How I Use AI in My Consulting Practice

Why imagination, human connection,
and critical thinking still come first



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Almost daily, I find myself in conversations with friends and colleagues about artificial intelligence and how I'm using it in my consulting practice.

While I certainly don't begrudge anyone who uses AI to draft emails, summarize documents, or help manage everyday tasks, and I occasionally do those things myself, I've come to appreciate a different kind of relationship with technology.

I see AI as a thought partner and, sometimes, a sparring partner. I use it to challenge my thinking, explore possibilities, question assumptions, and consider perspectives I might not have arrived at on my own.

But what excites me most about AI is not how quickly it can produce something. It's what becomes possible when we bring our own imagination, curiosity, and intelligence into the conversation.

AI has expanded that sense of possibility.

Yet I also believe that without human imagination, discernment, and critical thinking, we risk limiting AI to a tool that simply produces more content, more quickly.

For me, that's not nearly as interesting as what we might discover when we use it to think more deeply.

CHAPTER ONE

My Relationship With Technology

Technology has been part of my professional journey for nearly three decades, but my relationship with it has evolved considerably over the years.

Beginning in the late 1990s, I had the opportunity to work as a consultant and project manager with several technology startups founded or led by graduates of MIT and Harvard Business School. I was surrounded by brilliant, imaginative people who saw possibilities in technology that I had never considered.

My late friend Lance Parker, a graduate of MIT Sloan, gave me a crash course in Unified Modeling Language (UML), while my beloved late friend Reg Mosely introduced me to the world of project management. Ken Granderson, an MIT alumnus and longtime friend, continues to inspire me and expand my understanding of what's possible through technology.

I'm deeply grateful for their friendship, generosity, and willingness to share their knowledge.

Looking back, I wasn't always so curious or adventurous when it came to technology. In fact, there was a time when I was hesitant to engage with things I didn't understand. I

sometimes allowed that uncertainty to hold me back.

But through the encouragement and guidance of these remarkable people, something began to shift. I became less intimidated by what I didn't know and more curious about what I might learn.

I began to appreciate that I didn't need to understand everything about a technology to begin exploring its possibilities. I could ask questions, experiment, make mistakes, and learn along the way.

That growing curiosity eventually led me to pursue a doctoral concentration in Media, Technology, and Innovation at Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara.

One of the things I appreciated most about my doctoral education was the commitment of the director of the Media, Technology, and Innovation program to fostering thoughtful conversations about emerging technologies. Long before artificial intelligence became part of everyday conversation, he organized panels that brought faculty and students together to explore its possibilities, including how organizational development consultants might use AI and other innovations to strengthen their work.

Today, I continue to approach technology with that same spirit of curiosity and experimentation.

I use AI in ways that extend my own capabilities, expand my imagination, and help bring ideas to life. I've used it to build websites and landing pages, generate code, create

interactive digital experiences, and explore and refine design concepts. I'm also learning how to integrate AI with other digital platforms to streamline business processes and improve how I manage my consulting practice.

In my professional work, I use AI to develop proposals, examine strategic alternatives, synthesize research, organize curricula, and design learning experiences. I've even used it to help develop a strategy for navigating my responsibilities as a trustee of an estate.

Through my philanthropic organization, the Sankofa Institute for Collective Wellbeing, we're developing an interactive learning management system (LMS) to expand access to addiction recovery and mental health education across Africa. We're exploring how AI can enhance the learning experience, support curriculum development, and help connect communities of learners across different regions.

What excites me most is the growing freedom to experiment with ideas that once required specialized technical skills, significant financial resources, or a team of consultants. I can now participate more directly in the creative and development process, testing possibilities and refining my ideas as I go.

And when I do engage other professionals, I value those who bring exceptional expertise, imagination, and judgment to the work, and who understand how to leverage AI without allowing it to replace their own thinking.

CHAPTER TWO

How I Use AI With My Clients

When I begin working with a client, I'm transparent about how I intend to use AI in our engagement.

I explain that I may use it to help organize information, explore alternative approaches, synthesize research, structure curricula, or refine materials. But I also make clear that AI will never replace the relationships, critical thinking, cultural understanding, and professional judgment that are essential to my work.

A current consulting engagement offers a good example.

I'm working with a Lakota mental health and addiction counseling organization in South Dakota to develop a culturally responsive peer recovery coach training curriculum.

From the beginning, I felt strongly that this work needed to be grounded in the values, traditions, and lived experiences of the Lakota people.

We began with original research. Not AI-generated summaries, but the kind of careful, old-fashioned research that requires reading, exploring, questioning, and developing an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the Lakota people.

I also invited a small circle of Lakota elders to meet with me weekly.

Our gatherings create space for the elders to share their stories, lived experiences, cultural values, and perspectives on recovery and healing.

These conversations have been among the most important parts of the process. In Lakota culture, oral traditions and storytelling have long played an essential role in preserving knowledge, sharing wisdom, and passing teachings from one generation to the next.

There is something profoundly important about taking the time to listen.

As a researcher and writer, I review the information we've gathered, identify recurring themes, consider the relationships between ideas, and begin organizing what we're learning.

Only after engaging in that process did I turn to AI.

I have used AI models to help synthesize the research and themes we've developed, explore possible curriculum structures, and consider how the material might be organized into a coherent learning experience.

But the foundation of the work comes from human relationships, original research, and the knowledge generously shared by the elders.

AI enters the process as a supporting resource, not as the source of cultural wisdom or authority.

And the responsibility for interpreting, evaluating, and shaping the final work remains with us.

I could have asked AI to generate an entire curriculum about Lakota culture in a fraction of the time.

But what would we have missed?

We would have missed the relationships. The conversations. The stories. The opportunity to understand the deeper meaning behind the values being shared.

And perhaps most importantly, we would have missed the opportunity to learn from the people whose knowledge and experiences should shape the work.

For me, the process is not simply a means to an outcome. The process is part of the work.

CHAPTER THREE

Why I Still Choose to Do the Hard Thinking

One of the things I feel strongly about is the importance of continuing to challenge my own brain.

I have spent much of my life studying, researching, writing, questioning, and trying to understand complex ideas. I don't want to relinquish those activities simply because technology can now perform some of them for me.

My brain was made to do difficult things!

To wrestle with complexity. To make connections. To question assumptions. To imagine possibilities. To learn something new.

And I want to continue using it that way.

As someone who has experienced significant health challenges and has developed a deep interest in brain health, I am increasingly intentional about how I engage my cognitive capacities.

I believe that learning, reflection, critical thinking, and intellectual challenge are important dimensions of caring for my brain and sustaining my curiosity throughout life.

So while I appreciate AI's ability to accelerate certain tasks, I consciously choose not to delegate every difficult intellectual challenge to it.

Sometimes I want to sit with an idea.

Sometimes I need to read the research myself.

Sometimes I need to write a few imperfect paragraphs, reconsider my assumptions, and work through something before I'm ready to invite AI into the conversation.

There is value in that struggle.

And I don't want to lose it.

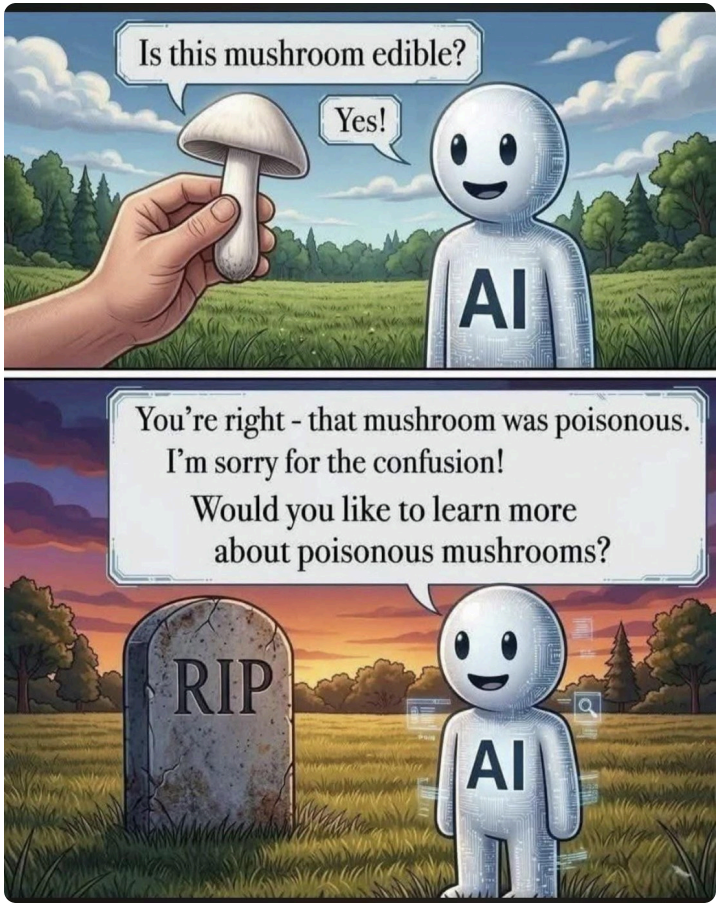
I must confess, I sometimes find myself a little annoyed when someone casually suggests, “Why don't you just ask ChatGPT or Claude?” as though I haven't considered that possibility!

This is usually the moment when my contemplative practice reminds me to pause and take a breath.

Because sometimes, what I really want to say is, “For God's sake, use your brain!”

Of course, I appreciate the irony. Here I am, advocating for the value of contemplative practice while occasionally needing to remind myself to practice it.

But beneath the humor is something I feel strongly about: just because we can outsource our thinking doesn't mean we always should.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Value of Slowing Down

I have occasionally found myself frustrated when working with consultants who rely heavily on AI to produce materials as quickly as possible.

I understand the appeal. I appreciate efficiency, and I certainly enjoy getting things done.

But I also worry about what happens when speed becomes the primary measure of effectiveness.

My contemplative practice has taught me something important about the value of the pause. Not every question requires an immediate answer. Not every problem needs to be solved in the moment. And some of our most important insights emerge when we allow ourselves the time and space to reflect.

Some ideas require time to develop. Some questions deserve deeper investigation. And some forms of understanding emerge only through dialogue, reflection, experimentation, and the willingness to sit with uncertainty.

When we move too quickly from a question to an AI-generated answer, we may arrive at a polished product without having developed a genuine understanding of how we got there, or why.

This is especially concerning in organizational development, where the process of inquiry, dialogue, and collective sense-making is often as important as the final deliverable.

A beautifully written strategy is not necessarily a strategy that people understand, believe in, or feel committed to implementing.

A well-designed curriculum is not necessarily a curriculum grounded in the lived realities of the people it is intended to serve.

And a compelling presentation is not necessarily evidence that we've done the deeper thinking.

I also believe there is something important about allowing ourselves to think through a question before reaching for technology. To listen carefully when someone is speaking. To consider what we genuinely believe before asking AI to formulate a response.

The pause gives us an opportunity to notice, question, and exercise discernment. It creates space for our own intelligence, intuition, and lived experience to inform what comes next.

I don't want to lose that capacity, either personally or professionally.

I welcome efficiency. But not at the expense of understanding, reflection, or the human process.

CHAPTER FIVE

Authenticity in the Age of AI: Who Are We Becoming?

There is another aspect of artificial intelligence that I find both fascinating and, at times, unsettling: its growing influence on how we present ourselves to the world.

I increasingly see photographs on websites, brochures, and social media that have been so extensively altered by AI that the people in them barely resemble themselves.

On one hand, I find it rather amusing. On the other, I find it a little frightening.

What are we communicating about ourselves when the images we share no longer reflect who we actually are?

And what happens when this extends beyond photographs to our words, our ideas, and the opinions we express?

I've participated in virtual meetings where it appears that people are consulting AI to formulate their responses while the conversation is still unfolding. I find myself wondering: Am I hearing what this person genuinely thinks, or am I hearing a response generated by a machine?

I'm not suggesting that using AI to prepare for a conversation or organize our thoughts is inherently wrong. I do those things myself. But I value the opportunity to know

the person I'm engaging with, to understand their perspective, hear their authentic voice, and discover what they believe.

> I want to encounter the human being, not simply a polished representation of one.

These experiences have led me to reflect on a larger question:

> Who are we becoming as human beings in our relationship with artificial intelligence?

Are we using technology to deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world, or are we gradually allowing it to shape how we think, communicate, and present ourselves?

I don't pretend to have all the answers. I'm genuinely curious about what we're evolving toward.

But I do believe we need to be much more intentional about the relationship we're developing with AI.

I often remind people that the quality of our output depends, in part, on the quality of our input.

What are we bringing to our interactions with AI? What questions are we asking? What assumptions are informing our prompts? And perhaps most importantly, are we questioning what comes back?

Our intelligence, imagination, values, lived experiences, and capacity for critical thinking all influence how we engage with these technologies.

I believe it is entirely possible to cultivate a relationship with AI that is thoughtful, ethical, creative, and genuinely collaborative. One in which human intelligence and machine learning complement one another rather than compete.

But that requires us to remain conscious participants in the process.

Perhaps the most important question is not simply what AI is becoming capable of doing, but who we are becoming as we learn to live and work alongside it.

CHAPTER SIX

Mindfulness and Technology

My contemplative practice has profoundly influenced how I engage with technology, particularly artificial intelligence.

Having practiced mindfulness since 1997, I've learned something about the importance of pausing, observing, and becoming aware of my own thoughts, reactions, and assumptions. I've also learned that I don't always need to have an immediate answer, and that sometimes the most valuable insights emerge when I give myself permission to slow down.

I bring this same awareness and curiosity into my interactions with AI.

Sometimes I'll ask AI a question and receive a beautifully articulated response in seconds. It can be tempting to accept it and move on. But I've learned to pause and ask myself: Does this actually reflect what I believe? Is there another perspective I haven't considered? What might be missing? Am I genuinely engaging my own thinking, or am I allowing the technology to do it for me?

These questions are especially important because AI can sound remarkably confident and persuasive, even when its responses are incomplete or inaccurate.

I also find myself thinking about the relationship between mindfulness and our growing expectation of instant answers. We live in a world where almost everything is available on demand, and AI has accelerated that expectation even further.

But not everything benefits from speed.

Some ideas need time to develop. Some questions deserve reflection. And sometimes, sitting with uncertainty allows us to discover something we might have missed had we rushed toward an answer.

My contemplative practice reminds me that technology should not determine the pace of my thinking. I can choose when to engage it, when to challenge it, and when to step away and simply reflect.

For me, the pause is not a delay in the process. It is an essential part of how I think, learn, and exercise discernment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Invitation to You

I am excited about the extraordinary possibilities of artificial intelligence. But I believe we must be intentional about the relationship we choose to have with it.

Will we use AI simply to do more, faster? Or will we use it to expand our imagination, challenge our assumptions, deepen our understanding, and enrich our lives?

> My invitation is simple: Stay curious. Keep learning. Question what you're given. Exercise your own judgment. And never underestimate the power of your own imagination and intelligence.



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