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THE FRONTLINE AI PLAYBOOK

From Reactive ATS to Agentic Hiring

A practical guide for HR and Ops leaders on moving frontline hiring from a system that records work to one that runs it.



Ask it. Run it. Cue by Fountain

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.7 billion people work frontline jobs worldwide. For two decades, HR technology designed for desk-based work was stretched to fit frontline industries like retail, food service, logistics, healthcare, and manufacturing, instead of being rebuilt around how they actually operate.

The result: a hiring stack that records what happened instead of driving what happens next.

A recruiter posts a role. Applicants pile up. Someone screens them by hand, days later. Interviews get scheduled over email, then rescheduled, then no-showed. By the time an offer goes out, half the pipeline has already taken another job.

2026 marks the first real inflection point. AI has become autonomous enough to operate at the scale frontline hiring demands: hundreds of applicants a week, across dozens of locations, with hiring deadlines that don't move.
Frontline workers are already feeling the shift: **42% say AI or automation has changed their day-to-day responsibilities, with 14% saying it has changed them significantly.***

This playbook is a working guide, not a forecast. It draws on patterns from more than 1.2 million frontline hires processed annually through Fountain, across 78 countries: **what agentic hiring looks like in practice, what changes for a recruiting team on the ground, and what a first 90 days of it can look like at your company.**

> **Important note**: Agentic hiring is not about replacing recruiters or removing humans from the process. It is designed to support recruiters and candidates by handling coordination work, while people remain in control of judgment, oversight, and final hiring decisions.

* https://www.fountain.com/news/frontline-workers-dont-want-ai-out-of-hiring-they-want-it-out-in-the-open

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