each appear once in the recruiter's words where true, plus a summary line naming the target role. Defensible: every bullet has a number or story ready for the follow-up. With the tailoring mini-template:

Posting's exact phrase	Where it is true for me	My resume line, in their words

The Target Ten tracker and job-post decoder (Chapter 3).

#	Role and company	Fit evidence	Warm path (the one person)	Tailored?	Follow-up date
1 to 10				Y / N	

The AI Use Line self-check and Story Bank (Chapter 4).

What I am using AI for	Before or during the room	Defendable with no tool present?	Preparation or crutch
		Y / N	

Story	Situation	What I did	Result, with a number	Follow-up I would dread

The Worth Gap calculator and counter-offer script (Chapter 5).

Field	My entry
Posted range, public data low/mid/high, my target, one component beyond base	

For the counter-offer script itself, see the fill-in version in Chapter 5, then rehearse it out loud until it sounds like a fact. That chapter carries the informational-not-legal-advice line that governs all of it.

The Skills Half-Life Audit and 90-day sprint (Chapter 6).

Question		My answer	
Decay risk, one skill to build, durable human skills I carry			
Window	Goal	Weekly hour goes to	How I prove I learned it
Days 1 to 30, 31 to 60, 61 to 90			

Sources and further reading

Every number in this book is dated and attributed in the line that carries it. The list below collects them by chapter with the source id, publisher, and date, so you can trace any claim to its origin. Vendor figures are labeled as such and read as directional.

Chapter 1, Surface, state of AI hiring.

AI use in HR doubled, 26% to 43%, recruiting most common; job descriptions led at 66%, screening 44%. SHRM, 2025¹.

39% of organizations have AI in HR now, 46% by 2026; recruiting most common. SHRM, 2026⁴. Size gradient: ~60% of 5,000-plus firms, ~35% midsize, ~33% small. SHRM, 2026⁵.

Demand side, AI skills and re-orientation. World Economic Forum Future of Jobs, 2025¹⁵³.

Parsing routes a failed read to manual entry; image files and complex layouts break the read. Greenhouse documentation, 2026^{3,154}.

39% of candidates used AI in applying; 30% open to AI-led interview; 31% told in advance. Gartner, 2025⁶. Only 26% trust AI to evaluate fairly, 52% believe AI screens them. Gartner, 2025⁷.

Name-swap embedding experiment: white-associated names preferred 85.1% versus 8.6% Black-associated. Wilson and Caliskan, AIES, 2024⁸.
NYC Local Law 144 enforcement audit⁹: 5% posted audits, 3% posted notices, two complaints in two years (NY State Comptroller, 2025)⁹. "Null compliance" design (FAccT)¹⁰.
EU AI Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, recruiting AI classified high-risk, phasing in 2025 to 2026¹¹.
Referred workers 12% to 30% less likely to quit. Quarterly Journal of Economics¹².

Chapter 2, Surface, how an ATS reads your resume.

The 75% auto-reject claim, also cited 70% and 88%¹³, traces to a 2012 Preptel sales pitch; the vendor folded in 2013 with no method published¹³.

HBS and Accenture "Hidden Workers," September 2021¹⁶: more than 90% use software to filter or rank (94% middle-skills, 92% high-skills)¹⁶; 88% agree qualified candidates get screened out on exact criteria¹⁶.

ATS Autopsy, UnchartedCareer, June 2026, 600 scored field reads².
Single-column 0% loss¹⁸; text-in-image 37.5% loss¹⁹, name/email/phone dropped 100%²⁰; header 25%²³, footer 25%²⁴; unusual font 20.8%²⁵; three-column 14.6%²⁶; tables 12.5%²⁷; two-column 1.4%²²; nonstandard headings 0%²¹; PDF 19.9%²⁹, DOCX 0%³⁰.

ATS is a database with a workflow; a failed parse is a manual-entry task, not a rejection; Talent Matching is assistive and does not auto-reject; knockout questions are recruiter-set; hidden keywords get ingested as plain text; checker simulators are approximations. Greenhouse and open-source documentation, 2026^{14,15,28,31,32,17,33,34}.

Chapter 3, Surface to Screen, AI job search and auto-apply.

Mean cold-application callback 10.4%, 12,224 resumes to 4,594 postings. NBER, 2015^{35,37}.

11,000 applications per minute, up 45% year over year. eWeek, 2025³⁸. ~25% rise in AI-assisted applications, headhunter estimate³⁹. Cold offer rate fell from ~7 to ~2 per 1,000. Ashby⁴⁰. One job seeker, 700-plus Easy Apply, zero responses³⁶.

53% of US job seekers used generative AI in Q1 2024⁴¹, up from 25% in Q2 2023⁴².

LinkedIn User Agreement effective November 3, 2025 bars scraping and bot automation^{45,46}.

Referrals: 30% of all hires, 45% of internal hires, 2016, SilkRoad via SHRM, 2017⁴⁷. Ashby, 2026: 40% application-to-interview⁴⁸, 16% interview-to-offer⁴⁹, 52% pass initial screens versus 35%⁵⁰. Mechanism is fit, Quarterly Journal of Economics^{51,52}. oDesk simulation, 79% versus 9% hired⁵⁴, Philippines sample, Harvard LEAP, 2015⁵³.

Screening, HBS and Accenture, 2021: 63% use an RMS, 75% in the US⁵⁵; more than 90% filter or rank⁵⁶; a six-month-gap auto-screen⁵⁷; 88% exact-match exclusion⁵⁸; 44.2 applications and 1.2 offers over five years⁵⁹. AI resumes are spotted by total keyword overlap and fail the phone screen, recruiter accounts^{43,44}.

Chapter 4, Signal, the AI-era interview.

Recruiting highest AI adoption at 27% of US organizations. SHRM, fielded December 2025⁶². AVIs reviewed by humans or algorithms⁶³.

39% of candidates used AI in applying. Gartner, 4Q24⁶⁴. 6% admitted interview fraud. Gartner, 2Q25⁶⁵.

Anthropic candidate guidance, July 10, 2025: no AI in live interviews, no model on take-homes unless permitted^{60,61}. EEOC AI initiative launched October 28, 2021; existing law applies^{66,67}.

AVI validity is an open research question. International Journal of Selection and Assessment editorial, 2025^{68,69}.

AI personality scoring weak and nonsignificant vs supervisor ratings, Study 2 N=25. Stevenor et al., 2024^{70,90,89}. Hickman et al., 2022 did not test job performance^{91,92}. SIOP cautions and validity standard^{93,94,74,75}.

HireVue competency validity $r\text{-bar} = .24$ across five samples, 1,124 people, range .20 to .27, vs human-rated $r\text{-bar} = .32$. Liff et al., HireVue, January 2024^{95,96,97}.

EPIC FTC complaint against HireVue, November 6, 2019⁷¹; 10% to 30% of score from facial expressions⁷²; HireVue dropped facial analysis January 12, 2021⁷³.

NYC Local Law 144, effective July 2023⁷⁶; ~5% audits and 3% notices posted, FAccT data Oct to Nov 2023⁷⁸; penalties \$500 to \$1,500 per day, complaint-only⁷⁹; two complaints July 2023 to June 2025 per Comptroller⁸⁰, with the audit-and-notice mandate at⁷⁷. Illinois AIVIA effective January 1, 2020 and HB 3773 effective January 1, 2026^{83,84,85,86,87,88}.

Chapter 5, Settle, salary and negotiation. Informational, not legal or financial advice.

"Women Don't Ask," 2003¹⁰⁴, a dean's framing of the claim¹⁵⁵, via 2007 Harvard paper: 7% of women versus 57% of men negotiated, those who did gained 7.4%⁹⁸.

Pew Research Center, April 2023, survey of 5,775 U.S. adults¹⁰⁰: 32% of men and 28% of women asked¹⁰⁰; of those who asked, 28% got their ask, 38% got more than the offer⁹⁹; comfort gap 42% versus 33%¹⁰¹.

Backlash experiments, Bowles, Babcock, and Lai, 2007: 236 adults¹⁰², effect 5.5 times greater for women¹⁰³. Anchoring explains over half the

variance and aggressive offers raise results but lower satisfaction¹³⁰; contradicting information neutralizes a first offer, 2001 experiment¹³¹.

Modern data, Academy of Management Discoveries, 2023: 54% of women versus 44% of men among ~990 MBAs¹⁰⁵; 64% versus 59% of alumni¹⁰⁶; the propensity gap cannot explain the pay gap¹⁰⁷; women more often turned down¹⁰⁸.

Gender pay gap: women's median weekly \$1,043 versus \$1,261, 83%, U.S. BLS, 2024¹⁰⁹. Pew, 85% in 2024¹¹⁰; 95 cents on the dollar for ages 25 to 34¹¹¹; women at 81% in 2003¹¹².

Pay-transparency statutes, each dated and high-volatility: NY Labor Law 194-B^{113,114}, WA RCW 49.58.110^{115,116,117}, NJ^{118,119}, IL HB3129^{120,121,122,123}, CO C.R.S. 8-5-101^{124,125}, MA Wage Transparency Act^{126,127,128}.

Salary-range disclosure raised wages 1.3 to 3.6%. NBER working paper, November 2025¹²⁹.

Chapter 6, Sustain, future of jobs and career change.

WEF Future of Jobs 2025, January 2025, over 1,000 employers, 14.1 million workers, 55 economies¹³⁵: 170 million created, 92 million displaced, net 78 million, 22% turnover, 1.2 billion formal jobs¹³². Skill instability 39%, down from 44% in 2023 and 57% in 2020¹³⁴. 59% need training by 2030¹⁴⁹. Fastest-growing roles and skills^{143,152}. Declining roles¹⁴⁸. 86% expect AI to transform their business¹⁵⁰. Human task share 47% to 33%, 82% from automation¹⁵¹.

BLS Employment Projections 2024 to 2034, released 2025, with a Monthly Labor Review overview January 2026: +3.1% to 175.2 million, 5.2 million jobs, vs 13.0% prior decade¹³³; AI dampens specific fields, gradual change assumption¹³⁶. Healthcare +8.4%¹³⁸, computers and math +10.1%¹⁴¹. 15 fastest-growing led by wind turbine techs +49.9%, solar

+42.1%, nurse practitioners +40.1%, data scientists +33.5%, infosec +28.5%^{,137}. NP wage \$129,210^{,139}, data scientist \$112,590^{,142}, home health aides +739.8 thousand at \$34,900^{,140}. Declines: admin support -3.9% / 761,900 jobs, sales -2.0%^{,144}, word processors -36.1%^{,145}, telemarketers -22.1%^{,146}, cashiers -314,000^{,147}.

ATS Autopsy method and raw data live under docs/content-drafts/labs/ats-autopsy. The full per-claim ledger, with publisher, URL, and confirmation date for every id above, lives in the research fact ledger.

About this book and UnchartedCareer

UnchartedCareer is a career platform that helps people get hired when AI sits on both sides of the table. This book is published under the Organization byline, not a personal one, because the work behind it is a team's research, not one author's opinion.

We build four things, and each one fits a layer of the Hiring Stack. The free ATS scan and resume-to-job match score work the Surface layer: paste a resume and a posting, see what a parser reads and where the relevance gaps are. The AI job search and match score work the move from Surface to Screen: read many postings, surface the handful that fit, score the match before you spend effort. The AI interview practice works the Signal layer: a live, two-way mock that asks the follow-up you did not see coming and lets you watch yourself back. Career coaching works the Settle and Sustain layers: difficult-conversations practice for the salary number, and a second set of eyes on which skills to defend and which to build.

That is the whole reason this book teaches the manual method first. Every chapter shows you the work by hand, well enough to succeed without us, then names the one tool that does it faster once you have felt where the

manual method hits its ceiling. We do not publish self-served ratings for our own products, and we do not claim a tool does something a human still has to do. The honest line runs through everything here: software sorts and surfaces and scores, and a person decides. Our tools live on the machine side of that line, to get you cleanly in front of the person who does not.

Nothing in this book uses private data about the people who use our products. Every figure is public, dated, and cited.

Clear the machine layers so a person can see you, then win the person, because the person is the one who hires. Open your camera tonight and answer one hard question out loud, no notes, and you have already started.

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