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Tech Savant And Director Tackles Hiring Discrimination With Reality Show



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Diversity & Inclusion

I write about combatting ageism in the workplace.



Whiteboard Challenge is a reality show focused on the world of HR recruiting in the high-tech industry. MICHAEL KURETH

Recruiters and hiring managers often discount talent, according to Michael Kureth, award-winning technology and entertainment professional with decades of experience in software engineering, film production and technical architecture. To make his point clear, Kureth created [Whiteboard Challenge](#), a docustyle reality show focused on the world of HR recruiting in the high-tech industry.

In the show, Kureth and a panel of three judges discuss the many challenges software engineers face in the hiring process, to include discrimination on the basis of age, social introversion and other biases that often disqualify highly-skilled talent. Kureth sees the show as a vehicle to expose and remediate these issues by raising awareness and giving a voice to those who have been silenced.

The show was named after the tech industry's interviewing practice where software engineers are asked to solve a code challenge on a whiteboard in front of a panel of hiring managers. It is the first and only show of its kind featuring the software engineering interview process in the form of a game talk show.

In a quirky yet informative style, Whiteboard Challenge is entertaining even for non-tech people. Tech-minded viewers will especially appreciate the judges' suggestions on best ways to navigate an interview, and will enjoy watching how each candidate approaches problem-solving with varied logic and language.

Game Show with a Message

[Evans Data Corporation](#) indicates there are 23.9 million software engineers globally, a number expected to increase to 28.7 million by 2024. With millions of engineers competing for the same jobs, competition is brutal. The criteria to filter applicants isn't always ethical.

"The interviewing process for software engineers is outdated and doesn't take into account experience and personality type. Hiring managers are focused on people who fit in socially, not necessarily those who will excel at the job," said Kureth, a message that is emphasized in the pilot. Most engineers are introverted, and some may have other socially restrictive disorders. Because they don't always interview well, they are often excluded from the interviewing process, regardless of their capabilities.

Each contestant on the premier show portrays a prevalent societal topic—[women in tech](#), age discrimination, and homelessness. The diverse show casts actual software engineers and no professional actors. While the contestants are solving the code challenge, the three judges and Kureth, as the host, discuss tech industry topics.

The episode concludes after one contestant is eliminated, leaving the final two running their whiteboard code in a timed playback.

Homeless Talent Overlooked

Kureth is especially empathetic to the estimated 60,000 people in Los Angeles living in the streets and their cars. During a six-month period after losing a job, he realized how quickly he could become homeless. He was lucky to have had connections who supplied him with freelance work until he found full-time employment. "I began meeting with and learning from a software engineer who was homeless to prepare myself to survive in the chance that I could no longer afford rent," Kureth said.

When casting for the show, he met with more than twenty currently and formerly homeless developers who had decades of experience, some with graduate degrees. Kureth desired to showcase the extent of ostracized talent and increase awareness and empathy for the community since homeless is difficult—if not impossible—to overcome.

[Pedro Munoz](#), one of the show's contestants, is an example of how easy it is to become homeless in Los Angeles. After being laid off from a software engineer job earning six-figures, Munoz lived in his car for a few months. Of those Kureth interviewed for the show, Pedro was the only one willing to participate. The others were too embarrassed by their current and previous situations to be involved and feared being blacklisted by the industry.



Michael Kureth, creator of the reality show Whiteboard Challenge, is tackling bias and discrimination in high-tech hiring. MICHAEL KURETH

During Kureth's personal experience hiring and managing teams, he admitted that an HR executive once rejected a candidate he had identified as the most qualified because the candidate's shirt had not been ironed and he "looked homeless." Having the ability to perform successfully in the role or being the strongest candidate for the position was never a factor in HR's decision.

Hit a Nerve with Facebook

When promoting the premier on Facebook and Instagram over the summer, Facebook pulled all of Kureth's paid advertising and event promotions and blacklisted Whiteboard Challenge. Kureth's trailer of Keith Goodman was accompanied with, "Vote for Keith beginning July 9 to influence his win at the premiere of Whiteboard Challenge. Help us end discrimination in tech."

In the ad that triggered the response, contestant [Keith Goodman](#) talked about being in a phone interview with a recruiter at an unnamed company. According to Goodman, everything was going great until the recruiter, indifferent to the law, asked how old he was. Once Goodman revealed his age, the recruiter hung up on him and refused to respond to any calls or messages regarding the opportunity.

Kureth's only message from Facebook was that his posts violated Facebook's community standards. Kureth fought for a week before getting everything back up and running.

"These issues have to be exposed, and violators need to be brought to light. It's not going to happen if people don't feel they have a voice or if they've been silenced on different social media platforms. Facebook removing the trailers for Whiteboard Challenge addressing discrimination in the industry is just another cultural fit excuse, and culture fit is an antonym of diversity and inclusion."

Red Carpet Premiere



Software engineers on Whiteboard Challenge from left: Keith Goodman (contestant), Pedro Munoz (contestant), Michael Garcia (judge), Michael Kureth (host), Daniel Munoz (judge), Michael Malone (judge), and Brittany Reves (contestant). MICHAEL KURETH

"While the tone of Whiteboard Challenge is tongue-in-cheek and humorous, the underlying issues are very serious and real," said Kureth. "The goal is to humanize the people behind the code and showcase their unwavering ambition and determination. Hopefully, audiences can recognize that while the show's spotlight is on the software engineer industry, diversity and inclusion challenges exist in all industries."

The pilot episode for the [Whiteboard Challenge](#) premieres September 21, 2019, in Los Angeles at the Cinemark theatre, followed by a tech event after-party. [Cinedapt](#), a new film distribution business model set to end film piracy and expand originality in film-making, will exclusively offer 36 versions of the pilot in 2020. Cinedapt's adaptive film streaming service will provide a tailored experience for the viewer with different winning scenarios.

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I am an author and longtime communications professional with experience in online and print media, public affairs and corporate storytelling. After spending over a decade managing diversity and inclusion for a major pharmaceutical company, I resigned to spend more time with family, write and coach others to chase their dreams. I’m on a mission to promote a productive, multigenerational workforce and to demonstrate how "career pauses" can lead to happier, healthier and higher-skilled employees. I love delivering a relevant, content-rich presentation that leaves people feeling informed and motivated to take action. Reach out to me via the Speaker page on my website. Follow me on Twitter @SheilaCallaham. **Read Less**