

WHITE PAPER

Do We Need Respect Back in the Hiring Process?

*Confronting the ghosting epidemic and rebuilding reciprocity
between employers and candidates*



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Executive Summary

Ghosting - the abrupt, unexplained cutting-off of communication - has migrated from the dating world into the heart of professional recruitment, and it now runs in both directions. Job seekers vanish after accepting offers; employers fall silent after multiple rounds of interviews. What was once an occasional discourtesy has hardened into a systemic feature of how hiring works, and the data shows it is getting worse, not better.

Recent industry research paints a consistent picture. Pre-employment testing firm Criteria reported that the share of job seekers ghosted by an employer in the prior year climbed from 38% in 2024 to 48% in 2025, a three-year high. Greenhouse found that 61% of candidates were ghosted after an interview, a figure that rose to roughly two-thirds among historically underrepresented applicants. Employers feel the reverse pressure: SHRM's 2025 Talent Trends report found 41% of organizations encountering candidates who ghost them mid-process, and separate surveys show that more than four in ten candidates admit to having ghosted an employer themselves.

The costs are real and compounding - wasted recruiting hours, abandoned offers, prolonged time-to-hire, and lasting reputational damage amplified by review sites and professional networks. The breakdown is mutual, and so is the remedy. This paper argues that the underlying problem is not bad manners but a collapse of reciprocity, and that restoring respect, in the form of timely, honest, two-way communication, is both an ethical obligation and a competitive advantage.

Numbers at a Glance

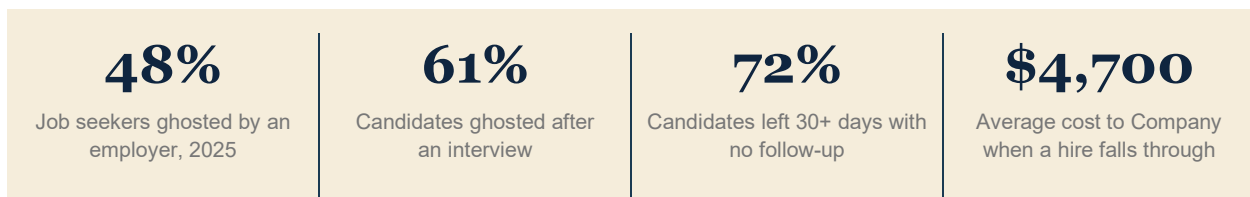


Figure 1. Representative figures from independent 2024-2026 industry surveys; directional indicators rather than directly comparable measures.

Key Takeaways

- Ghosting is now mutual and rising on both sides of the hiring table.
- It carries measurable costs - rehiring expense, slower hiring, and brand damage that follows organizations and individuals.
- Legislators have begun to act: Ontario's 2026 law makes post-interview silence a finable offence.
- The fix is structural - clear timelines, status updates, and closure - not heroic individual effort.

1. Introduction: The Erosion of Reciprocity

Hiring has always been an exchange of effort and trust. A candidate invests hours tailoring applications, preparing for interviews, completing assignments, and rearranging their lives around a possibility. An employer invests screening time, interviewer hours, and the promise, implicit or explicit, that the process will lead somewhere. The unwritten contract is simple: both sides show up, and both sides communicate.

That contract is breaking. Ghosting has become the default failure mode of recruitment, and it is striking that the behavior is now bidirectional. Candidates disappear after phone screens or even after accepting offers; companies go silent after final-round interviews, leaving applicants to interpret weeks of nothing. The question posed in this paper's title is not rhetorical. When a process that depends on mutual good faith routinely abandons that good faith, the practical question becomes: how do we put respect back into it?

This paper treats ghosting not as a moral failing of individuals but as a predictable outcome of a system under strain - overwhelmed by application volume, distorted by automation, and stripped of accountability. Understanding it that way is what makes it fixable.

2. The Scale of the Problem

No single authoritative database tracks hiring ghosting, but a cluster of 2024-2026 surveys from established sources converges on the same conclusion: ghosting is widespread, normalized, and intensifying. The table below summarizes representative findings.

Finding	Figure	Source
Job seekers ghosted by an employer in the past year (2025)	48% (up from 38% in 2024)	<i>Criteria, Candidate Experience Report</i>
Candidates ghosted after an interview	61%	<i>Greenhouse, State of Job Hunting (2024)</i>
Post-interview ghosting among underrepresented candidates	~66%	<i>Greenhouse (2024)</i>
Employers reporting candidates ghosting them mid-process	41%	<i>SHRM, Talent Trends (2025)</i>
Candidates who admit to ghosting an employer	~44%	<i>CareerPlug, Candidate Experience</i>
Active candidates left 30+ days without recruiter follow-up	72%	<i>Pin, Employer Ghosting Index (2026)</i>

Finding	Figure	Source
Negative experience reviews that mention being ghosted	87%	<i>Glassdoor Economic Research (2023)</i>

Table 1. Figures are drawn from independent surveys with differing methodologies and samples; best read as directionally consistent indicators rather than directly comparable measures.

Two patterns stand out. First, the silence concentrates at exactly the moments candidates have invested the most. While most ghosting still occurs early, after an application or first screen, a meaningful share happens deep in the funnel. iHire's October 2025 survey of more than a thousand candidates found people ghosted after multiple rounds (11%), after a skills assessment (9%), after salary negotiation (4%), and even after receiving an offer (4%). Greenhouse data likewise suggests roughly one in nine ghosted applicants had gone deep into the process before the silence began.

Second, the trend line points up. Criteria's year-over-year jump and Greenhouse's nine-point post-interview increase both indicate that, far from self-correcting, the problem is accelerating - driven, as the next sections explain, by forces larger than individual carelessness.

3. A Two-Way Breakdown

Ghosting is often framed as something candidates do to employers or something employers do to candidates. The evidence is that both happen at scale, and each reinforces the other. Treating only one side guarantees the cycle continues.

3.1 When candidates ghost employers

Candidate-side ghosting most often appears as no-shows for interviews, sudden silence after expressing strong interest, and, most disruptively, accepting an offer and then failing to appear on the first day. Surveys consistently find that more than four in ten candidates admit to having ghosted an employer at some point. A distinct and growing variant, sometimes called "career catfishing," involves accepting a role with no intention of starting; it is reported especially among younger workers. The candidates doing this are not all disengaged junior applicants - research profiles many as employed, established professionals who simply have other options and little incentive to deliver bad news.

3.2 When employers ghost candidates

Employer-side ghosting is, if anything, more pervasive and more damaging because of the power imbalance. Estimates that as many as three-quarters of applications receive no response at all are common, and post-interview silence is widely reported. Pin's 2026 Employer Ghosting Index, built from more than 200,000 real candidate conversations rather than self-report, found that 72% of people in live dialogue with a hiring team on a still-open role went more than 30 days with no logged follow-up - behavioral evidence that confirms what candidates have long described.

It's easier to vanish than to be honest - but it's also incredibly damaging.

- Paraphrasing a recurring theme among HR commentators on why employer ghosting persists

The asymmetry matters. A candidate who ghosts inconveniences a hiring team; an employer who ghosts can leave someone in financial and emotional limbo, often after that person turned down other opportunities to stay in the process. That is why the regulatory response, discussed in Section 6, has focused first on employer conduct.

4. Why Ghosting Is Accelerating

Ghosting is a symptom. The underlying drivers are structural, and most have intensified in the last two years.

4.1 The automation arms race

Generative AI has turned applying into a numbers game. Candidates can now tailor and submit dozens of applications in the time it once took to write one, and recruiters report being buried under unprecedented volume. As the resume becomes an easily generated, weaker signal, employers struggle to differentiate applicants and simply stop replying to the thousands who do not advance. The same tools that empower applicants overwhelm the humans meant to respond to them.

4.2 Long, opaque processes

Average time-to-hire has stretched dramatically, by some measures from roughly 44 days in 2023 to nearly 69 days in 2025. Multi-stage processes with unclear timelines and little status communication invite disengagement. When candidates cannot tell whether they are still being considered, the rational move is to pursue other options and quietly drop the slower process.

4.3 More options and remote flexibility

The expansion of remote and hybrid work has widened the field of opportunities available to many candidates. With more parallel processes running, it becomes easier, and, absent any relationship, more tempting, to abandon one without notice in favor of another.

4.4 “Ghost jobs” and eroded trust

A significant share of postings are not active vacancies. Companies advertise roles to build talent pools, gauge the market, or project an image of growth they are not actually pursuing. Each application to a phantom role is wasted candidate effort, and the discovery that a posting was never real corrodes trust in the entire process, making candidates quicker to ghost in turn.

4.5 Economic uncertainty and the power balance

When the labor market tightens in employers' favor, the perceived cost of treating candidates poorly falls. Organizations uncertain about their own trajectory keep postings open and applications flowing while deferring decisions, leaving applicants in indefinite limbo. Ghosting, in this light, is less an act of malice than of organizational drift and unowned process.

5. The Hidden Costs

Silence feels free. It is not. Ghosting imposes direct financial costs, slows hiring, and inflicts reputational damage that compounds over time - for organizations and individuals alike.

5.1 Direct and operational costs

When candidates ghost after accepting offers, employers absorb the full expense of restarting a search. Industry estimates place the average cost per hire near \$4,700, and surveys find a notable share of offer-accepting candidates never appear on day one. Aggregated across a hiring program, the rehiring bill runs into six figures for even mid-sized employers. Prolonged time-to-hire adds its own carrying cost: vacant roles mean lost productivity and overburdened teams.

Cost dimension	Illustrative impact
Average cost per hire	~\$4,700, lost when a hire falls through
Offer-stage no-shows	A meaningful share of accepted offers go unfulfilled
Time-to-hire	~69 days in 2025, up from ~44 in 2023
Word of mouth	A large majority of ghosted candidates tell others
Online reviews	Negative reviews concentrate around being ignored

Table 2. Illustrative cost dimensions compiled from industry reporting; figures should be treated as directional.

5.2 Reputational and relational costs

Candidate experience is now public. Ghosted applicants share their experiences on review platforms and professional networks, and Glassdoor's analysis found that the overwhelming majority of reviews mentioning ghosting also reported a negative overall impression, the silence dominating the memory of the entire process. Because talent markets are interconnected, that reputation follows an organization into future searches and partnerships. The same is true in reverse for candidates who ghost: in tight professional communities, the behavior is remembered.

5.3 The human cost

Beyond spreadsheets, ghosting takes a psychological toll. Job searching is already a period of heightened stress and self-doubt; prolonged silence after genuine investment can read as a verdict on one's worth rather than a routine business outcome. Career experts describe job seekers increasingly using words like exhausted and demoralized to describe the market. A two-minute message of closure does not just save someone time - it preserves their dignity.

6. The Regulatory Response

For years, calls to fix ghosting relied on appeals to professionalism. In 2026, that changed: a major jurisdiction made employer silence after an interview a matter of law.

6.1 Ontario's anti-ghosting law

Effective January 1, 2026, amendments to Ontario's Employment Standards Act, enacted through the Working for Workers legislation, require employers with 25 or more employees to notify any interviewed candidate of the hiring outcome within 45 days of the final interview. This makes Ontario the first jurisdiction in North America to legally prohibit post-interview ghosting. The law sits within a broader transparency package.

- Interviewed candidates must receive a decision within 45 days; a “still under review” notice can satisfy the duty.
- Public job postings must disclose expected compensation or a salary range.
- Employers must state whether a posting is a real, active vacancy - curbing “ghost jobs.”
- Use of AI in screening or selection must be disclosed.
- Postings may no longer require “Canadian experience.”
- Hiring records must be retained for three years to support compliance checks.

Enforcement carries real teeth: penalties can reach CAD \$100,000, though first violations are expected to draw warnings or smaller fines. One Toronto HR advocate who campaigned for the change captured the sentiment of many practitioners, expressing disbelief that basic professional courtesy now requires legislation at all.

WHAT IT MEANS

Even organizations outside Ontario can treat the 45-day rule as a sensible internal standard. Building disposition workflows now positions employers ahead of regulation and signals respect to candidates today.

6.2 The United States: bills, not yet laws

No U.S. federal or state law currently requires employers to communicate a post-interview decision. Several states, however, have introduced anti-ghosting and “ghost job” measures. As of 2025, New Jersey, California, and Kentucky had proposed bills targeting deceptive postings

and unresponsive employers, for example, requiring disclosure of whether a posting reflects a genuine vacancy. Industry groups have pushed back on some provisions as impractical for high-turnover sectors, and the proposals remain in flux. The direction of travel, however, mirrors a broader “right to know” movement in recruitment.

7. A Framework for Bringing Respect Back

Because ghosting is structural, the remedy must be structural. Relying on individual recruiters to be conscientious under crushing volume is a recipe for continued failure. The following framework translates respect into operational practice. None of it is exotic; the differentiator is consistency.

1. **Set and publish timelines.** Tell candidates at the outset how many stages to expect and roughly how long each will take. A predictable process is one people do not feel they must abandon.
2. **Close every loop with a disposition.** Every candidate who reaches a human interaction receives an outcome - yes, no, or “still deciding.” Adopt a self-imposed deadline (the 45-day rule is a reasonable ceiling; two weeks after a final interview is better).
3. **Automate the routine, personalize the meaningful.** Use an applicant tracking system to acknowledge applications and trigger status updates automatically, so human time is reserved for late-stage candidates who deserve a personal, specific response.
4. **Tell the truth about the role.** Post only genuine vacancies, label talent-pool postings honestly, and disclose salary ranges and any AI screening. Transparency upstream prevents wasted effort and resentment downstream.
5. **Make ownership explicit.** Assign clear responsibility for candidate communication at each stage so no one falls through the cracks. “Everyone’s job” becomes no one’s job.
6. **Measure candidate experience.** Track response rates and time-to-disposition the way you track time-to-hire. What gets measured gets managed; surveying departing candidates surfaces silent failures.
7. **Model the reciprocity you expect.** Employers who communicate reliably earn the right to expect the same. Respect is contagious; so is its absence.

For candidates, the reciprocal obligations are lighter but real: decline gracefully rather than disappearing, withdraw when no longer interested, and give notice if plans change after accepting an offer. A short, honest message costs little and preserves relationships in a smaller professional world than it appears.

8. Conclusion

The title of this paper asks whether we need respect back in the hiring process. The evidence answers plainly: yes, and urgently. Ghosting has become normalized on both sides of the table, it is accelerating under the pressure of automation and opaque processes, and it carries costs that are financial, reputational, and human. The breakdown is mutual, but the leverage is unequal: employers hold most of the power, and most of the responsibility for restoring trust.

Ontario's decision to legislate basic courtesy is a milestone, and likely a preview. But organizations should not wait to be compelled. Respect in hiring is not a soft nicety; it is a measurable advantage in attracting talent, protecting brand, and shortening hiring cycles. In a market where most competitors fail at fundamental responsiveness, simply doing the decent thing, communicating clearly, honestly, and on time, becomes a genuine differentiator.

RECOMMENDATION

Bringing respect back does not require a cultural revolution. It requires a few committed practices, applied consistently, and the recognition that on the other side of every application is a person who showed up. The least we can do is reply.

Methodology Note

This paper synthesizes publicly reported survey data and reporting from 2023-2026. Figures derive from independent studies with differing samples and methods and should be read as directional rather than as a single authoritative measure. Where sources disagreed, the more recent or larger-sample figure is presented, with the divergence noted in text.

References & Source Notes

- [1] Criteria - Candidate Experience Report (employer ghosting rates), via Newsweek and Fortune coverage.
- [2] SHRM - 2025 Talent Trends Report (candidate ghosting and hiring difficulty).
- [3] Greenhouse - State of Job Hunting Report (post-interview ghosting), via Pin Employer Ghosting Index.
- [4] iHire - 2025 candidate ghosting survey (stage-by-stage ghosting).
- [5] Pin - Employer Ghosting Index 2026 (behavioral follow-up data).
- [6] CareerPlug / Talroo - Candidate Experience data (candidate-side ghosting).
- [7] The Interview Guys - 2025 Ghosting Index and State of the Hiring Process (cost and time-to-hire figures).
- [8] Fortune - reporting on three-year-high employer ghosting (2026).
- [9] Ontario Working for Workers / Employment Standards Act amendments (45-day rule), via Employment Hero and government summaries.
- [10] Positive News and Capital Current - coverage of Ontario's law in force (2026).
- [11] The Interview Guys - analysis of 2026 anti-ghosting legislation (US state bills).

Next Steps

Stiletto HR advises talent acquisition and HR leaders on building the disposition workflows, timelines, and ownership models described in Section 7 - the practical mechanics that turn respect into a repeatable process rather than a one-off good intention.

If a candidate-experience or recruitment-process review would be useful, **Tracy Micciche** and the Stiletto HR team are available to walk through where your organization stands against the framework above.

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