

The Human Advantage in the Age of AI - 20260723

Earle Airey

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Welcome to Victory Leadership. Where good leadership leads to victory. Here we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth. Let's get started.

Welcome to the Leadership Pits. Stop. Where we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth.

I am Earl Arie with Victory Leadership and this episode will be the Human Advantage in the Age of AI how leaders reinvest time into the work that only humans can do. Cuz in the last episode we talked about AI conversation that your team may already be having without you.

We explored a simple but important leadership idea. AI can accelerate the work, but only leaders can create that clarity, trust, skill and judgment that is needed to use it.

Well, today we're going to continue that conversation, but we're going to look at it from a bit of a different angle because last time we focused on the responsibility of AI adoption.

Today we're going to focus on the human advantage in the age of AI AI because many people are asking the questions, what will AI replace from both sides of the fence, from those that are looking to. To increase their profit margins, to those that are concerned about having a job and everything in between and probably all around. But the.

I would say that of course that question deserves a. An honest answer and it should be addressed.

However, one of the things that leadership would really, you know, a question that they should really consider is that if AI gives us back time because it does things quicker, it does things more efficiently, it can discover pattern recognition, we've got this bulk of time and time is precious. We always say, like time is money, just to emphasize how important it is. But how do we reinvest that time into work only humans can do?

If AI makes work faster, beautiful, that's great.

Then that time that we get back from it, when we use it wisely, it can help free the human capacity for work that requires judgment, empathy, curiosity, creativity, courage, and meaning, along with stewardship.

Today we're focusing on the elements around the title of the Human Advantage in AI and how leaders can reinvest that time into work that only humans can do. So let's go ahead and pull in today's leadership pit stop.

Now that our tires are good, our fuel tank is topped off, and we're heading back out on the track. And we're going to hit that green flag

moment. And so consider this. Do not just ask what AI can do. I mean, that's important. That's an important ask.

But beyond that, ask what AI can free humans to become better at. Now that's a paradigm shift. Because if we only ask What I can automate, we may miss a larger leadership opportunity.

The goal should not be to remove human or humanity from the work. The goal should be to remove the unnecessary friction so that people can bring more of their humanity to work. So think about it a little like this.

AI does not decide whether the work becomes more or less human. It does not diminish humanity itself.

Human choices decide whether AI is used to reduce people to costs or elevate people towards a higher value contribution. And that's why leadership matters.

Because if leaders use AI only to extract more output at a lower cost, people may experience the technology as a threat.

But if leaders use AI to reduce the unnecessary friction, strengthen judgment, improve service, support learning, and free people, or may I say, liberate them for more meaningful contributions, AI becomes a part of a more human centered future of work. And, and why would humans not be the center of it?

Even if there is a factory with robots that are building robots, there is still some human oversight in that process. So in pretty much in all of these elements or all these contexts, that humans are always going to be the centered future of work.

If we ever get to a point where it's not, hopefully humanity is on easy street and we're not vegging out somewhere, but still liberated to make a meaningful contribution to whatever is next. Because if we just look at it from the short term perspective, because replacement is a short term question, reinvestment is a leadership question.

Because a replacement mindset may look at how many human centric tasks can we remove? Now, I'm not saying that that should not be a consideration, but we really need to take a look at what that means.

Because a stewardship mindset may ask, how can we maximize our investment in AI to liberate human capacity for the wonderful things only humans can do? That is the stronger leadership question.

Of course efficiency matters and productivity matters as well as financial responsibility, but the efficiency should not become the highest, highest purpose of leadership. It's almost like not being able to see the forest through the trees or cutting off the nose despite the face.

When we can focus on one thing, then there is a little bit more of an organic connection that the other things will occur when properly implemented.

Just focusing on the short term cost removal, you know, then you may sacrifice some key elements, of course you gain speed and cost reductions, but you may lose trust. The creativity, the loyalty, the judgment, the meaning. All of these things that make what it is that we're doing, what we're doing.

Even if we're taking the AI at some point, who is it serving. It's. It's serving humanity.

And when you pull the humanity portion out of it, then you risk alienate all these things that you want to leverage to make the connection to create the value add in the first place of the reason why the organization exists in the, in the target audience it's meant to serve. Let's not just ask what AI can do, but ask what it can free humans to become better at.

Now, in the last episode, we met Renee, a leader that was trying to guide her team through the AI conversation. The team was divided. There was some curiosity, caution, experimentations that were scattered here and there.

And in general there was a bit of a worry because there wasn't, there wasn't any clear understanding of what AI meant and how they were going to interact within the environment of their organization, within the workplace. And Renee didn't start with the tool. She started with the work by asking the team where they were experiencing friction.

She helped named concerns, clarify guardrails and choose a small, responsible experiment. And the experiment was simple, just something to get used to it. We don't have to shift the direction of the entire organization.

Let's just give it a little, a little bit of a try, a road test, if you will.

And for two weeks, the team used an approved AI tool because we want to make certain that all the security elements on the back end are in place and the file protections and any availability or data restoration. So we want to make certain that an approved tool is used.

Even if you're experimenting, and it does not matter if what you're experimenting with is going to get lost, then just have reasonable documentation on what it was so that if that tool is, for whatever reason no longer available, that you're not starting over from scratch.

When we use an approved tool, if we're going to actually put in real information to experiment with, even if it's small, because bad actors can use minor information to gain credibility called social engineering. And that can have consequences. So we want to make certain we're using the right tools.

For those two weeks, people were experimenting by drafting meeting summaries and developing action item lists. All of those elements were human reviewed before they were shared. There was, you know, a set of eyes that were on it.

And at the end of the two weeks, the team, collectively, they learned something important. The tools, they were helpful? Absolutely. Were they perfect? Of course not.

It still need a human review as it missed nuances of times, or we, we may not have been clear. And we had a bit of a, you know, a mental assumption that it knew this when it didn't, and it didn't have complete information.

So there's getting used to it. Not only the technology itself can. Can be buggy, you know, because haven't worked in IT for 14 years.

It's one of the few industries I know where an incomplete product can be sold at first, brand new, and we'll get the rest of it to you later. And I say that happens in every case. But can and some of the AI tools may be similar. We want to get people on the platform and get used to it.

We don't want to make them wait because there's all sorts of reasons behind why we don't want to do that. And you have something where something was promised and it'll come later. So sometimes those things need to be considered. So is it perfect?

Of course not, even if it was complete. But it reduced administrative drag. That AI test showed how it could give people some time back in their day.

Then Renee asked a question that helped to steer the conversation in. In another direction.

Earle Airey

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If AI gives us time back, how do we reinvest that time into work only humans can do?

Earle Airey

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The team grew quiet because. Because gears in their heads are starting to turn. They're starting to think about that. You know, they're thinking about.

It's the question of, like, if somebody asked a question, if you receive \$50 million after taxes, how would that change your life? You may not be vocal right away. You're starting to think about, oh, wow, you know, this is kind of like the, like a dream phase.

If, if you're familiar with appreciative inquiry, you discover dream design and destiny. And the part of that dream phase, you're thinking about these possibilities, you know, what. What can we do?

Where are our gaps and how can we bridge them? And thinking about all of the possibilities that. That can create, that, that dream phase is important, important.

So here, you know, this question is bringing things to mind, some possibilities. And as people are cultivating their thoughts, you know, they're. They're starting to share some information.

It's raw, you know, so it's just like you pick corn right off of the stalk. It's raw. It still has the husk around it, and we have to peel that back, we have to get all that stringy stuff off of it.

And then whatever the plan for that ear of corn will be, it will then get processed further.

So our ideas are very similar in that they start to grow and they're cultivated in harvest, and then they are prepared to meet the needs that we are anticipating in the future. And so some are saying we could handle more meetings.

Earle Airey
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Who.

Earle Airey
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Who wants more meetings? I mean, but I understand that there could be more efficiency in those meetings, or some of the meetings can be. Can be replaced.

Someone says we can produce more reports.

Well, you know, like they say, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it, you know, and then someone else chimed in and said we can move through tasks faster, and those are reasonable answers. However, Renee pushed the conversation deeper.

Earle Airey
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What if the goal is not simply to fill the time with more tasks? What if the goal is to create more room for the work that requires our judgment, care, creativity, and relationships? Hmm.

Earle Airey
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Now there's some additional thoughts around how to cultivate this brainstorming session. That's when the team started to see different possibilities.

Earle Airey
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We could spend more time preparing for difficult customer conversations. We could coach newer employees instead of rushing past their questions.

Earle Airey

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We could review recurring process issues instead of just reacting to them. We could finally improve the handoff that keeps creating confusion.

Earle Airey

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We could use the time to listen better.

Earle Airey

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And another said, and another said, and another said. Enough said. It's creating this dialogue. Ideas are coming.

So if AI can liberate those mundane tasks that require just minimal oversight because nothing should have zero oversight, what, what does that enable? What does that freak? What does that liberate? And that is the human advantage. It's not doing less, not caring less.

And it's certainly not about thinking less or using the technology wisely so that people can do more of the work that makes the human contribution valuable. So when AI saves time, energy, or attention and takes that back to the leaders, they should ask, where is that pat? Where should that capacity go?

And I'll just suggests these elements. It's not exhaustive. It's just a starting point. You know, just some, some considerations based on some observation and research, if you will.

And the first one is judgment. AI can generate options. Humans must discern judgment, will ask, is this accurate? Is this ethical? Is this appropriate?

Is it aligned with our purpose, what we want to do, our hopes, goals, dreams, values, ambitions as we move forward. This is useful for person, team, customer, patient, client, or the community we serve.

AI can support decisions, however, it's the human beings that remain accountable for its consequences. And then empathy. The second one is empathy. AI can generate the language humans carry.

Presence, empathy, notices, emotion, dignity, context, fear, trust in relationship. AI may help a leader prepare for a difficult conversation, but it should not replace the leader's responsibility to listen, care, and repair.

Some moments require more Than efficient communication, they require human connection. The third is curiosity. AI can answer questions, but humans must ask better ones. Curiosity helps leaders move beyond surface answers.

What are we missing? What assumptions are we making? Or what problem are we really solving?

What this would look like from an employee's perspective or a customer's perspective? What is the question we have not asked yet? Because better questions help to create and develop better thinking.

And better thinking creates better use of AI. Fourth one is creativity. AI can generate possibilities. Humans imagine meaning, context and purpose. Creativity is not only about producing more ideas.

It's about seeing new relationships between problems, people, resources and possibilities. AI can help create a first draft. Humans decide what beautiful, useful, timely, wise and worth building. What happens next? We make that decision. 5.

Courage. AI can surface patterns. Humans must decide whether to act.

Courage is needed to raise concern, challenge weak assumptions, admit uncertainty, protect quality, and say, this may be faster, but is it better? In the age of AI, courage may come even more important. Because speed can make a poor decision, travel further and faster.

Leaders need people who will speak up when something feels unclear, unsafe, biased, inaccurate or misaligned. If the AI does that, it means it was tuned to. It's going to work within those parameters.

Yes, AI can learn, but it's the human connection that sees beyond that and deeper. And that brings us to the sixth one, meaning. AI can create output. Humans create significance.

Not to say that the AI output does not have any significance associated with. But once we see that and we decide to do something with it, that is the significant addition to the human condition.

Work is not valuable simply because it's faster. I mean, of course that brings value, but that's not the only thing. Work becomes valuable when it serves people and it solves real problems.

Strengthening trust, improving lives, supporting growth, or if it contributes to a purpose worth pursuing. Meaning helps people understand why the work matters, but it cannot be automated into existence. It has to be led.

And then that brings us to the seventh one of stewardship. Because AI can expand capability, humans must guide responsibility. Stewardship asks, what are we building and why? Who benefits and how?

Who can be harmed or helped? Who or what should we protect? Who or what should we improve? What kind of workplace are we creating through the way we use this technology?

Stewardship is the leadership discipline that helps speed connected to wisdom. Wisdom is proper application of knowledge in motion, the human advantage. It's not anti AI.

This, of course, is not an argument against AI, but it is an argument for better leadership and how it may utilize AI.

Because AI can be a powerful partner, it can reduce administrative burden, help people learn faster, support brainstorming, organize complexity, help people prepare, review patterns. I've discussed it before, and it goes on and on and on. And in some of the greatest opportunities is to help people create a starting point.

As I've mentioned before, once begun, it's half done. Because at times, getting started is the hardest part. AI works best when human beings remain clear about what should not be surrendered.

Do not surrender judgment. Do not surrender empathy, accountability, meaning or trust. Do not surrender the responsibility to think.

It's okay to delegate some things to technology if it helps free us up. However, these are things that we should not, we should not neglect the need to know.

In some cases, as I'm typing, I may typo something and I, you know, the word comes up misspelled or I just have a brain freeze and I can't quite think of how to spell this word and I'll spell it phonetically and then the technology corrects it. Now, of course, if I have problems spelling a word, I need to know how to find the correct spelling.

Using the technology is a quicker, faster way of making that correction occur sooner. So utilizing the technology is just a faster route to getting to where we need to go. And it's a good thing.

However, we need to be responsible of what that actually means. What that, what is that going to do?

Because if we're equating time with money and we hold too fast to that, we may lose a part of ourselves that is innately, deeply what makes us human beings. So I can say that the goal is not to prove that humans are still valuable by refusing the technology.

Of course we're going to use it, and we want to be mindful of how we use it. The goal is to use technology in a way that makes human value more visible. We can see a lot of that.

There are, of course, you know, challenges with, you know, what that looks like when it's developed, how do we manifest that? But it's to elevate the human condition for all of us.

So when you think of technology, think about it in the sense of the human advantage audit, if you will. So this week, my action item, I would recommend that you choose one task that the AI could help accelerate.

In the previous episode, we even kind of looked at this a bit and then maybe consider these five questions. One, what human time or energy could this fruit? What can we free up? What can we liberate?

Two, what higher value human work should that capacity return? So we free somebody, we liberate them. What is the more meaningful task that should fill that time slot. 3. What should remain under human judgment?

Even if you put that into the AI and it comes back with something, you got to think about it in the greater context of what is happening. What is the paradigm, what who are, who's involved?

We could try to put as much of that into the AI and sometimes inadvertently we just might forget something. So we really must consider holding on to the judgment based on the human elements, the human condition. 4.

How could this improve surface trust, creativity, learning or care? We're considering using it as has to have a purpose beyond just saving time.

And then five, what growth opportunities does this create for the person, the team, the organization, our clients, our neighborhoods, our environment, our society, our world? This doesn't have to be complicated, especially at first. It's taken a centralistic essentialism approach to this. Just keep it simple.

And if the AI can help reduce meeting time, reinvest that time into clearer follow up conversations. If AI helps draft routine communications, then reinvest that time into listening to the people affected by the message.

Use AI to organize data, then reinvest that time into better interpretation and wiser decisions. We build AI training outline drafts, then reinvest that time into coaching, practice and application.

AI assisted administrative drag reduction can give back time to reinvest into the relationships and decisions that make the work matter. That is responsible growth. The future will not be shaped by AI alone. Of course not. It will be shaped by the leaders who decide how AI is used.

Will it be used to create more pressure or positivity? More surveillance or more support? More output or meaningful contribution? More speed or more wisdom with that speed? These are leadership choices.

These are all of our choices and how we interact and collaborate to move towards a shared and unified goal. The organizations that thrive in the age of AI will not be the ones to simply automate most tasks.

They'll be the ones that learn how to contribute or combine the contributions of artificial intelligence with human judgment, empathy, creativity, courage, meaning and stewardship. AI can give time back, time that we always seem to be in short supply of. Leadership determines whether that time becomes more noise or more value.

So before asking what AI can do, ask what AI can free humans to become better at? Because the human advantage is not disappearing. We will not go gentle into that good night.

It is waiting to be developed, protected and applied with purpose. So thank you for spending some time with me about this, this well discussed topic. Hopefully this provided some direction or some ideas.

If you found this of value, please share it with someone else. That is encouraged by developing their leadership, their curiosity of leadership, whether they're emerging or well established.

Because this is something that can be a game changer.

When you think about those things that have contributed to humanity over our existence, like being able to control and manage the use of fire, discovery of electricity, things around sciences and medical contributions to humanity, this is, this is up there with all of those monumental developments. Let's use it in a way that helps develop us to be the best versions of ourselves as we move forward together into into history.

So I appreciate your time. Thank you so much. And remember that good leadership leads to victory and I will see you in the winner's circle.

Take care everyone and have a great day. Thank you for joining me today on the Victory Leadership Podcast Desk.

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