



Is Professional Courtesy in 2025 a thing of the past?

**EXECUTIVE TALENT SEARCH PARTNERS WHITE PAPER**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

I am a small business owner of a boutique search firm, Executive Talent Search Partners and a proud member of Generation X (1965-1980). Gen Xers are known for being independent, resourceful, adaptable, and valuing work-life balance. These represent my core professional values to this day. The only addition being that I am people focused: People are my priority in business.

Now being a Gen Xer, I realize that my professional outlook and values will probably be painted by some as someone that is stuck in “old school thinking.” But before diving into that, I want to share the events of this past month that have triggered my quest to seek clarity and answers to the question:

Is Professional Courtesy in 2025 a thing of the past?

Earlier this month, I went out on a professional limb with a junior-level hire I because I thought she had the communication skills and work ethic for success. She expressed sincere appreciation for my belief in her and that this was the career and life changing break she was praying for. During her first two weeks, I regularly checked up on her to see how her transition was going. Her manager reported that he thought she had a bright future and thought she was off to a good start with her project work. At the end of her second week, she even reached out to her manager a couple of times on the weekend about scheduling meetings the following week for the project they were working on. Her hiring manager stated everything seemed good. On the following Monday morning she missed the regularly scheduled team call. I sent out multiple messages via phone, email, text, and LinkedIn expressing my concern for her. Her manager did the same for the next three days. Both of us were getting an automated message that the phone was not accepting calls or messages. By Wednesday the hiring manager and I came to the hard realization that we had to move on and that we did all we could to reach her and learn of her well being. We also had to accept the hard truth: We got ghosted.

Last week, within days of each other, I and one of my colleagues were separately interviewing by phone potential candidates for a leadership role within our company. These were not cold calls—they had applied for for the job. As we both spoke with our candidates, covering every aspect that was shared in detail within the job description, each candidate abruptly hung up, ending the call instantly.

Now, I do not feel a need to share what the particular issue was that caused the candidates to decide to rudely hang up. The important issue is not the subject topic or is the fact that both candidates obviously did not thoroughly review the job posting they applied for. The headline and important issue is that two individuals felt the appropriate, right thing to do was to respond to something they did not like by hanging up mid-sentence on a business call. I find this personally and professionally fascinating—and equally disturbing.

Lastly, just yesterday, one of my team member’s shared with me that earlier in the day he responded to a former professional colleague’s article that was posted publicly on

LinkedIn. The subject of the article painted a bleak picture of how the politics of today are forever tanking the job market. My teammate innocently responded to his former colleague sharing that he had never known him as “doom and gloom” person. As a result that that single comment, my teammate was defriended. It is hard for me to accept this reaction as appropriate for 2025.

Now capturing the spirit of fellow Gen Xer Dennis Miller, the Emmy nominated comedian and former cast member of Saturday Night Live and the HBO late night talk show *Dennis Miller Live*, known for his tag line “Now I do not want to go off in a rant but ...” When did people start believing these kind of actions have become acceptable business behavior? Did I miss a memo, email, text, something on Twitter (I mean X), Tik-Tok, DM, blog, or podcast? Did Taylor Swift leave a message for Swifties to decode during the Eras tour? Seriously, when? I find myself befuddled!

### **BACKGROUND:**

What is Professional Courtesy?

According to Merriam-Webster, they define professional courtesy as professionalism and the conduct, qualities, or aims that characterize a professional person or profession. It includes the skill, judgment, and polite behavior that is expected of someone who is trained to do a job well.

For the purposes of this essay, professional courtesy will be defined as being courteous, conscientious, and businesslike practices extended in the workplace. It also includes being respectful, ethical, and professional in interactions.

Examples of professional courtesy

- Treating colleagues with respect and courtesy
- Acting in a professional manner when dealing with potential customers / colleagues
- Exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace

Other examples of professional courtesy also include:

- Being on time: Arrive on time for meetings and appointments
- Being respectful: Say "please" and "thank you"
- Being considerate: Hold the door open for others
- Being mindful: Be aware of others' personal space
- Being honest: Apologize when you make a mistake
- Being a good listener: Actively listen to others' perspectives
- Being helpful: Offer to help when needed
- Being tidy: Clean up after yourself
- Being a team player: Give credit to the group when others compliment you

Benefits of professional courtesy include reducing conflict, building trust and respect with internal and external audiences. It also enhances communication, encourages collaboration, and creates a more positive work environment.

Let me be perfectly clear, professional courtesy is a two-way street not only expecting a level of professionalism for candidates only but also from corporate America. When I started my corporate recruiting career back in 1999, professional courtesy was the accepted and expected set of behaviors and values that demonstrate respect and consideration between members internal teammates and recruitment candidates.

It's 2025. I'm calling out any HR or Recruiting Professional that does not follow-up with active candidates or fails to follow through with their promises of feedback.

I have always prided myself throughout my career of my practice and belief that if I speak with a candidate that I submit to a client, I have the responsibility to speak with them about the outcome of their candidacy no matter good or bad. And I continue this practice to this day and have built Executive Talent Search Partners on this principal as one of our company's foundation pillars.

I am not looking to be nominated for sainthood or looking for any platitudes. My practice was not built of professional ethics or good practice standards. It was born out of my own negative experiences as a candidate forgotten by recruiters and silently dismissed by HR professionals and hiring managers. All too many never had the decency, or the *professional courtesy* to provide the reasons, factors or feedback why I did not get an interview or job offer.

I fully understand there are legal and HR policy limitations on what information can be shared. However, applicants deserve acknowledgment that one's candidacy was given full consideration but the hiring manager found a candidate that was better / closer fit for the position. There, I just did it and it took me less than 10 seconds. This is all candidates seek and need for professional development self-improvements.

I could not agree with more when Terence T. Burton wrote in "What The Hell Happened To Professional Courtesy In Organizations?":

"Professional courtesy should be non-negotiable, a standard of great companies with great cultures. The world is improving exponentially rather than linearly, and the key to success is (and always has been) people and talent! Consciously living best practice leadership behaviors and instilling these behavioral attributes in others is a great start to regaining professional courtesy. It's also a great start towards developing and nurturing a superior culture and best place to work. However, don't forget the basics of please, thank you, honesty, respect, recognizing accomplishments, listening, awareness, objectivity, dealing with facts vs. emotions, team before individual needs, thinking before speaking, kindness, and other conscious fundamentals of working together... Yes, professional courtesy matters, and its demise or resurgence is a leadership choice. Demise is the wrong choice. This decline in professional courtesy does not have to be permanent with

the right leadership attention, behavioral alignment, and cultural development. Professional courtesy is just one of many evolutionary culture changes required in today's workplace.”

(<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/has-anyone-seen-professional-courtesy-terence-t-burton>)

While it's long been a known practice that employers have ghosted job applicants during the hiring process for years, ever since I can remember entering the work force as a candidate and professionally as a corporate recruiter almost 30 years ago. It is easy to find thousands of posts on-line in various chat rooms like Café Pharma or Reddit from candidates sharing too often similar experiences of companies failing to get back to them about their status with a company.

A new trend—since Covid especially—is job seekers are also doing their fair share of disappearing during the hunt. After years of corporate neglect by employers not getting back to candidates, there are indications that younger generations are starting to turn the tables and rebelling against the traditional history of corporate silence.

### **GHOSTING: What is Ghosting in the job market?**

In 2017, Merriam-Webster dictionary officially added the term "ghosting" as it relates to abruptly ending communication with someone without explanation, primarily in the context of dating. It's believed to have originated in the early 2000s, gaining widespread popularity around 2015, when media started to use the term to spotlight high-profile celebrity relationship breakups.

So, what is professional ghosting? People talk about it all the time these days. I have used the term a couple of times earlier in this essay. How are we getting ghosted at work?

Professional ghosting refers to abruptly ceasing communication or interaction with a professional contact, often without any explanation or prior warning. This can manifest in various ways, such as failing to respond to emails, not returning phone calls, or neglecting to follow through on professional feedback and/or commitments.

Michele Darley, a Certified Interview Coach /| LinkedIn Top Voice recent wrote on January 20, 2025 in her LinkedIn article “Ghosting in the job market” she defined what ghosting is and what is not ghosting.

Darley went on to define ghosting as:

- Not showing up for a planned interview – this happens on both sides. Recruiters ghost candidates, and candidates ghost recruiters.
- Going through multiple interviews and not getting any feedback or follow up – that candidate's been ghosted.
- Going through multiple interviews and now can't get in touch with the candidate to provide follow up/feedback and potentially an offer – the candidate has ghosted the company.

- At any point while you're in the interview process – passed the recruiter and have had one additional and you cannot get anyone to give you feedback – also ghosting.
- Making a verbal offer to a candidate and then disappearing – horrible and ghosting.
- It's also when you've scheduled a meeting with someone and they don't show up and don't bother to cancel - ghosting happens outside of the hiring process as well.

Darley went on to define what is NOT ghosting as:

- Applying online and not getting a response – you could be one of hundreds or even thousands of applicants. Sometimes companies don't have the capabilities to respond to everyone and they aren't obligated to, especially if you aren't a match for the job. possibly bad behavior at most, but a lot of companies will put into their ATS that only qualified candidates will be contacted.
- Sending an email to someone and not getting a response – if I had a dollar for every cold outreach email/InMail I sent to a candidate that didn't respond to me – I'd have some cash. I don't expect everyone to open a message from me – while I'd love for them to, they are also getting many emails. If your cold outreach message to HR/Recruiting or a hiring manager doesn't get a response, don't take it personally, because you are one of many, and it absolutely doesn't count as ghosting.
- Talking to a recruiter who says you're not right for the role you were speaking for, but they will keep you in mind...and then you don't hear from them, is not ghosting (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ghosting-job-market-michele-darley-sik1e>)

In a February 24, 2025 Newsweek article “Gen Z Is Ghosting Employers,” Suzanne Blake summarized a new report from Number Barn sharing recent survey data showing the extent to which applicants were in turn ghosting potential employers. She found this was especially common among younger generations. Roughly 41 percent of Gen Z (1997-2012) admitted to ghosting a potential employer, while 37 percent of Millennials (1981-1996) said the same.

In addition, little more than 4 in 10 Gen Z job seekers said they had ghosted a potential employer, while 37% of millennials did the same, according to the Number Barn survey. Only 26% and 22% percent of Gen X and Baby Boomers (1945-1964) had done the same. Across the board, 35% said they had ghosted a company during the hiring process.

Blake went on to share that a recent Intelligent.com survey found a whopping 6 in 10 employers had already fired college graduates who were hired in 2024. And one in seven said they might refrain from hiring new college grads next year as well, showing a reluctance toward taking a chance on Gen Z employees. Why is this important? Gen Z makes up those aged 13 to 28, and the newer generation is primed to shape the workforce as they become a more prominent part of it by 2030. So far, Gen Z has sparked major change in companies, pushing for greater work life balance and better starting salaries despite some hiring managers' dissatisfaction. (<https://www.newsweek.com/gen-z-ghosting-employers-survey-2035468>)

In his published January 10, 2025 article “Why are new hires ghosting employers?” Rich McEchran shared findings from a survey of more than 1,000 HR and senior management professionals, conducted by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development. He found that 27% of companies actively recruiting in the past 12 months had hires fail to turn up on their first day. And, even if they do walk through the door, 41% of those surveyed for the institute’s *Resourcing and Talent Planning Report 2024* have seen new employees leave within their first 12 weeks.

(<https://www.itpro.com/business/business-strategy/why-are-new-hires-ghosting-employers>)

## **CONCLUSION:**

Today’s world makes it increasingly difficult to be friendly, respectful, tolerant and considerate. There are more humans on the planet than ever before, and yet we live increasingly isolated lives and forget to respect the personal boundaries of others. Anonymity makes it much easier to behave in a self-centered way.

There is absolutely no doubt that technology today is creating a more productive world by the numbers. Technology has made it convenient for people to conduct business in a less personal style, making it easier to drift away from professional courtesy and other different standards of conduct. In some circumstances these changes are creating a meltdown in the workplace due to a disregard (intentional or unintentional) for courtesy, respect, and other best values and codes of professional conduct.

In our fast-paced post covid world, accepted business practice norms are more than just a courtesy—it’s an essential skill. I dare say, it’s needed more today than ever. Gone are the days of business suits, dresses and ties as the expected corporate culture. Nowadays video conferencing has replaced much of the urgency for the face-to-face interaction. Times have changed and they will continue as technology evolves.

As we all begin uncertain times at the start of 2025, I am not advocating to discard technology and return to the antiquated workplace practices of the past. I want recognition by both companies and individuals to continue to use technology to enable major improvements in productivity and business performance, *and* at the same time enable and reinforce the practice of right behaviors and cultural standards of excellence.

Technology and a fast-paced work culture are not the real issue or problem. It is the acceptance of relaxed standards of conduct and social behaviors by which leadership, organizations, and people use technology to interact professionally. Too much focus has been directed on technology itself and not enough focus on creating the right behavioral, social, organizational, and cultural aspects to create a great work environment. This has caused a more relaxed approach and informal behavior that has emerged in recent years – ie more casual dress codes, greater authenticity communicating digitally, confusing honest communication with inappropriate dialogue that would rarely would have been shared face to face. Zoom video calls do not mean that “old school principals” like respect and good manners should be overlooked or forgotten. It is all of these combined factors that has caused the decrease of professional courtesy in 2025.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

For the better part of the last 25 years, Sean Fitzmorris has been the strong talent acquisition support behind several world-class recruiting organizations. His expertise lies in executing a relationship-driven approach, by learning the nuances of multiple specialty areas. He understands every element of full-cycle recruiting, from requisition development through onboarding, with a special emphasis on all the intricate sourcing details in between. He has a Master's Degree in Public Relations / Communications from Rowan University. He is currently the President and Founder of a boutique search firm, Executive Talent Search Partners (ETSP).

## **ABOUT EXECUTIVE TALENT SEARCH PARTNERS (ETSP):**

“We Take Our Business Personally”

Executive Talent Search Partners (ETSP) is a boutique search firm driven by a dedicated, personalized business approach focus and value delivery model for exceptional corporate leaders in high demand sectors. ETSP provides an alternative to traditional search practices by successfully bridging the gap between the focus of traditional retained model on the candidate side and dedicated attention of the Recruiting Process Outsourcing (RPO) recruitment model with our client partners.

Through a collaborative hands-on approach to learn your needs, our passion is to build meaningful relationships with highly skilled and experienced cyber / information security professionals to connect with forward thinking client partners needing liked minded talent for their rapidly changing landscape within multiple industries.

Through the design and execution of our personalized and customized research and 15 step recruitment search process that double vets every interview ready candidate we share with our client partners to take your business to the next level.

In an era that finds the rise of AI sending tsunami like ripple effects in today's business world resulting in the depersonalizing of human interaction across the global corporate landscape. ETSP is dedicated and strives for the “human touch” with both our client partners and candidate business relationships.

ETSP partners with clients, as an extension of their business to resolve problems within talent acquisition program by providing client focus expertise to address high demand sectors such as Healthcare, Life Sciences Information Security / Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence by identifying real obstacles with their recruiting practices, supply and demand and/or the inevitable challenges they should expect. We help client partners close open requirements for highly skilled and experienced technical professionals with speed and precision to hire the right person at the right time for the right position.