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**Apply. Wait.
Ghosted. Repeat.**
**The Candidate
Experience Crisis
in 2025 and
How to Fix It**

VONQ

VIEW

The candidate experience is broken.

Most will agree that the job-seeking experience for candidates and employers alike is currently broken.

The “spray and pray” approach that defines the existing hiring process, from both sides of the fence, has broken down. Employers are able to quickly and easily distribute job ads far and wide, while candidates are able to “fast apply” to hundreds of jobs at the click of a button. But while quantity has been turbo charged, quality of candidate experience and accuracy of candidate matching has suffered.

With job application volumes surging, hiring is even more labour intensive than ever. [A study by The Stepstone Group¹](#) found that recruiters spend an average of 12.5 hours per hire on administrative activities alone.

This comes at a time when the skills shortage crisis means competition for talent is both fast and fierce. According to the [World Economic Forum²](#), 63% of employers cite a scarcity of skilled talent as “the key barrier they face”.

In a world where candidates are used to seamless, intuitive digital experiences in their everyday lives, they have little patience for job applications that feel slow or cumbersome.

This is especially true for the most in-demand, tech-savvy talent - the very people employers are most eager to attract.

This is why our research shows that in 2025, one in two employers plan to increase their investment in improving the candidate experience, recognising that a better journey leads to stronger hiring outcomes.

This month's VONQ View report explores how and why the hiring process is breaking down and which strategies, tools, and technologies are helping employers rebuild it.

In today's talent market, those who invest in creating a smarter, more seamless candidate journey are the ones who will stand out and ultimately attract the best talent.



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Why should we care about candidate experience?

According to a [2023 survey by Talent Board³](#), 58% of candidates who had a negative experience during recruitment would decline a job offer, even if it was their dream role. Conversely, 77% of candidates who had a positive experience would not only accept the offer but also recommend the company to others.

A job application process is a candidate's first experience of your Employer Brand. Even if they aren't successful on that occasion, they might potentially be a rockstar teamplayer in the future. If their experience is poor, you may lose them to the competition.



Where is the candidate experience falling short and what are candidates truly looking for today?

Surprisingly, according to [ERE⁴](#), 3 in 4 job seekers (in the US) are not satisfied with the talent acquisition process. That same research found that less than half of employers (48%) prioritised the candidate experience at all.

Worse than that, 1 in 2 companies haven't made any improvements on the candidate experience this year. No one can afford that kind of complacency in such an environment of labour shortage.

Our research shows the typical experience is dramatically at odds with what candidates expect and demand.

The modern experience of job hunting has broken down in three distinct areas:



A communication chasm between candidate and employer,



Frustrating friction in the process journey



Terrible transparency in terms of job description and salary expectations.

Communication chasm

According to a [2024 report by Criterea⁵](#), 51% of candidates said that poor employer or recruiter communication was the chief reason why they've abandoned a job application process. Moreover, 38% of candidates also reported being 'ghosted' by an employer in the last year, and the vast majority of candidates assume they've been 'ghosted' after two weeks of no communication.

[The 2024 Monster Work Watch Report⁶](#) found that 47% said "poor communication" from employers and recruiters, such as not being updated on their application status or their messages not being responded to quickly, if at all, would lead them to pull out of an application.

Friction frustration

According to that same report by Criteria, 33% of candidates believe applications are too time consuming and tedious and 34% thought the process was too long. A [report by Indeed⁷](#) found that number to be as much as 49%! Importantly, 60% of job seekers will quit in the middle of filling out applications if they are too long or complex. "Too long" is defined as more than 10 minutes! So the welcome mat for form filling is very thin.

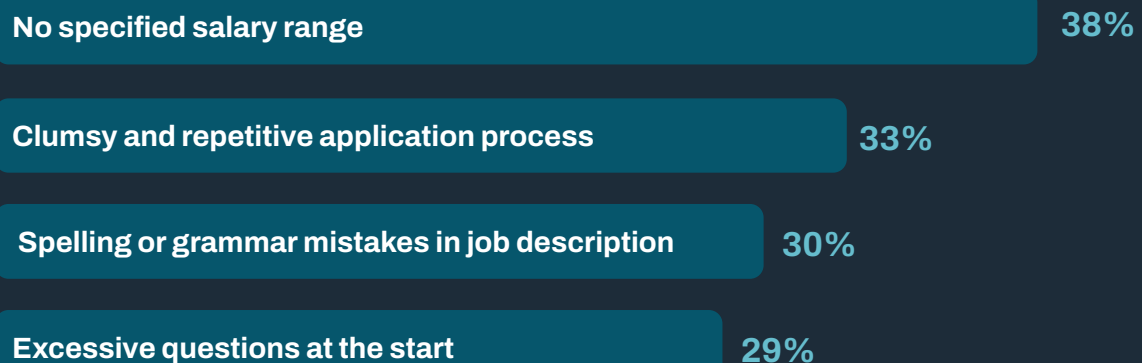
Monster's Report found that 36% of job seekers agreed that the feeling of being made to "jump through hoops" would lead them to exit the process altogether.



Fast apply creates a tsunami of applications that takes TAs and employers days or even weeks to sift through. Yet according to Criterea, 75% of candidates assume they've been ghosted by an employer if they don't receive a response within 2 weeks.



Workers would stop applying or abandon an application it...



Terrible transparency

According to Careerplug, nearly half (47%) of job seekers expect to learn about salary before applying and 26% want to see more transparency in terms of pay and benefits. [Indeed¹⁰](#) found that 37% of applicants would abandon an application process if the salary was not disclosed.

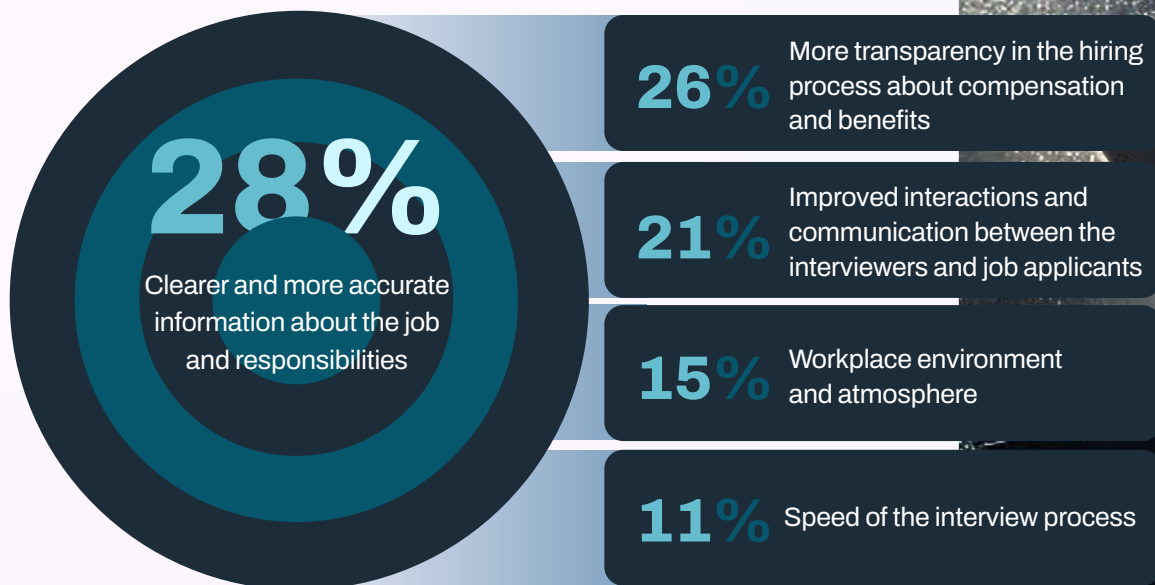
Crucially, job descriptions must be transparent and explicit. Discovering that the job offer differs substantially from the original job description in the ad is the number one reason why successful candidates might turn that offer down.

The Stepstone Group found that 44% of candidates dropped out of at least one hiring process in the past year — unmet expectations regarding role and salary are the main reasons.

It stands to reason that if your eventual offer is rejected by the best candidate because your ad wasn't transparent, it is a bad own goal in terms of job ad ROI.

What do candidates really want?

CareerPlug's research found that candidates' top three asks were clearer information, more transparency over pay and better communication, at 28%, 26% and 21% respectively:



The research also found that 45% of job seekers we surveyed said they want to hear back from an employer within 24 hours of applying. Put simply, candidates expect to apply in a few taps, and they expect the process to respect their time.

In terms of where candidates expect recruiters to be heading, consider this: according to a survey from The Stepstone Group in 2022, 70% of job seekers think that in the future, the application process will be so standardized that one click or swipe via smartphone will be all it takes to apply for a job.

What does it take for employers to succeed in hiring today?

According to Monster, employers' top priorities in 2024 were to "improve the success rate on hard-to-fill roles" (43%) and to reduce the time to hire/fill positions (18%). Importantly 51% said they expected their recruitment budget to go up this year.

But as we've seen, according to [Aptitude Research¹¹](#), only half of companies have made improvements this year. So if you're among those employers looking to spend more in order to hit new hiring highs, what's the best way forward?

Emerging best hiring practices in 2025



01 Agentic AI: The next frontier in candidate experience with 'human-in-the-loop'

For many job seekers, applying for a role still feels impersonal and inefficient. Long forms, repeated uploads, and silence after clicking "apply" remain among the biggest frustrations - and over half of candidates say they rarely receive feedback at all. In today's market, where speed and transparency shape perception, these moments define how candidates judge employers.

Emerging agentic AI systems are changing that dynamic. By enabling more natural, two-way interactions - through chat, messaging, or voice - they simplify the process and keep candidates informed in real time.

For candidates, the benefits are clear:



Less friction – simple, intuitive applications without repetitive steps



Faster communication – instant updates and answers reduce uncertainty



Always accessible – support available anytime, across devices and languages



Transparency and fairness – visibility into next steps and structured evaluation

When paired with timely, human interactions, this balance of automation and empathy creates a candidate experience that feels modern, fair, and respectful - one where people stay informed, connected, and confident throughout their journey.

02

Smoothing process friction with hyper-personalization & “dynamic journeys”

Today's candidates expect simplicity and relevance. Long, complex application forms remain one of the biggest barriers to conversion - even when interest is high. To meet these expectations, leading employers are rethinking recruitment journeys, shifting from rigid, one-size-fits-all funnels to adaptive, personalized pathways that respond to candidate behavior in real time.

These dynamic journeys reflect best practices long used in marketing:



Tailored experiences: Candidates see different content or messages based on persona, role, or seniority (e.g., engineers vs. sales).



Behavioral triggers: Automated reminders or supportive messages when candidates pause or abandon an application.



Real-time feedback loops: Micro-surveys or engagement prompts help course-correct and maintain momentum.



Optional depth: Candidates can explore “culture videos” or team insights if they want to learn more — or move straight to applying.

Redirecting candidates from e.g. LinkedIn, job boards, or mobile apps to external career sites is a major drop-off risk, and more companies are adopting native or embedded application experiences. A more streamlined application process reduces the risk of drop-off and encourages completion.

For example, simplified, one-click application options further reduce friction. By allowing candidates to apply directly - often using existing profiles or pre-filled data - these experiences feel intuitive and fast. Candidates can submit an application in seconds, receive immediate confirmation, and stay informed about their status through transparent next-step updates.

For recruiters, this translates into higher completion rates and better candidate quality, as fewer people drop off midway. With hyper-personalization and instant submission, the focus shifts from managing forms to engaging talent - creating a responsive, and connected experience on both sides.

03

Pay & Compensation Transparency as Baseline Expectation

Candidates increasingly expect to see salary ranges and benefits up front - not as post-screening revelations. Indeed¹² found that 74% of candidates look at this first. Poorly written job ads increase candidate drop-off rates by up to 52%.

Thus, job postings or ads that lack easily visible compensation details are at a structural disadvantage in terms of trust and conversion.

03

Companies that are explicit about salary ranges, benefits, growth opportunities, and work-life balance in their job ads aren't just demonstrating transparency – they're building trust into the relationship right at the outset and enhancing their employer brand.

Also... **Creating a candidate feedback loop**

Despite its importance, many organisations don't systematically collect candidate feedback (e.g. via post-application or post-interview surveys). According to JobScore, only 11% of organizations track candidate satisfaction.

But this is changing: forward-looking TA teams are now treating candidate experience as a core KPI (like NPS for customers), building closed-loop feedback mechanisms, and using that data to improve touchpoints.

A feedback loop that helps build a best practice candidate experience more in touch with their expectations creates a competitive edge in the search for the best applicants!



It's a good idea to conduct extensive user-testing on the process to smooth out any wrinkles and understand what the process feels like for candidates. Only then is it possible to continuously improve towards best practice.

How VONQ Helps Employers Elevate the Candidate Experience

VONQ began life more than 19 years ago when three friends noticed how the internet was disrupting traditional hiring strategies. In 2015, VONQ was born as the first Job Marketing Platform to help HR teams figure out where to attract candidates online, post their jobs on social media networks and job boards, and measure the effectiveness of each campaign.

We also work closely with leading ATS and HCM providers to embed our technology directly within their systems. Today, our ecosystem spans the

full spectrum of recruitment marketing - from programmatic job advertising to intelligent candidate delivery.

This unique position allows us to help employers meaningfully enhance the candidate experience. In particular, our AI Agents, combined with Direct Apply, streamline and personalise the application journey - making it faster, simpler, and more engaging. The result? More candidates complete their applications, and even those not hired walk away with a stronger impression of the employer's brand.

Simplifying the application process with Agentic AI

Employers who integrate VONQ's AI Agents into the recruitment process can simplify the application process and make it more human - engaging candidates through WhatsApp, SMS, email, or web with fast responses, automated updates, and even short, structured interviews.

But combining this approach with 'human-in-the-loop' interventions, recruiters always review the results, receive complete candidate dossiers, and make the final hiring decisions - ensuring that AI supports, but never replaces, that human touch.

Our feedback is that candidates describe the experience as clear, respectful, and even motivating. They tell us they feel seen and supported, which increases completion rates and builds a stronger emotional connection with the employer's brand.

This means candidates experience a smoother, faster and fairer application process that is:

As Simon Van Hijfte, Candidate Marketing Manager at Adecco, puts it:



Less friction: No long forms or retyping CVs. AI collects only what's essential.



Instant feedback: Candidates receive updates and answers in real time, reducing uncertainty and frustration, ensuring they remain in the process throughout.



Always available: The AI is available on a 24/7 basis, ideal for people applying outside office hours or across time zones.



Language inclusion: Multilingual capabilities remove barriers, helping candidates apply confidently in their preferred language.



Transparency and fairness: Candidates know where they stand, understand how they're being assessed, and can trust that transferable skills are recognized.

Adecco

"With VONQ's AI Agents we never miss a candidate. They respond instantly, even at 2 am, ensuring a seamless experience when candidates expect quick replies."

Creating Job Description (JD) clarity and transparency using AI

With VONQ's AI Job Description Builder, TA professionals can create optimized, engaging job descriptions in minutes using AI that are not only more compelling to read, but are clear and concise in spelling out the critical information candidates need to make a quick decision on whether to apply or not - including the information candidates expect clarity on such as salary, benefits and work-life balance expectations.

Breaking down barriers with **Direct Apply**

VONQ's Direct Apply feature eliminates barriers like long forms or fragmented dialogue by allowing candidates to submit their applications directly through the job board. Each application is automatically transferred into the employer's ATS, ensuring seamless and efficient continuity from attraction through to evaluation.

In September 2025 alone, Direct Apply processed over 211,000 applications, showing its scalability and reliability across industries.

By simplifying the process in this way, Direct Apply enhances the overall candidate experience in several important ways:



Faster applications – candidates can apply instantly without redirection.



Smooth experience – a single, consistent journey from job board to ATS.



Fewer drop-offs – reduced friction encourages more completed applications.



Quicker feedback – recruiters receive applications sooner and can respond faster.



Transparent process – automated acknowledgements and clear next steps keep candidates informed.

With integrations across leading ATS platforms (e.g. Workday, Bullhorn, iCIMS) and major job boards (LinkedIn, Indeed, SEEK, InfoJobs, Naukri), VONQ Direct Apply delivers a frictionless experience from application to review.

Importantly, Direct Apply enables ROI tracking across all channels and supports pre-screening questions, ensuring only qualified candidates reach the ATS, turning interest into action efficiently and intelligently.



1. Hiring Efficiency Study, The Steptone Group: <https://www.thestepstonegroup.com/english/newsroom/press-releases/stepstone-survey-only-one-in-seven-job-applications-leads-to-an-interview/>
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Key Takeaways



The job-seeking experience for candidates and employers alike is currently broken.



Our research shows the typical experience is dramatically at odds with what candidates expect and demand. For instance, in the US, only 25% of job seekers are satisfied with the talent acquisition process.



The modern experience of job hunting has broken down in three distinct areas:

- **A communication chasm** between candidate and employer: 51% of candidates said that poor employer or recruiter communication was the chief reason why they've abandoned a job application process.
- **Frustrating friction** in the process journey. 60% of job seekers will quit in the middle of filling out applications if they are too long or complex
- **Terrible transparency** in terms of job description and salary expectations. 26% of job seekers want to see more transparency in terms of pay and benefits



Candidates top three asks were clearer information, more transparency over pay and better communication, at 28%, 26% and 21% respectively.



Employers and recruiters who deploy smarter technology to differentiate their candidate journey will win the competition for the best talent

- Employers can solve the communication chasm with a balance of conversational AI and timely "human-in-the-loop" interventions.
- Process friction can be smoothed over with hyper-personalization & "dynamic journeys"
- Being more explicit about salary ranges, benefits, growth opportunities, and work-life balance in job ads doesn't just demonstrate transparency, it builds trust into the relationship and enhances employer brand.



By combining automation with empathy, VONQ's AI Agents redefine efficiency without compromising the human experience."



VONQ's ecosystem minimizes drop-offs through smart distribution and data-driven targeting — ensuring candidates engage where they're most comfortable.



A richer candidate experience with no extra logins, no extra clicks and no unnecessary complexity drives greater recruitment efficiency for employers.

Are you ready to turn a complex hiring process into a candidate experience that converts?

Now's the time to act. Let's bring your jobs one click closer to the right hire with VONQ.
Ready to get started?

