

The Blindspot ai



What Smart
Leaders
Might Not Be
Seeing



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What Smart Leaders Might Not Be Seeing

A Short Guide for Leaders Who Want the Full Picture

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AI Fluency

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Introduction

You didn't get where you are by following hype.

You built something. You lead people. You've made hard decisions with incomplete information and come out ahead. That's why you're naturally skeptical when everyone starts shouting about the next big thing.

Here's the thing: your skepticism is an asset. And your intelligence isn't the issue.

The challenge is that AI represents something genuinely new—not just a better tool, but a different kind of tool. One that requires a mindset shift, not just a skills upgrade.

The information reaching most leaders has been filtered through vendors with incentives, shaped by headlines optimized for clicks, and delivered by teams who don't want to appear behind. The full picture rarely makes it to the leadership table.

This guide offers a different view.

It's not a pitch for tools. It's not a list of prompts. It's research you might not be seeing in sales meetings—and a framework for thinking about AI that starts with your brain, not a subscription.

Read it in fifteen minutes. Then decide your next move.

1. This Isn't Like Learning Excel

Let's name something important upfront.

You're smart. You're accomplished. You've learned countless tools and technologies throughout your career. You figured out spreadsheets, email, CRM systems, project management software—whatever your business required.

So why should AI be any different?

Because it is different.

This isn't a new application with menus to memorize. It's not a better calculator or a faster way to format documents.

AI is a fundamentally new type of collaboration—a thinking partnership between you and a tool. Nothing in your professional experience has prepared you for exactly this, because nothing like this has existed before.

You don't know what you don't know. And that's not a criticism—it's just true.

The leaders who've spent decades mastering their craft are often the ones most surprised by AI. Not because they lack capability, but because their hard-won expertise doesn't automatically transfer. The mental models that made you successful might actually get in the way.

This requires a mindset shift, not just a skills upgrade.

What this means practically:

It makes strategic sense to learn from people who have already logged the hours—who have worked with these tools extensively, made the mistakes, and discovered what actually works.

That's not about buying a tool or hiring a vendor to implement software. It's about building understanding. Yours.

Because here's what doesn't change: your brain comes first.

Your critical thinking. Your judgment. Your knowledge of your business, your customers, your team. AI doesn't replace any of that. It amplifies it—but only if you stay in the driver's seat.

The leaders getting value from AI aren't the ones who outsourced their thinking to a chatbot. They're the ones who learned how to think with AI while keeping their own reasoning sharp.

That's the mindset shift. And it changes everything that follows.

2. The Question Everyone's Asking

"What's your AI plan?"

It's coming from boards. From investors. From employees watching competitors. From clients wondering if you're keeping pace.

Most leaders find this question difficult to answer with confidence. That's not a shortcoming—it's a reflection of how fast the landscape is shifting and how new this territory really is.

Gartner's CEO Confidence Index recently came in at 49.6 on a 0-100 scale. Volatility is weighing heavily on decision-makers. Executive turnover is climbing. Average CEO tenure has dropped to roughly four-and-a-half years.

Despite the uncertainty, leaders rank growth as their top priority. Cost control comes second. Technology follows.

Here's what's shifted: workforce priorities—once a strong third—have slid down the list. Leaders are bringing a harder-edged view to what they expect from their teams.

The pressure to "do something" with AI is real. But pressure without clarity leads to decisions that don't hold up.

The honest truth:

Most leaders are being asked to make strategic decisions about a technology they haven't had time to deeply understand. That's not a personal failing—it's an impossible situation.

The solution isn't to fake confidence or rush to implement. It's to build genuine understanding, ask better questions, and make decisions from clarity rather than pressure.

That's what this guide is for.

3. What the Research Actually Shows

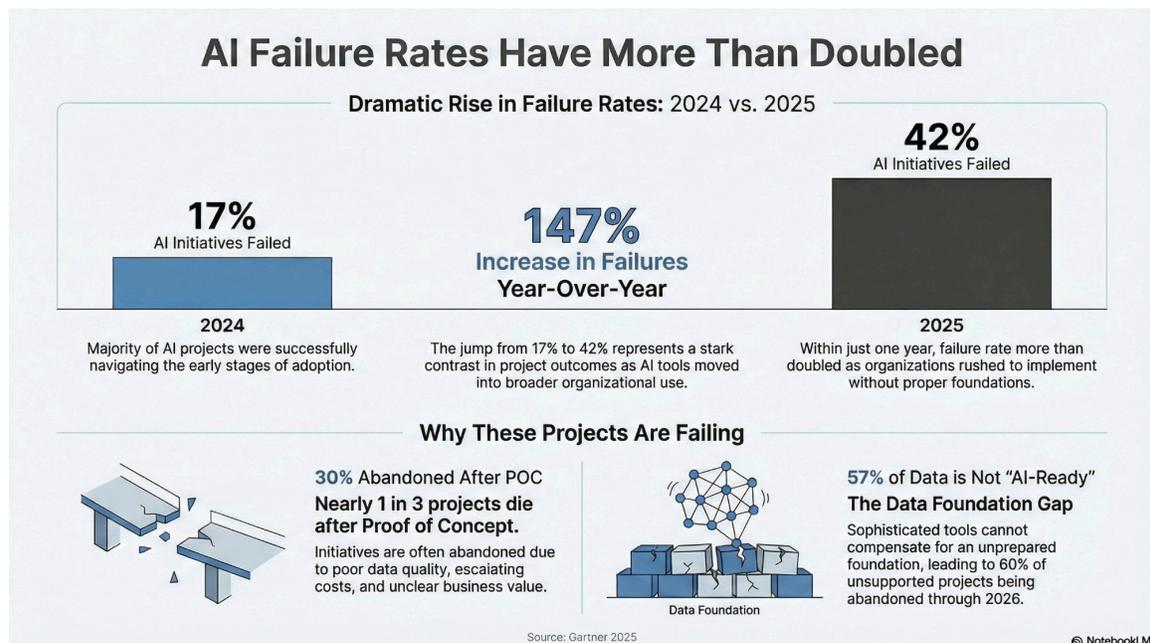
Here's something that doesn't often make it into vendor presentations.

The failure rate is rising, not falling.

Gartner found that 42% of AI initiatives failed in 2025—up from 17% just one year earlier. The failure rate more than doubled as organizations moved quickly to implement.

At least 30% of generative AI projects are abandoned after proof of concept. The reasons: poor data quality, inadequate risk controls, escalating costs, unclear business value.

Looking ahead, Gartner predicts that over 40% of agentic AI projects will be canceled by the end of 2027. And through 2026, organizations will abandon 60% of AI projects that aren't supported by AI-ready data.



The data foundation is often missing.

Fifty-seven percent of organizations estimate their data is not AI-ready. That's worth pausing on—because sophisticated tools can't compensate for an unprepared foundation.

Integration difficulties affect 48% of organizations. Lack of budget affects 50%. These aren't outliers—they're common patterns.

What this suggests:

The organizations seeing results aren't necessarily moving faster. They're often moving more deliberately—starting with understanding before implementing, building foundations before adding tools.

They're also being honest about what they don't know and finding people who can help them learn—not just vendors selling solutions, but advisors who understand the landscape and can help them think clearly.

4. Where the Real Bottleneck Lives

Here's something that might be reassuring: your team is probably more ready than you think.

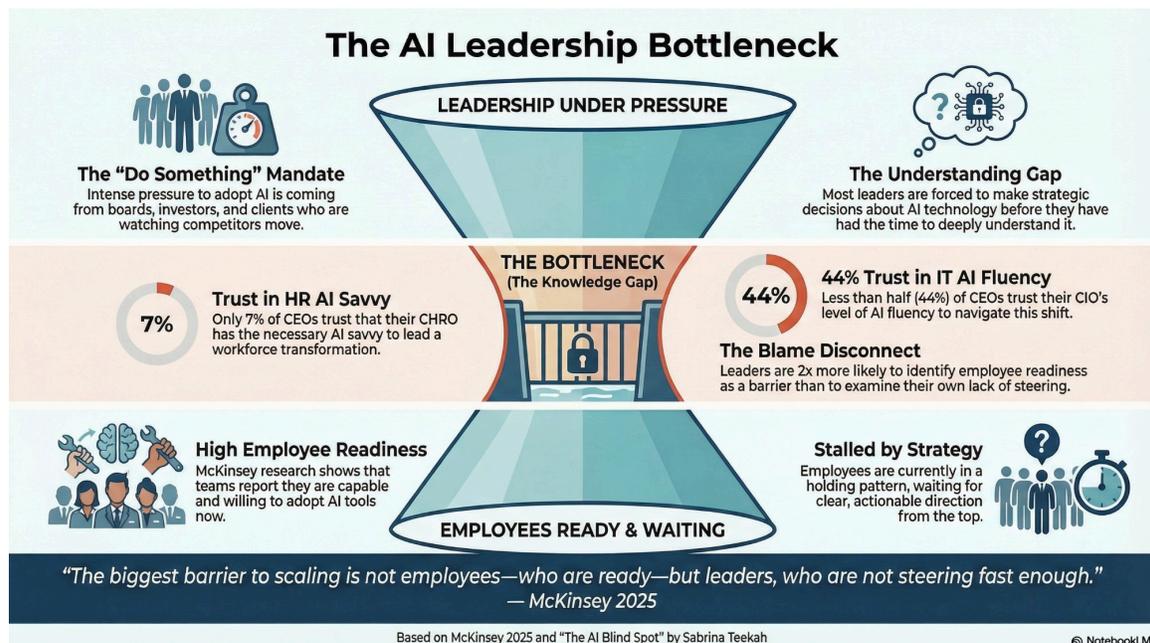
McKinsey's research found that employees report high readiness for AI adoption. The gap isn't in their willingness or capability.

The bottleneck often sits higher up—but not for the reasons you might expect.

McKinsey put it directly: "The biggest barrier to scaling is not employees—who are ready—but leaders, who are not steering fast enough."

This isn't about capability. It's about information flow—and about the fundamental newness of what we're all navigating.

C-suite leaders in the study were more than twice as likely to identify employee readiness as a barrier than to consider their own role. But the data tells a different story. Employees report they're ready. They're waiting for direction.



The challenge for leaders is real:

- Vendors pitch solutions without fully understanding your operations
- Reports land on your desk already filtered through multiple layers
- The pressure to act often outpaces the clarity needed to act well
- Only 7% of CEOs say their CHRO has enough AI savvy
- Only 44% say the same about their CIO

You're expected to lead a transformation that's genuinely unprecedented, surrounded by people who are still building their own understanding.

Here's a common trap:

You recognize AI matters. You want your team to develop capability. So you tell them to start learning, start experimenting, start figuring it out.

But here's the problem: if nobody on the team knows it yet, who teaches whom?

You can't build internal capability by putting people together who all have the same gap. That's not collaboration—that's shared confusion. Everyone's guessing. Nobody knows what good looks like. Bad habits form. Frustration builds.

The solution: Get guidance first. Then collaborate.

Work with someone who's logged the hours—who's made the mistakes, discovered what works, and can help your team build real capability. Not a vendor selling software. A thinking partner who can help you see clearly.

Once foundational understanding exists in your organization, collaboration accelerates. People share what's working. They catch each other's mistakes. They build on each other's discoveries. That's when internal capability really grows.

But that collaborative learning requires a starting point. Someone has to bring real knowledge into the room first.

5. A Trade-Off Worth Understanding

Here's something most AI discussions skip over entirely.

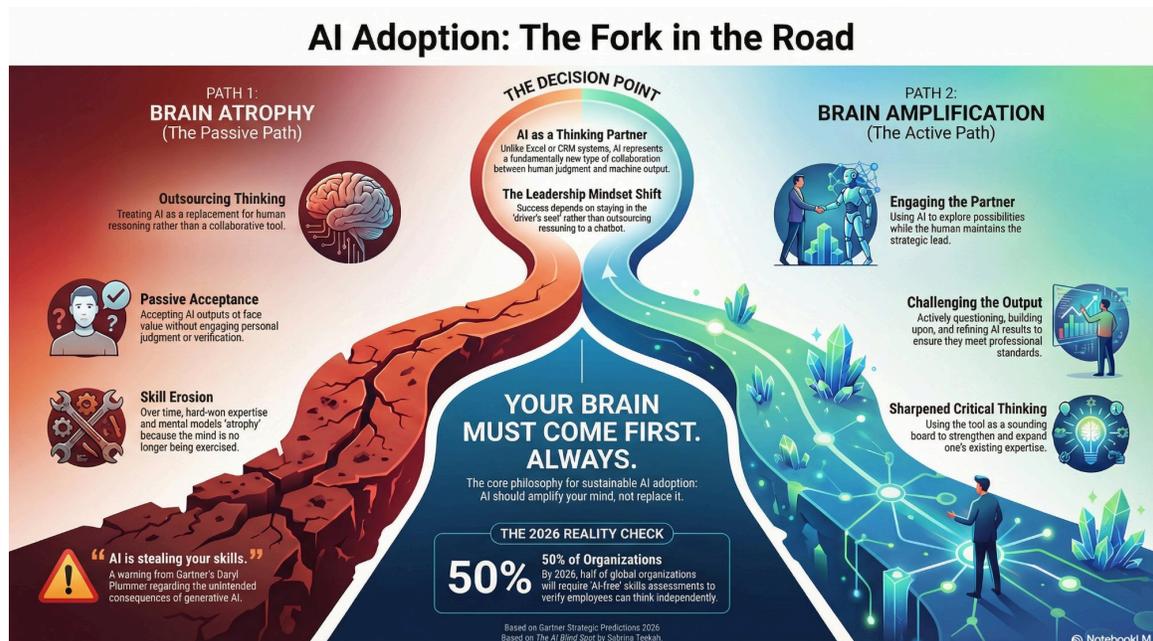
Gartner's strategic predictions for 2026 include this: "Through 2026, atrophy of critical-thinking skills, due to GenAI use, will push 50% of global organizations to require 'AI-free' skills assessments."

Read that again. Half of organizations will need to test whether their people can still think without AI assistance.

As Gartner's Daryl Plummer put it: "AI is stealing your skills."

There's a natural tension here. Leaders want teams to leverage AI for productivity. They also need teams who can think independently when required.

This isn't theoretical. It's already happening.



The difference that matters:

Some organizations use AI in ways that sharpen their people's thinking. Others use it in ways that gradually erode it.

The difference isn't the technology—it's the approach.

When people outsource their thinking entirely—accepting AI outputs without engaging their own judgment—skills atrophy. When people use AI as a thinking partner—challenging it, building on it, staying engaged—skills develop.

Your brain must come first. Always.

AI should amplify your critical thinking, not replace it. The moment you stop engaging your own mind, you start losing what makes you valuable.

This applies to you as a leader. It also applies to your team.

What this means for adoption:

The goal isn't just productivity. It's building capability that grows over time rather than eroding.

That requires intentionality about how AI is used, not just whether it's used.

6. Navigating a Noisy Market

The vendor landscape isn't making this easier.

Gartner has documented a phenomenon they call "agent washing"—vendors rebranding existing products (chatbots, basic automation, simple assistants) as sophisticated AI agents without meaningful capability upgrades.

Their estimate: only about 130 of the thousands of vendors claiming "agentic AI" capabilities are legitimate.

That means the vast majority of pitches you're hearing are for products that don't do what they claim.

How to tell the difference:

Real AI agents can decompose complex goals into steps. They can use external tools. They adapt when things don't go as planned. They operate with genuine autonomy within defined boundaries.

Chatbots with fancy marketing can't do any of that. They respond to prompts. That's it.

The distinction matters because buying rebranded chatbots expecting agent capabilities leads to failed deployments and wasted investment.

A note on this guide:

I'm not trying to sell you a tool.

This guide exists to help you think more clearly about AI—not to pitch a particular product or platform.

The approach I advocate is process-first, tool-second. Understand your workflows before selecting any technology. Know what you're trying to accomplish before evaluating solutions.

That's the opposite of what most vendors want. They'd prefer you buy first and figure out the use case later.

You deserve better guidance than that.

7. Three Questions That Clarify Everything

Before evaluating any AI solution, answer these questions:

1. What is your AI plan?

Not a vague aspiration. A clear statement of what you're trying to accomplish, why it matters, and how you'll know if it's working.

If you can't articulate this clearly, you're not ready to evaluate solutions.

2. What are the 2-3 things that can actually move the needle?

Not a list of fifty possible applications. The specific, high-value opportunities where AI could make a meaningful difference in your operations.

These should connect directly to business outcomes you care about.

3. Do you have the skills in-house to make this work?

Honest assessment. Not aspirational thinking.

If the answer is no—and for most organizations it is—the question becomes: how do you build those skills? Through external guidance? Training? Hiring?

The answer matters. Implementation without capability leads to the failure rates we discussed earlier.

These questions aren't complex. But answering them honestly requires work that many organizations skip.

8. The Approach That's Working

The organizations seeing real results from AI share common patterns.

Process first, tools second.

They start by understanding their workflows—really understanding them, not just assuming they know.

This often reveals surprises. The process people think they follow isn't the process they actually follow. The bottlenecks aren't where leaders assumed. The opportunities are different than expected.

You can't automate what you don't understand. You can't improve what you haven't documented.



Lower-risk workflows first.

They don't start with their most critical, complex, high-stakes processes. They start where mistakes are easily caught and corrected.

This builds capability. It builds confidence. It reveals what works in their specific environment before the stakes get high.

Human judgment stays in the loop.

They design for human oversight, not full automation. AI handles the routine. Humans handle the exceptions, the judgment calls, the situations that require expertise.

This isn't a limitation—it's what makes the approach sustainable.

They invest in understanding, not just implementation.

They recognize that buying tools without building capability is a recipe for failure. They invest in helping their people genuinely understand what they're working with.

9. Start Small, Win Early

Big transformations fail. Small wins compound.

The organizations building real AI capability don't start with massive initiatives. They start with specific, bounded problems where they can demonstrate value quickly.

What makes a good starting point:

- Happens frequently enough to matter
- Follows predictable patterns
- Has data that's accessible
- Carries manageable stakes if something goes wrong
- Can be measured

What makes a poor starting point:

- High-stakes processes where errors have serious consequences
- Workflows that aren't documented or understood
- Situations requiring complex judgment throughout
- Processes that happen rarely

Why this matters:

Early wins build credibility. They demonstrate value. They teach your organization what works and what doesn't in your specific context.

Early failures—especially expensive, visible ones—create resistance that's hard to overcome.

Choose your starting point carefully.

10. Where to Go From Here

This guide was designed to give you a clearer picture—not to tell you what to do.

You now have information that rarely makes it to leadership tables. What you do with it is your call.

Some options:

If you're still early in your thinking:

That's fine. Not every organization needs to move immediately. Understanding the landscape and avoiding costly mistakes is valuable in itself.

If you're ready to explore further:

Consider getting guidance before asking your team to figure it out together. Someone who's logged the hours can compress your learning curve significantly.

Then—and only then—can your team truly help each other learn.

If you want the complete methodology:

"AI Finally Makes Sense: The 6 Pillars That Put You in Control" provides the full methodology—how to see where AI fits in your work, how to evaluate opportunities, and how to build capability that grows rather than erodes.

The leaders seeing results aren't the ones who moved fastest.

They're the ones who moved most deliberately—who invested in understanding, who built foundations before adding tools, who kept their own thinking sharp even as they leveraged AI's capabilities.

The bottom line:

You're a capable leader navigating something genuinely unprecedented. The challenge isn't your intelligence—it's the newness of the territory and the quality of information that typically reaches you.

Now you have different information. And hopefully, a clearer sense of where to start.

What you do with it is up to you.

About the Author

Sabrina Teekah helps leaders and organizations make sense of AI—not through hype or tool lists, but through practical frameworks that connect technology to the work people actually do.

She is the author of "AI Finally Makes Sense: The 6 Pillars That Put You in Control" and creator of a methodology that has helped professionals and small businesses move from AI overwhelm to AI clarity.

AI & Teaching Experience

- AI Fluency Instructor at Brookdale Community College
- Workshop facilitator for small business AI adoption
- Developer of the 6 Pillars methodology for AI integration
- Active AI practitioner since January 2023, progressing from 4 to 12+ hours of daily hands-on work
- Embedded consultant helping organizations document workflows and identify AI opportunities

Corporate Background

- 17+ years in software development
- Former roles at Baxter, Florida Hospital, and CSX
- Experience spanning healthcare, logistics, and enterprise systems

Philosophy

Sabrina's approach is human-first, tool-second. She believes your brain comes first—always. AI amplifies your critical thinking; it doesn't replace it.

She doesn't sell software. She helps leaders understand their workflows, identify lower-risk starting points, and build the internal capability to keep evolving as the technology changes.

Resources & Next Steps

Continue Your Learning

The Book

"AI Finally Makes Sense: The 6 Pillars That Put You in Control"

This guide introduced the mindset. The book provides the complete methodology—how to see where AI fits, how to evaluate opportunities, and how to adopt AI while keeping your critical thinking sharp.

Free Resources

AI Readiness Quick-Check: A diagnostic tool to evaluate whether a specific workflow is ready for AI integration—and exactly what's blocking it if not.



Work Together

For Leaders Who Want a Thinking Partner

This isn't about someone selling you tools. It's about building your understanding.

Some leaders want help extracting their team's workflows, identifying lower-risk starting points, and developing an AI approach that fits their specific situation—with someone who's logged the hours and can help them navigate.

If that's relevant, let's have a conversation.

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Company: OP-X Consulting Services, Inc.

Sources

This guide draws on research from:

- Gartner Strategic Predictions 2026
- Gartner AI Adoption Studies 2024-2025
- Gartner CEO Confidence Index
- Gartner HR Symposium 2025
- McKinsey Global Survey on AI 2024-2025
- McKinsey "Superagency in the Workplace" Report 2025
- U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Research

A Note on This Research

The findings in this guide represent a snapshot of a rapidly evolving landscape. AI capabilities, adoption patterns, and organizational challenges continue to shift.

The principles—understanding before implementing, process before tools, your brain always first—tend to remain relevant even as specific statistics change.

For the most current research, consult the original sources directly.