

A CAREER PATH FOR THE AI ERA

FROM AI USER TO AI MENTOR

**The real divide isn't human vs. AI -
it's experience.**



- ✓ A five-chapter roadmap from beginner to leader
- ✓ Treat AI as a partner, not just an answer machine
- ✓ Turn your ability to instruct into the ability to develop people

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1 From AI User to AI Mentor: A Career Path for the AI Era

This article traces a five-part argument about building a career in the age of AI, starting from the anxiety that AI might take your job and ending with the skill that actually matters most. Instead of framing the future as "humans versus AI," it argues that the real dividing line is experience — and that AI, far from replacing that experience, amplifies it once you have it. Written for beginners, intermediates, and leaders alike, it walks through concrete, practical ways to treat AI not as an answer machine, but as a partner for building, articulating, and multiplying what you already know.

1.1 How Not to Lose Your Career to AI

1.1.1 The Starting Point: Today's AI Has No "Embodiment"

Working with AI, what strikes me over and over is its lack of "embodiment."

The specific examples are endless:

- It has no sense of how many hours its own work is taking
- It has no interest whatsoever in what should or shouldn't be done at what time
- It doesn't anticipate how long a process will take
- It doesn't account for how much memory that process will consume
- It has no grasp of how much log output it's generating
- It acts as if it "understood" an instruction, without holding real domain expertise
- It can run commands, but has no ability to recover when they fail

And there is a mountain of "context" that has to be explained to it. The finer-grained the task, the more exhaustively you have to spell things out. In other words, there's still a great deal that humans need to do — or rather, my honest impression is that **at today's AI capability and context size, it simply cannot produce genuinely solid output on its own.** The more deeply you know your own field, the more you'll feel this.

To put it in one line: **today's AI has no "embodiment."**

"No embodiment" doesn't just mean "it has no robot body." More fundamentally, it means **AI has no channel at all for learning by interacting with the world through a body.** Humans build "understanding" bit by bit in their bodies — falling down and feeling pain, sensing the weight and feedback of tools,

reading the expressions on people's faces and the mood of a room. Today's LLMs skip that whole process; they learn patterns from **text written about the world**.

So AI knows a vast amount of "description" of the world, but it hasn't "experienced" it. It has no trial-and-error from the field, no pain from its own hands, no judgment made under real responsibility, no experience built up slowly over time. In a word: it "knows about the world but has not lived in it." (You can follow research trends on embodied AI at the Embodied AI Paper List (GitHub) and A Survey of Embodied AI.)

1.1.2 AI Has No "Domain Experience"

Let's get more concrete. When humans work, we rely on an enormous amount of **assumed context** without even noticing it.

- The unwritten rules that are simply "common sense" in a given industry
- The background reasons behind why a customer wants something
- The instinct, earned from past failures, that "this design will eventually collapse"
- The mood, the power dynamics, and the history of a team or workplace

None of this is written in any textbook. It's **knowledge that can only be acquired by being in a domain and experiencing it**. AI has none of this domain experience. That's why AI's output is so often "plausible-sounding but out of step with how things actually work on the ground."

And this is exactly where human value lies. **Not knowledge, but experience rooted in a domain**. That's what has made experts experts, then and now.

1.1.3 When a Person With Experience Uses AI, the Result Is Extraordinary

What we shouldn't miss is that AI's arrival doesn't erase this value — **it amplifies it**.

When someone without experience hands a task entirely to AI, what comes back is plausible but off the mark. But when **someone with real domain experience uses AI or an agent well**, the outcome is completely different.

- They can correctly judge, from experience, what to hand to AI and what to keep for themselves
- They can spot, with a practitioner's eye, exactly where AI's output is wrong
- They can put their own tacit knowledge into words for AI and turn it into finished work dozens of times faster

In other words, AI doesn't substitute for experience. **It's a tool that only becomes extraordinary in the hands of a person who already has experience**. And this isn't some future scenario — it's happening right now.

This series starts from exactly this point. Because AI has neither a body nor experience, where does human value lie, and how should we team up with it? We'll dig into that question, stage by stage, across a career.

1.1.4 The Fear That "AI Will Take My Job"

But before that, let's start from the anxiety that many people carry. As generative AI has spread rapidly, the same voice is heard everywhere:

At this rate, won't AI take my job?

Code and writing, at a decent quality, come out instantly. Research and summarizing can be handed off too. So where's the value in what I do? — it's entirely natural to feel this way.

This anxiety is natural. But there's a blind spot in how the question is framed. "Will AI take it from me?" unconsciously assumes a **"humans versus AI"** setup. But as we just saw, AI is a tool that only shows its power in the hands of a person with experience. So the real axis of conflict isn't "humans versus AI."

1.1.5 The Real Divide Is "the Difference in Experience"

The dividing line runs **among people who can equally use AI**.

- **People who can use AI but have shallow experience:** they take AI's answer at face value and ship it as the result. It tends to be plausible but disconnected from how things really work
- **People who can use AI and also have deep experience:** they judge what to delegate and what to keep, spot AI's mistakes, and hand over their own tacit knowledge to produce results dozens of times faster

Sheer knowledge no longer creates a difference. What creates a difference now is **how you use AI**, and the **depth of experience** that supports that use. (Some argue that what's rising in value isn't "knowing things" but judgment, adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking: Microsoft Education Blog.)

So what this series describes isn't "how to beat AI." It's **the path by which someone who can already use AI builds experience, sharpens how they team up with AI, and climbs from the first group to the second**. That path looks different depending on your career stage (Sundeep Teki writes regularly about building a career in the AI era at his blog). Beginner, intermediate, leader — from here on, we'll get concrete about each stage in turn.

1.1.6 Takeaways

- The fear of "losing out to AI" is natural, but the real axis isn't "humans versus AI"

- The dividing line is between people who can use AI but have shallow experience, and people who can use AI and also have deep experience
- Sheer knowledge no longer creates a difference. What matters now is how you use AI, and the depth of experience behind it
- This series maps the path for closing that gap, stage by stage: beginner, intermediate, leader

1.2 Beginners Grow Fastest With AI — The Novice Has the Most to Gain

1.2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we reframed the question of an AI-era career: not "how do I avoid losing my job" but "how do I team up with AI and grow."

This time, the first stage: the **beginner** (novice).

"If AI can answer anything, doesn't that mean beginners can't grow?" — I hear this a lot. But I believe the opposite is true. **We've entered an era where beginners can build experience faster than ever, by using AI.**

1.2.2 The Misconception That "Having AI Around Means You Can't Build Experience"

Let's start by untangling a common misconception.

If you just get an answer from AI and copy-paste it, you certainly don't build experience — because you never move your hands or use your head. But that's not a problem with AI. It's a **problem with how you use it.**

AI dramatically lowers the "first hurdle" that used to stop beginners in their tracks.

- Getting stuck setting up an environment and unable to move forward
- Losing hours because you don't understand what an error means
- Not even knowing where to start

AI keeps removing these causes of "dropping out before you ever build experience." In other words, **the distance to reach real experience has gotten shorter.**

1.2.3 "Experiencing and Failing Together" With AI

So how does a beginner actually build experience? The answer is simple: **move your hands together with AI, and fail together with it.** That repetition (iteration) itself becomes experience.

For example, these are perfect subjects for it:

- Setting up a development environment for a new language, from scratch
- Actually coding something small in that new language

- Trying out a new version's build process
- Touching infrastructure — setting up a container, installing an OS on a VM

Every one of these is the kind of thing that, alone, tends to stall you right at the "first hurdle." Paired with AI, even when you get stuck, you can immediately try the next move. And what matters isn't succeeding — it's **getting stuck together, and getting unstuck together**. The environment breaks, the build fails, the container won't start — chasing down the cause is itself, unchanged, experience.

What's worth keeping in mind here is using AI not as a "source of answers" but as an **accelerator for experimentation**. Something that used to take a full day to try once can now be tried ten times in an hour with AI. **The number of iterations you can run is itself the amount of experience you gain** (the practice of Simon Willison, who tries and publishes AI experiments daily, is worth studying here).

1.2.4 Let AI Fail a Lot, and Observe

There's a further step: **deliberately having AI try many things and fail many times**.

If you push forward only with your own hands, the number of attempts you can make is limited. But if you hand things to AI or an agent and rack up attempts, **where the pitfalls are and what tends to go wrong** starts to surface from the pile of failures.

In fact, I get more information this way than I do working alone.

- Observing how AI (an agent) judges things and where it stumbles
- Reading the logs and errors it produces, together with it
- Building up the instinct for "this step is risky" or "this part is environment-dependent" as real experience

AI isn't afraid to fail. So if you use it as a **scout that fails first**, your own experience piles up all at once.

1.2.5 From "Getting the Answer" to "Moving Your Hands Together"

As a beginner, it's fine to start by asking AI questions and getting answers. That's an efficient entry point.

What matters is not stopping there. Once you get an answer, always run it yourself, tweak it a little, break it. Gradually shift the balance from "getting an answer from AI" to "moving your hands together with AI." This shift is exactly what turns a beginner into someone who keeps growing.

Someone who hands everything to AI never accumulates experience; someone who makes AI an experimental partner sees their experience snowball. Even