LEADERSHIP INTELLIGENCE

By Caroline Webb

USING AI ALONGSIDE THE BOOK

A COMPANION TO THE BOOK

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I wrote *Leadership Intelligence* to help you bring the best out of the humans you work with—and ultimately, that is deeply human work. As I say in the book, you can't really subcontract to a machine the job of reading a room, building a relationship, or lifting people's spirits when they're flagging. But you can use AI to sharpen your thinking as you prepare for the moments that matter, and to take some of the more mechanical load off your plate so you have more room for judgment and care.

This guide is my attempt to help you do that. I haven't tied the advice to any specific AI tools, because everybody has their own favorites, and AI capabilities change daily. I'll aim to keep this guide updated as technology evolves, but I'm hoping the principles below should hold up for a while. The underlying message isn't really about the technology in any case—it's about the quality of your thinking, and how to protect and strengthen it.

A quick word before we start. None of what follows assumes you're an AI enthusiast, and none of it assumes you're a skeptic. Reasonable, thoughtful people currently sit all along that spectrum, and I'd encourage you to bring as much caution as you'd bring to any other powerful and imperfect adviser.

A FEW PRINCIPLES

To lead well in an AI-rich world, we need to be clear what our distinctively human strengths are, and be deliberate about making the most of them. That means honing our ability to make good calls when there's no right answer, sensing what a situation really needs, helping people feel seen and supported.

AI can be a thinking partner that helps you do those things better. But AI can also make us dull and dependent, because mental muscles that we stop using will eventually waste away. And once AI suggests something, there's a good chance you'll get anchored on it and stop seeing alternatives (for all the reasons we learned about in the Deliberate Wisdom part of the book).

So make a conscious choice, each time, about where to use it. Here's what I suggest you keep in mind:

1. "First mile, last mile." Always do some of your own thinking first. And always apply your own critical thinking last.

Make sure you have the first and last pair of eyes on everything. You always need to make sure you're framing the issue correctly upfront, and that you're checking and evaluating the quality of output. Channel some of what I talked about in Chapter 3, on metacognition (the ability to rise above a task and ask what kind of thinking it actually needs, and how best to do it).

- Focus your mind, by getting clear what you really want to achieve. What's the problem or opportunity you're really trying to solve for?

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- Before you ask AI what it thinks, unpack what your initial thinking is—your own read of the decision, your own draft of the message, your own list of options.
- Then decide how to bring AI in to shift, challenge and extend your thinking. See the next point for ideas on that.

2. Use AI to extend what your mind can do, without replacing your framing or your judgment.

Ways to do that include:

- **Kick the tires.** "Here's my reasoning. Where are the holes? What am I assuming? Whose perspective am I missing?" This is AI as a smart, candid colleague.
- **Practice a framework.** Every chapter has a framework. Describe its steps, describe your situation, and have it take you through the steps one at a time, asking you questions to get you working through each.
- **Rehearse a conversation.** "Play the part of the other person, and help me see through their eyes." Very useful for a feedback conversation, a tricky negotiation, or a difficult relationship you're trying to improve. This is AI as a wise, empathetic colleague.
- **Widen your perspective.** "I've come up with three approaches. Please give me five more, including a couple I probably wouldn't like, to broaden my thinking." This can help you break out of the first idea that comes to mind, using AI as a creative colleague.
- **Lighten the load.** Ask it to summarize and organize your scattered notes. Ask it to pull together briefings or background reading before meetings. Take inspiration from Chapter 2, and the Let Go and Grow category. If you offload workaday admin, you'll get more time to spend on the more strategic work you want to say a Positive Yes to. This is AI as an amazing analyst or intern.

3. Treat it as one fallible source of perspective. Check everything.

You wouldn't hand every important decision in your life to a single human adviser, however clever they were. And you probably wouldn't just forward work by a junior colleague to your boss without even looking at it, unless it's so routine that there's nothing to go wrong. The same goes here. AI is a useful voice to add to the mix—often a well-read and tireless one—but it's still just one voice, and it can be confidently wrong.

So: **Check it**.

- Remember **that** the output might look good on the surface, but look closely what it's really saying—does it make sense? Is it actually insightful? You're responsible for making sure that's the case.

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- Make sure you understand the arguments for its assertions. Be explicit that you want to see real sources that have functioning links and traceable origins, to help you exercise quality control.
- Weigh what you get from it against your own knowledge, your colleagues' input, and the evidence in front of you, and keep the final call where it belongs: with you. (The buck stops with you, and all that.)

4. Keep it human where it counts.

What I'm about to say is probably obvious, but just to be clear, AI can't do the following:

- **Take accountability for your choices.** Be really careful in thinking through the judgment calls that define your leadership, because in the end those are yours to own and you need to be able to stand by them, and explain them to others, and get them on board.
- **Show people that you're really present in important conversations.** It's on you to recognize a colleague's effort, deliver developmental feedback, give people hard news with care, or tell someone you believe in them. It's OK to use AI to prepare, but don't parrot an AI script. Put it in your own words. Put your devices down so you're really listening. And make sure you're making time for these crucial interactions.
- **Read what's going on in your team.** You're the one who can see how your team is really doing, and what they really need from you. Whatever your preferred meeting cadence, make sure you're checking in with them as individuals and as a group, and really paying attention to where they're doing well and where it looks like they need coaching or support.

TIPS FOR EACH CHAPTER

Here's where I think AI could be useful to you, chapter by chapter. These are starting points rather than an exhaustive list. You'll spot a running theme, which is to use AI to sharpen your own thinking rather than to do the thinking for you.

PART I: DELIBERATE WISDOM

Chapter 1: How to Better Understand a Complex Situation (360-Degree Vision). To See Differently, ask AI to take on the role of a mentor or colleague who might have a different point of view to you. (You could also try getting it to imagine how a skeptical customer or a frontline employee might see the situation.) To See Across, ask how common or rare your situation is elsewhere in your industry, so you don't treat a routine issue as a crisis (or the reverse). And once you've gathered a messy pile of observations, it can be good at helping you See the System, by organizing your notes into themes and possible chains of cause and effect.

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Chapter 2: How to Make Time for Your Top Priorities (the Yes-Grow-No Rule). Once you've decided to decline something, AI can help you prepare to deliver a Positive No. Paste your draft and ask it to check that you've got the 4 steps in it. You might also ask it to challenge what's really on your Let Go and Grow list: which tasks are you holding onto that someone else could grow into?

Chapter 3: How to Come Up with Fresh Ideas and Solutions (the FUSE Model). After you've done a brain-dump of everything rattling around a problem—the Unpack step—ask AI to chunk your thoughts into themes, to help you surface patterns. It's also useful in the Shift step, as a tireless rubber duck: explain the problem to it in writing, and the act of putting it into words will often shift your thinking before it has even replied.

Chapter 4: How to Make an Important Decision (the ACORN Approach). You can probably get it to help with every step but in particular, you can ask AI to widen your Options, especially if you're struggling to see beyond the one or two options you're evaluating. "Give me five more, including a couple I'd probably reject." Once you have what looks like a potential winning option, use it to kick the tires on the idea with both a Now Forward consequence tree ("if I do this, what are the things that are likely to happen next") and a Future Back premortem ("imagine it's a year from now and this went badly; what are the likeliest reasons?").

Chapter 5: How to Mentally Prepare for a Key Meeting (the Triple-A Checklist). Tell AI your Aim for the meeting and the Assumptions you're walking in with, and ask it to poke at both. Is there a more leader-like aim you could adopt? Are you assuming the worst about someone's motives, and is there a more generative assumption that would allow more room for something good to happen? It's a low-stakes way to reset what you're taking into the meeting. (The third A, your Attitude, is all yours to set and reset.)

Chapter 6: How to Handle a Disagreement Well (the Common Ground Technique). The hardest part of this technique is describing the other person's position as warmly as they would themselves. You could ask AI to help you with that—to make the strongest, most sympathetic case for the view you're arguing against.

Chapter 7: How to Lead Intelligent Team Discussion (the 3 Fs of Team Wisdom). You could describe how you're planning to run the meeting, and ask it to test against the three Fs: is this going to help keep them Focused, am I doing enough to encourage people to be Frank, and am I encouraging some Flexible thinking—maybe through a reflection at the end?

PART II: INTRINSIC INSPIRATION

Chapter 8: How to Get People Aligned on a Goal (the Pillars of Possibility). Write the Purpose of your goal in an "imagine if" sentence, then ask AI how a skeptical team member might hear it and how to improve it. On having a clear Path, you might also use AI to help you check you've got coherence between your short-term and long-term goals, your big picture and individual goals.

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Chapter 9: How to Change the Way People Work (the CASE for Change). Share your first draft of a From-To to check it's Clear enough, before getting your team to discuss and refine it. If you're not moving as fast as you'd hoped, you could use AI to help you diagnose what might be getting in the way of the change being Easy, whether that's skills, processes, workload, or anything else.

Chapter 10: How to Communicate and Be Heard (the Four Frequencies). Draft your message, then ask AI which of the four frequencies you're actually broadcasting on. Ask it to suggest a line or two for each frequency you've skipped. It's also good at flagging the pet phrases you don't know you overuse and under-explain, if you ask it to look.

Chapter 11: How to Delegate for High Performance (the Fix-Flex Approach). Before you hand something over, talk through with AI which parts of the task you feel you truly need to Fix, and which you can let Flex. Articulating this out loud—even to a machine—can help you check the guardrails you really need, and how much you could actually let go. Remember that it's actively helpful to tell people where you're truly Flexible.

Chapter 12: How to Give Feedback that Drives Action (the Factual Feedback Model). Draft your feedback yourself, then ask AI to check your Observation step for the most common flaw: interpretation dressed up as fact (saying "you seemed disengaged" is an interpretation; "you were looking at your phone during the client call" is a fact). You can also have it role-play a feedback recipient, so you feel how your words might land before a real person has to absorb them.

Chapter 13: How to Develop a Colleague's Capabilities (the GUIDE Model of Coaching). The discipline of coaching is asking open questions instead of dispensing answers, and that turns out to be a good thing to rehearse with AI. Ask it to play a colleague bringing you a problem, and to call you out every time you smuggle a suggestion into a question. It can help you build the reflex you want for the real conversation.

Chapter 14: How to Strengthen Team Collaboration (the 4 Hs of Team Inspiration). Like Chapter 7, this is mostly a hands-on chapter for you to apply in real life. But you might be able to use AI to help you design a longer session or offsite for your team, using the exercises in the chapter.

PART III: REASONED RESILIENCE

Chapter 15: How to Stay Steady and Energized Under Pressure (the Five Resets). The "reset" that AI can help with is Reframe. When you're stuck in a bleak reading of a situation, ask it for three other ways of seeing the same facts—not to talk you out of your feelings, but to loosen the grip of the first, most catastrophic interpretation.

Chapter 16: How to Lead Through Uncertainty and Upheaval (the Know-Be-Do Framework). If you're in the middle of a crisis, and you're trying to think clearly about the right thing to say to your team,

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ask your AI to help you sort a messy situation into the three buckets—what you Know for sure, who you continue to Be as a team, and what you can choose to Do—so you arrive at a message that steadies people.

Chapter 17: How to Improve a Difficult Stakeholder Relationship (the Bridge Model). This is perspective-taking, which AI is oddly well suited to, because it carries none of your history with the person. Describe the relationship and ask it to build Tower 1: the most sympathetic account of what might be driving their behavior, without assuming bad intent. Then ask the harder question—what might you be doing that they find difficult (Tower 2)? You don't have to accept its suggestions but it can help you see what's really going on.

Chapter 18: How to Help a Colleague Who's Struggling (the CALM Approach). The whole point of CALM is to stop you leaping to the M of making things manageable. You can use AI at the Check step, to make sure you're keeping an open mind. Describe what you've noticed about a struggling colleague and ask it to surface the "good person, bad situation" explanations you might be overlooking. And then go into the conversation with that more open mind, and ask them gently what's going on.

Chapter 19: How to Respond to Failures and Mistakes (the Voyage of Discovery). A step people often skimp on is the last one about learning. Ask AI to help you Land the Learning: give it what happened and have it draft the questions that would draw out the real lessons.

Chapter 20: How to Handle Exits and Layoffs Fairly (Compassionate Clarity). The kindest thing you can do in a hard exit conversation is to be truly clear, and AI is a good test of whether you're really being as clear as you need to be. Ask it: could someone hear this and still not understand what's expected, or whether their job is at risk? Softening a message until it blurs is a false kindness, and an outside reader will catch it. Handle this chapter with particular care about confidentiality, though—keep names and identifying details out of anything you type.

Chapter 21: How to Build Healthy Resilience in Your Team (the 5 Cs of Team Resilience). Consider showing AI an anonymized version of your team's Calendar and ask what it implies about what you truly value, and where the Capacity pressure points are. We're often blind to the signals our own schedules send.

CLOSING WORDS

Used well, AI can give you back time and sharpen your thinking so that you have more to offer your team. *Leadership Intelligence* is about unlocking the best intelligence in everyone you work with; if a bit of artificial intelligence helps you do that, great—as long as it's your intelligence still holding the wheel. Use AI to sharpen your own thinking, not to do the thinking for you.

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