Narrative

Interviewing and getting a job

jkolko@wonderfulnarrative.com

Focusing your state of mind and setting your expectations

Remember…

The work needs to be good

+

What to expect

This is not how it will work.
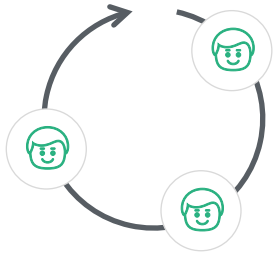

Portfolio review

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Accepting or declining

What to expect

This is how it will work.
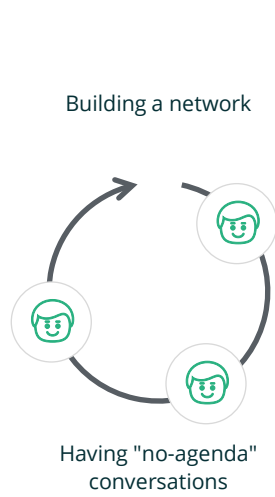
Building a network

Having "no-agenda"
conversations

You are always building a network, by having conversations <u>without an agenda</u>.

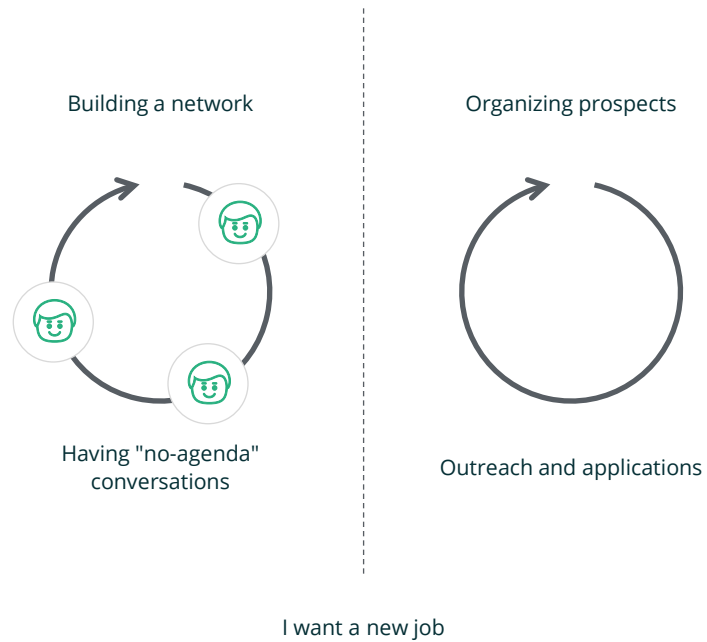**What to expect**

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Having "no-agenda"
conversations

I want a new job

When you are ready for a new job,
you'll have a strong network to talk
to.

Narrative

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Outreach and applications
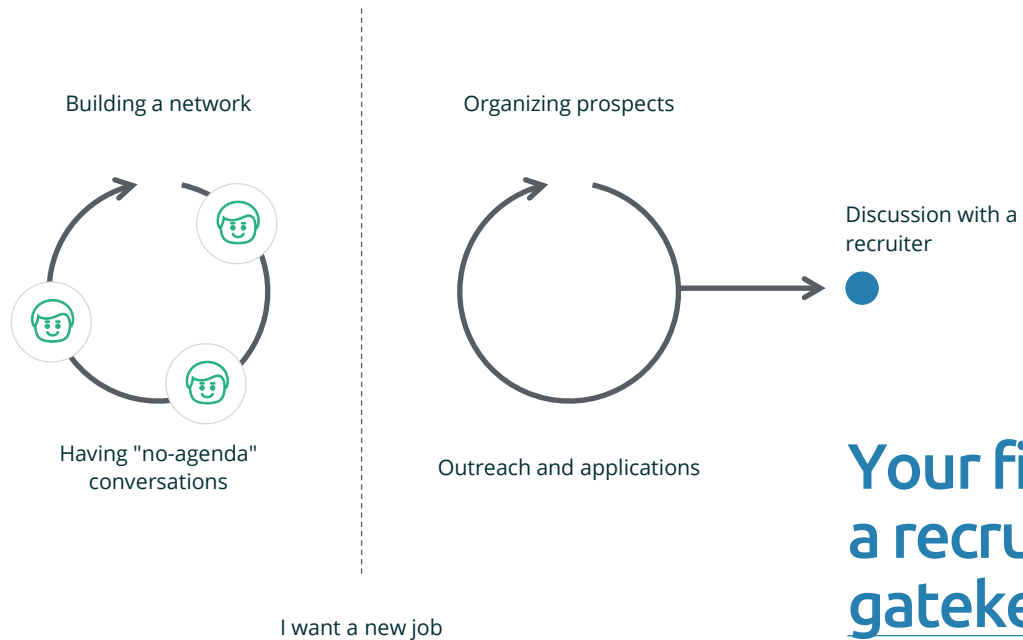
I want a new job

The job search itself will be an organized, methodical, step-by-step process.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Discussion with a recruiter

Having "no-agenda" conversations
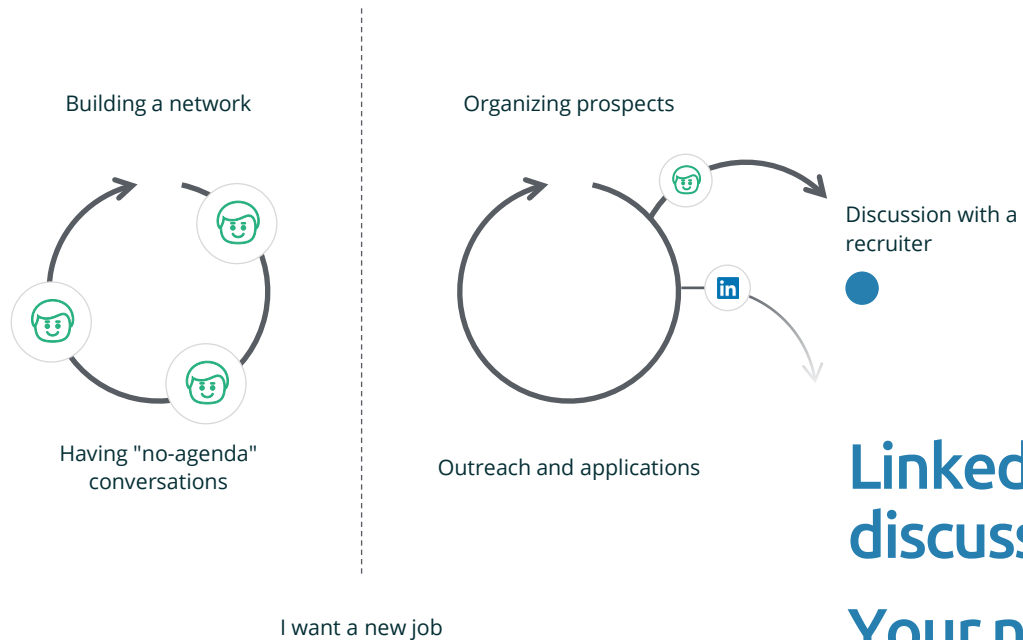
Outreach and applications

I want a new job

Your first goal is to get the attention of a recruiter. A recruiter is the gatekeeper of the process.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

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I want a new job
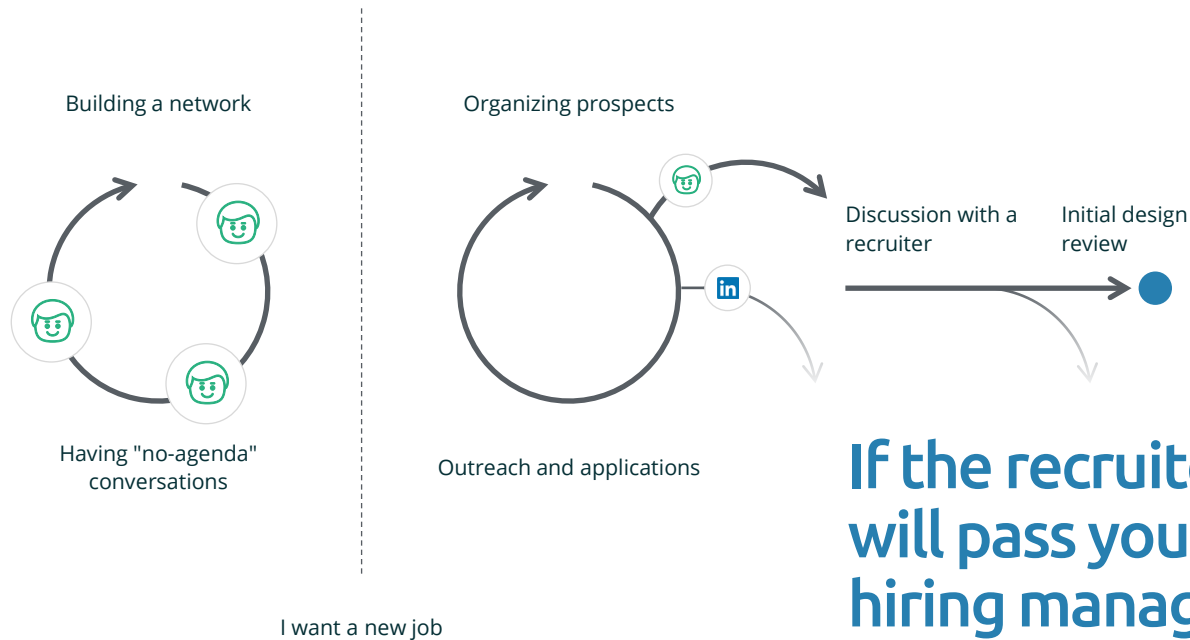
LinkedIn will probably not get you a discussion with a recruiter.

Your network will get you a discussion with a recruiter.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

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Outreach and applications

I want a new job
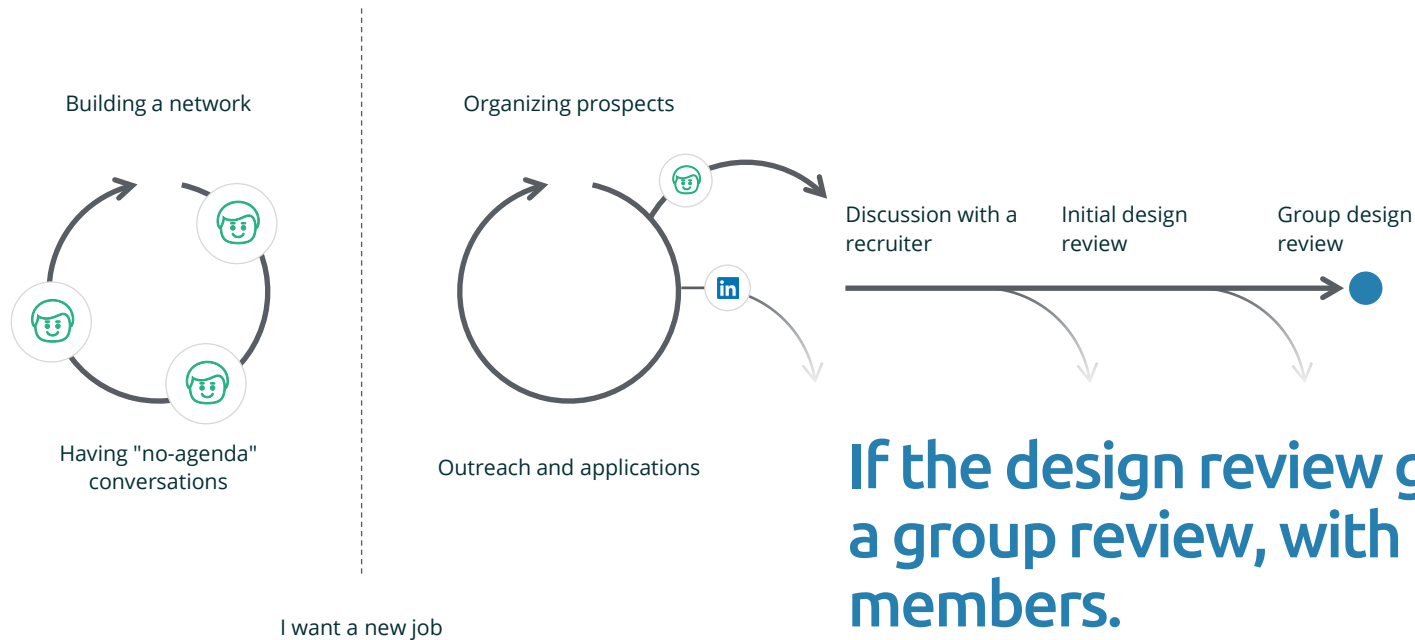
Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

If the recruiter sees a potential fit, they will pass your portfolio and resume to a hiring manager.

If the hiring manager sees there's a good fit, you'll have an initial design review.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

If the design review goes well, you'll have a group review, with multiple team members.

Narrative Workshop Series
February 21, 2025

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What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review
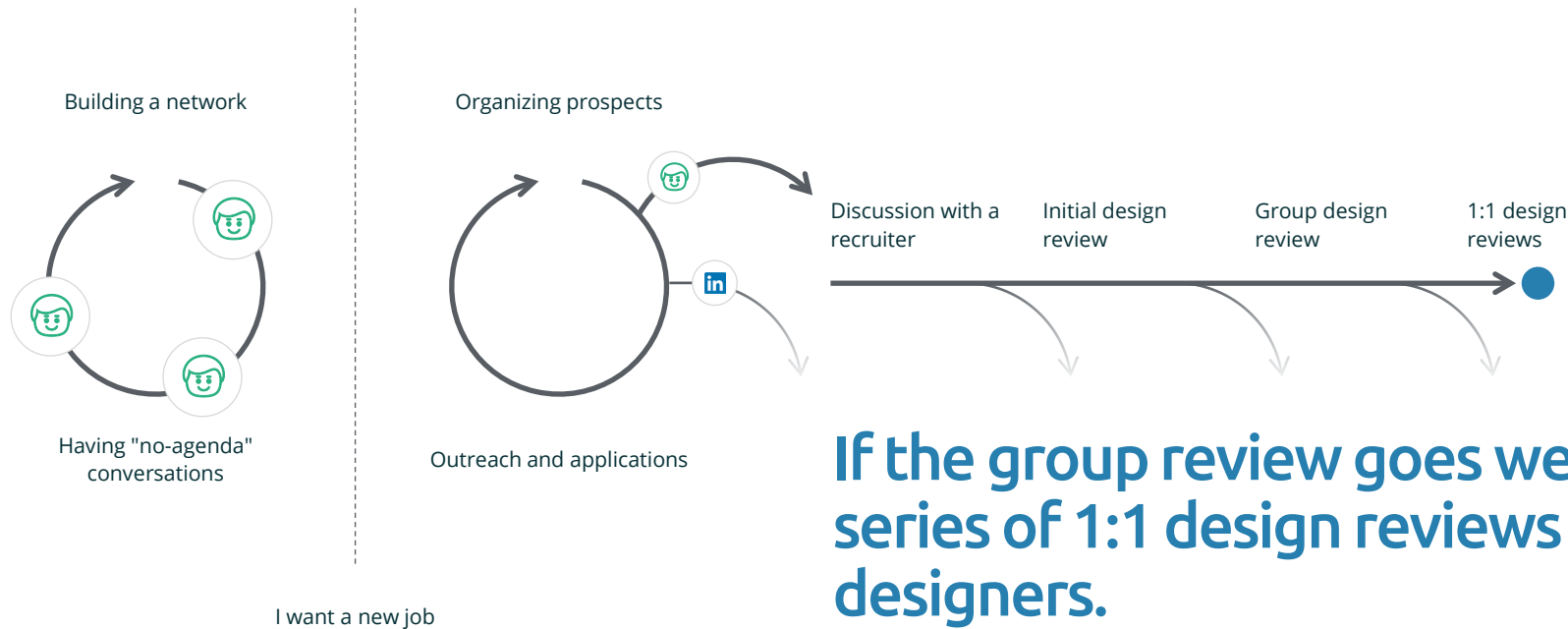
1:1 design reviews
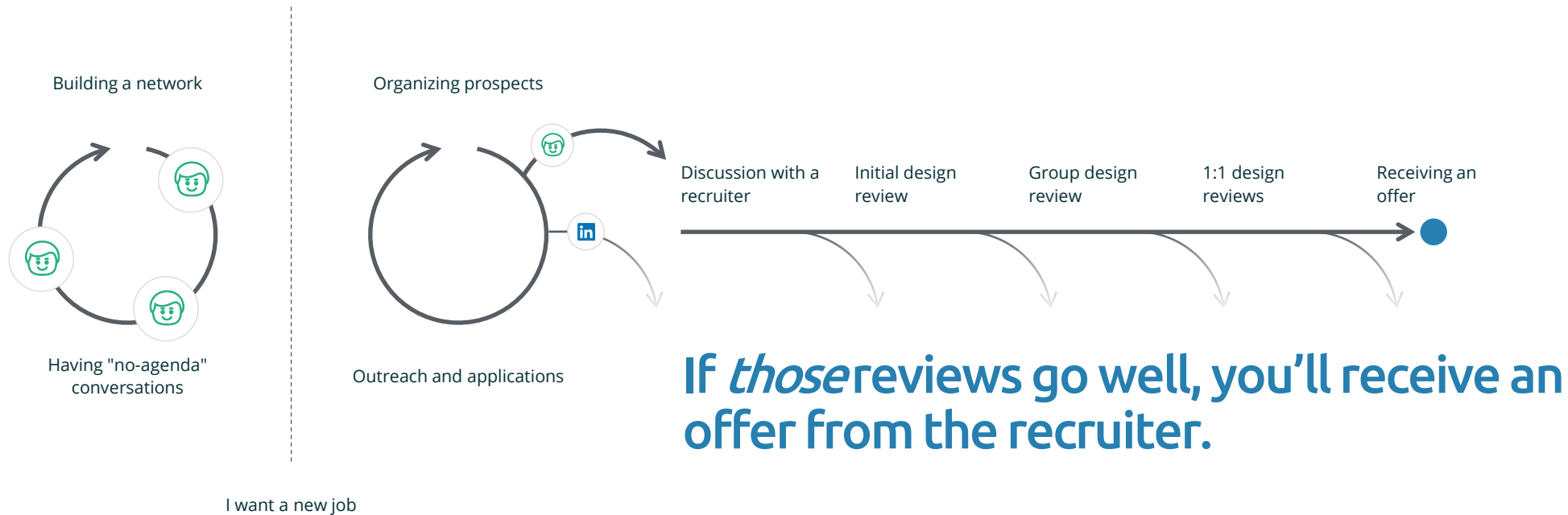
If the group review goes well, you'll have a series of 1:1 design reviews with other designers.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

If *those* reviews go well, you'll receive an offer from the recruiter.

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Outreach and applications

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Depending on the offer, you may negotiate for better terms.

I want a new job

What to expect

This is how it will work.

Building a network

Organizing prospects

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Accepting or declining

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

$

Finally, you'll either accept, or decline.

What to expect

This is the most important part...

Building a network

Having "no-agenda"
conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

Discussion with a
recruiter

Initial design
review

Group design
review

1:1 design
reviews

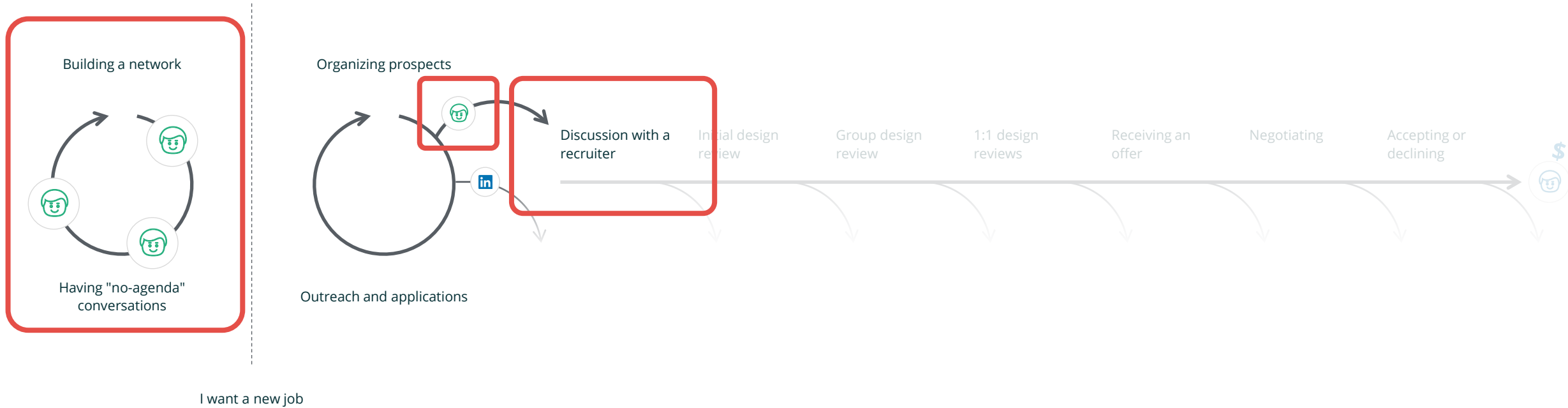Receiving an
offer
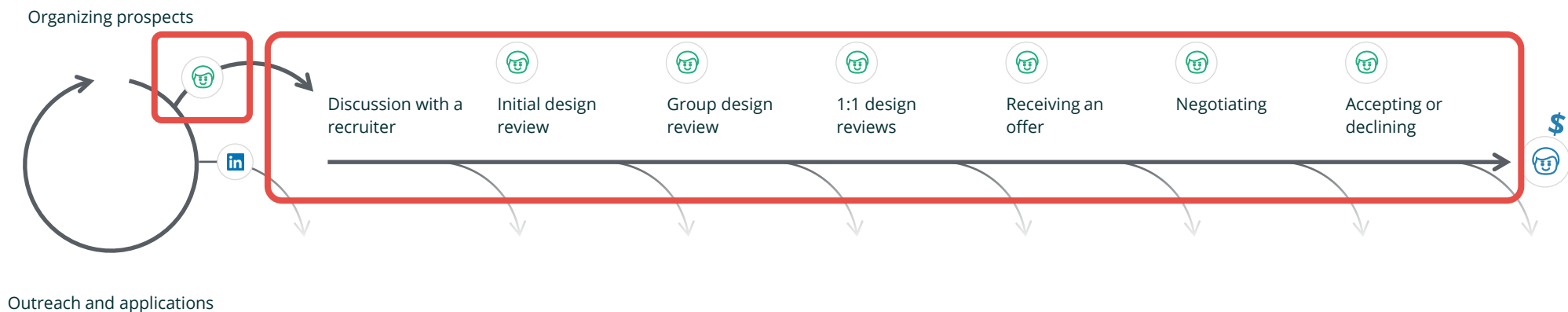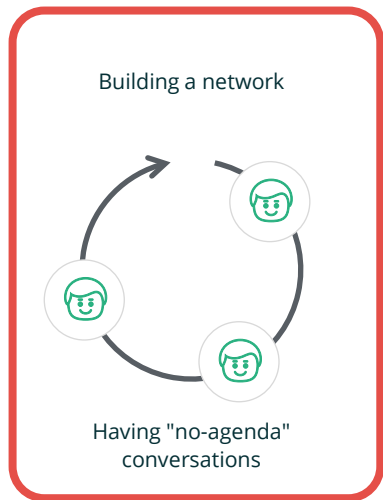
Negotiating

Accepting or
declining
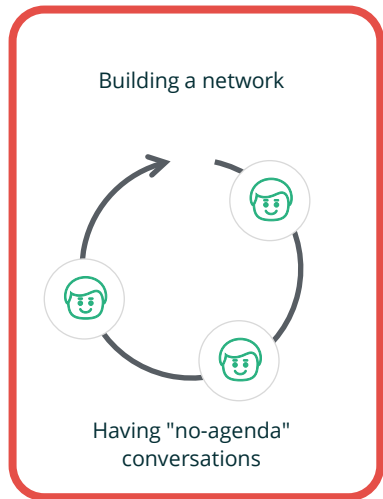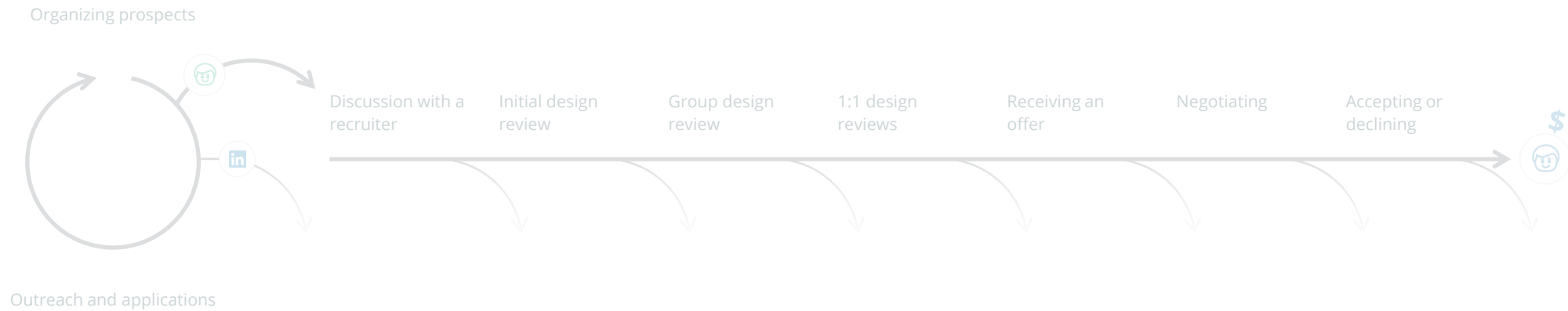
I want a new job

What to expect

Because it gets you this:
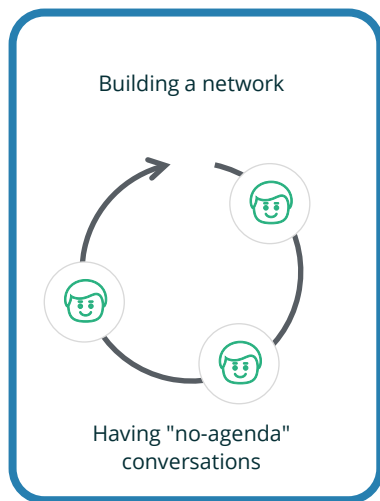
What to expect

And sometimes it gets you this:

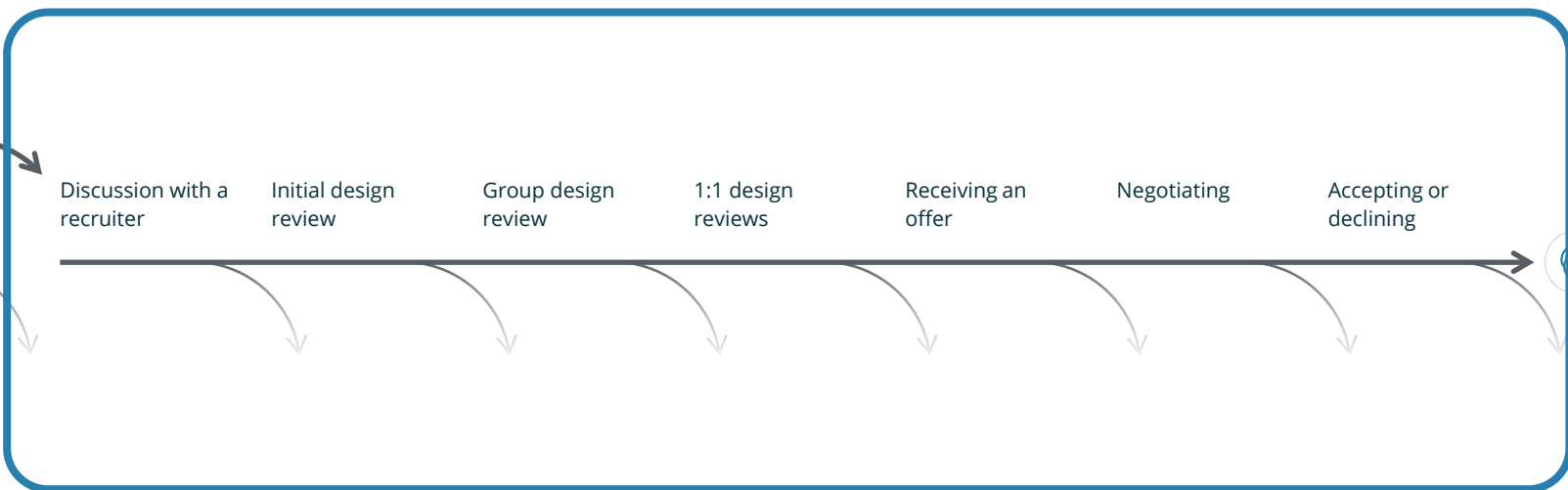**What to expect**

It will take a long time.

Your whole career

A large amount of months

A smaller amount of months

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

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1:1 design reviews

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I want a new job

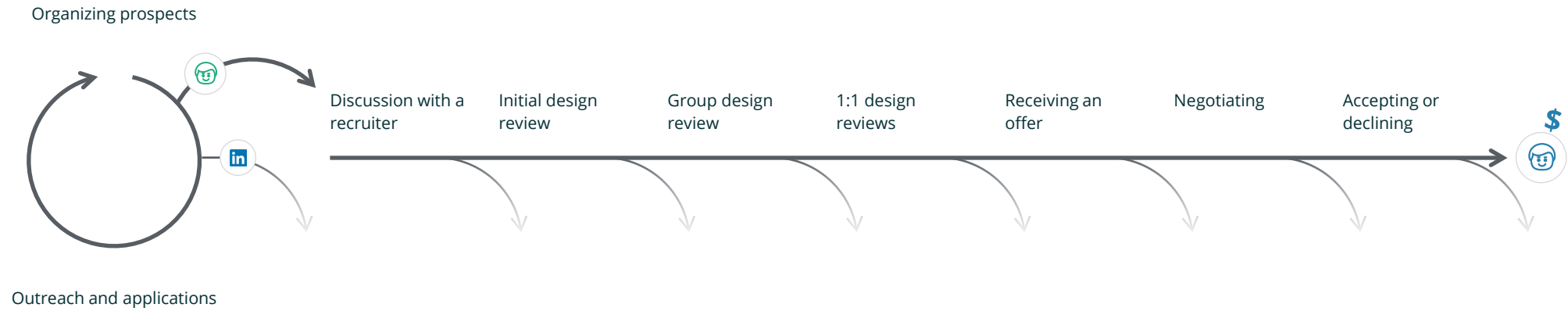|					
1 **Dig in for the long haul**	2 **Focus on the recruiter**	3 **Get off LinkedIn**	4 Leave the house	5 Use your network, not my network	6 Have "no agenda" conversations
7 Network when you don't need a job	8 Schedule your day	9 Track your applications	10 Get a hobby (that isn't on the computer)	11 Ignore the sexy jobs	12 Aim lower
13 Become a visual designer	14 Tweak your resume and portfolio	15 Practice	16 Do your homework	17 Wash your clothes	18 Be ready to show the mess (but clean it up a little)
19 Tell a specific story	20 Show your work	21 Show *your* work, not your team's work	22 Show a detail project	23 Show a process project	24 Take notes
25 Ask questions	26 Talk about your decisions, not your actions	27 Show yourself	28 Send a thank you note	29 Thank the secretaries and the janitors	30 The work needs to be good +

Growing and tending your network

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Accepting or declining

Growing and tending your network

Start with people you already know.

Map out your existing network

Using a sharpie and a big piece of paper,

- Identify the communities you are already a part of.

- List the people in those groups that you trust the most.

- Extend the list outwards.

Hint: you know more people than you think.
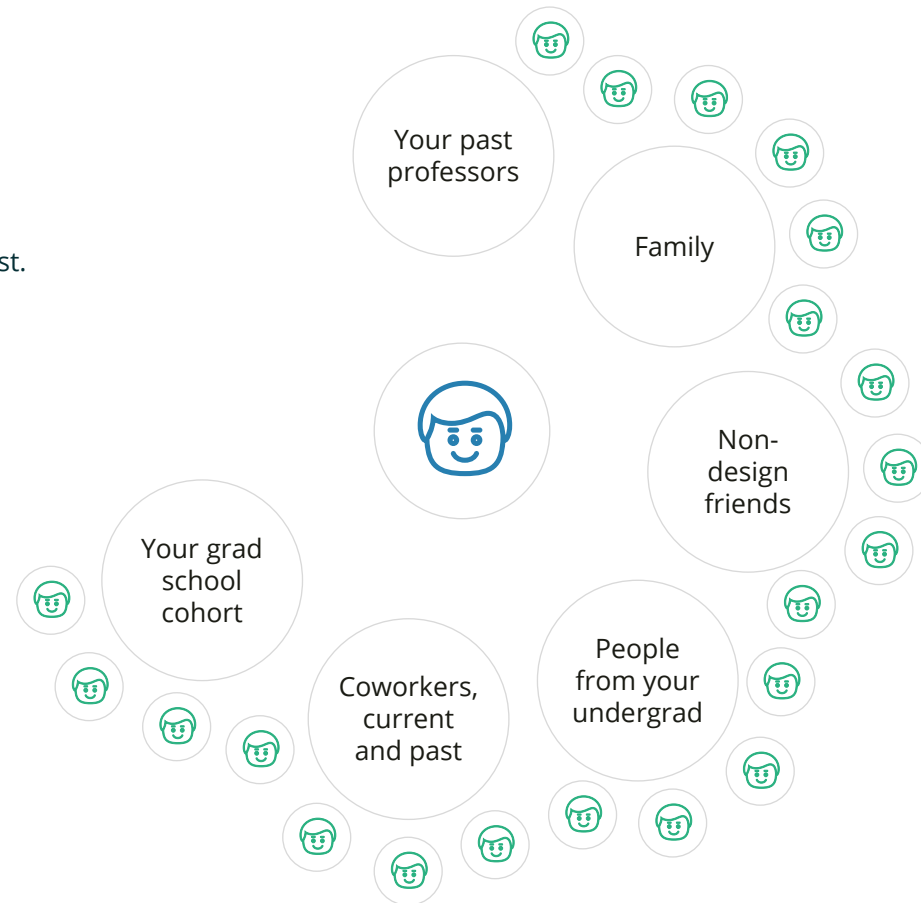
Narrative

Growing and tending your network

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Hi there! I'm looking for a job. Do you have one?

...ur past ...fessors

Family

Non-design friends

Your grad school cohort

People from your undergrad

Coworkers, current and past
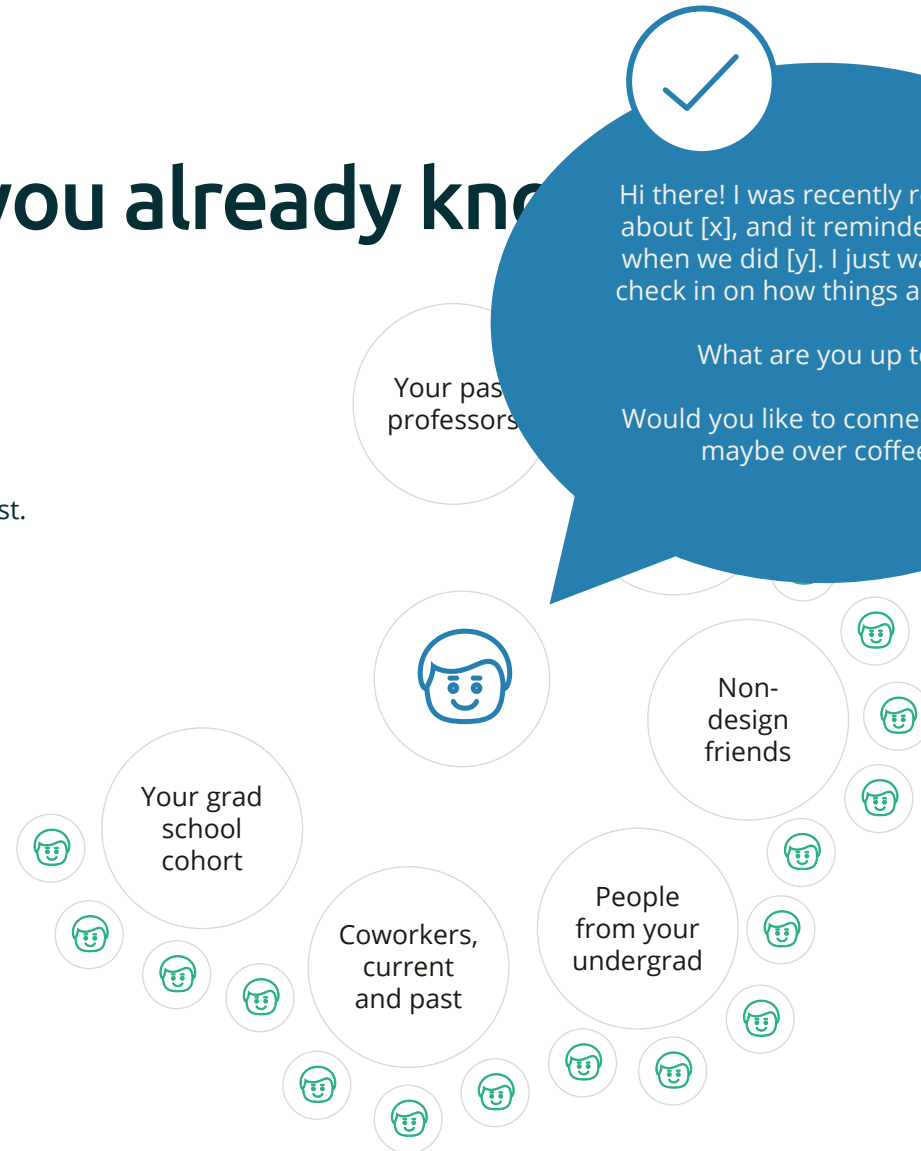
Narrative

Growing and tending your network

Start with people you already know

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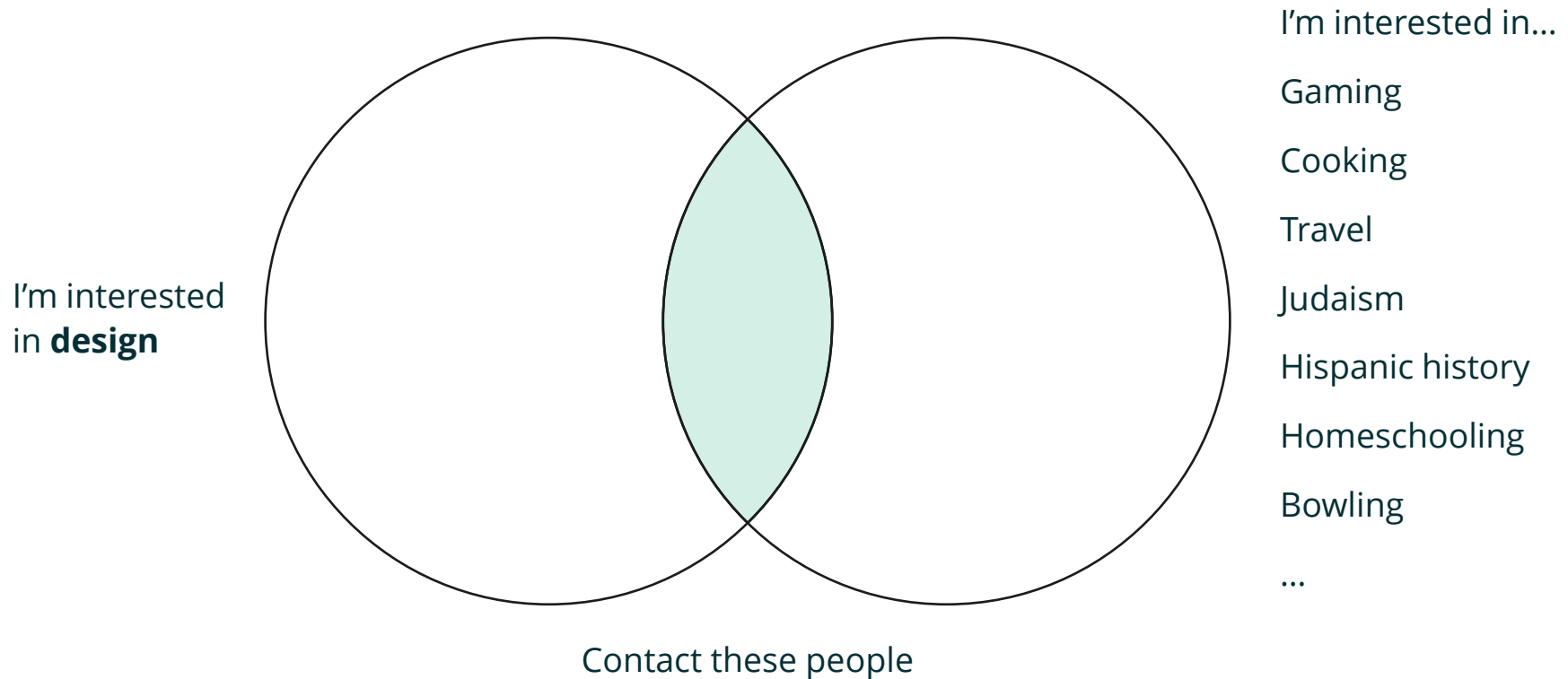
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• Identify the communities you are already a part of.

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Hint: you know more people than you think.

Your past professors

Hi there! I was recently reflecting about [x], and it reminded me of when we did [y]. I just wanted to check in on how things are going.

What are you up to?

Would you like to connect again, maybe over coffee?

Non-design friends

Your grad school cohort

Coworkers, current and past

People from your undergrad

Growing and tending your network

Leverage your unique background and interests.

I'm interested in **design**

Contact these people

I'm interested in...

Gaming

Cooking

Travel

Judaism

Hispanic history

Homeschooling

Bowling

...

Growing and tending your network

Leave the house

Growing and tending your network

Build and maintain a tracking spreadsheet.

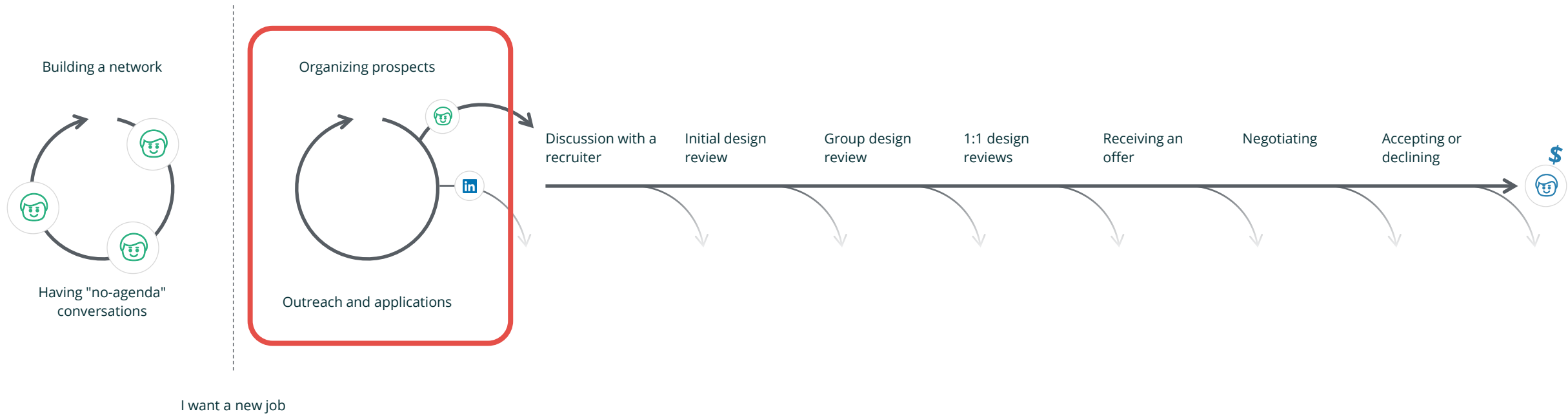| Contact	Company	Title	Email	Phone	How are we connected?	Initial outreach	Follow-up	Next steps
Jon Kolko	Narrative Design	Partner	jkolko@wonderfulnarrative.com	-	Was my professor at UCI	Mar 30, 2025	-	Reach out in June after budget cycles begin again
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Narrative
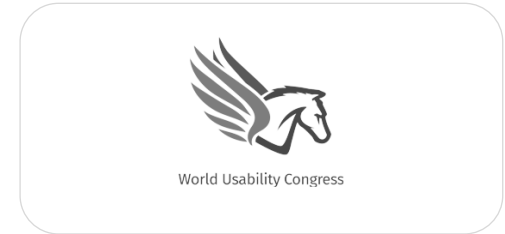
Growing and tending your network

The best time to grow your network is when you don't want anything except a good conversation.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Dig in for the long haul	**Focus on the recruiter**	**Get off LinkedIn**	**Leave the house**	**Use your network, not my network**	**Have "no agenda" conversations**

7	8	9	10	11	12
Network when you don't need a job	Schedule your day	Track your applications	Get a hobby (that isn't on the computer)	Ignore the sexy jobs	Aim lower

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Outreach and applications

Building a network

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conversations

Organizing prospects

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I want a new job

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$

Outreach and applications

Treat your job search like a project, with a plan and a thoughtful, but flexible, approach.

1. Write or revise your job search mission statement

2. Revise your resume to match

3. Identify your main network contacts

4. Reach out to those contacts

5. Work the relationship spiderweb

Outreach and applications

Write a job search mission statement for your ideal job.

My ideal job is working at a small software consultancy, where I can work closely with developers and focus on educational products for high-school students. I want to be in-person in a cozy office up to three days a week, and I'll sacrifice comp and title for the ability to learn from a strong mentor.

A job search mission statement is just for you

- Identify companies that match your mission statement and add them to your to-contact list—even if they aren't hiring

- Focus your job search so you aren't overwhelmed by the number of opportunities

- Cater your portfolio to that specific job (potentially at the expense of other jobs)

Print it and put it on the wall

When job searching gets tedious or frustrating, revisit your job search mission statement.

- Are you looking in the right places for your perfect job?

- Is it still accurate? Are you willing to adjust?

- Are you looking for a needle in a haystack?

Outreach and applications

Revise your resume to fit your job search mission statement.

Change your lead and your content

- Make *why you are* reflect *what you want* (but don't lie.)

- In your supporting data, use language that supports your ideal job, and to reflect your intent.

- Match keywords, so recruiters can understand how and where you fit

Outreach and applications

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- Match keywords, so recruiters can understand how and where you fit

My ideal job is working at a large "name brand," where I can be a user-experience researcher. I want to work in consumer, but beyond that, industry doesn't matter to me.

Jon Kolko
User Experience Researcher

Experience

Partner & Researcher, Modernist Studio
(2014-2022)

- Sold 12+M in projects, emphasizing user researcher in pitches

- Led comprehensive research programs across majors brands, including Microsoft, Logitech, and more

User Experience Researcher, Blackboard
(2012-2014)

- Built and led a team of 5 researchers (and 15 designers)

- Led qualitative and quantitative research efforts across 12 lines of product

- Rolled out UXR training to 100+ developers

Outreach and applications

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My ideal job is working at a mid-size company, where I can work closely with developers and focus on educational products for high-school students.

Jon Kolko
Ed-Tech Product Designer

Experience

Partner & Product Designer, Modernist Studio (Consultancy)
(2014-2022)

- Sold 12+M in projects, supporting product design efforts for majors brands like Houghton Mifflin, 2U/EdX, Scholastic, and more

- Led in-scrum design efforts, owning specific product lines
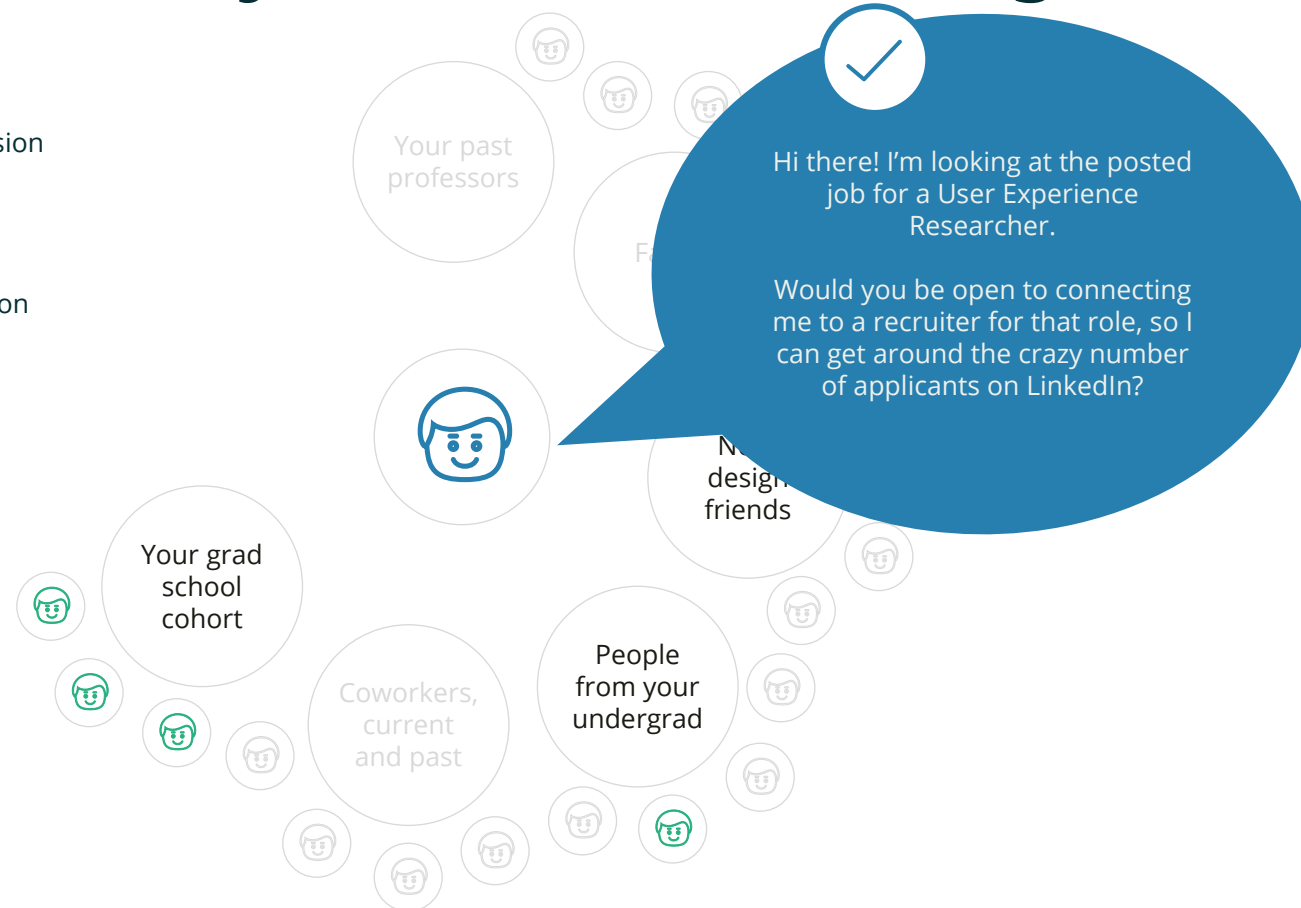
Product Designer, Blackboard
(2012-2014)

- Built and led a team of 15 designers (and 5 researchers)

- Managed distributed product design efforts across 12 lines of product

- Rolled out training to 100+ product developers

Outreach and applications

Identify and reach out to your main networking contacts.

Start the process, but be selective

- *Now*, hit up LinkedIn to see jobs that match your mission statement, and identify who is working where.

- Look at first connections, first.

- List people who are the closest fit, and their connection to the jobs you see.

- Reach out, via text (if you are that close), or email.

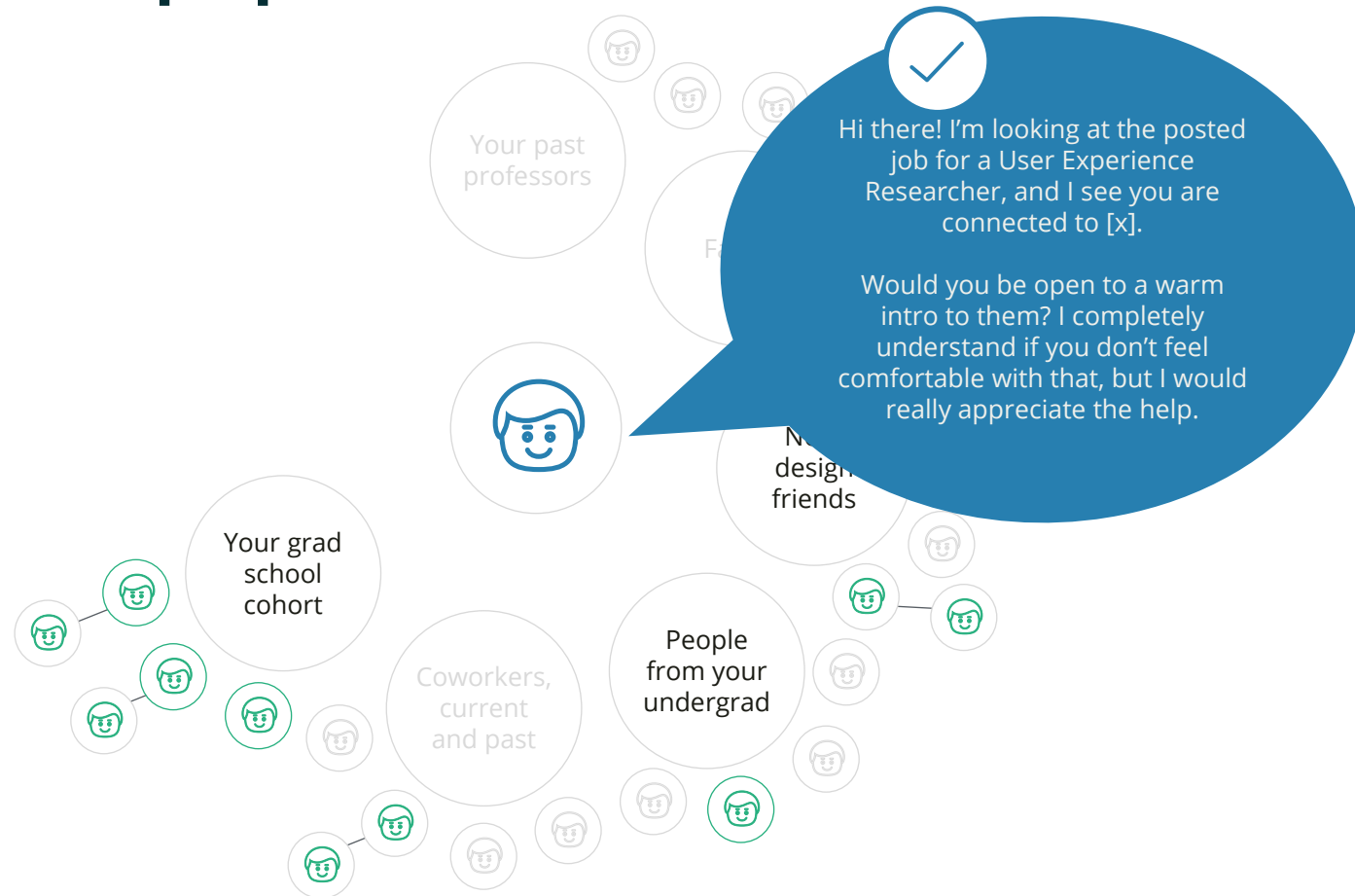- **Your goal is a conversation with a <u>recruiter</u>.**

Your past professors

Hi there! I'm looking at the posted job for a User Experience Researcher.

Would you be open to connecting me to a recruiter for that role, so I can get around the crazy number of applicants on LinkedIn?

N design friends

Your grad school cohort

Coworkers, current and past

People from your undergrad

Outreach and applications

Work the relationship spiderweb.

Extend your messaging.

Your success rate will go **way down**.

Your past professors

Your grad school cohort

N... design... friends

People from your undergrad

Coworkers, current and past

Hi there! I'm looking at the posted job for a User Experience Researcher, and I see you are connected to [x].

Would you be open to a warm intro to them? I completely understand if you don't feel comfortable with that, but I would really appreciate the help.

Outreach and applications

Keep your tracking spreadsheet up to date.

Contact	Company	Title	Email	Phone	How are we connected?	Initial outreach	Follow-up	Next steps
Jon Kolko	Narrative Design	Partner	jkolko@wonderfulnarrative.com	-	Was my professor at UCI	Mar 30, 2025	-	Reach out in June after budget cycles begin again
...								

Outreach and applications

Build your daily schedule, and write it down.

Establish a routine

- Set specific hours for your job searching activities

- Manage and block a calendar

- Build in breaks throughout the day

- Build in breaks across weeks

Manage your health and wellness

- Don't abandon your hobbies

- Do things that have nothing to do with design

- Leave your house

- Turn off all social media

- Stay off LinkedIn, except for finding contact information about people you need to reach

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
9:00am	Outreach	Outreach	Outreach		Outreach		
10:00am	Portfolio work	Portfolio work	Portfolio work		Portfolio work		
11:00am	Break	Break	Break		Break		
12:00pm	Portfolio work	Portfolio work	Portfolio work		Portfolio work		
1:00pm	Portfolio work	Portfolio work	Portfolio work		Portfolio work		
2:00pm							
3:00pm							
4:00pm	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*
5:00pm	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*	*No technology*
Evening		In-person networking activity			In-person networking activity		

Outreach and applications

Aim low, and count no chickens.

You don't need your dream job right away.

Nike is going to get thousands of applications. The Mid Size Saas Company You've Never Heard Of will get hundreds.
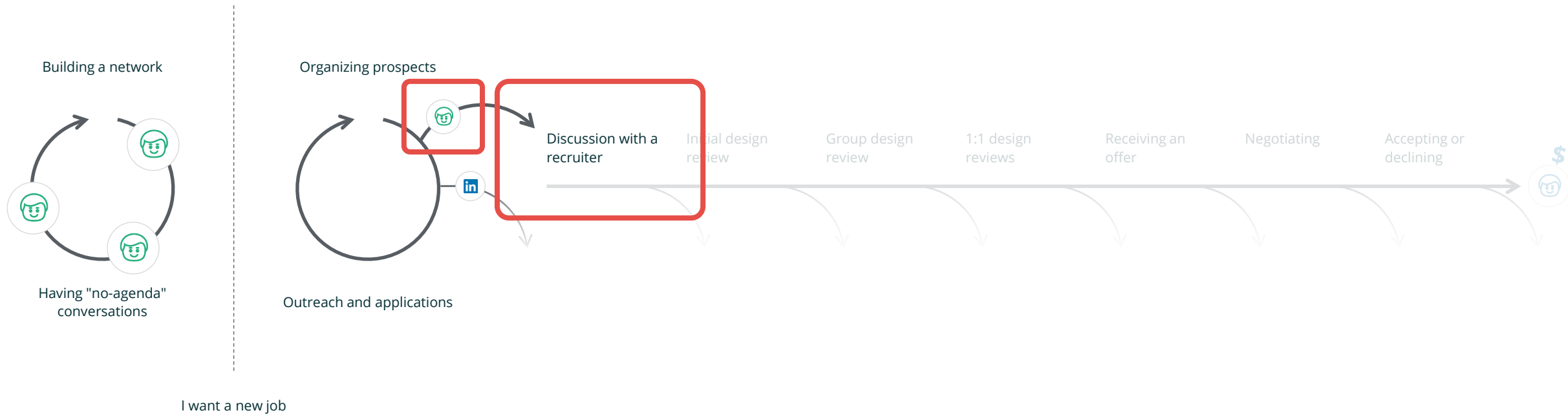
Your chances, and impact, go up.

Nothing is a sure thing, until it's done.

Work to temper (but not eliminate) your enthusiasm when you start to see progress.

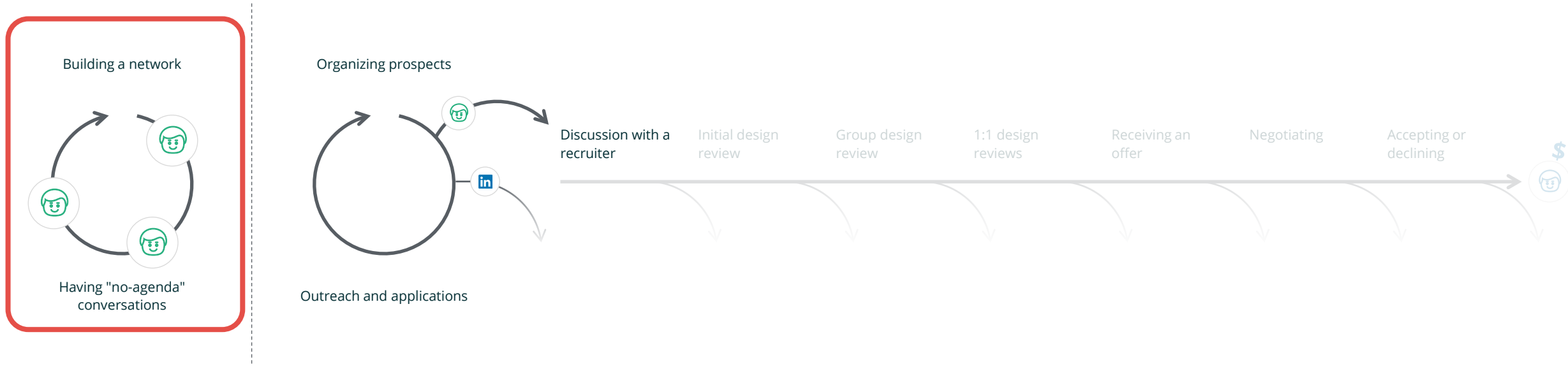- Company priorities shift

- People forget

- People change their minds

Outreach and applications

# Don't forget: your goal is a discussion with a <u>recruiter</u>.

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Organizing prospects

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Accepting or declining

Outreach and applications

I want a new job

Outreach and applications

Keep having "no-agenda" conversations! (forever...)

Building a network

Having "no-agenda"
conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

Discussion with a
recruiter

Initial design
review

Group design
review

1:1 design
reviews

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I want a new job

Narrative

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Network when you don't need a job	**Schedule your day**	**Track your applications**	**Get a hobby (that isn't on the computer)**	**Ignore the sexy jobs**	**Aim lower**

13	14	15	16	17	18
Become a visual designer	**Tweak your resume and portfolio**	Practice	Do your homework	Wash your clothes	Be ready to show the mess (but clean it up a little)

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Ask questions	Talk about your decisions, not your actions	Show yourself	Send a thank you note	Thank the secretaries and the janitors	The work needs to be good

Getting ready for an interview
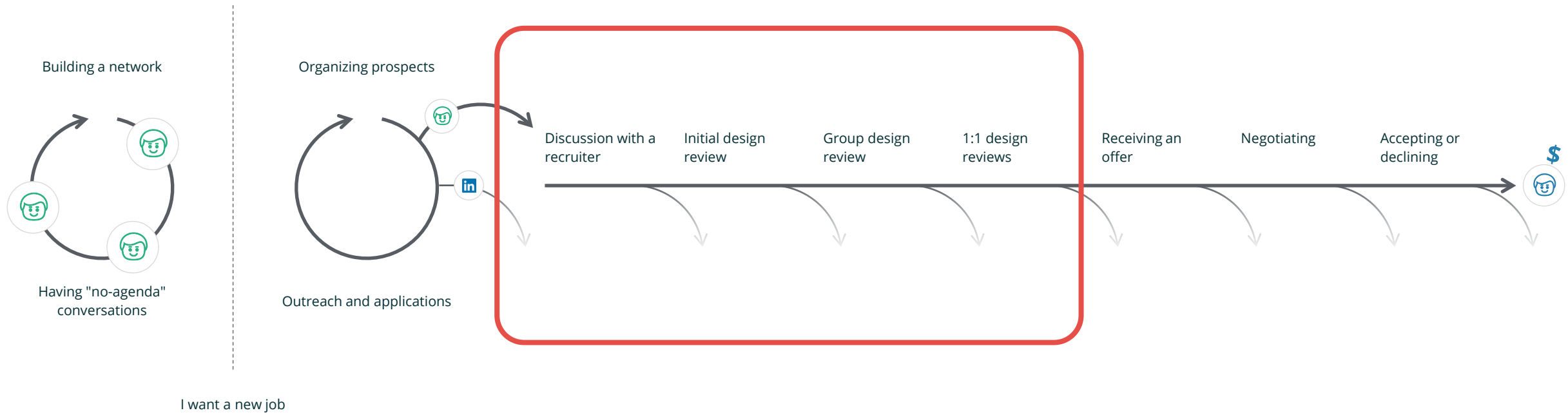
Getting ready for an interview

Do your homework.

What does the company do?

- Spend time on their website

- Look for news articles or recent press releases

- Learn about recent product launches or acquisitions

- Identify competitors

Who will be there?

- Ask the recruiter who will be attending

- Look at the invite, and search for the people who will be there

- Learn about their backgrounds

- Look for things in common

Getting ready for an interview

"Tell me a little about yourself."

Getting ready for an interview

Get your work ready.

Organize your projects so you can *tell stories about it*.

- What narrative will support your Job Search Mission Statement?

- What narrative will match what the company is looking for?

- How much time will you have?

- How many projects do you need to show?

Getting ready for an interview

Anticipate the questions

Get ready for the good ones

- Why do you want to work here?

- Walk me through your process.

- Tell me about a key problem you solved on this project, and how you solved it.

- What was a decision you made during this project, and how did you make it?

- How do you know your solution is a good one?

- What was your role? What was your team's role?

- What other things did you explore along the way, before deciding on this solution? Can you show them to me?

Get ready for the dumb ones

- Tell me a time you overcame adversity.

- Tell me a time you had to deal with a difficult person or situation.

- What's your biggest flaw?

- If you were a fruit, what would you be? (Seriously...)

Be prepared for the pragmatic ones

- What are your salary expectations?

- When can you start?

- Are you willing to relocate?

- Are you willing to work (In office/remotely/hybrid)?

- Are you willing to work (overseas hours)?

Getting ready for an interview

Practice!!

Narrative

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During an interview
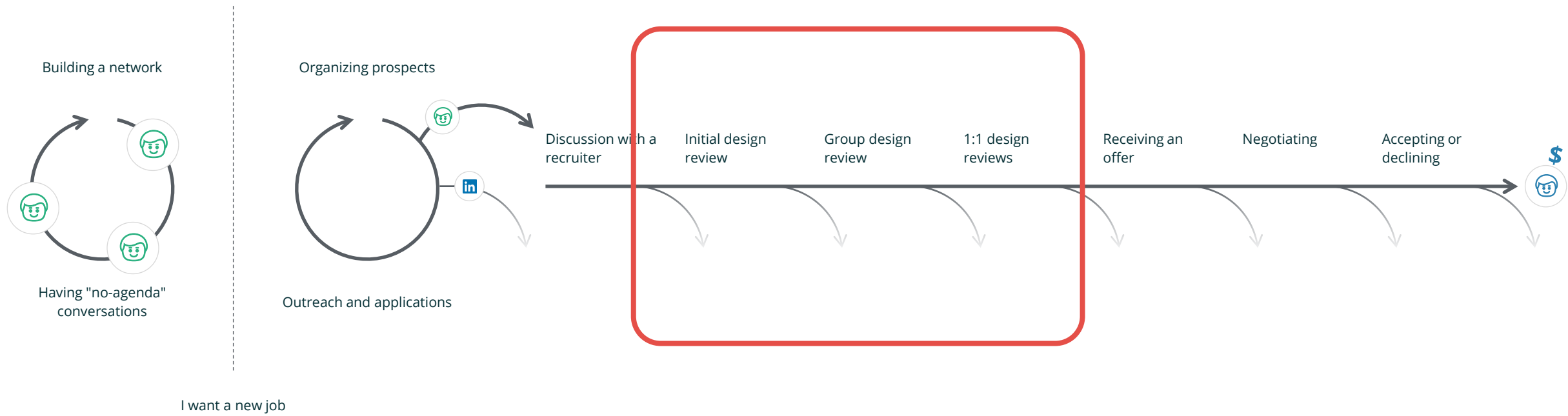
Narrative

What are they looking for?

To *get* an interview, your work needs to stand on its own. When you *have* an interview, your work becomes a show. The interviewer is trying to assess...

The relationship you have with creativity

Design has become operational, and many interviewers are looking for an exception to this "follow the process" approach to design. They are looking for:

- Indications that you use, but also selectively ignore, methods and process

- Unexpected solutions to a problem

- "Raw" creativity: solutions that feel more artistic and less designerly (but as explorations, not necessarily as final solutions)

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The way you present and discuss design

In a work environment, you are constantly presenting. An interviewer will be judging not only your work itself, but also how you:

- Set a context for a design problem

- Discuss your decisions and provide user-centered rationale for what you did and why you did it

- Frame a problem, including real and artificial constraints that impacted your solution

- Use, avoid, or explain jargon and methods

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Your temperament

During your interview, you communicate the way you will behave if you were hired. An interviewer will be looking to see if you:

- Have a sense of humor

- Are thoughtful and methodical

- Are arrogant or humble

- Are inquisitive and curious

- Are self-aware

- Communicate a sense of passion for making and creating things

- Are cleaned up

Clean it up

If the interview is in-person:

Groom yourself (seriously!)

- Professional clothing (Aim "one higher" than what your interviewer will be wearing), ironed

- Combed hair

- Brushed teeth

- Cut fingernails

- Clean shoes

Get there early

- Make sure you know where parking is

- Have the address ready

- Have the contact information for your host ready

Narrative

Clean it up

If the interview is digital:

Groom yourself (seriously!)

- Professional shirt (Aim "one higher" than what your interviewer will be wearing), ironed

- Combed hair

- Brushed teeth

- Cut fingernails

Set up your environment

- Simple, thoughtful background

- No dogs

- No interruptions

- No coffee shops

- No rumpled sheets, bed, dirt, etc

Set up your technology

- Good lighting

- Good camera

- Good microphone

- Solid internet

- Backup plan: your phone, with the conferencing software already installed and the meeting information at your fingertips

Discussing your work

Take charge (nicely)

Ask if there's a plan, and propose an approach.

I would like to start by showing some of my work. Is that okay with you?

I have several projects I would like to discuss, one that shows my process, and one that dives deep into wireframes and software. Do you have a preference for which I start with?

I see we have about 45 minutes. Does it seem reasonable for me to spend about 30 of that discussing my work, and leave time for questions?

Discussing your work

Get to the work, quickly.

Set the context

Help your interviewer understand the backdrop of the project. Describe…

- Was it a team project?

- How long did you have to work on it?

- Why are you selecting it to show? What skills and abilities are you hoping to communicate?

Skip the _process preamble;_ jump to the work itself

Unless your goal is to illustrate a generalist end-to-end process, avoid the parts of the process that aren't related to your _job search mission statement_.

Skip the generic diagrams of your process.

Jump into the work product: show the things you made.

Discussing your work

Read your audience, and check-in frequently.

Establish key milestones to see if people have questions or comments

When you start, explain that you will stop at certain points to ask for feedback. Then, use those stopping points to check for questions, and also to see if you are using the time effectively.

- *Before I show the next part of the project, I want to stop and see if you have any questions or comments about what I just presented.*

- *I'm about halfway done with this project. Is it valuable for me to continue, or would you like to shift to see another project?*

- *Is there a part of this work that you would like to see in more detail?*

Observe detailed behavior, like eye movement or device use

Keep an eye on your audience, and adjust accordingly.

- Does it look like they are using other monitors and reading other things?

- Are they holding a mobile device and looking at it?

- Do they look bored? *Careful: bored, angry, and listening intently all look similar!*

Discussing your work

Explain your decision making process.

Describe <u>what you did</u>, and <u>why you did it</u>

After setting the context, select a small part of your work, and dive into the details.

- Be specific; drill into very small design elements.

- Avoid naming methods ("I did the persona"). If you *do* mention a method, briefly explain what it is, and why you elected to use it.

- Explain why you are showing the parts of the work: *I wanted to share this with you because it shows how I think about designing complex forms that users have to fill out during a workflow.*

Emphasize the decision points you faced

When you solve a design problem, you continually encounter small detailed challenges. Show what these were, and explain how you resolved the challenges.

- How did you work through a problem?

- What role did users play in your decisions?

- What role did external critique play in your decisions?

- How many different things did you try? How did you select your final choice?

Discussing your work

Offer to show the mess (and have it ready to show).

Have Figma open and organized (but not too organized)

- Name your layers and pages.

- Align your artboards and frames.

- Show explorations, not just a final design.

- Remove things that are really bad.

- Don't overclean: leave some of your working process and show the way you think when the work is still raw and unpolished.

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Clean your digital environment

- **Don't share your whole screen;** just share the application you are using.

- If you have to share your full screen (seriously, don't!) close your various chat tools entirely.

- If you are sharing a browser, hide your bookmark bar, use an incognito window so your search history doesn't show up, and close your other tabs.

- Close other Figma files, particularly those with names of other clients or companies.

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Don't make your audience sick

Think about how your computer navigation will be received by someone who isn't you. Careful; watch out for:

- Window and page switching too quickly

- Zooming in and out rapidly

- Panning all around a canvas

Look them in the eye

It looks like you are present and engaged

It looks like you are watching Youtube
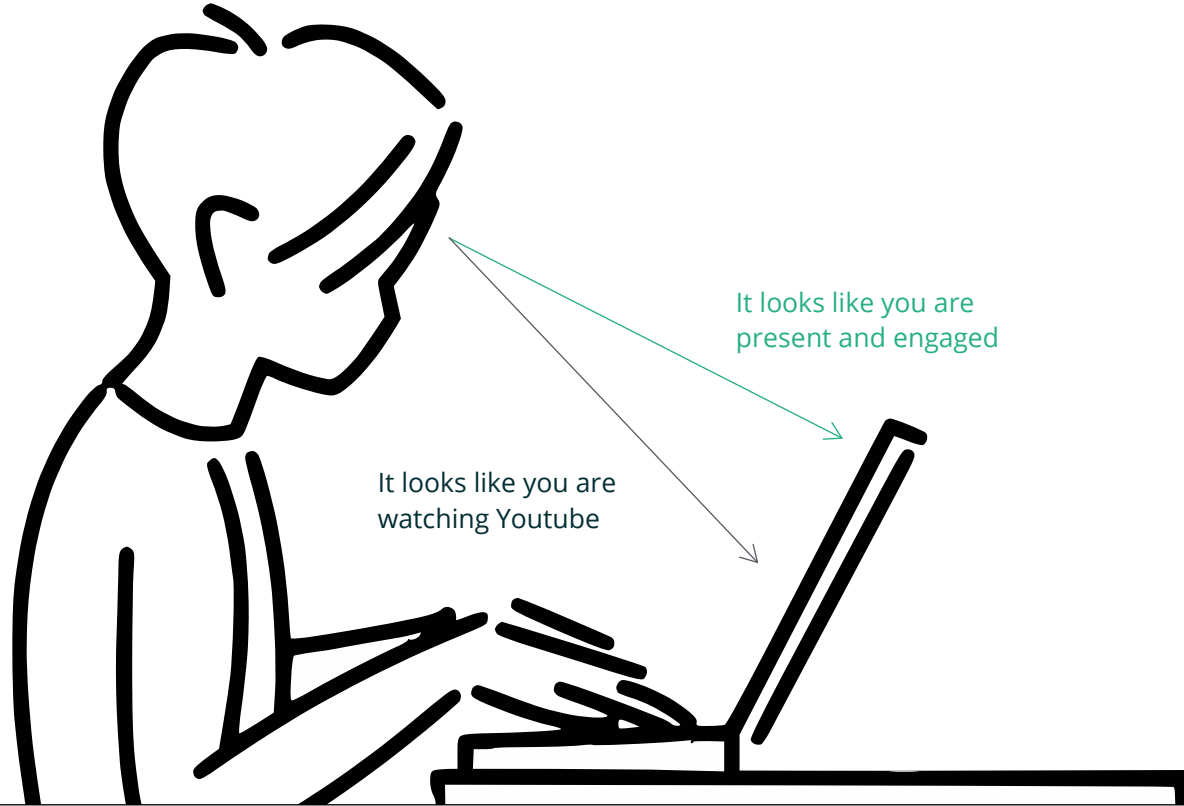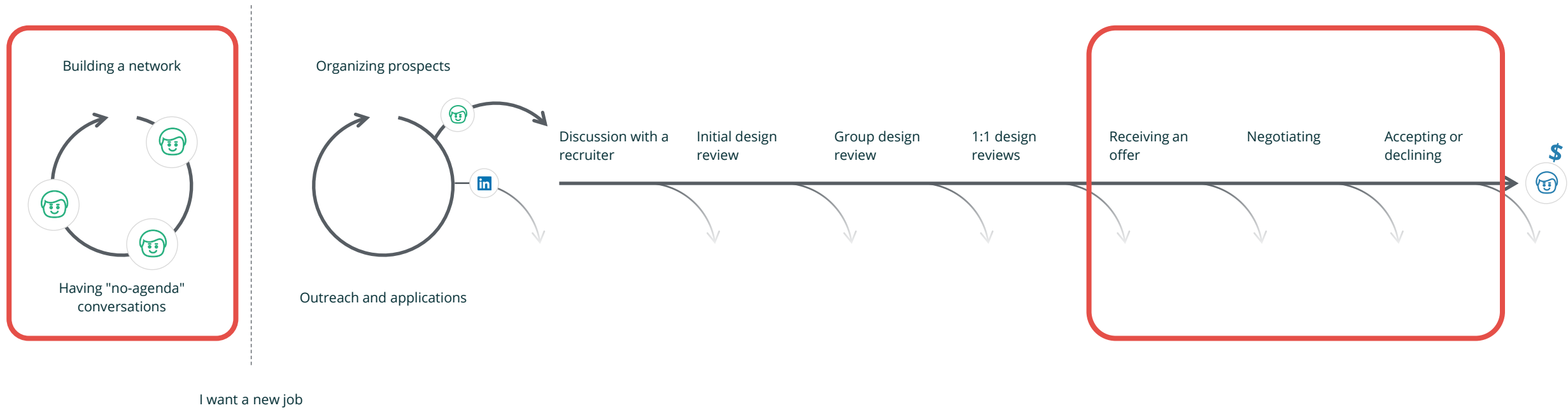
Show your real curiosity

Have questions ready, and ask them.

Ask questions because you actually want to know the answers

- Write your questions down ahead of time.

- Ask questions about the company's work, culture, processes, and team demeanor.

- Ask about their opinions.

- Don't ask about salary, benefits, or time off, until it's the right time.

- Ask about next steps—leave the interview with a clear understanding of what to expect.

- Do not run out of questions; run out of time.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Dig in for the long haul	**Focus on the recruiter**	**Get off LinkedIn**	**Leave the house**	**Use your network, not my network**	**Have "no agenda" conversations**

7	8	9	10	11	12
Network when you don't need a job	**Schedule your day**	**Track your applications**	**Get a hobby (that isn't on the computer)**	**Ignore the sexy jobs**	**Aim lower**

13	14	15	16	17	18
Become a visual designer	**Tweak your resume and portfolio**	**Practice**	**Do your homework**	**Wash your clothes**	**Be ready to show the mess (but clean it up a little)**

19	20	21	22	23	24
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After an interview

Narrative

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

Accepting or declining

$

I want a new job

After an interview

Manage your follow-up approach.

Thank everyone... slowly.

• Your "thank you" is a chance to both remind people you exist, and check in on the status of the process.

• Thank the janitors, admins, valets—anyone you interacted with.

You get a mulligan, if you need one.

If you feel you bombed on a part of your interview, own it in an email, and fix it.

"I was reflecting on our call, and I don't think I did a good job of answering your question. I hope this helps clarifying what I meant:"

After an interview

Negotiate.
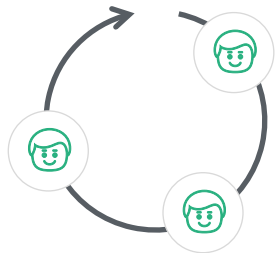
You are allowed to negotiate, to a point.

- An offer is flexible.

- Base salary may be hard to change, but other things may be open for discussion.

- Explain your rationale.

- Be reasonable.

**You have the most leverage
when you don't need a new job.**

After an interview

Everyone you spoke with is now in your network, even if you don't get the job.

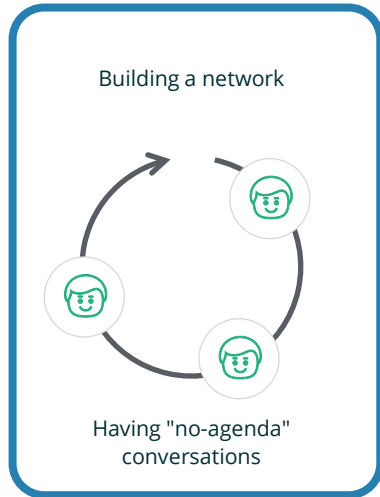Building a network

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Summary

Narrative

Summary

It will take a long time.

Your whole career

Building a network

Having "no-agenda" conversations

A large amount of months

Organizing prospects

Outreach and applications

A smaller amount of months

Discussion with a recruiter

Initial design review

Group design review

1:1 design reviews

Receiving an offer

Negotiating

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I want a new job

1 **Dig in for the long haul**	2 **Focus on the recruiter**	3 **Get off LinkedIn**	4 **Leave the house**	5 **Use your network, not my network**	6 **Have "no agenda" conversations**
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Thank you!

jkolko@wonderfulnarrative.com