



PEOPLE SKILLS AI CAN'T REPLACE

How work is changing, and the human strengths to encourage and hire
Ideas drawn from Noema Magazine

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Why This Matters Now

101,743

US job cuts that
employers blamed on
AI, January to June
2026

16%

Drop in jobs for
workers aged 22 to 25
in AI-exposed fields

57%

Share of Claude
conversations where
people thought with AI
rather than handing
work off

Sources: Challenger, Gray & Christmas; Stanford Digital Economy Lab; Anthropic Economic Index (cited by Friedland, Noema)

Keyboard Work Shrinks, Judgment Grows



Shrinking

- Drafting routine documents
- Entering and moving data
- Writing routine code
- First-draft reports



Growing

- Judgment when things are messy
- Sorting signal from noise
- Persuading and negotiating
- Building trust with people

History's Lesson: Tools Reshape Expertise

Before 1800

1800s–1950s

1960s–2020

Now

Artisans

Skilled craftsmen
made each item by
hand

Factories

Machines created
new skilled jobs:
machinists,
electricians, clerks

Computers

Routine office jobs
faded; pay rose
mostly for college-
educated experts

AI

Could help more
workers make
expert decisions

AI Helps Those Who Know Their Work

40%

less time on writing tasks, and the weakest writers caught up to average

3 vs 10

months for new customer service agents to match experienced ones

No gain

for radiologists who weren't trained to use the AI tool well

Lesson: like a nail gun, AI helps the trained worker and endangers the beginner.

The Judgment Economy: 3 Rising Skills



Bringing People Together

Persuading, building agreement, leading

Example: A supply chain director who convinces partners to act on the AI's plan



Interpreting Information

Turning data into wise choices and risk calls

Example: A fund manager weighing how a crisis changes a 20-year plan



Connecting Ideas

Combining insights from many fields

Example: A transit planner blending health, climate and community needs

What People Bring That AI Does Not



Lived experience: We have felt grief, hunger, fear and joy



Trust and accountability: We answer for our decisions



Reading the room: We sense the unspoken and the mood



Sense of history: We know why things came to be



Hands-on know-how: We handle the messy physical world



Presence: We can show up and stay with someone



Moral judgment: We weigh right and wrong, not just odds



Original creativity: We link unlike ideas in new ways



Persuasion: We negotiate and win people over



Purpose and caring: We care how things turn out

Thinking Skills to Encourage at Work



Question the output

Is it accurate? What is missing? Who checked it?



Ask "so what?"

Which finding actually matters for our goals?



Connect across fields

What can we learn from another field or from history?



Explain it plainly

Can a busy director grasp it in two minutes?



Know your own thinking

When should I trust the AI, and when trust myself?

From AI Findings to Clear Answers: 4 Steps

1 Check

Verify facts and numbers against a trusted source

2 Choose

Pick the 2 or 3 findings that matter most

3 Translate

Say what it means in plain words

4 Advise

Suggest a next step and name the risks

Example for a food pantry director: "The AI says visits rose 18% since spring. I checked our sign-in sheets and it's right. Most growth is seniors on Saturdays. I recommend adding two Saturday volunteers. The risk is a volunteer shortage in December."

Costly Mistake: Speed Isn't Good Thinking

AI simply added on

- Doctors with AI: no more accurate
- Drug sales: about 20% below no AI at all
- Consultants: worse on judgment tasks

People and AI as a team

- Doctors: accuracy rose from 75% to 82–85%
- Drug sales: up 16%, with 40% more client meetings
- Consultants: 40% better on tasks AI handles well

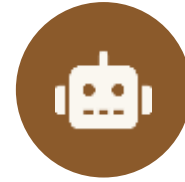
Same AI. The difference was how the work was set up.

Keep People in the Driver's Seat



Person leads, AI assists

Judgment stays sharp and keeps growing



AI leads, person follows

People "fall asleep at the wheel" and skills fade



A real reversal:

In 2024, Swedish company Klarna replaced hundreds of customer service staff with AI chatbots. By 2025, service had slipped and it rehired people.

Hiring for the AI Era: What to Look For

Old focus	Add this focus
Speed at typing and data entry	Good decisions under uncertainty
One narrow technical skill	Curiosity across many fields
Degree or job title	Track record of real decisions
Working alone fast	Teamwork, trust and persuasion
Knowing the answers	Asking good questions and checking AI

Interview idea: hand over an AI summary. Ask what they would check and say.

How Leaders Encourage These Strengths



Protect learning

Keep entry-level work that teaches judgment; pair new staff with mentors



Reward good decisions

Praise sound calls and lessons learned, not just volume



Design teamwork with AI

Have people and AI assess separately, then compare



Train, then trust

Teach staff when to rely on AI and when to override it

Honest Risks to Watch



Lower-paid replacement jobs

Good jobs could be refilled with poorly paid ones



A missing bottom rung

Fewer entry-level jobs means fewer ways to gain experience



Gains for a few

Profits could concentrate with whoever owns the AI



Unequal access

Broad education and training aren't available to everyone

Sharing the Gains Early



The big idea

- Give people skills and a stake early, not just checks after layoffs
- Model: the 1944 GI Bill paid for school, homes and business loans
- It helped build America's largest middle class



Help available now

- Free retraining for laid-off workers through WIOA
- In Ohio: local OhioMeansJobs centers
- RAISE US: \$500M+ effort testing wage insurance and retraining



What Remains Human

"AI can interpret my grief. It cannot grieve." — Houda Nait El Barj

Invest in judgment, presence and trust. They are what make AI worth using.

Sources

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