

CATHERINE HARRIS | THE NEXT MOVE

# WHAT RECRUITERS ACTUALLY SEE WHEN THEY LOOK AT YOU

The hidden gap between how you present yourself and how you're being assessed.



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# Hey there!

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## For nearly two decades, I was the recruiter.

I led talent acquisition inside Australian corporate. I've sat in thousands of conversations where your name came up and you weren't there. I've watched senior leaders get dismissed in 30 seconds and junior candidates get championed by the CEO. I've seen brilliant people miss out on roles they were perfect for, for reasons they'd never have guessed.

The hardest part of my job was knowing what I couldn't tell you.

That ends now. This is what recruiters actually see when they look at you. The seven-second scan. The silent disqualifiers. The patterns that get you shortlisted and the ones that get you skipped. Everything I wish I could have said when I was still on the other side of the table.

Read it honestly. Some of it will sting. All of it will help.

*Catherine*

# The gap between how you present yourself and how you're actually being assessed is bigger than you think.

**Being good isn't enough.** When recruiters scan 400 applicants, the question isn't "is this person right for the role?" It's "is this person worth reading properly?" That decision takes seven seconds. If you're not legible in seven seconds, you're not being read.

**You are being assessed before the first question is asked.** By the time you walk into an interview, the recruiter, the hiring manager, and often the CEO have already formed a view. The interview is usually them confirming what they think, not discovering who you are.

**The things that disqualify you are rarely the things you'd guess.** Thin social proof. A photo that breaks the coffee test. A vague About section. An under-described recent role. Most candidates lose opportunities before they realise they were being considered.

**The candidates who get championed aren't the most qualified.** They're the ones who've made someone else's job easier. Clear positioning. A specific story. An obvious fit. When your name comes up in the room, someone has to be able to summarise you in a sentence. Make sure you've written that sentence first.

**You can fix this.** Almost everything recruiters see is within your control. The patterns are learnable, the fixes are specific, and the difference between invisible and shortlisted is smaller than you think.

Read on for the seven-second scan, the three questions I asked in my head, the silent disqualifiers, a 10-minute self-audit, and what a strong candidate actually looks like.

# The rules have changed.

If you're wondering why what used to work doesn't work anymore, you're not imagining it.

The recruitment industry has changed more in the last two years than in the decade before it. Technology screens resumes before a human ever sees them. LinkedIn is now the first filter, not the second. Applicant volumes are higher than they've ever been, and recruiter time per candidate is lower. What got you shortlisted in 2022 won't get you seen in 2026.

The hardest thing to accept is this. The process isn't designed to find the best candidate. It's designed for speed. It's built to help the recruiter manage volume, not to help you stand out. Once you understand that, everything in this guide makes more sense.

**You're not failing the process.**

The process was built to fail most people. Your job is to learn the new rules.

# The 7-second scan.

Here's the uncomfortable truth about how you get shortlisted. When a recruiter opens your LinkedIn profile or your resume, the first decision isn't "is this person right for the role?" It's "is this person worth reading properly?" That decision gets made in about seven seconds.

## Seven seconds. That's it.

I used to feel bad about this. For years I fought against it, giving every candidate the full read. Then I watched my own inbox hit 400 applicants for a single role and realised the maths didn't work. Nobody has time to read 400 resumes properly. So, you learn to scan, and the scan becomes instinct, and the instinct becomes the filter everyone else in the hiring process trusts.

This is what I was actually looking at in those seven seconds:

**1. Standardised headings I can scan quickly.** I am not reading your resume the way you wrote it. I am moving down a mental checklist. If your formatting buries that information, or every role is laid out differently, I lose time I do not have. The headings I expect to find include Career Summary, Professional Experience, Education, Previous Experience, Professional Development. Give me consistent structure and I can get what I need in seconds.

**2. The front page punching me in the face with your size and impact.** Size is breadth and depth. How big were the teams, the budgets, the remits you owned? Impact is the quality of the work. What actually changed because you were there? I need to see both on the first page. Not buried in bullet point four of your third role. The front page. If it is not there, I am not excited enough to keep reading.

**3. The words you use to describe yourself.** Generic tells me you don't know how to position yourself, which is a proxy for how you'll show up in the role. Specific tells me you know what you've done and can articulate it.

**4. Something that catches the eye.** A company name I recognise. A result with a number attached. A phrase that sounds like you and not like LinkedIn. This is what pulls me out of scanning mode and into reading mode.

If two or three of those land, you get the full read. If none of them do, you don't.

## The hard part.

Most of the candidates I passed over weren't bad. They were just indistinguishable from the other 399. Being good isn't enough. You have to be legible in seven seconds, and almost nobody is.

# The first three questions I asked myself.

If your resume survives the seven-second scan, you've earned a proper read. This is where the real assessment starts.

I wasn't going through a formal checklist. Nobody does. But there were three questions I asked myself for every candidate I took seriously, and almost every recruiter and hiring manager I've worked with runs some version of the same three. Most candidates only know about the first one.

## Question 1: Can you do the job?

This is the obvious one. Do you have the skills, the experience, and the track record to actually perform in this role.

Most candidates spend all their preparation time here. They tailor their resume to the job description. They list the right keywords. They rehearse examples of times they've done similar work. And they wonder why they're still not getting shortlisted.

Here's the thing. Almost every candidate who reaches the shortlist can do the job. By the time I'm deciding between five people, they've all cleared this bar. Being able to do the job is the entry ticket, not the winning hand.

## Question 2: Are you the right level?

This is the one almost nobody prepares for, and it's where most candidates quietly lose.

Level is not just your job title. It is how you write about yourself, the scope of the problems you describe, the way you talk about your decisions, and whether the language you use matches the seniority of the role on offer.

I have seen candidates with the right title and the right years of experience get quietly moved to the back of the pile because their resume read like someone two levels junior. They listed tasks instead of outcomes. They described what they were part of instead of what they owned. They used language that said, 'I contributed to' when the role needed someone who says 'I led'.

The reverse happens too. A candidate pitching too senior for the role, using language that signals they would be bored or frustrated within six months. That is a risk a recruiter will not take.

Level is a signal, and you are sending it whether you mean to or not. The question is whether the signal you are sending matches the role you are going for.

*Check the language in your resume and your LinkedIn About section right now. Does it match the level of the role you want next, or the level of the role you just left?*

### Question 3: Will you be easy to champion?

This is the one nobody tells you about. And it is the one that wins and loses roles.

By the time I am shortlisting, I am not just thinking about whether you can do the job. I am thinking about whether I can walk into a room, put your name on a whiteboard, and have the hiring manager get it in thirty seconds.

Can I summarise you in a sentence? Do you have a clear story, or do I have to do the work of constructing one for you? Are there any obvious objections I will have to pre-empt before anyone has even met you?

The candidates who get championed are the ones who have made the recruiter's job easy. Clear positioning. A specific narrative. An obvious fit between their background and the role. When someone asks, 'who else are we looking at?' Their name is the first to come up because it is the easiest one to explain.

The candidates who get quietly deprioritised are often just as capable. But their story is harder to tell. Their positioning is vague. Their most recent role is under-described. There is something that needs explaining and nobody has explained it.

You cannot be in the room when your name comes up. But you can write the sentence that gets said when it does.

*"You cannot be in the room when your name comes up. But you can write the sentence that gets said when it does."*

If you've only been preparing on Question 1, you're doing the right work on the wrong question. Question 2 is where most candidates lose, and Question 3 is where the ones who win, win.

# The silent disqualifiers.

Most candidates assume they lose out because someone else was more qualified. Usually that is not what happened. Here is what actually disqualified you on LinkedIn before anyone had made a decision.

**1. A photo that breaks the coffee test.** When I look at your LinkedIn profile picture, I am asking one question: does this feel like someone I could be sitting across from in a cafe? The photo needs to be recent, professional, and an accurate representation of what you actually look like. Smiling, looking into the camera, shoulders up. The goal is familiarity. When someone meets you in person after seeing your profile, they should feel like they have already met you. That familiarity creates safety. At senior level, the bar is higher, not lower.

**2. A vague or missing About section.** Your LinkedIn About section is the one place you get to speak directly. Most people either leave it blank or fill it with adjectives. 'Experienced leader passionate about driving outcomes.' That tells me nothing. If I cannot work out what you do, your value, and what differentiates you from others who do what you do inside thirty seconds, I am moving on.

**3. A LinkedIn profile that does not match your resume.** The most recent role is the one I scrutinise hardest, and the first thing I check is whether your LinkedIn and your resume tell the same story. The dates, the companies, the titles, and the accountabilities need to align. Inconsistencies raise questions I should not have to ask. If I have to reconcile two different versions of your career before I have even spoken to you, you have already made my job harder.

**4. Thin social proof.** Recruiters absolutely look at your social proofing. We want to see that others think you are as good as you say you are. That comes through endorsements and recommendations. Their absence is noticed at senior level. Two or three strong, specific recommendations from people you have worked with carries weight. If nobody has ever written a sentence about what it is like to work with you, I am left wondering why.

**5. Career history that tells the wrong story.** Three lateral moves in four years. A step back that is not explained. A long gap with nothing to account for it. Staying in one company for a long time without career progression. Or job hopping that looks flighty. None of these are disqualifying on their own. But they raise questions, and if your profile does not answer those questions, I will fill in the blanks myself. You will not like what I come up with.

**6. Generic language everywhere.** Results-driven. Strategic thinker. Strong communicator. These phrases appear on approximately 80 per cent of the resumes I have ever read. They are not wrong, they are just invisible. If every line of your resume could have been written by someone else in your field, you have not actually told me anything about you.

**The hard truth.**

None of these disqualifiers are about your ability to do the job. They are all about how you present yourself. Which means every single one is fixable.

# The 10-minute self-audit.

Pull up your LinkedIn profile and your resume. Work through each of these. Be honest. The point is not to feel good about where you are. It is to see clearly what needs to change.

Area	What to check
<b>1. Your photo</b>	Recent, professional, well-lit. Does it look like the calibre of person the hiring manager is expecting to meet?
<b>2. Your headline</b>	It is jammed-packed full of keywords that a recruiter looking for someone who does what you do would be searching with? Or is it just your title?
<b>3. Your About section</b>	Read it as a stranger would. Can you tell within thirty seconds what this person does, what value you bring, and what makes you different from others who do what you do?
<b>4. Your experience</b>	Is this section identical to your resume? Do you have a well-articulated overview for each of your roles? Do you have skills embedded into your profile for each role?
<b>5. Your career trajectory</b>	Does the pattern read as progression? If there are moves that need context, have you provided it? If you have been in one company for a long time, is your progression evident so you don't look stale. Likewise, if you have changed roles a lot, can it be explained so you don't look like a flight risk?
<b>6. Your language</b>	Scan for generic phrases. Cross out anything that could have been written by any professional in your field. What is left?
<b>7. Your social proof</b>	Do you have both endorsements and recommendations? Do your recommendations speak to what you want to be known for next, or just what you were doing five years ago? Recruiters use social proof to verify that others see you the way you see yourself.
<b>8. The seven-second test</b>	Ask someone who does not know your work to look at your profile for seven seconds. Ask them what they think you do and at what level. Their answer is what recruiters are seeing.

# What a strong candidate actually looks like.

After thousands of candidates, the ones who stand out share the same things. Not the most qualifications. Not the longest tenure. These five things.

**1. They are legible in seven seconds.** Their current title, their trajectory, and one specific result are all visible without having to read properly. Standardised headings. Size and impact on the front page. The scan does the work for them.

**2. They have a clear and specific story.** They know what they are good at, they know what they want next, and they have connected those two things in plain language. When someone asks 'what do they do,' there is a clear and compelling pitch. Not a job title. Not a list of responsibilities. A story with a point.

**3. They have already answered the obvious objections.** The gap is explained. The lateral move makes sense in context. The industry change has a rationale. They have not left me to construct the narrative on their behalf, and they have not left me to wonder.

**4. They make the hiring manager's job easier.** When their name goes on the whiteboard, the room nods. There are no awkward questions. Their profile has done the pre-selling before anyone has picked up the phone.

**5. They know the difference between what they have done and what it was worth.** They do not list tasks. They describe outcomes. They can quantify where there is something to quantify, and they can articulate impact where there is not. They understand that a recruiter is not hiring your history. They are hiring what your history tells them you will do next.

None of this is about being the best candidate in the pile. It is about being the most legible one. The clearest one. The one whose story tells itself.

The candidates who land roles are rarely the most qualified people in the room. They are the people who understood what the room was actually looking for and made it easy to say yes.

You can learn to do this. The patterns are not instinct. They are skills. And skills are teachable.

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# Ready to fix this?

Everything in this guide is fixable. The seven-second scan, the silent disqualifiers, the way you tell your story. None of it requires starting from scratch. It requires a strategy.

The Next Move is Catherine's flagship career accelerator for mid and senior professionals who are serious about landing their next role. It covers everything: getting clear on what you actually want, a resume that gets past the bots and gets read, a LinkedIn profile that works while you sleep, how to access the hidden job market, and how to walk into interviews with confidence.

It is not a course you buy and forget about. It is a program you work through, with weekly group coaching, expert sessions, accountability built in, and a stay-until-you-land guarantee.

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*The Next Move comes with a stay-until-you-land guarantee. If you do the work and don't land, you keep going at no extra cost.*