

Lunch & Learn take away report

# 5 relationships principles that transform hiring outcomes

What Talent acquisition can learn from dating,  
without the clichés

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# Introduction

**The world of work is transforming at a pace most organisations aren't yet equipped to match. The need for future-ready teams is accelerating, while the ability to hire the right people is getting measurably harder. Supply is tightening. Expectations are shifting. And most TA playbooks were written for a market that no longer exists.**

That's why we hosted a Lunch & Learn with recruiters, people leaders, and employer branding professionals, to explore what relationship psychology can teach us about talent acquisition.

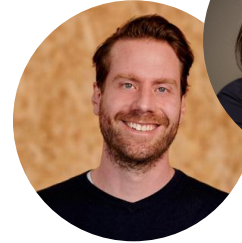
This report captures the insights from that session, combining the expertise of Sophia Evertse, relationship expert, and Laurens van Nues, Co-founder & CEO of Magnet.me.

## Why the relationship comparison works

Hiring is frequently treated as a transaction: define a role, collect applications, select a candidate. Clean, linear, repeatable. But anyone who has spent time in talent acquisition knows the reality is far messier.

In practice, hiring behaves far more like a relationship system. Trust has to be built over time. Candidates re-evaluate their interest at every interaction. Timing determines outcomes as much as fit does. And the moment you stop investing, the relationship cools.

This session set out to make that implicit reality explicit, and to draw practical lessons from relationship psychology that TA leaders and recruiters can apply right now.



**Laurens van Nues**  
Co-founder & CEO Magnet.me



**Sophia Evertse**  
Relationship expert

The dating analogy works for one important reason: in dating, you are not just evaluating someone, you are trying to create the conditions in which they choose you back. The same is true in hiring.

There is, of course, one key difference. Hiring means building those conditions with many potential partners simultaneously, at different stages, with different needs, across different timelines. That requires a system, not just a mindset.

## Executive summary

# Key takeaways

Talent acquisition is no longer a pipeline problem. It's a relationship problem. The organisations winning the war for talent aren't the ones with the biggest sourcing budgets, they're the ones building trust, maintaining continuity, and knowing when to act.

1

## Authenticity creates better fit

Candidates in 2026 aren't impressed by polished employer branding. They're looking for honest signals: real team stories, transparent expectations, and genuine values alignment.

3

## Timing is the conversion lever teams underestimate

Most missed hires are not about fit. They are about timing. The organisations that convert at the highest rate are those that stay warm and act at the moment timing aligns. That capability requires infrastructure: consent-based data, active talent pools, and smart reactivation.

2

## Commitment and trust must be built continuously

A candidate doesn't decide to join you once. The organisations that win are those that treat the hiring journey like a relationship: worthy of consistent investment, not just effort at the point of offer.

## Key recommendations

1

### **Build and maintain consent-based talent communities**

Move beyond passive CV databases. Build and maintain communities where talent opts in, segmented, relevant, and alive between open roles.

2

### **Design every touchpoint like a first date**

Clear, human, and candidate-first. Every interaction is a moment where the candidate decides whether to say yes again.

3

### **Invest in talent pool hygiene**

Segment your pool, engage relevantly, and build reactivation triggers.

4

### **Hire for adaptability, not job descriptions**

As AI reshapes roles, skills and adaptability hiring outperforms checklist hiring. Build for the team you'll need, not just the role you have today.

5

### **Treat 'not now' as a relationship to maintain**

A respectful close with a clear re-engagement moment is worth far more than a ghosted candidate. The near-miss today can be the hire tomorrow.



1

# Three forces shaping the future of work.

Before exploring the relationship principles, it is important to understand why urgency matters. Three structural forces are converging to make effective talent acquisition significantly harder over the next decade.

## Three forces

# 1. The ageing workforce.

Europe is facing a demographic cliff. As baby boomers exit the labour market, the working-age population is shrinking. This isn't a future problem, it's already reducing the supply of experienced talent across sectors.

By 2050, there will be 57 retirees for every 100 working-age people in the EU. The pool isn't just tightening. It's structurally smaller. This pressure won't ease when the economy shifts or when budgets return. Demographic change moves slowly, and permanently. The competition for talent is not cyclical. It's demographic.

### For TA this means

Supply shrinks while demand stays high. Organisations that wait for talent to come will pay the price in time-to-fill and cost-per-hire.

### TODAY (EU)

**21%**

of population is 65+

**34**

retirees per 100 working age people

**75%**

of employers report difficulty filling roles

### BY 2050

**30%**

of EU population will be 65+

**57**

retirees per 100 working age people

**+68%**

Increase in dependency ratio

### Three forces

## 2. Gen Z and Gen alpha.

The newest entrants to the workforce behave differently. Gen Z candidates research employers the way consumers research products. They value authenticity, responsiveness, and alignment on purpose. A slow or impersonal process is a signal the organisation doesn't walk its talk.

The net outcome is positive, but the transition requires hiring for adaptability and learning velocity, rather than static role requirements. As tasks are automated, the human premium shifts towards connection, judgement, and creativity. Paradoxically, this makes employer brand and authentic human engagement more important, not less.

### For TA this means

Authenticity and responsiveness are no longer soft considerations. They're direct drivers of offer acceptance rates.

### Gen Z and Gen Alpha Entering the Workforce

27%

of the global workforce is gen z




64%

prefer hybrid or remote work



49%

would reject an employer whose values don't align with theirs



50%

are likely to leave within 2 years without development opportunities



### Three forces

## 3. AI and automation.

AI isn't eliminating jobs, it's transforming them. Roles evolve faster than job descriptions can track. The skills that matter are shifting toward adaptability, learning velocity, and working alongside intelligent systems.

The net outcome is positive, but the transition requires hiring for adaptability and learning velocity, rather than static role requirements. As tasks are automated, the human premium shifts towards connection, judgement, and creativity. Paradoxically, this makes employer brand and authentic human engagement more important, not less.

### For TA this means

Hiring for yesterday's job description increases mismatch and churn. Assess for adaptability, curiosity, and learning potential, not just current skills.

**39%**

of jobs skills will change in 2030

Critical need for reskilling and upskilling

### Job market transformation





2

## Five relationship principles.

## Five principles

# Five relationship principles applied to hiring & employment

Drawing on research in relationship psychology, Sophia Evertse, Relationship expert, identified 5 principles that map directly onto the challenges of modern talent acquisition.



**Sophia Evertse**  
Relationship expert

Source: Sophia Evertse (De Relatiecoach) – [www.derelatiecoach.nl](http://www.derelatiecoach.nl)



## 1. Choose each other again every day

Candidates don't decide to join you once. They re-decide at every step of your process: the quality of your first message, your response speed, the clarity of your next steps, and whether you follow through. A strong initial impression can be eroded by a single week of silence.

**A relationship doesn't succeed on one 'yes.'**

- Maintain consistent touchpoints, no black holes.
- Make micro-commitments easy: short intro calls, one-click scheduling.
- Reinforce 'why us, why now' at every interaction.

*Every touchpoint should make it easier to say yes again.*

## Five principles



### 2. Put your partner first

Candidate-first design is not a recruitment marketing strategy. It is a trust-building strategy. The organisations that design their processes around the candidate's experience, rather than their own convenience, achieve higher offer acceptance, faster fill times, and better retention. And this principle does not stop at the offer. The same logic that wins candidates is what keeps employees.

#### Trust grows when you consider the other's needs.

- Be upfront: salary range, expectations, team context, timeline.
- Reduce friction: fewer steps, faster feedback, flexible scheduling.
- Deliver on the promise: growth is commitment, not messaging.

*Design for who you want to attract  
and who you want to keep.*



### 3. Take care of yourself

Strong hiring starts before the first outreach message. It starts with a clear, credible employer identity and a talent pool that is well-maintained, properly segmented, and engaged with consent.

#### Healthy relationships require identity, boundaries, and consistency.

- Build a recognisable and consistent employer narrative.
- Invest in talent pool hygiene: segmentation, expectation management, and consent-based communication.
- Prioritise relevance over volume. One targeted message beats ten generic ones

*Strong hiring starts with strong identity and good talent pool hygiene.*

## Five principles



### 4. Be vulnerable

In a market shaped by AI-generated content and highly polished employer branding, authenticity has become a genuine differentiator. Candidates are increasingly sophisticated, they can recognise corporate veneer, and they are sceptical of it.

**Pretending doesn't last. Real connection requires honesty.**

- Be transparent about organisational realities: the challenges, the change, the current growth stage.
- Make interviews a genuine two-way match check, not a one-sided assessment.
- Use authentic voices: hiring managers, team members, and real stories rather than corporate messaging.

*Design for who you want to attract  
and who you want to keep.*



### 5. Accept it, and walk away (for now)

Not every candidate is ready right now, and that's okay. The mistake is treating 'not now' as 'never.' The most effective thing a TA team can do is let go gracefully and keep the relationship warm for when timing changes. A respectful close today is a warm re-engagement tomorrow.

**You can not force fit or timing**

- When timing is the issue, be honest: acknowledge it, nurture the relationship, and agree a moment to reconnect.
- Stop investing in processes or role designs that are structurally broken, salary misalignment, unclear scope, unrealistic timelines.

*Walk away from the decision, not from the relationship.*



3

# Recommendations

## Recommendations

# Recommendations by force

The three structural forces outlined above each create specific vulnerabilities in talent acquisition. Here is how to respond to each.

Talent acquisition is no longer a pipeline problem. It's a relationship problem. The organisations winning the war for talent aren't the ones with the biggest sourcing budgets, they're the ones building trust, maintaining continuity, and knowing when to act.

### Recommendation 1

## Aging workforce

### ! What changes

Supply shrinks while demand stays high. Hiring becomes less about sourcing bursts and more about sustained access to future-fit talent. Relationships built now determine who is available to you in two years.

### ✘ What breaks if you don't adapt

Over-reliance on inbound and last-minute sourcing increases cost-per-hire, time-to-fill, and missed critical hires. The pipeline runs dry when you need it most.

### ✔ What to do now

Shift from reactive sourcing to proactive community building to identify future-fit talent before you have an open role. Build relationships with talent at earlier career stages so your pipeline fills naturally over time. Make retention as strategic a priority as acquisition. Keeping existing talent is the most cost-effective response to supply scarcity.

### Recommendation 2

## Gen Z & Gen Alpha

### ! What changes

Authenticity, responsiveness, and alignment matter as much as the role itself. These candidates will reject a process before they reject a job.

### ✘ What breaks if you don't adapt

Polished messaging combined with slow, unclear, or impersonal processes leads to application drop-off, ghosting, and low offer acceptance. You can't out-brand a bad experience.

### ✔ What to do now

Audit your process end-to-end from the candidate's perspective. Identify where friction, silence, or vagueness exists. Build in clear communication rhythms and honest employer content. Move faster, communicate more, and make it feel human.

### Recommendation 3

## AI & automation

### ! What changes

Roles evolve faster than job descriptions. Hiring success increasingly depends on a candidate's adaptability and learning velocity, not their static technical profile.

### ✘ What breaks if you don't adapt

Hiring for checklists increases mismatch and early churn. Talent strategies that don't account for role evolution will fall behind the market quickly.

### ✔ What to do now

Reframe your assessment criteria around adaptability, problem-solving, and learning potential — not just current skills. Use structured interviews that explore how candidates navigate change. Partner with hiring managers to define what 'future-fit' actually means for each role.

## Recommendations

# Timing: the hidden success factor

**Ask most TA leaders why a strong candidate didn't convert, and they'll point to fit, competition, or salary. Rarely do they point to timing. But timing is often the real answer.**

A candidate can be genuinely excited about your organisation, aligned with the role, and positively disposed toward your employer brand, and still not move forward. Not because they are not interested, but because the conditions in their life or career are not right at that specific moment.

The problem is that most talent strategies are built around your timing, not theirs. A role opens, outreach goes out, and who ever happens to be available and interested at that exact moment enters the process.

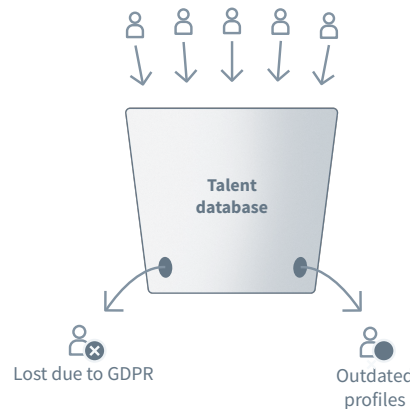
Everyone else, gets a polite no and disappears into a database.

Think of your talent pipeline as a bucket. You are constantly pouring talent in at the top, through sourcing, attraction, and inbound interest. But the bucket leaks, and it leaks from multiple places simultaneously.

### What you need to capture timing

Solving the timing problem requires three capabilities working together:

1. Fresh, consent-based data that reflects where candidates are now.
2. Regular touchpoints that keep your employer brand top of mind.
3. Automated reactivation: the ability to identify when a candidate's situation has shifted and act on that signal quickly and personally.



**X** ATS's and other static talent databases leak candidates at very high rates.

### The result:

Your talent pool is significantly smaller than it appears on paper. You are spending resource to fill a bucket that is constantly emptying from the bottom.

From insight to action

## Ready to treat hiring like a relationship?

The frameworks in this report are most powerful when backed by the right infrastructure.

Magnet.me brings candidates and employers together in one AI-powered network, turning one-off transactions into lasting connections.

- | 6,000+ companies
- | 450,000+ professionals
- | 1 network



Employers build and nurture their own talent community, with AI automatically re-engaging the right people at the right time.



Professionals stay connected with the companies they admire, so today's near-miss can become tomorrow's perfect match.

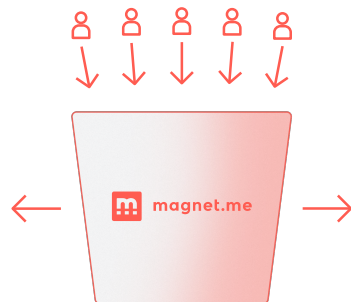
### Want to see how this works in practice?

We'd be happy to walk through your current setup and show where the biggest opportunities lie.

→ [Schedule a call](#)



## Your talent community



No more GDPR data deletion or outdated profiles. Your community only grows.