

## Summary

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### Key Topics Discussed

- Heated exchange in a meeting involving yelling, defensiveness, and being shushed, which was not appreciated.
- Opportunity for the colleague to acknowledge and handle feedback differently, but refusal to do so escalated the situation.
- Broader cultural issues at the company, perpetuated by legacy employees from Merck and continued in the current group, especially among those who transitioned from Merck.
- Reflection on self-awareness in passionate discussions and suggestions for calmer communication, like requesting quieter tones.
- Decision to seek new employment opportunities, starting actively after Christmas due to increased opportunities with open budgets; currently feeling tired from a demanding job, ongoing efforts to improve team and processes, and added stress from interpersonal dynamics; initial job searching efforts in weekends and downtime, though challenging, including pinging LinkedIn contacts and speaking with recruiters, but market feels tough; pause during Thanksgiving break, with renewed focus in January including attending Interact retail conference next week on Wednesday and Thursday; ramping up networking by attending free holiday events, dinners, retail-related gatherings, and re-engaging with existing groups like WhatsApp Chief and T200 (women's technology) to build connections; recent resume updates to include target keywords and listing current consulting role under the brand name of the major company (per recruiter advice to enhance appeal, despite initial discomfort about not specifying contract status, though 'contract' was added for personal comfort); emphasis on networking through personal conversations to stand out in a saturated market, as LinkedIn applications and keyword optimization via AI are ineffective due to high volume and lack of differentiation; renewed ramp-up in networking after a summer lull, including meeting back up with people; openness to interim roles as fruitful options given the tough market for VP/SVP positions.
- Importance of networking and connections in securing job opportunities, including current role through a recruiter (no internal connections) and two July offers via personal networks; Novartis opportunity originated from a spring

networking conversation with a friend of a former Takeda manager, leading to a recent recruiter follow-up despite no initial openings; value of initial introductions and resume sharing, as they can lead to unexpected future calls; interest in connecting with Gracie, who handles director-level and tech-related roles, for potential opportunities despite her recent maternity leave.

- Desire to avoid burning bridges upon leaving, aiming to maintain a good impression despite tensions with some colleagues; recognition of good people at the company who appreciate contributions.
- Reduced effort in current role compared to a long-term commitment, as focus shifts toward eventual departure.
- Emphasis on protecting mental health and finding a workplace where one wants to go every day, with valued skills and competent colleagues; frustration with widespread skill and knowledge gaps among 50% of team members and daily collaborators, making the role feel like rebuilding from the foundation rather than a simple rehab project.
- Unexpected need to train others on drug development basics, contrary to initial job expectations.
- Comparison of job perks: remote work and decent paycheck acknowledged, but poor benefits, high insurance costs (premium increasing from \$600 to nearly \$1,000 monthly in 2026 due to lack of federal subsidies driving up prices across plans, with out-of-pocket costs at \$600 and employer contribution only \$400, leading to switch to a better-coverage HMO despite higher premium; agreement that insurance is brutal and hope for improvements); delayed vacation accrual (starts after three months, with an extra week negotiated but not yet usable), unrealistic sales goals leading to no bonuses (only 1% given to everyone, seen as insulting), lack of corporate cards resulting in reimbursement delays (e.g., six weeks for a canceled trip ticket), ongoing issues with expense recoveries, and recent cancellation of a trip with partial reimbursement but left with unused credit; company citing cash shortages, including canceling the Christmas party.
- Early negative experiences, such as in the second or third week team meeting where the CFO and CEO joined late without greeting or welcoming the new employee, signaling indifference to new hires.
- Willingness to accept a significant pay cut for a job at a better company like Novartis, prioritizing happiness and well-being over higher salary to avoid daily frustrations.
- Update on Grace's consulting role: engagement ends mid-January with planned transition to returning colleague, but company reorganization leaves no clear

recipient for handover; ongoing discussions about potential retention and extension; recent renegotiation to full-time position at desired rate, started since August as a strategic project, going well overall with positive performance feedback (P is really good), though very busy and constant pace; followed advice from Chris to negotiate successfully, avoiding initial low offers; discussions with a staffing agency recruiter affiliated with the current company, who is supportive and sharing opportunities, promising assistance if the role is not extended; recruiter emphasizes persistence in talking to multiple contacts amid tough market, noting preference for consulting or interim roles.

- Experiences with recruiters: lack of loyalty due to inconsistent results; positive impression of recent recruiter but limited success; another recruiter, Brett, is liked but yields few opportunities, often with internal promotions blocking roles; multiple interviews led to low pay offers (over \$100k below expectations), deemed unacceptable at this career stage; companies acknowledge fit but cite budget constraints, leading to rejections.

## **Decisions Made**

- None explicitly made regarding the meeting incident.
- Plan to actively seek new job opportunities starting after Christmas, while slow-walking the process now due to exhaustion and workload; openness to accepting a pay cut for a more fulfilling role, though unwilling to take cuts exceeding \$100k; intensified efforts in January, including attending Interact conference next week; increasing attendance at free networking events and dinners during the holidays, re-engaging with groups like WhatsApp Chief and T200; incorporate recruiter suggestions on resume presentation, such as listing under brand name without emphasizing contract status; prioritize networking through direct conversations over LinkedIn applications and standard keyword strategies, given the competitive market; accept interim roles as viable options amid challenges in securing VP/SVP positions.

## **Action Items**

- Follow up with contact about connecting with Gracie for potential director-level opportunities in tech-related roles.

## **Important Points & Insights**

- Defensiveness and refusal to accept feedback, such as on being shushed, perpetuate negative company culture and escalate conflicts unnecessarily; simple

acknowledgment could de-escalate quickly.

- Legacy Merck employees are seen as key offenders in maintaining this problematic culture, now embedded in the organizing group.
- In group settings, perceptions of yelling vary, but calm interventions like suggesting quieter tones or self-acknowledging intensity are preferable to escalation.
- The incident highlighted deep-seated cultural issues, leading to disillusionment and a decision to leave; current high workload and interpersonal stress make active job searching challenging at present, compounded by extensive skill gaps requiring constant training; job market remains tough despite proactive steps like recruiter outreach, LinkedIn networking, resume tailoring with keywords, and now increased event attendance and re-engagement with professional groups; however, mass applications via LinkedIn and AI-assisted keyword matching fail to differentiate candidates amid hundreds or thousands of submissions; networking through connections proves most effective, as initial casual conversations can unexpectedly yield opportunities months later; interim roles offer practical bridges in a competitive landscape; recruiter experiences underscore unreliability, with frequent internal promotions and budget-limited offers despite strong candidate fit, reinforcing need for diverse sourcing strategies; persistence with multiple recruiters and contacts is key, as the market favors consulting or interim positions.
- Life is too short to tolerate daily dread of work; need for a role with competent teams, valued expertise, and better overall conditions despite some positives like remote work and pay; willingness to sacrifice salary for improved job satisfaction outweighs financial gains in a toxic environment, but significant pay reductions feel inappropriate at this point.
- Poor benefits, including subpar insurance with escalating premiums due to no federal subsidies (rising to \$1,000/month, inadequate employer contribution of \$400, high out-of-pocket \$600, prompting plan switch to HMO for better coverage), vacation policies, negligible bonuses, and reimbursement hassles, exacerbate the unsustainable nature of the position; leadership's lack of basic courtesy, like not welcoming new employees, underscores a broader indifference that feels worse than financial shortcomings.
- Balancing departure strategy involves conserving energy by not overcommitting, while preserving positive relationships with appreciative colleagues to exit gracefully.

- Organizational changes in consulting roles create uncertainty in transitions, potentially opening doors for extended engagements; successful renegotiation to full-time demonstrates effective negotiation and aligns with desired compensation, though high pace limits sustainability; supportive recruiter connections provide a safety net for future opportunities, including practical advice on resume optimization to attract better roles.

## Transcripts

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**Others:** Nothing wrong. You were yelling at me. There were two other people in the meeting. Like nobody thought I was yelling at anybody. Yeah. And it was just like, but you know, she did the exact opposite of like saying, okay, like this would have been no big deal. If she would have just like responded with like, you know what, I made a mistake. I want to do that again. That would have been like five second conversation and it would have been fine. Instead, she doubled down. She was like, this was completely justified. I did nothing wrong. You were yelling at me blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And it was just like, and I started off the conversation by saying, look, acknowledge I can get a little passionate sometimes.

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**Others:** You know, it would have been fine if you would have said, Zoo, can you just take, you know, can we talk a little bit more quietly? It seems like things are getting a little heated, a little loud, whatever. You choose anything verbal.

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**Others:** But I said, what I didn't appreciate was being shushed, right? I think that's not acceptable. And she, so I gave her the opening to kind of be like, okay, let's just deal with this differently next time. And she just would not even take that feedback. So it was just like, and after that I just was like, okay, this epitomizes everything that is wrong culturally with this company. Like the fact that she's worked at this company because she's one of these people who was legacy Merck. And now she's part of organizing when it's fun four years. So she's been here forever. I think this is the culture that Merck.

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**Others:** Perpetuated in this group and then Oregon has just continued to perpetuate it, especially with the people who came over from Mark. Cause they're the biggest offenders of this kind of, you know, culture. And so, um, yeah. So then after that, I just was like, that was like a really rotten week. I'm in a better place today, but I was kind of like, you know what? I'm just done. Like it sort of was like the last straw. And I kind of was like, I'm going to actively seek, you know, probably in the new year. I'll start like actively looking for something. But right now I'm just kind of slow walking it and seeing.

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**Others:** You know, what, what happens to land in my lap? And I figure like after Christmas, probably the more opportunities anyway, cause people will have their budgets open or whatever. So I'll start fresh, but I just have also been just tired. Like my job is actually quite demanding. Like because I'm not, I haven't mailed it in. So I am still trying to

like do what I can to improve things for my team, do what I can to improve things, process wise.

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**Others:** And, um, so, and because of that, there's just been a tremendous amount of work. And so on top of that dealing with the interpersonal dynamics has been kind of stressful. So I feel like it's more than it could handle to like go and look for actively for a job at the moment.

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**Others:** But, and I've also decided that.

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**Others:** I am going to try to care a little less about the company, like not that I'm going to completely mail it in, but like I'm approaching every day, just kind of going, you know what? Like I'm going to just take the high road. I'm not going to let the look, you know, the crazy interpersonal things bother me. Um, and I'm just going to do what I can.

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**Others:** Without.

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**Others:** Doing perhaps as much as I would if this were going to be a long - term gig for me.

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**Others:** You know, and then I'll, I want, I don't want to burn bridges. I want to still leave with like a good impression. Um, and I'm pretty sure if I leave soon, I, I am.

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**Others:** That's not going to go that well with like a fair number of people. Right. Because there are some good people at the company. And I think, and they also are very appreciative of what I bring to the table.

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**Others:** And so they will be disappointed, inclusive probably of my manager that I'm leaving. But at the end of the day, I also decided.

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**Others:** I have to protect my mental health and life is too short for me to like tolerate waking up in the morning and not wanting to go to work every day. Like it's not worth it. So I need to just find a spot where I want to go to work every day and where my skill set is valued. Um, and also where I work with people who know what they're doing, like it is a little like work with people who don't know what they're doing. Right. And it is kind of like 50 percent of the people I work with or my team's work with on a daily basis, have major skill gaps or knowledge gaps. That's a lot. There's a lot. That's like far more than what I was expecting. Like I was told it was a rehab project. This is like, you know, raising the whole damn thing to the, you know, foundation and starting again. That's really what this is like.

So I don't, it's too much. Like I'm like, I don't want to have to train every single person I run into on how to do drug development. Like that was not my expectation when I signed up for this job. Yeah. So, but you know, same thing, Abby. Like I get to work remote. I do get a fairly decent paycheck. Unlike you my benefits are actually quite good. So I think that, um, that really sucks for you that your benefits are not, are not good. It will not even have been. I mean, it's so bad. It's like, I can't even believe how much I have to pay. And I don't even have good insurance in 2026. I'm going to have to pay over 600 dollars a month.

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**Others:** It's really bad. Oh, and I have a vacation because I try to negotiate and they gave me an extra week, but I don't even start a crewing vacation. I'm not even accruing it right now. So I'm basically just looking and I can't take the day because they don't even let you start cruising after till three months.

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**Others:** Yeah. You can't take it. You're not even accruing it. And my boss was like, don't you have vacation? I'm like.

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**Others:** No, I specifically put in writing asking and Bob was like, this is it. So he gave me an extra week.

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**Others:** It was great.

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**Others:** So yeah, so no, I have no vacation. Basically no insurance.

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**Others:** I suppose of a bonus, but they set sales goals so high and unrealistic, no bonus. And they do a one percent for everyone came at.

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**Others:** Almost nothing. I like it. It almost insulting. Why don't you just not imagine at all guys like yeah, like and oh and then we don't have corporate cards. So why was supposed to travel into the office, bought my ticket. They canceled the trip at the last minute. It took them six weeks to pay me back.

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**Others:** For the ticket I bought. Then we were supposed to have another. I'm like, well, I have a credit on United.

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**Others:** And they still hadn't paid me back. I think at that point. So I booked the second yes, we're definitely having the super this week. We're definitely doing this trip.

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**Others:** Book the trip again.

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**Others:** Again, they cancel travel. At least I got my, but at least I got paid back for it. Like I got paid back finally for the flight. But now I just have a credit. I don't care. I'm like, you still need to pay me back. It's not my fault. You don't have a corporate card. Like there's so petty. And then normally they do I guess do a Christmas party, which was going to be like this week that we were there. And they were like, well, we're, we're not going to do a party. Cause we really don't have any cash. So we'll just do something in the now the whole trip was canceled. And the woman who works for me is like, she's like, this is not she's like, they've never been this week. I'm like, well, this is all I've seen. So she's been there for.

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**Others:** All I know. All I know and it isn't good.

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**Others:** And that, and that's not even like the cultural stuff. Like my second or third week I was in a team meeting and our CFO and our CEO. And I've met our CEO, but I had never met our CFO.

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**Others:** They come onto the meeting. They're like five minutes late.

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**Others:** They don't come off camera. They don't greet me. They don't welcome me.

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**Others:** And that was for me was like, okay, like it's my third week here and you're not even like showing your face and saying welcome to me. That is all I needed to know. Yeah. That's crazy. That to me is worse than like the money. That's like you don't even give a shit that I'm here.

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**Others:** So guess what? I feel bad if I leave. Yeah. Like the money piece is like if I were to take this job, if I get an offer at Novartis, um, and I were to accept it, they almost certainly would take a significant pay cut. But I'm willing to do it. Like I'd rather take a pay cut and work somewhere that I feel like I would be happy working than to get paid more. And, you know, be dealing with crap all day long, every day. So I totally hear you. But Grace, how are things with you? Yeah. Grace. Something good. I'm still doing the consulting thing. Um, so my, the person I am covering comes back in mid January. So my engagement is supposed to end like January 15th, I believe, um, if I remember correctly. Uh, so that week and I'm just going to select transition everything to her, but in the meantime, they're doing this whole reorg. So they have anything that I would transition. There's actually no one to transition to. So it's kind of bizarre because she's coming in and she's going to have a new role.

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**Others:** So we've been talking about whether they just retain me for a longer and what that looks like. So I'm still in talks with them on that.

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**Others:** So I mean, overall it's going well, the P is really good. Um, and had you renegotiate because I remember like, I think the last time I was on the call with you, they, they were trying to get you to sign like a more full time. Yeah. Yeah. No, they've been doing that for gosh, it's been a long time too. I've been doing that since I want to say in August, I've been doing that role since and it is high. Like it is what I was asking for. Cause I was settling for something because it wasn't full time. It was just like a strategic project.

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**Others:** So it was very little pain. Like I couldn't stay with them with that kind of pace. So yeah. And I remember distinctly that Chris had some really good advice about. Yes. Yes. She did actually negotiate out the night. I never said no. I'm like, wait, am I going to agree with me? I was expecting this guy. And I'm like, okay. Like what? Like, you know, Chris told me.

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**You:** Yeah.

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**Others:** But yeah, so I, yeah, I went through that in that. I actually turned out well. So I've been doing that. It's, it is very busy though. Like it's, it's constant.

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**Others:** I've been at the same time trying to look for a job to be like in the weekends or in some downtime that I have, which is stuff sometimes. It's like after work.

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**Others:** And it still feels really tough out there. Um, I talked to a few recruiters and one of them is like, just go through your LinkedIn, start from A and just ping everyone. And it's like, you know how brutal that is. But I, I was doing that before Thanksgiving didn't do anything for Thanksgiving break. Um, and then.

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**Others:** I've, you know, I think my, my focus will be more in January. I am going to go to interact, which is like this big retail conference in the city.

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**Others:** I've been invited to like a few dinners and stuff like that. So I think I'm just like kind of get back into it. And then there's this hot, like during the holidays. There's all these events. I've been trying to ramp up my event, like going to the, you know, some free events. I haven't really done any paid events yet, but most of them have been free, whether it's just like a dinner or a, uh, I don't know, just around retail, et cetera.

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**Others:** So I've been trying to do that a little bit more than I had in the past.

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**Others:** But other than that, I really like for a full time role.

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**Others:** Still really tough for like, like something and, you know, my role, my position. Um, and yeah, I don't know. I've been talking to one of the recorders that actually is a staffing agency for the company I work for now.

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**Others:** Um, and she's been great. She's like, you know, I think you should kind of like walk me through what they're looking at. And she's sending it to the rest of their recruiter. She's like, if they don't extend you, they'll definitely like try to help you.

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**Others:** So she's like, help me like redo my linking again. Like that's all I do. Um, I've, you know, redone my resume a little bit to kind of also like look for those target words.

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**Others:** In the past, I had like his interim, whatever. Or I had my consulting company. She's like, no, actually put the brand of the company that you're working for because it's such a big company. People will look at that and it'll, she's like, that's what everyone does. I'm like, well, I feel like it's a fraud. She's like, no, it's not. No, you can put everything. Yeah. Which is what I ended up doing. She said, you don't even need to put contract. She's like, that's what everyone does. I put contract like I did like type contract just cause I felt more comfortable doing that.

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**Others:** So, so yeah, my thought process right now is really to ramp it up a little bit more from a networking perspective because essentially that's every one of the advices you just have like you're not going to as much as I've been applying on LinkedIn and I still do apply. They're like, it's not like it's, it just doesn't panther.

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**Others:** Unfortunately. So I announced I'm just talking to people.

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**Others:** And after I opted. Yeah. That's smart.

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**Others:** I think you have to in this market. I really don't think applying through LinkedIn is the right way to go. I mean, everyone's getting conjured. Too many people doing it hundreds to thousands of applications. There's no way for you to stand out.

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**Others:** Um, no, there isn't a job. Yeah.

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**Others:** Even like ATS, whatever, the keywords, like I think everyone's doing that. Right. Like who's doing that at this point. Um, so I mean, AI made everything so easy to just like take a job description, put in the thing, rewrite your.

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**Others:** I mean, I got the shitty job through someone I know. Hey, tutor. Right. Like I got my current job through a recruiter. I didn't know anyone on the inside, but the other two jobs that I had got offers for in, in July, um, those were both through connections. So and even this Novartis opportunity was I had set up a networking conversation, um, back in the summer with this in the spring when I was, um, looking actively. And he's a friend of my, my former manager, Takeda. So I had set up that interview or just like a conversation. And he, he told me at the time we don't have any openings, but we'll, you know, things could change. But then like a month ago, the recruiter, um, called me up and said, Hey, yeah. So then.

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**Others:** I just think you just never know where those, even those introduction calls are those pings are going to lead.

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**Others:** So, so I might not even have this phone call without having had that initial conversation back in the spring and them having a copy of my resume already in their system. So, um, yeah, you know, I will, like when we, when we chat looking forward to seeing you next week when we chat, let's also think about whether I can introduce you to anybody else.

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**Others:** In the area, like through chief. Yeah. Cause, um, I know you used to be part of it, but are you still on like any WhatsApp chief stuff? I am on the WhatsApp chief stuff. Okay. Um, also there's like a T200, which is like women's technology. So I'm on that.

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**Others:** Okay. I will say like I've started to ramp that up again, um, the summer I didn't do much at all from a networking.

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**Others:** So I'm kind of trying to do that right now. Just like start to meet back up with people.

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**Others:** And, but I've also like one thing that, um, the recruiter of the staffing agency I was talking to. She's like, what you're doing now is actually fruitful too. Like I, so I'm not knocking that off as well. It's just like, I'm like, yeah, if it's another interim role, I'm fine with

that at this point in time, just for the market. It's just for VP, SVP role is like almost, yeah, it's just like really, really tough. So.

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**Others:** I'm trying to keep mine open. Um, I have a bunch. Like I am like not loyal to any recruiter. Like, cause I haven't like had a lot of luck with like recruiters. I think this person that I've been talking to recently, like I've, I've had another recruiter. His name is Brett and I really like him, but he's just like, hasn't really been able to like, he'll call me here and there and say, Hey, you know, this may come through, but it doesn't like, then the company's like, Oh, they ended up promoting within.

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**Others:** There's been a lot of that versus.

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**Others:** Like, um, actually even call me into an interview. I've had a couple of interviews with the pay has been so low that I'm like, you know what? I don't, I don't want to either go backwards either that much at this point in my, um, life. It just felt wrong. Uh, so I didn't like want to take over a hundred thousand dollar pake. I'm like, I'm not there. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And then.

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**Others:** That's kind of, yeah, they admit it. They're like, Oh, you're perfect for the roll, but we can't pay you. I'm like, great. Like.

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**Others:** Um, but yeah, the person I'm talking to now is she's through the staffing agency that we use at this company I'm at now. And she, um, she's actually really great because she was just like, well, we have a lot of recruiters and we have a lot of contacts, but you just have to keep talking to people. But she did admit she's like, it's really tough right now. I know. People would just rather like do consulting or interim roles.

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**Others:** Versus higher full time, especially all of it paid like I mean, I mean, I kind of feel like that's what I have right now. I mean, it's like, I have no benefit. So I'm basically, I mean, as far as I'm concerned, it's like, it's just, it is tough though. I actually feel for you because like I have to, and I don't know. I go through like the New Jersey marketplace in federal support for the insurance is like going away next year. So the price of insurance is like simple what I'm paying now. Well, that's why my final, how am I going to do this? Well, but like, yes, the federal, which supposedly leaves in conversation and hopefully, but because he, because of what happened, the insurance has just gone up.

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**Others:** Across the board because there is no federal subsidy to all the programs. Then it's just, it's just driven all the prices up in general. Like I switched my plans, but it didn't

matter. Like the plan I'm on right now is literally going from 600 dollar premium to almost a thousand. And I thought I can't do this plan again. Cause it's like, I might as well not even have endurance. It's so bad. So at least I just switched to another HMO that at least had better coverage.

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**Others:** But I'm being 600 dollars out of pocket.

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**Others:** They're only kicking in 400 dollars.

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**Others:** Yeah. It's terrible insurance is insurance is brutal. Like it's bad. And hopefully it changes. I'm hoping that they, you know. I hope so. I don't have. I don't know without current. Yeah. And he's already said, I'll have to look at those. So, you know, it's just, yeah, just have a hush on them to fix it. So hopefully it gets better. But yeah, I hope so. Oh my God. I got to get back to work. Yeah. Save you. Great to see you. Oh, it's so good to see. I'm so sad of mine on the East Coast to see you guys for dinner. I know. I'm very excited. Chris couldn't make it. Yeah.

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**You:** I have the conference.

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**You:** Next week on Wednesday and Thursday.

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**Others:** I need a conflict. Oh, that's over. Okay. Um, Gracie next time Chris. Sure. She is on maternity. She just went on between it's not urgent. I mean like December. I mean, yeah, cause we're in like similar worlds. So maybe. Or is she only like executive.

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**Others:** No, she does more. Like directors. Yeah. She does. It's a lot around tech though. Um, but yeah, I mean, she might have more. So let me ask, I'll definitely ask. Okay. Yeah. Let me know.

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**Others:** Cool.

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**You:** Yep. All right.

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**You:** Bye.

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**You:** All right, take care.

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**Others:** Well, let me see you guys for January. Happy holidays. Hey. Bye.

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