

- You are listening to the "HR Mixtape," your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now your host, Shari Simpson.

- Joining me today is Steven Rothberg. He's the founder and chief visionary officer of College Recruiter job search site which believes that every student and recent graduate deserves a great career. College Recruiter's customers are primarily Fortune 1000 companies, government agencies, and other employers who hire at scale. They advertise on collegerecruiter.com. They're part-time seasonal internships and early career job opportunities that require zero to three years of experience. Each year, College Recruiter helps more than 13 million candidates find great new jobs. Steven, thank you so much for jumping on with me today.

- Hey, Shari, it is great to be with you. Thanks for having me on as your guest.

- So you are a seasoned veteran in the talent acquisition field, so I'm sure you have witnessed many changes in recruiting technology.

- Yeah.

- I'm curious what you have felt has been the most impactful shift you've seen so far.

- Probably the dawn of the internet. So I founded the company that College Recruiter grew out of in 1991, and we started to really get into the employment space in '93. And in '95, '96 is when the internet became commercialized. You started to have browsers that were friendly. Yahoo came along. In '98, Google came along, and by about 2000, 2001, it was obvious that it was no longer a fad. Never really was a fad, but a lot of people thought that. And then I think the next one after that would've been mobile, smartphones. You know, I had a Blackberry. I still miss my Blackberry, but it's when the iPhone came along, that was a big game changer for recruitment. The reality is I think most TA organizations are still struggling after two decades to try to figure out what to do about mobile.

- No, I agree. I think there's an interesting, you know, how do we use text? How do we track it? How do we think about that? You know, some of the more social media tools like TikTok and Snapchat and some of those other things where, you know, there are younger generations who kind of live in that space. And so how do we legally do what we need to do and attract candidates and avoid bias and all of those things? You know, you have a platform yourself, right, the College Recruiter. How does that stand out, specifically for students and grads?

- Yeah, so, you know, in the world of job boards/recruitment

marketplaces, there are, in my mind, sort of three main kinds of types of them. One would be the general site. You're talking Indeed, LinkedIn, back in the day, you know, the Monsters, the Career Builders of the world. Then you have aggregators which are pretty similar from a job-seeker perspective. Lots of jobs, all different industries, all different levels of experience. And then you have niche sites. College Recruiter, we target students and recent grads zero to three years of experience, but you also have loads that target specific geographic areas. Might be a city, might be a state or a province, might be a particular country, continent, even. Some target particular occupational field. So we stand out in the sense that all of the jobs on our site, and we have about 3 million at any given time, are specifically targeted to that early career audience. We help about 13 million a year find part-time seasonal internship, what we call entry-level jobs, zero to three years of experience. And we're also really unusual because most of our competitors are just in the US or they're just in Europe, they're just in English or some other country, language, I should say. We're global. But 1/3 of our business is outside of North America. Multilingual, multilingual. See, I can't even pronounce that. If you're gonna pronounce the word lingual, you wanna do that properly, multicurrency, etc. So our customers tend to be really large and hire a lot of people. And rarely does that happen all within one occupational field, one industry, one geographic area.

- You know, having such a broad stroke to what you do, I suspect that you spend a lot of time talking to candidates on how to show up for an interview.

- Yeah.

- You know, I think about often finding a job is like dating, right? You bring your best self. And I do feel like these younger generations are being taught some really great interview skills. What are some of the things that you've talked to them about to make sure that they're showing up in their best way, both in person and maybe their digital footprint that they're leaving around?

- Yeah. Well, you know, I think starting off is acknowledging the reality that the vast majority of candidates who apply to jobs that are early career, entry-level, lower-skilled, they apply to those jobs after only looking at three pieces of information. Pardon me. One is the job title, the second is the geographic location. You know, is it close to where I live? Is it close to my school? Is it in a city that I wanna move to? That kind of thing. And the third is salary. Very few of them apply to a job having read the job description. And so the burden shifts to the employer at that point. The first employer to get back to them with a, we want to interview you. We want to give you an offer. Here's the offer. When will you start? The first employer is far more likely to win that candidate. So I first start off from the perspective of, I don't think that very many candidates actually ghost

employers. So like, in terms of approaching an interview, whether you actually show up for the interview is an issue. When employers complain about candidates who have ghosted them, it's usually employers who aren't getting back to candidates quickly. If you get back to them quickly, you have very little ghosting. But once an employer gets back to you and you have an interview scheduled, it might be a 10-minute phone screen, it might be a half hour, you know, asynchronous through a HireVue kind of a platform. It might be an online assessment, but something along those lines. You really need to understand what the role is, what the company does, what the culture is like. And that requires some research. Research now is way easier than it used to be. I mean, if you can't go into an interview understanding what this organization does, about how large it is, what your team is gonna look like, then you're really not trying very hard. When we interview people for roles at College Recruiter, one of the very first questions that we ask is, what is it about College Recruiter that attracted you to us? Probably half of the candidates can't name a single thing because they haven't done the basic research. And those candidates are essentially shown the door. Just as quickly as they disqualified themselves, we disqualify them. So I think candidates need to understand that they need to be prepared going into an interview. Now, they don't need to know who the hiring manager's son-in-law is, and, you know, what the school mascot was for their daughter who plays volleyball or something, you know, that's silly. But you do need to understand, is this a defense contractor? Do they have 10,000 employees? Would you be working remotely? Those sorts of things are really important to show that you know what you're getting into.

- With your approach to Gen Z, Gen Alpha, young Millennials, you know, you mentioned the one thing about ghosting and them looking at the job descriptions in a different way. Is there other things that you have learned about these generations and how they approach work?

- Hmm. One thing, if I may, I'll start even before work. One thing that is significantly different for Gen Z, and that's the youngest cohort entering the workforce now. I have one kid who's sort of on the cusp of Gen Z, depends who you talk to. Is he a Millennial, is it Gen Z? He is kind of right in the middle, behaves more like a Gen Zer in terms of his outlook. And then I have a daughter who's very much Gen Z, both in terms of birth year and her attitude towards the world. That generation, that Gen Z generation, they just won't tolerate a lack of transparency and authenticity by employers. I'm a Gen Xer, I'm 57. I grew up in a time where companies were in control of the narrative, and that's just simply no longer the case. When companies talk about, we created, we did this massive offsite, and we brought in this PR agency to create our employer brand, that is an employer that, if I was a candidate, I would be running from because they were under the mistaken impression that the employer brand belongs to them. And it doesn't, it belongs to your candidates. It's what your candidates

think of you, not what you would like your candidates to think of you. And so employers that don't publish clearly, transparently what the wage range is for the role, that is going to really hurt them with Gen Z. I expect that the Alpha, which Shari, I'm glad you mentioned them because very few people are, but, you know, if you're a fast food restaurant, you're probably about to start employing some members of the Alphas. They are the oldest ones, depending on the definition. They're like 12, 13, 14 years old now. And if any, if Gen Z was the first native or digital natives where they grew up literally in a time of the internet, not knowing a time without smartphones, Alphas even more so because their older siblings, their older cousins had smartphones, and when they were 10, 11, 12, and Alphas have been on them since they were able to, like, figure out that this thing on their, that at the end of their arm is called a hand. And that that the thing on the end of that is a finger. And so I'm gonna use mom's iPad while she's driving me to daycare. So man, if you're an employer and you still think that withholding salary information is a good idea, then just be prepared to not be able to hire Gen Zers or Gen Alphas.

- You mentioned technology. I'm curious, how have you seen that evolve or what are some things that you are foreseeing in the technology space when it comes to talent acquisition that's gonna have a big impact in the next five years-ish?

- Yeah, the next big thing, and this is already starting to happen and I think it's gonna accelerate over the coming months and then over the coming years is artificial intelligence. Everybody's talking about it. Some employers are coming to grips with it. Some are doing exactly the wrong thing. I'm seeing a number of employers basically saying, if you use ChatGPT or some other generative AI to help you write a resume, to help you prepare for your interview, then we are not gonna hire you. That's exactly the wrong thing. That would be like, you're hiring a bookkeeper in the 1970s and saying that if she uses a calculator, we're not gonna hire her. You want them to use a calculator. If she knows how to use a calculator, she's gonna be more productive. And if the candidate you're looking to hire knows how to use AI, that's a really good thing because AI is a tool that you will be using, and chances are your old Gen Xers, people like me, are not gonna know it as well as somebody who is 19, 22, 25 years of age. Loads of exceptions to that, right? There'll be loads of 19 year olds who won't have a clue, and there'll be loads of 57 year olds who will be experts. But generally, the younger you are, the easier technology gets for us. So man, employers need to really look for the new technologies and reward those who are embracing them, even if that technology did not exist when that employer was at that point in life. You know, my great-grandfather owned a livery stable. Like, basically, like where we go to get gas for our cars, that's what you used to go to with your horses. I don't think anybody feels like there should be livery stables on every corner selling Slurpees.

- I would like to talk to the person who does think that, if they do. I have so many questions for them. You know, in your career and with College Recruiter, you've been able to help, you know, millions of candidates find jobs.

- Yeah.

- I'm curious if there's stories that you have that you could share around, you know, the power of a platform or how technology has really helped elevate that experience.

- Yeah, you know, I had this major epiphany, I think it's about 10 years ago now. College Recruiter's been a long-time partner of LinkedIn. And LinkedIn has a fantastic annual conference, other than when we have these little global pandemics. But, you know, any talent acquisition, HR person who hasn't attended, it's a really good one to attend. Some of it is a drinking the Kool-Aid kind of thing. It's very much like LinkedIn is fantastic, and in a lot of ways, it is. So I get why they do that, and it shows you how to use their tools and features and what they're gonna come out with. But I was sitting there at a conference, again, I think it was eight, nine, ten years ago. And the keynote speaker was, at the time, the mayor of Newark, New Jersey. It was Cory Booker who's now a US senator, and he's a very dynamic speaker. Whether you love his politics whether you hate his politics, the guy is very bright and very articulate, and I really wanted to hear what he had to say to that audience. It was clear at the time that he was gonna be running for US Senate, maybe eventually for the presidency. And so I got there early. I was one of the first people in line, grabbed a chair right up at the front, and while we're waiting for the other 3,000 people to file in, Cory Booker kind of came out and was making small talk with people up at the front. So I got a chance to talk to him for seconds. And so he's like, "So what do you do?" And I said, you know, "Owner of this job board, College Recruiter." He's like, "Oh, interesting. "So how many people use it?" And at the time, it was about 100,000 a month, and it's about, well, it's like 10, 12 times that now, something. And you could see him sort of pause and think, and he's like, "Wow. "So over the course of a year, "you help over a million people find new jobs?" And it's weird because I had never thought of it in that context, but I don't think that there are too many things in life that you can do that are more honorable, that are more amazing than helping somebody find a job. And for those of us in HR where we have the opportunity to do that dozens, hundreds, thousands, millions of times a year, that's an amazing thing. So next time we get bogged down in paperwork or grumbling about how much this click costs, I think we need to remember that on the other end of all of that is somebody that we are really helping improve their life, improve the lives of their families. It's really powerful.

- Speaking of improving lives, you are working with college kids and recent grads, and I think back to my time in life in that space, and there was plenty of people around me who were offering advice on my career, on my personal life. Granted, I took some of it, some of it I didn't 'cause that's the way it goes when you're that age. If you could go back and give yourself some job seeker advice at that college age with the experience and knowledge you have now, what would that advice be?

- Celebrate your successes. I find it easy to look at friends and family and see the great things they've done and be excited for them. To me, when I do those great things, it's just kind of like, well, that's what I should have done. And that's a bit of a character defect I would say. So I do try to stop and celebrate those successes, and I wish my younger self would've done more of that.

- Oh, I love that. And what a great thing to do on LinkedIn, if you have not considered that a place to do the humble brag. Let's start doing the humble brag and let's just talk about our successes. There is so much great work we're all doing. And, you know, if you're in that space, people wanna celebrate successes. So don't feel like are you're out of place by sharing things that you've worked hard on and that you're proud of, 'cause I think so many people need to see that that's a normal part of work, that, you know, you have highs and lows and you learn from failures, but you have a lot of successes. And it's okay to sit in those and find joy in them. What a great motivator and way to end our conversation around just getting things done and finding joy in recruiting and thinking about all the lives that our talent acquisition partners are impacting on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis, like you said. So Steven, thanks for taking a few minutes to chat with me.

- It's been fantastic. Thank you, Shari.

- I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at [thehrmixtape.com](http://thehrmixtape.com). Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.