



The Human + AI Partnership:

**How to Empower Your People to
Create a Future-Ready Workforce**

FranklinCovey

AI Is Here... But Are Leaders Ready?



A recent FranklinCovey survey on AI in the workplace suggests that organizations—leaders and teams alike—are leaning in with enthusiasm but are struggling to find their footing. Our research shows that respondents, most of whom are in management roles, report feeling confident and even optimistic about the technology and their ability to use it effectively. But for leaders looking out across enterprises and engaging with teams, that confidence may be misplaced or premature.

Consider that 72% of survey respondents believe they know how to use AI better than most of their peers, with nearly 60% saying they and their organizations are deep into the adoption or innovation stages of integration. At the same time, [FranklinCovey Institute data](#) found that 36% of employees disagree that their manager reinforces the use of AI in daily work. Roughly 25% of workers say that expectations for AI use are unclear, while 42% report that AI best practices are not consistently shared. Only 9% say their managers have shared how AI will help the business grow.

When taken together, the data suggests that many leaders may be underestimating the breadth of the technology, the scale of the change, and even their own readiness to participate.

The data also suggests a major disconnect between leaders and their teams. The FranklinCovey Institute found that 70% of workers believe AI and technology are evolving faster than their cultures can adapt. FranklinCovey's AI General Attitudes Survey found that more than 70% of leaders say they clearly understand how their teams are using AI, yet 41% of individual contributors say their manager doesn't know how or if they're using AI in their roles. All told, **80% of employees** describe their manager's AI leadership as "hands-off," with nearly one in four respondents saying they feel overwhelmed by the technology and its implications for their job security.

Taken together, this intimates that the scalable and systemic adoption of AI may not be as within reach as the C-suite would like to believe.

All of this leaves leaders in a bind. They are working to integrate AI and empower their teams, but their impact doesn't match their intentions. Their organizations are caught up in the momentum of one of history's most transformative technologies. Hype and fear on one hand, and urgency and purpose on the other hand, remain in tension. The moment demands great leadership, but it isn't clear where a great leader should begin.

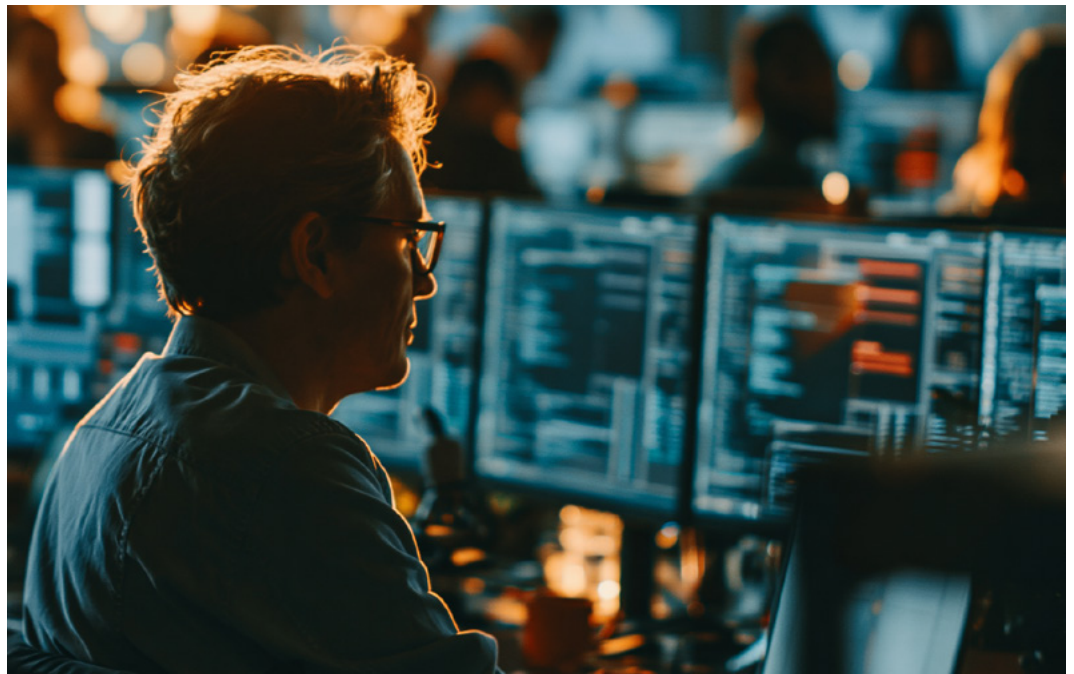
For all its promise, AI can fall short of our best intentions—and without strong leadership, it's likely to. [A much-discussed study](#) by MIT revealed that 95% of corporate generative AI pilot programs are failing to deliver business impact or return on investment. Additionally, a [July 2025 employment report](#) by Challenger, Gray & Christmas put layoffs at their highest pace since 2020, attributing approximately 16% of them specifically to AI. It's clear that hype alone isn't enough to secure widespread buy-in or desired outcomes.

Confronting AI's roiling implications and mixed messages, leaders can start by putting the new technology into perspective. The fear that workforces feel is the same reaction that has surfaced with so many other breakthrough technologies in history, whether the printing press or the steam engine or the internet: *This new technology is going to take my job.* But in each case, history ultimately told a different story. Each advance ended up multiplying human potential, creating entirely new industries and roles, and vastly increasing wealth and employment.

Generative AI is already headed in this direction. [PwC data](#) shows that productivity in AI-intensive industries has jumped from 7% to 27% since 2018, with workers earning a 56% wage premium and generating three

times more revenue per employee than peers in low-AI sectors. Studies from the [St. Louis Fed](#) and [OECD](#) find that AI saves time, boosts efficiency across tasks from writing to coding, and can add as much as 0.6 percentage points to annual labor-productivity growth. And despite fears of job loss, large-scale analyses by [Goldman Sachs](#) and [MIT Sloan](#) show that AI's impact is largely temporary, with new AI-enabled jobs and expanded output consistently outpacing short-term attrition.

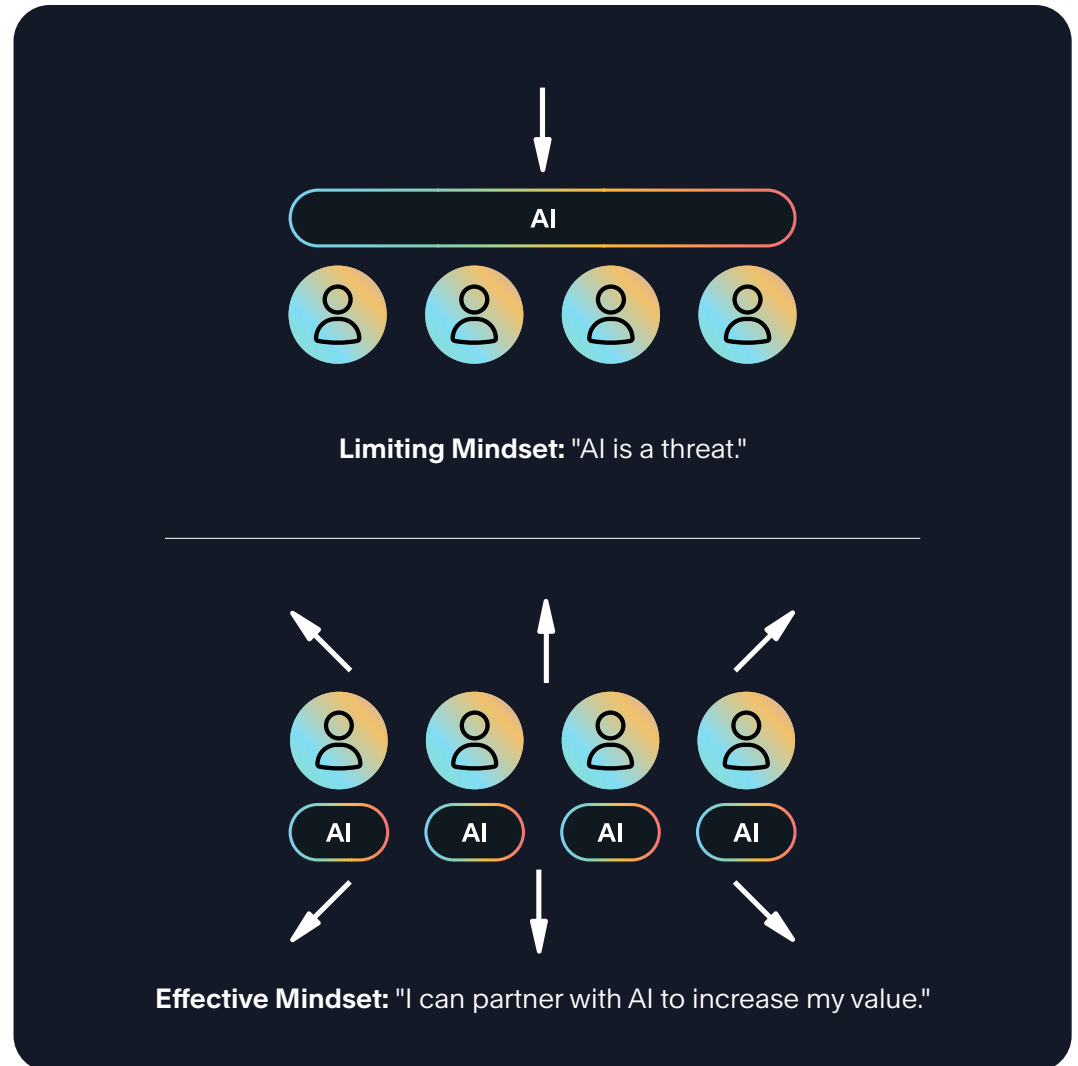
The risk that AI will devour everyone's jobs remains far lower than the risk that workers, or their leaders, will choose to ignore the new technology's potential. In fact, those who do so quite likely will be replaced—not by AI agents, but by other humans who know how to harness and use AI well.



Unleashing a Hybrid Intelligence

Both past and present teach us something we have long known: Complacency is not a strategy. The emergence of AI demands that every individual in the workplace shift their thinking from *AI is a threat* to the effective mindset: *I can partner with AI to increase my value*.

For leaders, the decision to embrace this mindset shift, and to invest in building a human + AI partnership, brings a particular responsibility. They must look beyond the angst and hype to actively create organizations and cultures that encourage all team members to make the leap from fear to value creation.



In confronting AI, leaders risk falling into three traps:

- 1. They “let it rip.”** Some leaders will be tempted to turn AI loose with minimal guardrails or guidance in the hope that great things will happen. Roughly 80% of the individual contributors in our survey said their managers encourage the use of AI without clear direction on implementation or best practices. Consider this the triumph of bravado or false fearlessness over informed engagement. At best, the outcome is confusion and inconsistency. At worst, teams will run headlong into the fray and put the organization at risk of a high-profile failure.
- 2. They fixate on cost savings.** Drawn by AI's promise to automate work and deliver major efficiencies, some leaders will center their AI strategy on cost savings. While that focus may be valid, and comfortably familiar, it risks creating new blind spots. In FranklinCovey's survey, 26% of employees said their manager expects AI to save them way more time than it actually does. Leaders who fixate solely on cost reduction will also miss the larger opportunity: engaging and empowering their teams, who will use the technology with or without guidance from leaders.
- 3. They act slowly or fail to act at all.** Some leaders may believe they can ignore AI or wait for the game to come to them. But without direction, employees will likely adopt AI in small doses anyway, while their frustration boils over. Talent will drift to organizations with visible strategies. The result will be chaos without even the transparency of a “let it rip” approach; experimentation will go underground as organizations are left behind.

Avoiding these traps requires more than settling on a “Goldilocks” option. In fact, no easy or obvious paths exists. AI calls for new thinking and new modes of action, executed and operationalized through activist leadership. Some will dismiss or attack this as micromanaging. But that misses the point: AI will reward those who grasp it with both hands. It will, in fact, catalyze the growth of a new generation of great leaders, who are ideally suited to the current moment. To seize the opportunity, leaders must first understand how value is created through a human + AI partnership—and, critically, what it means to build and harness a Hybrid Intelligence, where human wisdom and machine capability combine to unleash new and productive synergies.



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When you take what AI can bring and combine it with what's uniquely human, you get hybrid intelligence—a partnership that allows us to think better, make better decisions, and create greater things than either could alone.

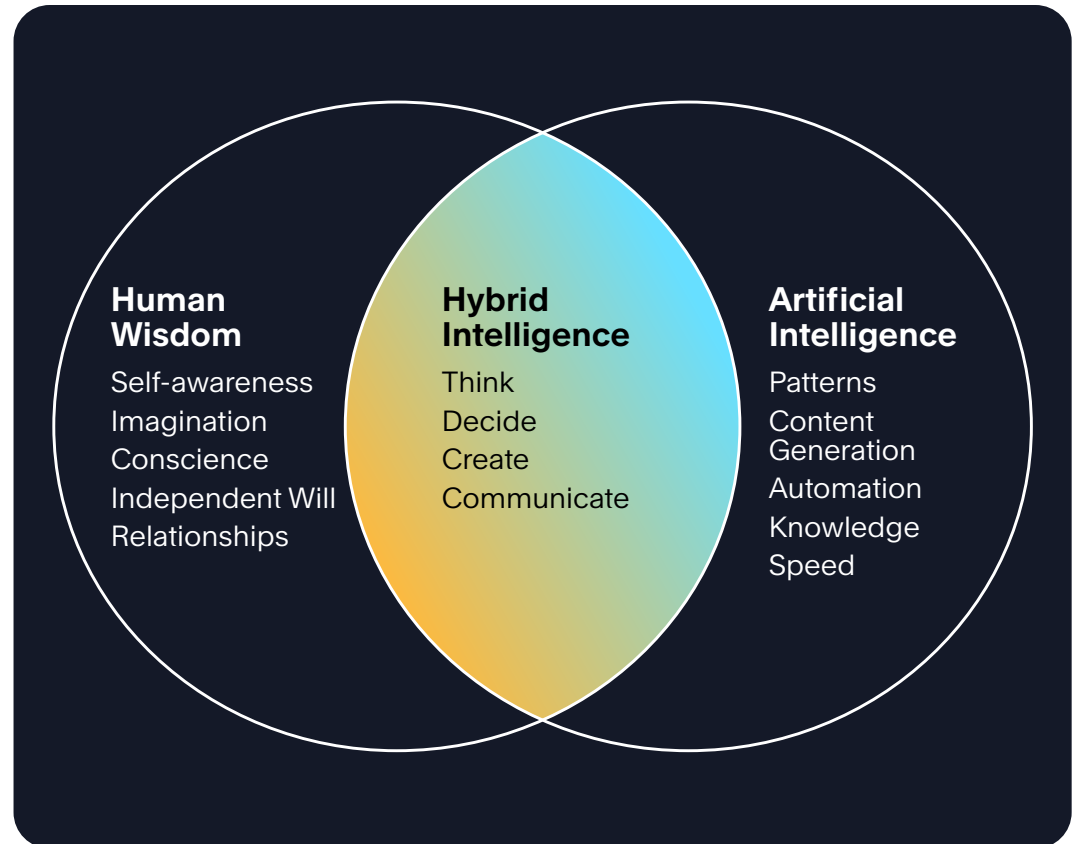
—Kory Kogon, Vice President of Content Development, FranklinCovey

Are We Bringing the Humans Along?

The most powerful antidote to fear is fostering a workplace where humans are elevated, establishing a clear, visible commitment to leverage this new Hybrid Intelligence and build a productive human + AI partnership. When leaders model that intention and make clear that people will not be left behind, they turn a source of dread into an engine of possibility. At every juncture in the AI journey, they need to ask themselves, *Am I bringing the humans along?*

Creating the human + AI partnership begins with understanding what each side brings to the equation. AI contributes pattern recognition, content generation, vast knowledge, automation, and extraordinary speed. Humans contribute what AI cannot: imagination and conscience, empathy and judgment, connection and inspiration.

It's important to notice the prominence of the five capabilities that separate humans from the animal world: self-awareness, conscience, independent will, imagination, and relationships. These enable us to see reality clearly, choose our direction, and align our lives with what truly matters.





Successful leaders will enable every team member to see that AI isn't in charge; **they are**. And moreover, by combining their human competencies with machine capabilities, they'll be able to make even better decisions, develop even better programs and products, and communicate with even greater impact. This change must happen from the bottom up, with every person at every level, empowered and enabled by their leaders to experiment, learn, and use AI to amplify their own contributions and value. Individual empowerment leads to team empowerment. And those efforts, in turn, aggregate upward to transform the entire organization. It becomes an organic engine of integrated human and AI capacities to create an organization that's more resilient, more capable, and more competitive.

This is the ultimate synergy—a deep creative collaboration whose sum, following **Habit 6** of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*®, is vastly greater than its individual parts. Partnered with AI, organizations have the adaptive capacity they need to thrive in an AI-driven future. Individuals begin to see that they have not been replaced, but that their fear has been replaced by increased agency and a new range of individual and collective competencies.

Best Practices for Leaders in the AI Era



Lead With Empathy and Action

Stay close to your team when it comes to AI, making it a priority line of inquiry in 1-on-1s and group settings. Model the use of AI yourself and share your experiences, demonstrating the behaviors you want to see. Kory Kogon explains it this way: “Leaders have to lead with empathy and action. You’ve got to put yourself in your team’s shoes—are they curious, cautious, afraid?—and then model the behavior you want to see.”

Try this now:

Identify one or more team members with whom you already have a strong, trust-based relationship. If you have not already done so, find time for informal but focused conversations with them about AI’s operational and cultural implications. If you have already broached the subject, make time to go deeper.

Ask yourself:

- Why have I delayed or limited purposeful discussion of AI at work? or Do I feel my conversations to date relating to AI have been useful?
- What about these conversations surprised me?
- What was the team member’s emotional response? How did the conversation make me feel?
- How do I extend the conversation to the rest of the organization?

Clarify the Game Plan

Be transparent about your organization's AI vision and strategy, communicating them in intentional ways that clarify their relevance to your mission. Candor is critical; leaders must distinguish the knowns from the still-unknowns. Address potential role changes or reductions, while emphasizing individual growth expectations and opportunities.

Try this now:

Take time away from your desk to put your vision on paper, sketching out where your organization is today, where it wants to be in three, five, and 10 years, and the role AI might play in enabling and accelerating its progress.

Ask yourself:

- How hard was this exercise? How surprising was it?
- How do I feel about my own understanding of and comfort level with AI?
- What steps can I take to close my knowledge gaps?
- What about the knowledge gaps within my team?





Establish Guardrails Early

Emphasizing that AI adoption is an iterative process, leaders must set clear, practical boundaries for employees to experiment without putting the company at risk. Leaders must include guidelines on proprietary data use, define cases in which human review is mandatory, and specify approved resources and tools, with rationales for both inclusions and exclusions.

Do this now:

If you haven't already done so, convene a standards working group of those best positioned to define and manage your AI tech stack and get to work establishing ownership, deliverables, and deadlines. Include leaders from technology, human resources, and finance, as well as enthusiasts and early adopters. (The latter will provide a critical reality check and help build the bottom-up ownership you're aiming to foster.)

Engage Consistently, Emphasizing Team Input

To unlock AI's potential, keep the conversation alive—both informally and in defined forums. Turn enthusiasts and early adopters into champions, inviting them to help influence the whole organization. Encourage teams to identify the most high-impact opportunities and give them room to experiment and share ideas without fear. Celebrate successes. Make clear that AI is an ongoing, collaborative effort rather than a top-down directive.

Try this now:

Before designing a cadence or expanding your outreach, evaluate your own performance. Candidly assess what's been driving your AI actions and communications to date. Consider the messages you've sent, and situations in which you chose to intervene or hang back. Score yourself against your preexisting belief about what makes an effective leader.

Ask yourself:

- To what degree have my actions on AI been driven by intention? To what degree have they been driven by avoidance?
- What negative outcomes concern me?
- To what degree has a desire for employee control been a driver of my action or inaction?





Embrace Training

While AI training has become more accessible, new FranklinCovey data from June 2026 suggests it's still not widespread: Only 35% of individual contributors say they've received useful AI training in the past month, and just 21% of individual contributors say their managers have coached them on how to use AI better. Data suggests that individuals who have received quality AI training are likelier to believe that their organization will become more innovative because of AI.

In setting up your training plan, remember that AI is a new and fast-changing capability with diverse applications. Your organization's pre existing comfort and competency levels might not be what you think they are. Seek outside perspectives on what's needed, tap the wisdom of your standards working group, and use 1-on-1s to surface real, in-the-trenches concerns.

Look Outward

Empowering your organization to broadly and deeply embrace AI doesn't preclude bringing in new talent with fresh perspectives and skills. Consider these hires as a gift to the existing team. Make sure everyone understands the value they add rather than seeing them as a threat. And note: To retain and attract AI talent, it's critical to have an intentional and achievable AI strategy that aligns with your company's mission and to purposefully create an environment where AI can thrive. When employees experience that kind of support, they're far less likely to leave for more AI-savvy organizations.

Future-Ready Leaders Must Seize the Moment

Artificial intelligence matters so much because it's changing the nature and pace of work in ways that few technologies ever have, and it's doing so at a scale and speed that affect every function and level of an organization. It is reshaping how we create value, demanding more of our talent and culture, and remove amplifying the need for great leaders.

Hope and fear, confidence and anxiety—these are all natural first responses. What matters more is what comes next. To advance from these emotions to a productive response, what we might even call a *generative* response, can happen only when we acknowledge the complexity of those emotions and the uncertainty that fuels them and recommit our organizations to agency.

By its nature, AI will become our teacher (just as we are its teacher). As we engage with it, AI will reveal things about who we are and how we work. It will expose whether our organizations' cultures develop people or merely deploy them. By making efficiency gains seemingly so easy to achieve, it will force us to go back and remember the uniquely human strengths our organizations couldn't possibly succeed without. It will teach us the new math of “Human + AI” to multiply future potentials and tap into ultimate synergies.

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For more on how you can effectively leverage the opportunities of AI across your organization with our new courses, [Leading AI Adoption: Accelerate AI Impact Through Empathy and Action](#) and [Working With AI: Essentials for Working Smarter Together](#), email us at info@franklincovey.com or visit franklincovey.com.

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