MAYSON JAMES
SEARCH AND ADVISORY

PERSPECTIVES | CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Why Giving Candidates Feedback Isn't Optional — It's Part of Your Brand

By Zlatka Jones · Associate Director, Mayson James

Every recruiter knows the feeling: the role is closed, the successful candidate has accepted, and the inbox is already full of the next set of urgent requisitions. It's tempting to move on and let the other candidates who didn't make it simply fade out. No email, no call, just silence.

But that silence costs more than most recruiters realise.

Closure matters more than good news

Candidates don't expect every application to end in an offer. What they do expect, and deserve, is to know where they stand. Being told honestly why they didn't get the role is very often more valuable than no response at all — it gives people something they can actually use: a reason, a gap to work on, a next step. Silence gives them nothing but uncertainty.

Closure isn't just polite. It's respectful of the time, effort, and hope someone invested in a process you invited them into.

Feedback is part of your brand, not an extra task

Every interaction a candidate has with you is a data point in how they perceive you and, by extension, your agency or company. A candidate who gets clear, constructive feedback after an interview remembers that. They talk about it, they come back for the next opportunity, and they think of you first when they're ready to make a move again.

In an industry built almost entirely on relationships and reputation, how you handle the "no" is often more memorable than how you handle the "yes." Anyone can deliver good news well — it's the harder conversations that actually build trust.

A personal habit that has paid off

A few years ago, I decided I would give feedback after every single engagement, no exceptions, whether that meant a rejection after a first screening call or detailed notes after a final-round interview. It wasn't always easy to keep up, especially when volumes were high or the feedback itself was hard to deliver. But it's paid off many times over — candidates remembered it, came back for future roles, referred colleagues, and were more open and engaged the second time around.

> “
> *You are here to win a client, not a deal.*
> ON TREATING SENIOR CANDIDATES AS FUTURE CLIENTS

What good feedback actually looks like

Giving feedback well doesn't mean writing an essay after every call. It means being:

- **Timely** — don't let a candidate wait weeks to hear a decision that was made days ago.
- **Honest** — vague feedback helps no one; specifics, even gentle ones, are what candidates can act on.
- **Respectful** — deliver it the way you'd want to receive it: directly, without unnecessary padding, but with empathy.
- **Consistent** — every candidate who gave you their time deserves a response, regardless of seniority.

It matters even more at the senior end

Sometimes you simply can't help a candidate — the role isn't right, the market's quiet, or the search has moved in a different direction. That's not a reason to go quiet on them. Pointing a senior candidate towards someone who can help costs very little and is remembered for a long time. The person you couldn't place today may well be the client briefing you on a mandate in two years' time.

The long game

Recruitment is a long game. The candidate you reject today for one role could be perfect for another in six months, or could be the hiring manager you're trying to build a relationship with in five years. Giving feedback isn't a nice-to-have tacked onto the end of a process — it's one of the simplest, most repeatable ways to build a reputation as a recruiter people trust, win or lose.

PERSPECTIVES | CAREER & INDUSTRY

Coming Back: My Return to Recruitment After Three Years Away

By Zlatka Jones · Associate Director, Mayson James

Three years ago, I stepped away from a career I loved. After a successful run in recruitment with Morgan McKinley Singapore, I made the decision to focus on something even bigger: my family. Two boys, back-to-back, meant that the next few years weren't going to be about placements, pipelines, or performance targets. They were going to be about sleepless nights, first steps, and figuring out how to be present for two small humans who needed me more than any client or candidate ever could. It was the right call, and I don't regret a single day of it.

But recently, I made another decision: it was time to come back.

Three years is a long time

If you've ever taken an extended break from a fast-moving industry, you'll know the feeling — you left one world and returned to what looks like a completely different one. Recruitment hasn't stood still while I was away. The market has shifted, teams have changed, and the day-to-day rhythm of the job has evolved in ways I didn't fully appreciate until I was back in the middle of it. The corporate world doesn't pause for anyone, and walking back in after three years meant accepting, right from day one, that I had some catching up to do.

Reconnecting with my network

One of the most unexpectedly rewarding parts of this transition has been reconnecting with my network. Picking up conversations with former colleagues, clients, and candidates — some of whom I hadn't spoken to in years — reminded me why I loved this industry in the first place. Recruitment has always been a people business, and it turns out that genuine relationships don't expire. A few calls in, and it felt like no time had passed at all. Others took more effort to rebuild, and that's okay too — it's all part of the process.

Same role, new tools

On paper, the role I've returned to is the same one I left. But in practice, it doesn't feel that way, and that's largely down to technology. The tools available to recruiters today are more powerful than what I was using three years ago, and they've genuinely made parts of the job easier: sourcing is faster, data is richer, and there's more visibility into the market than ever before. At the same time, learning new platforms and weaving them into my everyday process has meant relearning parts of a job I thought I already knew. It's been humbling but also energising.

> “
>
> *The tools are only as good as the relationships behind them.*
>
> ON WHAT HASN'T CHANGED

What hasn't changed

Despite all the shifts in tools and technology, the fundamentals of great recruitment remain exactly the same. It's still about building real relationships. It's still about listening closely to what a candidate wants from their next move, and what a client actually needs from their next hire. It's still about delivering the best possible experience for both sides of the table, every single time.

A changing landscape in tech and transformation

My focus has always been technology and transformation recruitment, and that hasn't changed. What has changed is the shape of demand. The skills clients are chasing today look different from three years ago, and budget allocations are adapting accordingly — shifting towards new technologies, new capabilities, and new ways of working. Watching that shift happen in real time, and helping clients and candidates navigate it, has made the return to this space feel not just familiar, but genuinely exciting.

— Zlatka Jones, Associate Director | Mayson James

PERSPECTIVES | PRIVATE EQUITY & CFO LEADERSHIP

The Mandate Moves. The Appointment Doesn't.

By **Elliot Jackson** · Founder & Managing Director, Mayson James

Tenure among senior finance leaders in private equity-backed businesses has shortened again this year.

A familiar story

Boards tend to attribute this to performance. More often than not, the underlying cause is mismatch. A finance leader is hired against a scaling narrative — new markets, new capital and a brief built around growth. A year on, the business has quietly shifted toward stabilisation: tighter capital discipline, greater board scrutiny, a different definition of success. The mandate has moved, but the question of whether the original appointment still fits rarely gets asked.

This isn't a story about hiring the wrong person. In most cases the original appointment was the right one, assessed against the brief that existed at the time. What changes is the business around them — the investment thesis matures, the exit horizon shortens, a follow-on round doesn't land the way it was modelled, and the definition of a "good CFO" quietly moves from growth architect to disciplined operator. Few boards build in a mechanism to notice, let alone respond to, that shift.

Why finance is particularly exposed

Finance is particularly exposed to this. The role isn't fixed at the point of hire — it continues to be tailored by whatever the business needs next. That means the job someone was appointed to do and the job they're actually doing eighteen months later can look quite different, often without anyone formally recognising the shift.

A leader appointed to build out FP&A capability and support a Series C raise can find themselves, a year later, managing covenant conversations and cash runway with none of the scope, resource or authority that role actually requires. They haven't failed. The job changed underneath them, and nobody rewrote the brief.

What this looks like in practice

The pattern tends to surface in board conversations well before anyone names it directly. Meeting packs get denser. Forecasting cadence tightens from quarterly to monthly, then to weekly. The CFO is increasingly asked to defend numbers rather than present a strategy for growing them. None of this is unreasonable given the environment — but it is a materially different job to the one that was scoped and hired for, and it deserves to be treated as such.

> “
> *The mandate has moved, but the question of whether the original appointment still fits, rarely gets asked.*
>
> ON MISMATCH, NOT PERFORMANCE

A compounding pressure

A second, related pattern is compounding this. A growing number of PE-backed businesses are holding back on investment into the finance function itself — headcount, systems, reporting infrastructure — even as expectations of the finance leader continue to rise.

The result is a widening gap between what the role demands and what it's resourced to deliver. A CFO asked to run institutional-grade reporting on a systems stack and team built for an earlier, smaller version of the business is being set up to absorb strain that isn't theirs to own. Over time, that strain shows up as attrition, and the board is left explaining a departure as a performance issue when it was, in fact, a resourcing one.

The cost of getting it wrong

The cost of this rarely shows up on a single line item, which is exactly why it's under-priced. A forced CFO exit brings a costly search, a period of interim cover, a pause in board-level financial credibility at precisely the moment investors are watching most closely, and a successor who inherits the same unresourced mandate that pushed their predecessor out. Left unaddressed, the pattern repeats.

What the best boards do differently

Organisations that retain exceptional finance leaders over the long term aren't simply the ones that made a strong initial appointment. They are the ones that treat the mandate as a living brief: revisited annually, recalibrated as the business evolves, and resourced in line with shifting strategic demands. Fit, scope and leadership impact are assessed with the same mindset applied to any critical enterprise function — not once at appointment, but continuously, as the business itself changes shape.

— Elliot Jackson, Founder & Managing Director | Mayson James

PERSPECTIVES | FOUNDER STORY

Building Before Founding: Why I Started Mayson James

By **Elliot Jackson** · Founder & Managing Director, Mayson James

I founded Mayson James in July 2025, but the honest version of that story starts long before then. For seventeen years I built things for other people — desks, practices, entire market entries — inside businesses that were never going to be mine. Mayson James is the first thing I've built that is.

A career spent building

I started out a long way from executive search, as a sports journalist and football writer, of all things. It taught me more about this industry than people expect: how to ask a direct question without losing someone's trust, how to write quickly and clearly under deadline, and how to find the story inside a set of facts. Those are, it turns out, the same skills a search consultant uses every day — just applied to a boardroom instead of a press box.

The recruitment career that followed was really a series of building projects, though not always the same kind. Eight years in Singapore with Morgan McKinley, growing the finance recruitment business from the ground up as the market matured around us. Then Robert Walters, where the challenge shifted: first building out a new office in Texas from a standing start in Austin, then stepping in as Director of the Qualified Finance, Commerce & Industry practice in London — an existing business, inherited during a period of real uncertainty and change. Different starting points, the same underlying task — turn a brief into a functioning, revenue-generating part of someone else's business.

What building teaches you that starting doesn't

There's a particular kind of learning that only comes from building inside someone else's structure. You inherit their systems, their risk appetite, their brand equity, and your job is to make something new work within those boundaries. It's a genuinely useful apprenticeship — you learn what good infrastructure looks like, what a well-run desk feels like day to day, and just as importantly, what you'd do differently if the constraints were yours to set.

Building out a new office in Texas taught me how much of a new market's success comes down to relationships built before there's anything to sell — you're establishing credibility long before you place your first candidate. London taught me a different lesson again. I didn't build that Commerce & Industry practice from scratch — I stepped in as Director of an existing business during a period of real uncertainty and unfriendly market conditions. That's its own kind of apprenticeship: how you stabilise and refocus something that already exists, and the value of depth over breadth in narrowing a mandate until you know a market better than anyone competing for the same brief. Both experiences are baked into how Mayson James operates today.

> “
> *Every business I built belonged to someone else. Mayson James is the first one that's mine.*
>
> ON FOUNDING AFTER SEVENTEEN YEARS BUILDING FOR OTHERS

Why now, why this

By the time I left London, the pattern I now write about often — the CFO office being asked to do more with a mandate that keeps shifting — was one I'd seen play out from the inside of the search process, deal after deal. Finance leadership was changing shape faster than most search firms were built to track: data, digital and AI capability were becoming as central to a CFO brief as technical fluency. I wanted to build a firm around that shift specifically, rather than treat it as one more sector inside a generalist practice.

That's the whole premise behind Mayson James: a boutique, high-touch model built specifically around the CFO and CTO office, insight-led rather than volume-led, with the disciplined methodology I'd spent seventeen years refining and none of the constraints that came with building it for somebody else.

The apprenticeship, applied

None of it would work without everything that came before. The instinct for a story that started in journalism, the market-building experience from Singapore, the discipline of standing up a new desk from nothing in Texas, the specialism sharpened in London — all of it is in the firm now, just finally assembled on my own terms.

What's different this time is simply ownership of the decisions. Every judgment call I make now — who we work with, how thoroughly we scope a mandate, what "high-touch" actually means in practice — is one I'm accountable for in full, rather than one shaped by someone else's playbook. That's a small shift on paper and a significant one in practice. Mayson James isn't a departure from that seventeen-year career. It's the point it was always building towards.

— Elliot Jackson, Founder & Managing Director | Mayson James