PROMPT MAMA · VOL. II

MAY 2026

*An **updated** playbook*

Thriving in the AI Era 2.0

How to stand out when everyone's using AI — and how to use it without letting it sink your search.

BY LAUREN HOWARD

TEN SECTIONS · 8-MINUTE READ

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FIRST THINGS FIRST WHERE TO START

Find your next *play*

Looking for a job or a career change? Recently laid off? These 5 prompts help you narrow in on what comes next.

Before you dive into applications, get honest about what you're actually looking for — the kind of work, the kind of company, the kind of life it fits into.

Here's what's new: **AI has advanced so much in just the last year** that it can genuinely help you see what might be up your alley. It spots patterns in your own experience you've stopped noticing, names paths you hadn't considered, and pressure-tests the ones you have. Not gospel — but a remarkably good thinking partner to get unstuck.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Anyone trying to figure things out right now — whether you were recently laid off, you've been itching for a change, or you're simply finding your footing in a job market that's shifting faster than it ever has.

FIVE PROMPTS TO START

Start with the right *questions*

Paste each into your AI of choice, fill in the brackets, and answer honestly — what you get back is only as good as what you put in.

01 The Honest Inventory

What you actually want — not what you've been told to want.

• USE THIS PROMPT

Interview me to figure out what I should do next professionally. Ask one question at a time — about work I lose track of time doing, the parts of jobs I've quietly dreaded, and where I think the world is heading. Push back when I'm vague. After ~10 questions, name the 2–3 throughlines and what they imply about my next move.

02 The Four Paths

Build / buy / join / freelance — instead of defaulting to "find a job."

• USE THIS PROMPT

Given my background **[paste resume]**, lay out four real paths: (1) a senior role somewhere established, (2) start something from scratch, (3) buy or partner into an existing small business, (4) freelance/fractional work. Give the honest case for and against each based on my skills and risk tolerance — then tell me which one your evidence points toward, and why.

03 The Acquisition Play

A generation of owners is retiring with no successor — you don't have to build from scratch.

• USE THIS PROMPT

I'm exploring buying a small business rather than starting one, since so many owners are retiring with no successor. For my background **[summary]** and roughly **[budget / SBA range]**: what fits my skills, how do deal sourcing and SBA financing work, and how do first-time buyers get burned? End with a 90-day plan to reach my first broker conversations.

04 The Target Profile

Define the target so you stop applying to roles that quietly drain you.

• USE THIS PROMPT

Build me a one-page target profile for my ideal next role: specific role and level, company stage (startup / growth / enterprise), industry, culture markers, comp floor, and the 3 non-negotiables I should screen every opportunity against. First ask me about my best and worst past managers and how much ambiguity I actually want.

05 The Market Check

Pressure-test an idea or a sector before you commit.

• USE THIS PROMPT

I'm considering **[building / buying / working in]** something in **[space]**. Act as a skeptical investor: what's the real tailwind over the next 5 years, who's already winning, where's the wedge for someone like me, and what would have to be true for this to work? Tell me honestly — real opening or wishful thinking?

A stall isn't just an ending — with the right questions, it's your chance to choose the next play on purpose.

01 THE META SHIFT

What changed in *twelve months*

A year ago, using AI in your job search gave you an edge..

In 2026, it doesn't. Everyone's running ChatGPT through their cover letters. The edge moved.

The new differentiator isn't **access**. It's **judgment**. Which model for which moment, what to ground in facts, what to keep human, and what to *build* instead of claiming.

The stakes also flipped. AI used to help you. Now it can hurt you. AI-detector tools are standard in finance, legal, government, and education screening. Hallucinated company facts in cover letters trigger instant disqualification. Applying to 200 jobs because AI made it cheap reads as low signal, not high effort.

> *The new edge isn't using AI. It's having taste about how you use it, what model you're using. And showing your work.*



Sources: Insight Global, Resume Genius, Pew Research, novoresume (2025–2026).

02 A NEW MENTAL MODEL

The four modes of *AI for work*

Don't think of AI as one thing. Think of four modes. Match the mode to the moment.

1 Chat

FAST TURNS · CHEAP · ALWAYS-ON

Your default. Brainstorming, quick rewrites, mock interviews, research lookups. Use any frontier chat model.

Move on when the question gets heavier than one screen.

2 Think

EXTENDED REASONING · FOR HIGH-STAKES CALLS

Reasoning models with deep-think on. Weighing two offers, salary negotiation strategy, prepping for the hardest interview question. **Slow and worth it when the decision has long-term cost.**

3 Build

ARTIFACTS · CANVAS · CODE

The 2026 unlock. Build things that prove you can do the work. A 30-60-90 as a clickable doc, a mocked dashboard, a working prototype.

The artifact is the new portfolio.

4 Run

AGENTS · BROWSER AUTOMATION

Claude CoWork, ChatGPT agents, Operator-style tools. Have AI actually *do* the work. Research a company end-to- end, build a market map.

Powerful, but verify everything before acting.

03 THE BIGGEST 2026 SHIFT

Show, don't *tell*

A year ago, putting "AI in Action" on your resume was novel. Now it's expected. And on its own, it's noise. The move that actually lands: build the artifact.

Instead of *saying* you're AI-fluent and outcomes-driven, prove it before they ask. Three patterns that work right now:

i. **A 30-60-90 day plan as a clickable artifact**

Not a Word doc. An interactive page or shared link showing exactly how you'd land in role. Send it after the second interview. It gets forwarded.

ii. **A mocked dashboard, prototype, or even game for their stated problem**

If the role is sales enablement, mock a Field Activation tracker. If it's PM, mock a feature-launch dashboard. Use their language. Illustrative numbers are fine.

iii. **A teardown of their public-facing work**

Two pages, sharp, specific. What's working, what you'd test, why. This signals taste. The thing AI can't substitute.

> *AI made it cheap to say what you'd do. So the candidates who win now are the ones who show up having already built it*

03 The Build Library

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

A clickable prototype built straight from your PRD — proof you ship, not just spec.

MARKETING

A campaign dashboard wired to an engine that drafts on-brand content on demand.

DATA / ANALYTICS

An "ask-the-data" tool that turns plain-English questions into instant charts.

CUSTOMER SUCCESS

A churn-risk health score that writes the renewal play for every account.

FINANCE / FP&A

A scenario model that turns raw numbers into the board-ready narrative.

SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

A working prototype, or an agent that runs a real team workflow end to end.

RECRUITING / HR

An agent that turns messy interview notes into a calibrated, bias-checked scorecard.

OPERATIONS

An SOP generator that turns any recorded process into a repeatable playbook.

THE 90-MINUTE BUILD SPRINT

1. **Pick their problem, not yours.**
   Find the one outcome the role owns.
2. **Fake the data, real the structure.**
   Use illustrative numbers. The layout and logic signal taste.
3. **Make it a link, not a file.**
   An interactive artifact or shared page gets forwarded.
4. **Send it after interview two.**
   Not before. It reads as initiative, not desperation.

04 WHERE AI WILL HURT YOU

The new *red flags*

Recruiters and hiring managers know what AI output looks like. These are the tells that get applications discarded.

01 Em-dash overuse

The #1 AI tell. If your cover letter has three or more em-dashes per paragraph, it reads as machine output. Find and replace.

02 Hallucinated company facts

"I admired your work on [product that doesn't exist]." One made-up detail gets you instant-disqualified. Verify every name, number, and date.

03 Generic AI phrasing

"Delve," "leverage," "in today's fast-paced world," "unique blend of." All flagged. Cut them, even if the AI insists.

04 High-volume, low-signal applications

AI made it cheap to apply to 200 roles. Recruiters notice the pattern. Apply to fewer, with more taste, and follow up by hand.

05 AI-detector flags on written materials

Standard in regulated industries. If your sector uses them, run your draft through a detector yourself and break the patterns it flags.

06 Reading-along AI in live interviews

Increasingly detected via eye-movement and tab-switching tells. Use AI to prep. Don't use it live.

07 "I used AI to do X" without depth

Saying you used AI is table stakes. What lands is showing the *judgment*. What you kept, what you cut, why.

05 THE GROUND TRUTH RULES

Ground every claim in *facts*

Hallucinations are still the #1 risk. AI confidently makes up CEO names, funding rounds, headcount, financials, recent news. Every one of those in your cover letter is a disqualifier.

The two-pass rule. Generate with AI, then verify every specific claim with a search-augmented model or a direct source. Names, numbers, dates, product launches, leadership changes. All of it.

The "give me the source" prompt. When AI gives you a stat, ask it to cite. If it can't cite cleanly, don't use the stat.

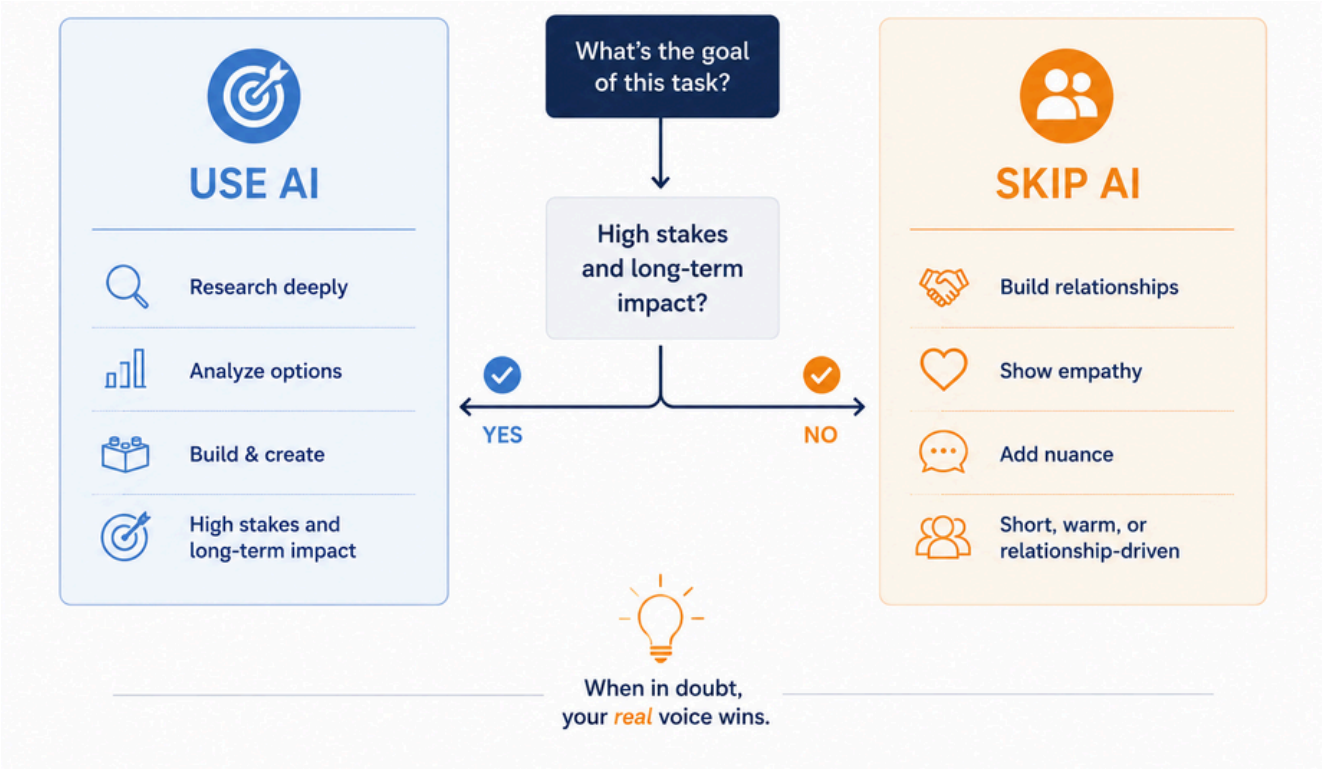
Use search-augmented modes (Claude with web search on, Perplexity, ChatGPT search) for anything current. Funding, headcount, news. Pure chat memory is wrong about the present often enough to ruin you.

> *If you can't verify the fact in 60 seconds, don't put it in the email.*

06 THE RESTRAINT MOVE

When AI is *overkill*

Knowing when not to use AI is a senior-level signal. Speed & warmth beat polish in plenty of moments.



IN GREATER DETAIL -

Use AI

Tailoring resume bullets to a JD

Researching a company before an interview

Mock interviews and answer drafting

Generating multiple positioning angles

Drafting a long cover letter

Building artifacts (decks, dashboards, plans)

Weighing offers (Think mode)

Skip AI

Three-line follow-up emails

Recruiter intro DMs on LinkedIn

Networking thank-you notes

The opening line of a cover letter

Founder-to-founder, peer-to-peer notes

Anything where speed beats polish

Quick "yes I'm still interested" replies

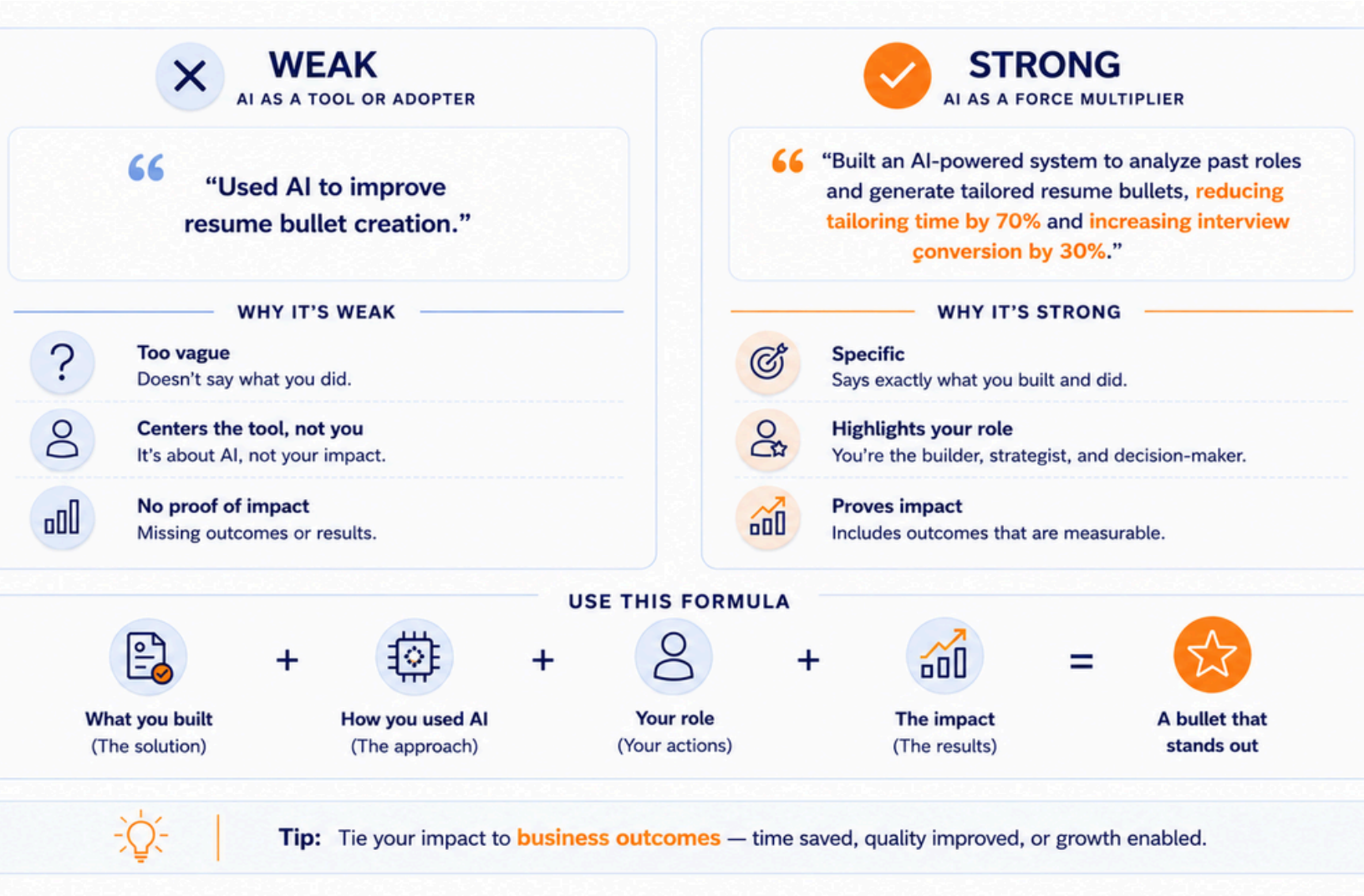
07 THE DOCUMENT RESET

Resume & cover letter, *rebuilt*

AI handles. Parsing the JD for top priorities. Mining your past roles for matching evidence. Generating three resume bullet variants per role. Finding keyword gaps. Suggesting structure.

Humans handle. The opening line of a cover letter. The specific anecdote that proves the bullet. The closing paragraph. The part where you say why *this* company and not just any company.

The new "AI in Action" bullet. Outcome-specific, verifiable, ideally tied to an artifact you can show. Not "used AI to be more efficient." Try this instead.



08 YOUR OPERATING SYSTEM

The tracking *system*

Job searches stall not because of skill but because of dropped balls. Build the system once, then run it.

The pipeline. A single tracker. Spreadsheet, Notion, or a custom artifact. Columns for company, role, stage, last touch, next action, source, and one-line "why this role." Every Friday, review and prune.

The dossier. Per active role, a one-page brief with company summary, recent news, interviewer LinkedIn snapshots, their stated priorities, and three thoughtful questions you'd ask. Generate with AI, verify with sources, review before each conversation.

The cadence. Follow up at day 3, day 8, and day 15 if you haven't heard back. AI drafts. You send. Short, specific, no apology.

> *Most job search advice is tactics. The win is having a system that runs whether or not you feel like running today.*

THE FOLLOW-UP CADENCE



AI drafts each one. You send. Short, specific, no apology.

08 CONTINUED - BUILD IT IN COWORK

How to build the tracking system in *Cowork*

Install. Cowork is a mode in the Claude desktop app. Get the app free at claude.ai/download (Mac or Windows). Open Claude, click the icon top right, switch to Cowork. The Pro plan or higher unlocks scheduled tasks, which the system needs to run on its own.

Access. Make a folder on your desktop called "Job Search." Drop in your master resume and a one-pager named value_props.md with your top 5 talking points. In Cowork, click the folder icon and grant access to that folder. Cowork can now read, edit, and create files in there.

The prompt. Paste the setup prompt below into Cowork. It does four things back-to-back: builds tracker.xlsx with the right columns, creates a live dashboard artifact you bookmark, schedules a 7am daily follow-up draft, and a Friday 3pm pipeline review. About five minutes. You watch it build.

> *You're my job search operating system. In my Job Search folder, build: (1) tracker.xlsx with columns Company, Role, Stage, Applied Date, Last Touch, Next Action, Source, Why This Role, Notes. (2) A dashboard artifact reading from tracker.xlsx showing today's follow-ups, this week's interviews, stale apps (7+ days), and pipeline counts. (3) A 7am daily scheduled task drafting follow-ups for stale apps. (4) A Friday 3pm task reviewing my pipeline and flagging the top 3 actions. Build each piece, show me as you go.*

09 WHERE TO ACTUALLY LEARN THIS

Free courses worth *your time*

You don't need a paid bootcamp. The strongest AI training right now is free, self-paced, and comes with a certificate you can put on LinkedIn.

AI Fluency: Framework & Foundations FREE

START HERE

Anthropic Academy's core course. Teaches the 4D framework (Delegation, Description, Discernment, Diligence) for working with any AI, not just Claude. Under 5 hours. *anthropic.skilljar.com*

AI Fluency for Students FREE

CAREER PLANNING

The one explicitly built around career **planning and professional skill-building**. Co-developed with university professors. Great even if you're not a student. *anthropic.skilljar.com/ai-fluency-for-students*

Claude 101 FREE

QUICK WIN

Practical everyday workflows. Writing, summarizing, brainstorming. The fastest way to go from "I've tried it" to "I actually use it." Short and hands-on.

Introduction to Claude Cowork FREE

FOR NON-CODERS

Automating file and task management without writing code. Useful if your work lives in documents, spreadsheets, and to-do lists. Which is most of us.

Worth knowing. Certificates are issued through Anthropic and add directly to LinkedIn. They carry more signal than a generic course badge because they come from the company that builds the model. And a 2025 World Economic Forum analysis found AI-literate workers command meaningful salary premiums over peers with the same experience.

10 THE ONE-LINE SUMMARY

If you remember *one thing*

In 2026, AI is the floor. Judgment, experience, and the artifacts you build on top of it are the ceiling.



That's the playbook. The rest is execution.

PROMPT Mama

— For more —

Built for parents and *professionals* figuring out AI in real time.

I'm Lauren Howard. Mom, tech leader, founder, and your guide to making AI actually work for your busy life.

If this landed, there's a lot more where it came from.

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