

T H E

OPENCLAW

PLAYBOOK

A Prompt-First Guide To Making
Your Agent Useful



Your agent gets smarter. So do you.

DENNIS STEINBERG

The OpenClaw Playbook

A Prompt-First Guide to Making Your Agent Useful

Dennis Steinberg

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Introduction: The Spiral

Imagine this.

You wake up on a Wednesday morning. Your agent has a message waiting. Short, no fluff:

“Rain until noon, clearing up by 3. You have two meetings today: standup at 9, then Lisa at 2 – last time you discussed the onboarding redesign, she was waiting on your mockups. Your meditation streak broke this week. I checked: the last three times this happened, your first meeting had shifted to 8:00 and the window disappeared. Tomorrow’s clear before 9. Want me to block it?”

You didn’t ask for any of this. Your agent connected your calendar, your habit tracker, and three weeks of pattern data to surface something you hadn’t noticed: it’s not your discipline that’s failing. It’s your Tuesday calendar eating your Wednesday mornings.

That’s just the start of this particular Wednesday.

At noon, a quiet note:

“Sleep has been under 6 hours for four nights. You’ve postponed five tasks this week and haven’t been outside since Monday. Six weeks ago looked the same – a free Friday morning and a long walk reset things. Want me to clear Friday before 10?”

Your agent didn’t wait for you to feel bad enough to act. It recognized a pattern it had seen before, and offered a solution that actually worked last time. Not generic advice. Your own history.

At 5 PM, a nudge before your dinner plans:

“You’re meeting Thomas tomorrow. Last time you talked about his job change – he was unsure. You wrote in your journal afterward that you want to listen more instead of giving advice. Also: sunny tomorrow, 20°C. The beer garden at the market square has tables.”

Your journal. Your reflection about yourself. Served back to you at the exact moment it matters.

This isn't science fiction. This is what Chapter 24 looks like. Right now, your agent probably answers when you ask, and forgets everything by tomorrow.

This book takes you from one reality to the other.

What Makes This Different

Every self-help book tells you *what* to do. Exercise more. Sleep better. Save money. Be more present. You already know this. The problem isn't motivation. It's visibility.

You can't see that your bad Wednesdays are caused by overloaded Tuesdays. You don't notice that you order food online after days with three or more meetings. You don't realize your journal entries get shorter in the same weeks your sleep deteriorates. These patterns are invisible to you because you're living inside them.

Your agent sees them. Not because it's smarter than you, but because it has all the data in one place: your calendar, your sleep, your tasks, your journal, your habits. And it never forgets.

What sets this apart from another book:

Data, not dogma. A book says "build better habits." Your agent says "your meditation works when your first meeting is at 9, and fails when it's at 8. Here's what changed this week." Your own data, applied to your own life.

Timing, not motivation. You know you should go for a run. But *when*? Your agent knows your calendar is clear at 5, the weather is good, and your energy tends to dip after 3 PM on days without movement. It doesn't lecture. It says: "Now would be good."

Connections you can't see. No sleep book knows your insomnia correlates with your Tuesday meeting load. No finance app notices you impulse-buy after stressful workdays. Your agent connects the dots across your entire life, because nothing is siloed.

This isn't a chatbot that answers questions. It becomes a partner that reads your logbook and holds you to your own words.

Why This Book

I've been a software developer for almost ten years. For the last two of those, I built AI platforms: chatbots, retrieval systems, the kind of tools that help companies answer customer questions faster. Useful work, but it always felt like scratching the surface.

When I found OpenClaw, I started building something different. Not an agent for work. An agent for *me*. One that knows my rhythms, watches my patterns, and nudges me when I'm about to repeat a mistake I've made before. Within a month, I had the first version of what this book teaches.

Most people use their agent like a better search engine. Question in, answer out. That's like buying a car and only using it to listen to the radio. An agent can understand your life, protect your time, spot your blind spots, and grow alongside you. But only if you set it up that way.

This book teaches that craft.

One more thing. Everyone will have an AI agent soon. The platforms are building them right now: agents that serve their business model, not your life. They'll keep you scrolling, keep you buying, keep you engaged. The question isn't whether you'll have an agent. It's who configures it. You, or someone else.

This book is about doing it yourself.

Author's Note. The Wednesday at the start of this introduction is real, mostly. I compressed a few weeks into one day. But the meditation insight actually happened. I had blamed my discipline for months. Turns out it was a scheduling problem. My agent showed me that by just looking at the data I already had. It didn't make me more disciplined. It showed me discipline wasn't the issue.

The Spiral

Think of a training partner at the gym.

Week one, they don't know you. They give generic advice. "Try running three times a week." It's fine, but it could be for anyone.

After a month, they've watched you. They know you skip Thursdays, do your best work on mornings after good sleep, and get discouraged by ambitious goals. "Let's move Thursday to Wednesday. And instead of 'run 10k,' let's start with 'run for 20 minutes.' You can always do more."

After three months, they know your patterns better than you do. They push back when you overcommit. They notice when you're burning out before you feel it. They remind you of things you said in January. "You told me you wanted to run a half marathon. At your current pace, we need to add a weekend long run. I found a free slot on Saturday morning."

Your agent becomes exactly this over the course of this book. A partner that grows with you.

This growth follows a pattern we call **the Spiral**:

1. You improve yourself.
2. Your agent understands you better.
3. It helps you make better decisions.
4. You grow.
5. That changes what you need from your agent.

Each turn builds on the last. It keeps going.

In more formal terms, you're building a Personal Decision Intelligence system. But we'll just call it the Spiral, because it's not a closed loop. It keeps going upward.

The book follows the Spiral's four turns:

Part I: Understand. You explain who you are. Your agent gets context about your life, your values, your data.

Part II: Automate. You hand over routines. Your agent starts saving you real time.

Part III: Decide. You define rules and boundaries. Your agent starts thinking ahead, nudging you at the right moments, flagging problems before they grow.

Part IV: Reflect. Your agent holds up a mirror. You see patterns you couldn't see before. You grow, and the Spiral turns again.



Principle: What works gets saved. Over time, your agent doesn't just react. It builds persistent rules from what worked. When a pattern proves useful ("after 3+ meeting days, suggest lighter evenings"), it becomes a stored rule, not something the agent re-discovers every time. Each insight becomes permanent infrastructure. That's how the Spiral compounds.

One thing to know: the Spiral only works if you're honest. Your agent has no skin in the game. It doesn't feel bad when its nudge was wrong. It doesn't get embarrassed by a lazy weekly review. *You* are the agent's accountability. Your feedback is the only consequence it faces. Stop being honest, and the whole system degrades.

And one gentle warning: an agent that only reflects your existing patterns back at you isn't helping you grow. It's building a comfortable cage. The Spiral includes experiments and surprises, not just optimization. We'll get there in Part IV.

Prompt-First: Why This Book Has No Code

Every chapter in this book works through prompts. No scripts, no configuration files, no programming. You tell your agent what you want. It builds the how.

Why? Because your setup is yours. Your tools, your calendar app, your note system, your fitness tracker. They're different from everyone else's. A prompt like "connect to my calendar and show me my week" works regardless of whether you use Google Calendar, Apple Calendar, or something else entirely. Your agent adapts.

But it goes further. In the early chapters, you prompt your agent. By the later chapters, your agent prompts *you*, asking the right questions at the right moments, nudging you toward decisions you'd otherwise avoid. You start as the teacher. You end as the student.

Every prompt in this book works with any model. With more capable models, you'll often get it right on the first try. With smaller models, you might need to rephrase or try twice. That's normal, not failure. The prompts are starting points, not magic spells. You don't need the most expensive model. Most of what this book teaches works with affordable options on OpenRouter or even free tiers. Bigger models are nice-to-have, not must-have. Chapter 4 covers token budgets in detail.

What You Need

A running OpenClaw setup. If you don't have one yet, the official docs walk you through it. This book picks up where the setup ends.

Basic comfort with a terminal. You don't need to be a developer, but you should be able to open a command line without flinching.

About 20 minutes per chapter to read, plus time to actually do the exercises with your agent. This is a hands-on book. Reading without doing is like reading about swimming.

And honesty. The exercises will ask you to articulate things about yourself you've probably never put into words. That's where the real value is.

How to Read This Book

Linear is recommended for your first read. Each chapter builds on the previous one, and the Spiral makes more sense when you experience it in order.

Modular works if you already have a running setup and want to jump to a specific topic. Each chapter lists what it assumes you've done before.

Iterative is how most people actually use it. Do Part I, live with it for a week, come back for Part II. The Spiral needs time between turns.

Conventions

You'll see these boxes throughout the book:



Principle. The timeless idea behind the chapter. True regardless of tools or setup.



Prompt. What to tell your agent. Use it verbatim or adapt it to your style.



Example Worlds. How each of the four personas applies this chapter.



Validation. How to know it's working.



Iteration. What to say when it's not.



Pitfall. Common mistakes and what to do instead.

Author's Note. Where I tell you what I tried, why it didn't work, and what I should have done instead. Mostly in that order.

Meet Your Fellow Travelers

Four people will walk through this book with you. They're fictional, but their problems are real. Each one shows how the same concepts apply to a different life.

Alex the Juggler. Freelance developer, three clients, works from home. His problem: focus. Context-switching is killing his deep work, and he's drowning in Slack channels. He wants an agent that protects his productive hours and keeps his clients from colliding.

Sam the Firefighter. Part-time job, two kids aged 7 and 4. Her problem: mental load. A thousand small things competing for the same few hours. She wants an agent that's proactive without being preachy. Help, not judgment.

Mira the Builder. Product manager by day, building her own SaaS product by night. Her problem: her day job keeps eating her side project. She wants an agent that protects her evening hours and keeps her momentum alive.

Jordan the Tracker. Wears a fitness watch, tracks sleep religiously, optimizes everything with data. Their problem: data without insight. Numbers everywhere, but no one connecting the dots. They want an agent that says “your HRV is low, skip the HIIT”, not “exercise is important.”

You’ll meet them in every chapter. They’re not you, but parts of them will feel familiar.

Let’s Begin

Whether your agent already knows a few things about you or starts completely from scratch, Chapter 1 gives it a real foundation. You’ll teach it who you are: your rhythms, your values, your boundaries, the things that make you *you*.

Twenty minutes from now, your agent will describe you back, and you’ll either smile because it nailed it, or you’ll realize how much work there is to do.

Either way, the Spiral starts turning.

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The rhythm

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Weather (after calendar)

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Tasks (after calendar, optionally after weather)

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Notes (after calendar and tasks)

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Social Media History (only after calendar, tasks, notes are stable)

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Fitness Data (only when you are ready to be corrected by data)

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3.4 Data Is Not Understanding

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Alex builds a Client Pulse Tracker

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What a good skill contains

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Read what your agent created

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What the other personas build

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The generic prompt

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Where custom skills live

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Chapter 6: The Morning Briefing

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