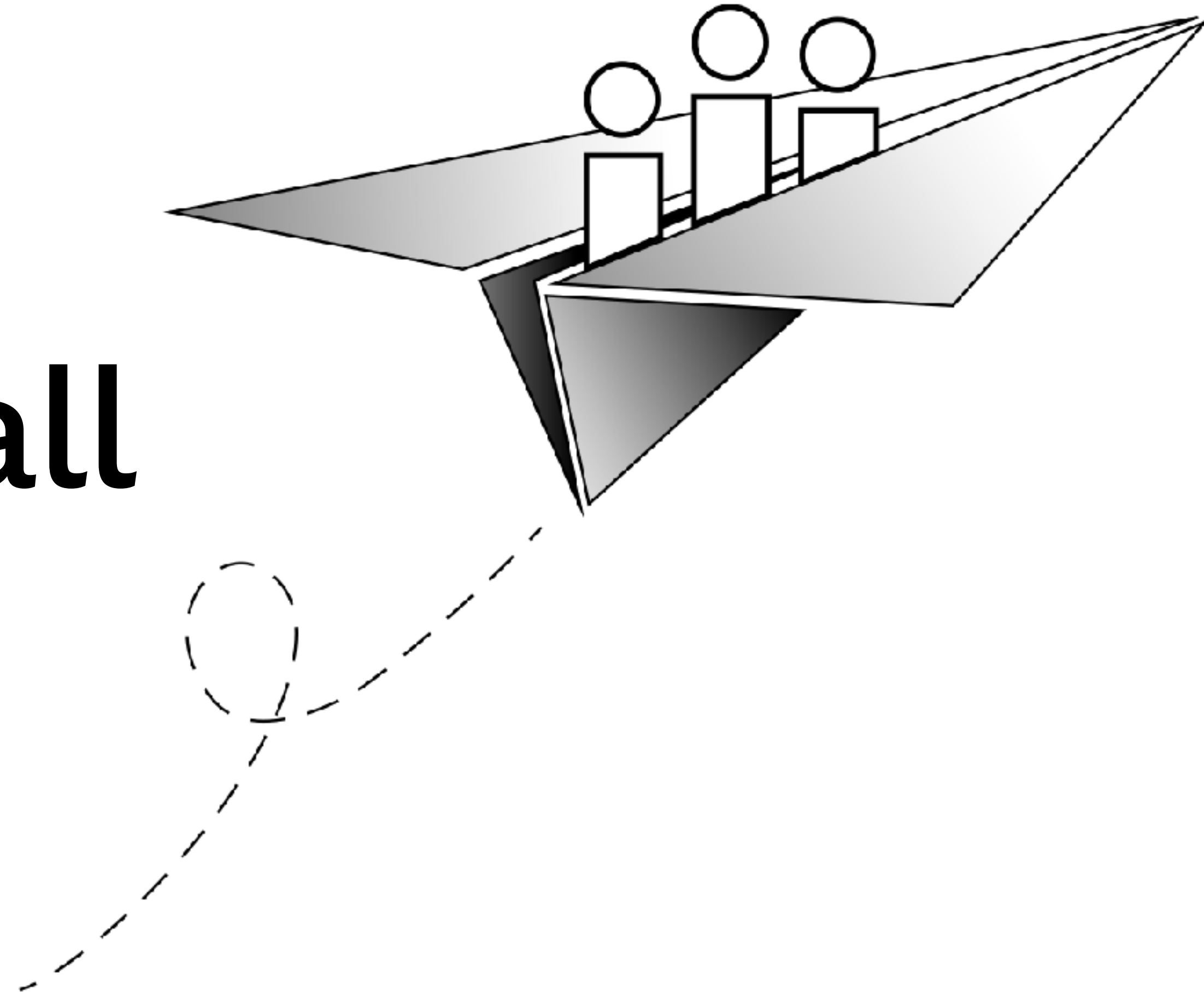


Rising After the Fall

Engineering Your Career Comeback

Kevin Goldsmith, ConFoo 2026



The Moment Everything Changed

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- Applying to jobs I'd never have considered before
- Watching the fire go out in my eyes during interviews
- The cycle of rejection feeding on itself

This Isn't About Failure

- Everyone faces career inflection points
- Some by choice, others thrust upon us
- The tech industry is cyclical
- You need different tools for different phases

Four Frameworks for a Career Comeback

- Framework 1: The Preparation Audit (Before you need it)
- Framework 2: Crisis Stabilization (First 30 days)
- Framework 3: The Gap Optimizer (During the search)
- Framework 4: The Evaluation Matrix (Making the decision)

Framework 1: The Preparation Audit

Before You Need It

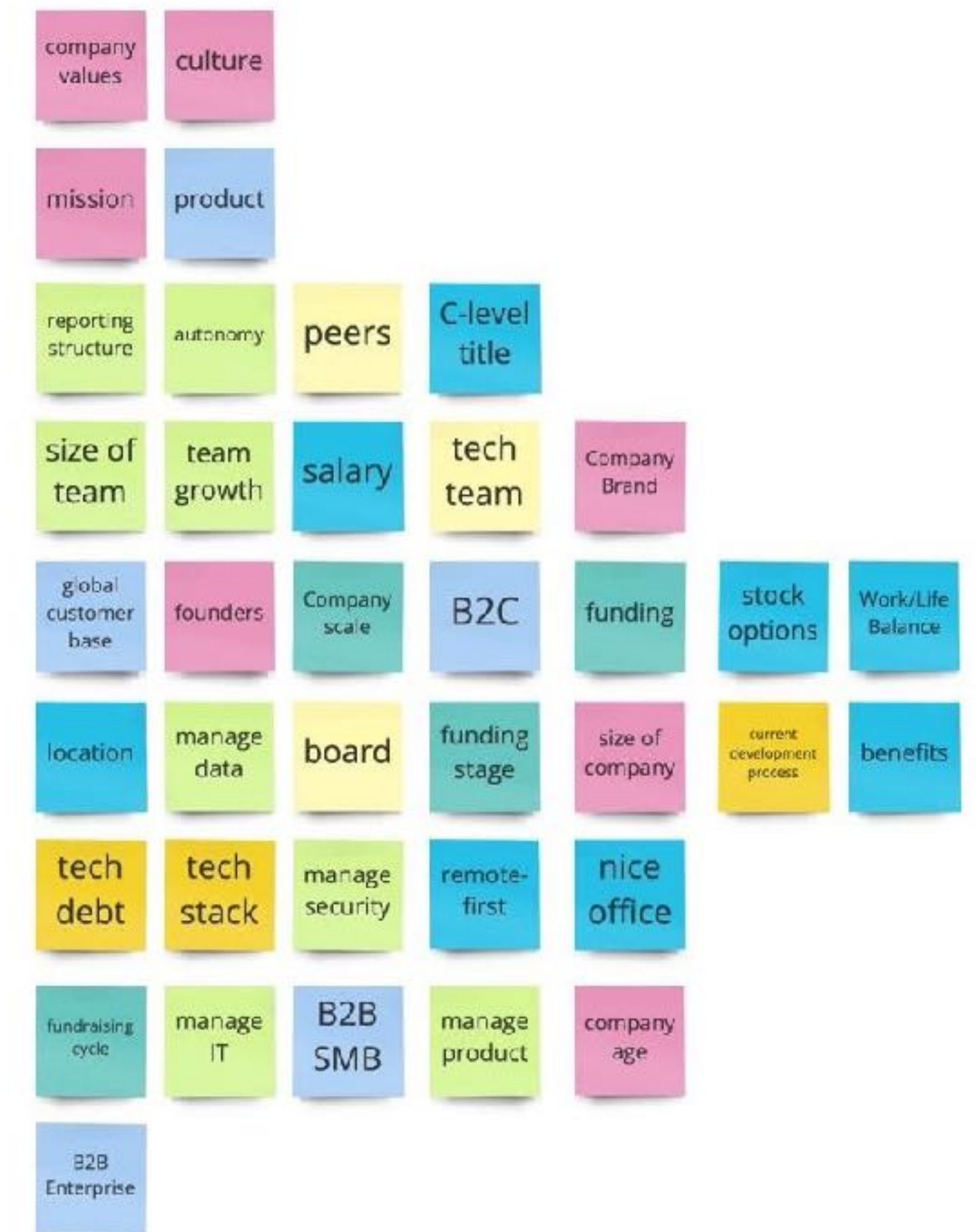
The Three-Part Assessment

- Self-Assessment: Know what you want
- Market Positioning: Know your story
- Skills Inventory: Know your gaps

Do this while you're employed and comfortable

Self-Assessment: Know What You Want

- Brainstorm criteria on cards
- Force yourself to prioritize them
- Your priorities will surprise you
- Be ready when recruiters ask: 'What are you looking for?'



Market Positioning: Know Your Story

- What's your narrative? (Not just resume bullets)
- What makes you different/valuable in the current market?
- Practice articulating this while employed

Skills Inventory: Know Your Gaps

- Honest assessment: What does the market want vs. what do you have?
- Identify 2-3 strategic areas to develop
- This becomes your roadmap for Framework 3 (Optimize the Gap)
- Address gaps while you're still employed

The Financial Foundation

- Save money NOW (before you need it)
- Build 3-6 month runway
- Cut unnecessary expenses

Network Maintenance

- Maintain relationships while employed
- Don't wait until you need them
- Quality over quantity

Framework 2: Crisis Stabilization

The First 30 Days

The Market Reality Reset

- In an employer's market:
 - Overqualified people are taking lower salaries
 - Jobs that you ignored before are now ignoring you

Accept this reality, don't fight it

The Confidence Paradox

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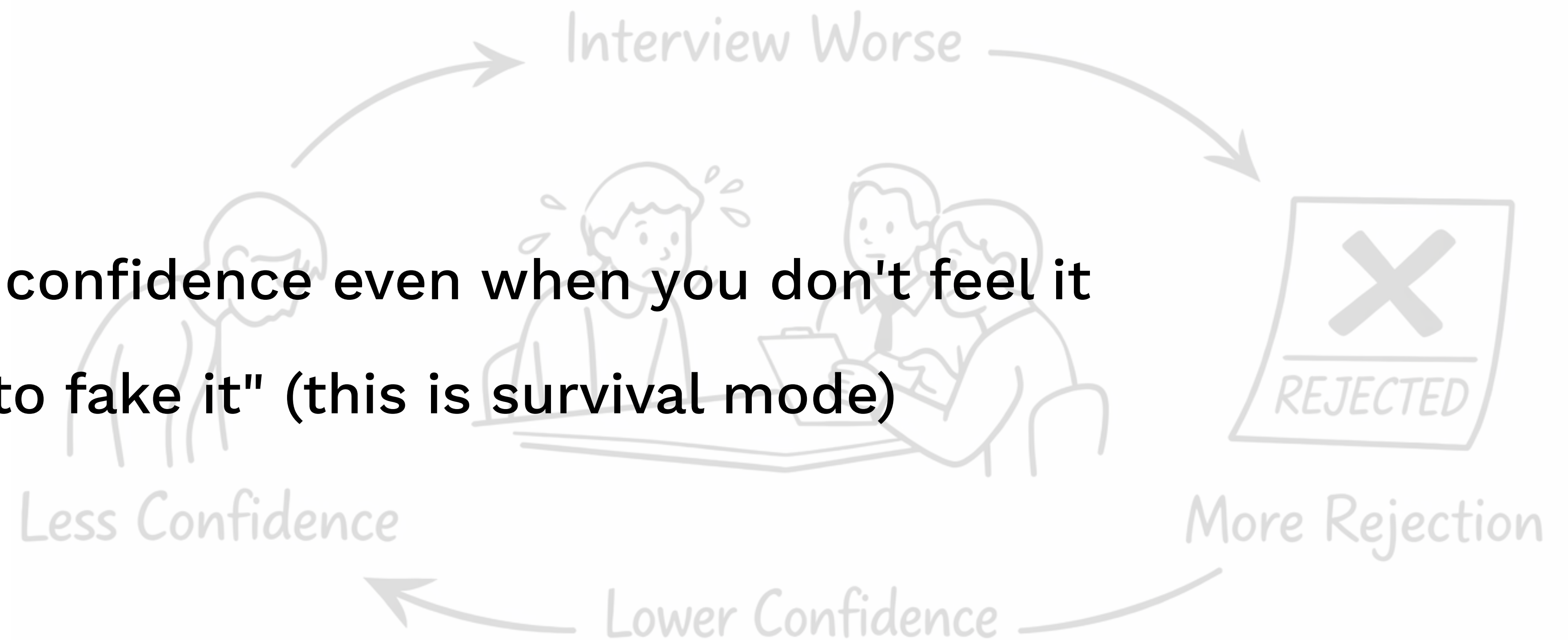
The Confidence Paradox

As weeks turned to months, I lost faith

The cruel cycle:

You **MUST** project confidence even when you don't feel it

"Even if you have to fake it" (this is survival mode)



Network Activation Strategy

- Not building networks - ACTIVATING existing ones
- Get over embarrassment (people understand)
- Friends get you past gatekeepers
- Attend meetups to meet others in the same situation
- Form groups to share tips about companies hiring

Managing Expectations

- The market will rebound, and salaries will go up again
- Take the lower offer if you need to
- Keep looking with the security of income

Framework 3: The Gap Optimizer

During the Search

Five Strategies for Productive Gaps

- Start a Consultancy
- Build a Startup
- Contribute to Open Source
- Volunteer Your Technical Skills
- Career Break (intentional framing)

Strategy Deep Dive: Starting a Consultancy

- **Why:** Shows you're working, using skills actively
- **Reality:** Hard without connections, but doable
- **Interview advantage:** Rich stories
- **Tactical:** Be ready to transition to full-time

Strategy Deep Dive: Building a Startup

- Don't let complexity intimidate (idea + website = startup)
- Interview advantage:
 - Technical decisions (why you chose X)
 - Product thinking and problem-solving
 - Business acumen
- Address directly: "I'm ready to shelve this and focus on your role."

Strategy Deep Dive: Open Source Contribution

- Pick a project you'd want to talk about in an interview
- Contribution doesn't mean "build a new framework."
- Bug fixes, documentation, tests all count
- Bonus: builds public proof of work that hiring managers can see

Other Strategies

- **Volunteering Your Technical Skills**
 - Contributes to society
 - Lets you expand your skills for a good cause
 - Experience with creative problem-solving with limited resources
- **Career Break**
 - 6-month max
 - Be specific about activities

Building Interview Narratives

- Each strategy gives you fresh material
- Transform "Why the gap?" into "What I learned/built."
- Confidence comes from having real work to discuss

Framework 4: The Evaluation Matrix

Making the Decision

The Spreadsheet Method

- Criteria-based scoring system
- Must-haves can score negative if not met
- Nice-to-haves score zero or positive
- Total to 2000 (forces trade-offs)

Item	Must-have	Guidelines	Answer	Base Score	Score
company values	Yes	Are they a good match with my values?	No	100	-100
culture	Yes	Is it a culture I want to work in?	No	100	-100
mission	No	Do they have a mission I can relate to?	No	90	0
product	No	Is this a product that is exciting?	No	90	0
reporting structure	No	Do I report to the right person?	No	80	0
autonomy	Yes	Will I have autonomy to make decisions?	No	80	-80
tech challenge	No	Are there cool tech challenges to solve?	No	80	0
peers	No	Do I respect my future peers?	No	80	0
title	No	Am I happy with the title?	No	75	0
size of team	No	Is the team a good size for me?	No	70	0
team growth	No	Do I get to grow the team?	No	65	0
salary	Yes	Is the salary reasonable?	No	65	-65
tech team	No	Do I like the existing tech team?	No	65	0
Company Brand	No	Is the company well-known?	No	55	0
global customer base	No	Is this a global product?	No	50	0
founders	No	Do I like the founders?	No	50	0
Company scale	No	How big is the company in the market?	No	50	0
B2C	No	Is this a B2C product?	No	50	0
funding	No	Is the company well-funded?	No	50	0
stock options	No	Do I get a reasonable amount of stock?	No	45	0
Work/Life Balance	No	Will I have a good work/life balance?	No	45	0
location	No	Is the company located somewhere I want to live/visit-often?	No	40	0
manage data	No	Do I manage data engineering/data science?	No	40	0
board	No	Am I excited about the board?	No	35	0
funding stage	No	How much money has the company raised?	No	35	0
size of company	No	Am I happy with the size of the company?	No	35	0
current development process	No	Am I happy with how they currently build software?	No	35	0
benefits	No	Are the benefits reasonable?	No	35	0
tech debt	Yes	Is there a reasonable amount of tech debt to clean up?	No	35	-35
tech stack	No	Do I like the existing tech stack?	No	35	0
manage security	No	Do I manage the security team?	No	35	0
remote-first	No	Is the company remote-first/remote-only?	No	35	0
nice office	No	If the company is not remote, do I get to work in a nice office?	No	35	0
fundraising cycle	No	When is the next raise?	No	25	0
manage IT	No	Do I manage the IT team?	No	25	0
B2B SMB	No	Is this a B2B SMB market company?	No	25	0
manage product	No	Do I manage the product team?	No	25	0
company age	No	Is the company not too old?	No	25	0
B2B Enterprise	No	Is this an enterprise product?	No	10	0
				Total Possible Score	2000
				Score	-380
				Percentage suitability	-19%

Creating Interview Questions

- Each criterion generates questions
- I had 5 pages of question prompts
- Never at a loss for "Do you have questions for me?"
- Helps ensure you gather the data needed to score
- You're not just being interviewed, you're conducting research

The Decision Moment

- When you get offers, you have data, not just feelings
- Can evaluate specific offers against your criteria
- Negotiate with confidence
- You know what matters to YOU
- No regrets, no FOMO
- Clear-headed decision making

It Will Get Better

Call to Action

- If you have a job now:
 - Do Framework 1 this week
 - Financial audit, criteria exercise, skills inventory
- If you're in it now:
 - Pick one Framework 3 strategy this month
- If you're hiring:
 - Be human, see the person underneath the gap

The Preparation Mindset

- Frameworks give you structure when everything feels chaotic
 - They won't make it easy
 - But they'll make it navigable
- When you're ready, you recover faster

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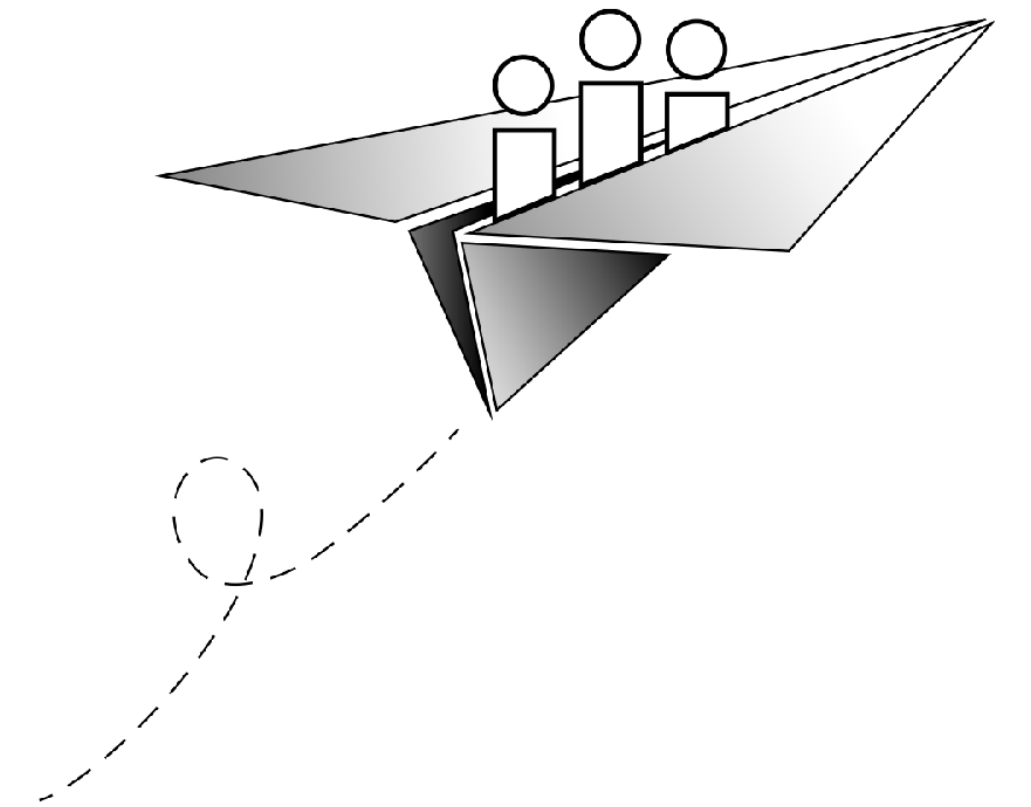
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TALK FEEDBACK

