

HOW TO MAKE YOUR STARTUP

# IRRESISTIBLE TO THE PERFECT CANDIDATE

**and make them  
want you. BAD.**



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## **Mimi Gross**

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# Introduction

by mimi gross

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This ebook is a step-by-step guide to successfully attract the right talent to join your company using a philosophy called **PEOPLE-LED GROWTH (PPLG)**. PPLG is a new philosophy of recruiting whereby the recruiting process itself brings value to the company and the candidate. The result is a process that attracts great candidates, a valuable experience for the company, and ultimately a good hire that leads to an enduring, mutually beneficial relationship.

People-Led Growth is based on a marketing strategy called Product-Led Growth, and was inspired by one of my clients and mentors, Nathan Burke, CMO of Axonius, one of the most exciting Israeli cybersecurity startups out there. Product-Led Growth is a “user-focused growth model

that relies on the product itself as the primary driver of customer acquisition, conversion, and expansion.” This means the product sells itself by bringing value to the prospect as it grows in its relationship through usage so that when the product and customer meet, it will be instant chemistry and natural adoption. Think of a software or app that offers a free version which naturally and organically brings people to purchase the product as their needs expand as a result of using the product. People-Led Growth is the same thing.

People By Mimi deploys PPLG strategy by introducing a company to candidates in a way that is organic, so that both parties are enticed to engage, derive value from the relationship, and when the time is right, the “conversion” is smooth for both parties because the relationship grew naturally.

What makes us unique as a recruiting firm is that we treat candidates and companies like people. It’s really simple, but unfortunately not typical, and that’s why our clients and the talented candidates we find love to work with us. Before I get into the details of PPLG and how it applies to every step of the recruiting process, I need to explain the secret that underlies PPLG. It’s a secret that I tell all of my clients. Early-stage cybersecurity sales and marketing recruiting is exactly like dating. All you need to do is remember all the brilliant dating advice that anyone ever gave you. With that in mind, you’re pretty much golden.

In this ebook, I will go through one of many tried and true dating principles that are essential when trying to attract good talent to join your team.

PART 1

# He's Just Not That into You

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*He's Just Not That into You* is one of the most iconic dating books to emerge from the 2000s. It was inspired by an episode of the hit television show *Sex in the City*, and was made into a popular film. It's a classic story of girl meets boy, boy asks girl out on a date, girl senses mutual chemistry, at the end of date the girl invites boy up to apartment, and then boy declines. The next day, girl asks a friend why she failed to close the deal, and the girl's friend tells her the truth: "he's just not that into you."





As a recruiter, I am your friend and I have seen this story a million times. Company founder or hiring manager meets a candidate on LinkedIn, the business version of online dating. On paper it's the perfect candidate. He or she has all the right training, skills, and experience. The Founder reaches out. The candidate is flattered. Phone call leads to meeting, meeting leads to dining, dining leads to wining. A good time is had by all. It looks like a match. After a process the Founder is confident that the candidate feels the same; but the Founder pops the question – and the candidate leaves them in the cold.

**“It’s not you, it’s me.”**

**“Great to get to know you, but I don’t like you in that way.”**

**“I hope we can still be friends.”**

There are many other similar scenarios - sometimes the Founders and/or hiring managers can't even get the first date - but the story is the same. They don't understand why. They have a great company, great product, they think they are doing everything right, and they just can't understand why they can't find Mr. Right or Ms. Right. *He's Just Not That Into You* taught women to see the bigger picture, and think about the other person when dating. If both parties are not equally invested in the process, there is nothing to talk about.

**PPLG applies that lesson to recruiting and helps companies and candidates think about what the other party is thinking during the process, and facilitates a process where both parties are equally invested.** For instance, there are lots of reasons that a person will take a date with you even though they are just not that into you.

## Reasons a Candidate Will "Date" You Even if They're Not Really Interested

- ✓ They are a serial dater.
- ✓ They are trying to make someone else jealous.
- ✓ They are on the rebound.
- ✓ They are interested in you as a person, but not as a partner.
- ✓ They are flattered that you are interested.
- ✓ They don't want to hurt your feelings.
- ✓ They are bored.

What all these reasons have in common is that in all cases, they are not interested in having a serious relationship with you, and if you are looking for a serious relationship then a date with these people will be a waste of your time. You can also miss out on the right person because you were occupied in the courtship to nowhere, while Mr. or Ms. Right was snatched up by your competitor. While New York City singles can take time to learn these lessons while having fun, for a startup this is not funny and is a huge waste of time and resources.

I had a client once who came to me after a series of heartbreaks. Several times, they found someone they liked, stopped searching for other candidates, and expended resources and manpower pursuing the person. In each case, the person continued to engage with them, so the company assumed that there was interest. But when it came time to close the deal, they fell flat.

On the other side, some candidates believe that they are a shoe-in for a role, go through a long process with a series of interviews, and ultimately, an offer never arrives. I have learned from dating that there are tried and true principles that explain whether a person is serious or not, and if you can master these principles, then you can extricate yourself early from these go-nowhere relationships and save time, money, and resources, and save yourself from heartbreak.



# The Manic Pixie Dream Girl Principle

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In 2005, film critic Nathan Rabin coined the term “manic pixie dream girl.” Manic pixie dream girls (MPDGs) are fictional characters who “exist solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures.” MPDGs are usually adorably quirky, physically hot - yet somehow also attainable - have multi-colored hair, and seem to know all kinds of secrets about life and its meaning that the main character is still trying to figure out. They are typically female, the most oft-cited examples are Natalie Portman in the movie *Garden State*, Kirsten Dunst in *Elizabethtown*, and Zooey Deschanel in everything she has ever been in, but can also be male



(think Leonardo DiCaprio in Titanic). The theme is always the same: the uptight main character is taught to loosen up by a mysterious romantic interest who magically appears and has all of the answers and no other purpose for existence other than mentoring the main character.

Sometimes candidates and companies can get caught up in a fantasy of what they think they want their life to be, but when the rubber hits the road, they decide that they are happy with the life that they have. For a candidate this can be, for example, someone who spent his or her career working for a big company, and fantasizes about what life at a startup is like. In a big company, the candidate exists within a structured world where he or she is a small part of a large machine and the company's existence feels inevitable. The candidate fantasizes about the excitement of knowing that success or failure of the company can hinge on their performance. The candidate longs to be free of the confines of the rigid corporate structure. Along comes an invitation on LinkedIn to actually see what that life would be like. For the companies, sometimes companies view their own internal culture as boring, stagnated, and stodgy, and a Manic Pixie Dream candidate comes along that the company thinks will completely change their culture.

Companies and candidates who are on the other side of these equations must quickly recognize if they are just a fantasy for the other party. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl paradigm only exists in fiction. In reality, these processes end in failure, or worse, they end in a hire that will ultimately fail because it is inherently a mismatch.

I will only take someone from a big company to work at a startup if they tell me that all they want to do is work at a startup. I cannot and will not sell someone on startup life. They have to want it on their own.

There are many ways to tell if someone is not really serious about leaving the structure and security of the big company for a startup. One obvious red flag is excessive questions about support staff, time off, “work-life balance.” A startup person does not depend on the company to provide these things.

But there are more subtle red flags that indicate that the person is not really interested in leaving where they are. If they say that they are other wise happy and love the people they are working with, but they wish they had more responsibility or are bored, there is nothing to talk about. They are happy with what they have, but are just looking around. The same goes for salary. If I am recruiting someone who is relatively happy where they are, I do constant temperature checks on salary. Sometimes, they are allured simply because the new job will pay more. Imagine a couple that is happy living in their home, but as a whim puts the house on Zillow for some ridiculous price, but when the unexpected offer comes in, they realize that they really don’t want to move. With candidates, they think that they will leave for a price, but when the offer comes in, they realize that they value their current happiness more than they initially thought.

Another red flag is when they say they feel underappreciated or underpaid. When I hear that, the first question I ask is whether they have asked for a raise. If they tell me they have not, I will not continue to work with the candidate or present them until they have. There is a high probability that such a candidate will end up using any offer as leverage to ask for a raise. Or even if they don't intend to, when they give notice, the current employer may come with a counter offer. I ALWAYS advise candidates that they should NEVER take a counter offer to stay after they have given notice; it never ends well for the candidate, and they end up a short time later with no offer and no job. But a candidate who has never asked for a raise is more likely to disregard that advice and end up rejecting the startups offer.

Another important consideration is the candidate's family. If the new job requires relocation, or will affect the candidate's lifestyle, if the candidate has a wife or husband, that must be considered. Does the candidate have a support system of friends or relatives in his or her current location? Does the candidate have a mortgage or other financial obligations that will make it hard to relocate such that when the offer comes they might have second thoughts? All of these are considerations that PPLG takes into account. By building genuine relationships and approaching candidates as real people, these considerations are brought up early in the process in a way that is comfortable for the candidate to share, and makes it so that there are no surprises down the road.

Similarly, there are subtle signals that candidates should pick up to know that a company is just not into them. First, you could be a second choice candidate. There is nothing necessarily wrong with being a second choice, as long as you know. The candidate should ask if there are other people ahead of them in the process, and if so, let the company know that they are also in demand and the company needs to keep that in mind.

Also, if the process feels less like a directed process and more like a series of discrete events, it indicates that the company may not be ready to hire, or be interested in hiring you. A process should have a clear road map with a starting point and an endpoint, with milestones along the way. Finally, the company should have a clear idea of what they want. If the company has not developed a vision of what their ideal candidate looks like, they are not ready to hire, and you may just be a casualty of bad timing. Make sure to ask what the ideal candidate looks like.

Whether you are the candidate or the company, don't be someone else's Manic Pixie Dream Girl. Establish early in the process whether there is a realistic prospect of the process ending in a hire. If not, it's just a fantasy and both parties are better served by moving on.





At People by Mimi, we connect inspired individuals and make magic happen. We commit ourselves to a People-Led Growth mentality, with the belief that people are a startup's greatest asset.

We place fabulous, high-profile, high-performance marketing and sales candidates with innovative cyber security startups. We are not just recruiters - we are matchmakers that create unions for the growth of your company.

[peoplebymimi.com](http://peoplebymimi.com)



# Praise for the People-Led Growth Methodology



“With Mimi’s help, I was able to hire for a position that seemed impossible to crack.

Here’s what you need to know about Mimi: her methodology and approach are unique, challenging and yes at times painful - the truth hurts! She will push you out of your comfort zone, ask a lot of “whys” to challenge the paradigms to make them more efficient, and eventually successful.

She really is a strategic partner in the process - always thinks 5 steps ahead, gets into the human and psychological factors to find the right match and above all - no BS.”

**-Vicki Michaeli**, VP Marketing, Cynerio



“Mimi is probably the best recruiter I’ve ever used and by far the most effective. She has a special eye for talent and unusual ways to find the people that other recruiters missed. The effectiveness is measurable: Mimi understood what we needed and instead of flooding us with mediocre candidates she sent us a few that were exactly what we were looking for. The ones we ended up hiring were a great fit and are among the best hires we ever made.

I am also recommending Mimi for the intangible, non-measurable things: She is a pleasure to work with; tenacious but not stubborn, self-managed and independent but also always available. Mimi is my first choice for recruiting critical talent and my first recommendation when I hear about anyone who is looking for a recruiter.”

**- Aviram Jenik**, CEO, Beyond Security



“Finding great Marketing people is hard. Finding great Marketing people with cybersecurity experience is just short of impossible. Mimi Gross is in the ‘just short of impossible’ business.

The mark of a truly remarkable recruiter is when you say to yourself “I’d hire all of these people if I could,” and I find myself saying that all the time when Mimi brings me ultra-qualified candidates that weren’t even necessarily looking.

Working with Mimi is unlike any other relationship I’ve had with a recruiter, as her North Star is integrity. I feel completely confident asking her advice even when it’s her candidate vs someone else. The idea of a trusted advisor can be a trope or a cliché, but she is truly someone that understands that the right person and the right fit is more important than anything else.

She’s the one person I constantly find myself recommending to other cybersecurity CMOs, and I can’t say enough about her.”

- **Nathan Burke**, CMO, Axonius



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