

// pillar 1 deep dive

Apply, track, & convert



The foundation for the whole job search. Learn why you never apply to a cold lead the way you apply to a warm one, and set up the system the next four pillars run on.

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This is pillar one of the Get Hired application track. It is the foundation: the mental model and the setup that make the next four pillars work. By the end you will understand warm versus cold leads, have your tracker and inputs ready, and know exactly why you are building the pipeline that comes next. This pillar ships with a companion file, the Get Hired Pipeline and Outreach Tracker, which you will set up as you go.

Stop applying the way everyone else does

If you take one idea from this entire system, take this one. The way most people search for a job is the reason it feels hopeless. You are going to do the opposite, on purpose.

▪ What everyone else does

They open a job board, hit Easy Apply on everything that looks close, send the same resume to all of it, do no research, and contact no human. It feels productive, because at the end of the day you can say you applied to fifty jobs. But that is motion, not progress. Every one of those applications lands in an applicant tracking system where a recruiter skims it for a few seconds against hundreds of others, with no one inside advocating for you.

▪ Why it fails

Cold applications through a portal convert at very low single-digit rates, and no amount of volume fixes a channel that is structurally stacked against you. You are competing on a resume alone, judged by a machine and a rushed human, in the most crowded lane there is. Applying harder in that lane does not work. You have to change lanes.

▪ What you do instead

Fewer, sharper, more human touches. For a warm lead, you get a referral. For a cold lead, you send a direct message to the person who owns the role, with proof that you build real things. Twenty targeted plays that each reach a human beat a hundred applications that each reach an applicant tracking system, because every one of the twenty jumps the line.

The mindset shift underneath it: you are not an applicant waiting in a queue. You are an engineer reaching out to help solve a company's problem. That single reframe changes the tone of every message you send, and it is what the rest of this system is built to help you do at scale.

Twenty targeted plays that reach a human beat a hundred applications that reach a machine. You do not apply to a cold lead the way you apply to a warm one.

Warm leads versus cold leads

▪ Warm leads

A company where you have a path to a human: a connection who works there, or someone one step away who can refer or introduce you. Warm leads convert at far higher rates, because a referral gets you past the pile before a recruiter ever opens the applicant list. You approach a warm lead through the relationship, which is what pillar three is entirely about.

▪ Cold leads

A company where you have no connection. Applying through the portal here is the black hole. Instead, you reach the decision maker directly: the hiring manager, an engineer on the team, or a recruiter. You approach a cold lead through targeted outreach, which is what pillar four covers, using Sales Navigator, Hunter.io, and Apollo.

Every company in your search is one or the other. Your first job on each is to tag which it is, then run the right play.

The tools you'll use, at a glance

You will meet each of these in depth in a later pillar. Here is what each one is for, so the rest of the system makes sense as you go:

Sales Navigator. LinkedIn's paid tool. Its filters let you find the exact hiring manager, engineering manager, or recruiter at a target company, build lead lists, and message them directly (pillar four).

Hunter.io and Apollo. They find and verify a person's work email, so you can reach their inbox instead of only their LinkedIn (pillar four).

n8n. An automation tool you'll use to pull jobs straight from company career pages and flag the roles where you already have a connection (pillar two).

Track: run the search like a pipeline

The tracker is the backbone. Every company, every outreach attempt, and your weekly numbers live in one place, so you can actually manage the search instead of losing the thread. This pillar comes with a ready-made tracker: the Get Hired Pipeline and Outreach Tracker, a separate spreadsheet with four tabs and a dashboard that updates itself.

YOUR TRACKER HAS FOUR TABS

Start Here: a dashboard that auto-counts your pipeline and your response rate. Delete the example rows first.

Pipeline: one row per company and role, tagged Warm or Cold, with status and next action.

Outreach Log: one row per outreach attempt, first message and every follow-up, with channel and response.

Contacts: the people you find, with their LinkedIn, email, and where you found them.

The Outreach Log is the part most people skip and most regret skipping. Conversions are won and lost on follow-up, and you cannot follow up on a message you never recorded. Log every touch the moment you send it. Across the whole tracker, the two fields that carry everything are Status and Next action: if every row has a clear next action with a date, you never stall.

Get your inputs ready

Two inputs feed the entire machine, from sourcing to referrals to outreach. You build them once, here, and an hour spent now saves you weeks later.

■ Input 1: your target criteria

Get specific about what you are aiming at. Write down the exact titles and seniority you will accept, the comp band you are targeting, and the segment that makes a company a fit: its stage and size, its relationship to AI, and its industry. Separate your must-haves (remote, a domain you care about) from your nice-to-haves.

Then build the starting list. Pull the companies forward from your Signal Project research, then expand it: search for companies similar to the ones you like, watch recent funding announcements since a company that just raised is usually hiring, and pull from AI-focused job platforms. Aim for thirty to fifty companies at least, because the pipeline needs volume to produce offers.

■ Input 2: your connections export

This is what turns companies into warm leads. In LinkedIn, go to Settings, then Data privacy, choose to get a copy of your data, select Connections, and request the archive. The download usually arrives by email within minutes, and it contains every connection's name, current company, position, and, where shared, their email.

Clean it and use it. The export goes stale as people change jobs, so verify a contact's current employer before you rely on them. Then cross-reference the list against your target companies: any first-degree connection at a target is an instant warm lead, and you will usually find more than you expected. This same file feeds the pillar two pipeline, which uses it to flag jobs where you already know someone, so having it ready now pays off twice.

Convert: turn applications into interviews

Applying is not converting. Converting is turning a sourced role into an interview, and an interview into an offer. This pillar sets up the first half; the interview itself is handled by Get Hired Modules 01 to 05.

- **The core rule: never apply alone**

Every application is paired with a human touch. For a warm lead, that touch is a referral. For a cold lead, it is direct outreach plus proof, sent alongside the application rather than instead of it. The application and the outreach are one move, not two.

- **The proof asset: your one-pager**

Every warm and direct message points to the same place: proof that you build real things. Prepare it once, now, so your outreach is instant later. Your one-pager should link to:

YOUR ONE-PAGER SHOULD LINK TO

Your Signal Project: the repo, a live demo, and the write-up

Your design doc and decision log: the senior-signal artifacts almost no one else has

A one-line and one-paragraph description of what you built and why

Your resume and LinkedIn: the bulletproof resume from Module 01, and a clean profile

Use it right. Link it in your outreach; do not open by attaching a resume like everyone else. Lead with "here is a system I built for a problem your company has," and let the design doc and decision log do the work of making you look senior.

- **The follow-up sequence**

Most conversions die from no follow-up, not from a no. Run a simple, polite sequence and log each touch: the first message on day zero, a short follow-up around day three or four, another around day eight to ten, and a final one near day fourteen. Keep each one brief and add a little value, a new detail or a relevant update, rather than just "bumping" the thread.

- **Watch your conversion metrics**

Two ratios tell you what to fix. Your outreach-to-reply rate tells you whether your targeting and message are working. Your interview-to-offer rate tells you whether your interview skills are converting. If replies are low, tighten the targeting and the message. If you are getting interviews but not offers, that is an interview-prep problem, and Modules 01 to 05 handle it. The tracker dashboard shows both.

Also convert by getting found

Outreach is the outbound half of converting. The inbound half is making the right people come to you, and unlike outreach, it compounds. Every post and every public artifact keeps working long after you publish it.

▪ Post on LinkedIn

Recruiters and hiring managers actively search and browse LinkedIn, so a visible, active profile surfaces you and warms up cold leads before you ever reach out. Posting also builds enough credibility that your outreach lands better when you do send it.

What to post. Build updates and milestones from your Signal Project, technical breakdowns of a decision or a tradeoff, a lesson you learned, a before-and-after, and short demos. You built one project, so turn it into many posts: the write-up, a deep-dive on one decision, a lesson, a demo clip, and a thread.

How to post. Lead with a hook, since the first line decides whether anyone keeps reading. Keep it skimmable with short lines and whitespace, add a visual or a demo, and end with a light question. Aim for two to four posts a week, consistently, and engage: comment on others in your space, and reply to every comment on your own posts.

Turn posts into conversations. People who engage with your posts are warm signals. Connect with them, and when it fits, message them. Posting is not vanity, it is a lead generator that also makes every later outreach warmer.

Build in public

Building in public means sharing your work as you build it, not just the finished result. You show the problem, the decisions and tradeoffs, the progress, the demos, the milestones, and even the failures. It is the ongoing version of your Signal Project launch.

Where. LinkedIn and X for reach, GitHub for proof (a public repo with a strong README and a clean commit history), a blog, Medium, or dev.to for depth, and the communities where your niche lives, like relevant Discords and subreddits.

What to share. The problem and why it matters, the key decisions and why you made them, demos and milestones like stars and users, lessons, and the things that did not work. Real beats polished.

Why it works for hiring. It creates a public, timestamped track record of you solving real problems, which is exactly what companies want to verify before they hire. It also generates inbound: people find your work, star your repo, and reach out to you.

Favor consistency over polish. A steady stream of real work does far more for you than one perfect post you agonized over.

Optimize your profile for inbound

Your LinkedIn profile is your landing page, and a recruiter decides in seconds whether you are an AI engineer worth contacting. Make that decision easy by tuning each part:

Headline. Not "Software Engineer." Signal AI engineering, your value, and your specialism, and include the keywords recruiters search, like LLMs, RAG, agents, and Python. For example: "AI Engineer building RAG and agent systems."

About. A tight narrative: who you are, what you build, your Signal Project, and what you are looking for. The first two lines show before the "see more" cutoff, so front-load the hook.

Featured. Pin your Signal Project (repo, demo, and write-up) and your best posts right at the top.

Experience and Skills. Mirror your bulletproof resume, AI-forward and with metrics, and list the exact skill keywords from your target job descriptions so you surface in recruiter searches.

Open to Work. Turn it on, with your target titles and locations. You can set it to recruiter-only visibility if you want to stay discreet.

The basics. A clear photo, a simple banner, a custom profile URL, and regular activity, since posting keeps you surfacing in search and in feeds.

The goal is simple: within seconds of landing on your profile, a recruiter sees an AI engineer who ships.

Set your cadence

A pipeline only works if you feed it consistently, so decide your weekly rhythm now, before motivation has to carry you. A search is a numbers and momentum game, and consistency beats intensity every time.

▪ Set weekly numbers you can sustain

Pick targets you can hold for six to eight weeks, not heroic ones you keep for a week. A reasonable starting point: ten to fifteen new roles sourced, five to ten warm asks, ten to fifteen cold outreaches, an application paired with each, two to four LinkedIn posts, and all of your due follow-ups cleared. Adjust the numbers to your real capacity, then protect them.

▪ Block your week

Batch similar work so you stay efficient. A simple rhythm: use the early week to source and apply, the middle of the week for outreach and follow-ups, and the end of the week for posting and a quick review. Time-blocking beats doing a little of everything every day.

▪ Review weekly

Once a week, open the tracker dashboard and read your two ratios. If your reply rate is low, fix the targeting or the message. If interviews are not turning into offers, that is interview prep, so return to Modules 01 to 05. Then adjust one thing and keep going.

A job search is a numbers and momentum game. A steady weekly rhythm you sustain beats a frantic burst followed by burnout, every single time.

How the five pillars fit together

Everything from here is execution on top of the foundation you just built:

- ▶ **Pillar 1 (this one):** the warm-versus-cold model, your tracker, your inputs, and your cadence.
- ▶ **Pillar 2:** build the n8n pipeline that sources roles and flags your warm leads.
- ▶ **Pillar 3:** work your warm leads, referrals and references.
- ▶ **Pillar 4:** work your cold leads, direct outreach to decision makers with Sales Navigator, Hunter.io, and Apollo.
- ▶ **Pillar 5:** negotiate the offer, and get it faster and larger.

What you should have before moving on

By the end of pillar one, you should have:

- ▶ The warm-versus-cold model clear in your head, and why each is approached differently.
- ▶ The Pipeline and Outreach Tracker set up, with the example rows deleted.
- ▶ Your target criteria and a starting list of thirty to fifty or more companies.
- ▶ Your LinkedIn connections export, cleaned and ready for the pipeline.
- ▶ Your outreach one-pager, ready to link.
- ▶ A LinkedIn profile tuned for inbound, and a weekly cadence you can actually keep.

With the foundation in place, you are ready to build the machine that fills it. Next you build your n8n pipeline, step by step, from a blank workspace.

→ **With the foundation set, move on to Pillar 2: Build the pipeline.**