



**THE AI/ROBOT
DISRUPTION
WILL OFFER A
UNIQUE CHANCE
TO RADICALLY
RETHINK OUR
ASSUMPTIONS
ABOUT WORK,
INCOME, AND
INDIVIDUAL
PURPOSE**

HOPE IN THE AGE OF AUTONOMOUS EVERYTHING

BY JOE TANKERSLEY

THE AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE PULLED UP IN FRONT OF THE GRAND ENTRANCE OF THE IROBOT SALES CENTER. EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD HOPE LOPEZ BOUNDED OUT OF THE CAR AND RAN TOWARD THE ENTRANCE, LEAVING HER PARENTS BEHIND. AS SHE REACHED THE GLASS DOUBLE DOORS A BIPED ROBOT USHERED HER INSIDE WITH A FORMAL FLOURISH.

The gigantic showroom floor was filled with robots of all sizes, shapes, and functions. There were care robots designed to look vaguely human, big and beefy construction bots that were all machine, and a whole collection of tiny delicate flying robots that performed tasks ranging from micro-surgery to surveillance.

It was not Hope's first visit. Like all her friends she had come before to marvel at the collection and dream about which robot would one day be her first. Now that day had come. After twelve years spent learning how to collaborate with humans and machines, developing her creative skills (Hope was a multi-media storyteller) and contributing to community projects, she was here to collect her graduation dividend.

Like everyone who graduated in 2040, Hope was given credit to purchase her first commercial robot. Unlike her grandparents, Hope would never have a "job." Instead, she would own the means to create her income. With that first robot those earnings might be small, but over time she could grow her fleet of workers and build a comfortable lifestyle. Most importantly, while her robots toiled, she would have the time to pursue her many other passions and contribute her unique talents to the community.

Before you dismiss this little scenario as optimistic science fiction, remember that just a few years ago the idea of having a personal smart agent in your home that you could talk to was considered far-out fantasy. It is impossible to predict what our autonomous future will look like, but we can expect robots and artificial intelligence to do more and more of the work traditionally reserved for humans.

Many people fear that future. They see it in terms of more vs. less. More robots equal less jobs, less incomes, less opportunities for humans. That view misses the real significance of this coming disruption. The age of AI will be as different from the industrial age as that time was from the agrarian age it replaced. Just as that earlier technological revolution created an entirely new kind of economy, robotization will challenge many of our industrial

age assumptions.

Chief among these will be the division between those who own the means of production and those who labor. In a world where labor is outsourced to robots and software, and where the cost of producing those tools continues to fall, that division will seem artificial. Why not solve the looming problem of no jobs by transforming workers into owners? Why not open the doors for everyone to own the new means of production?

Creating this alternative future will require more than just handing out free robots to high school graduates. But, faced with the inevitability of automation taking away jobs, we have to expand our imagination beyond the simple math of one for one replacement.

The AI/robot disruption will offer a unique chance to **radically** rethink our assumptions about work, income, and individual purpose. It is easy to envision a future where technology finally delivers on the promise of ending much of human drudgery. It shouldn't be much harder to imagine how we might use those same tools to create an economy that is more conducive to personal passion, community building, and an even more equitable sharing of wealth. Now, that is a story that gives me hope in the age of autonomous everything.

Joe Tankersley is a futurist, author and advocate for better tomorrows. His new book, *Reimagining Our Tomorrows; Making Sure Your Future Doesn't SUCK*, explores how digitally empowered entrepreneurs can create a sustainable, abundant, and just future.