



Too Senior to Prompt? Here's Why That's Dangerous

Allegra Care-Dare-Share Newsletter - Issue #3 - 5 min read

When I stepped away from the C-suite in December, I'll admit - I had my doubts.

After years driving digital transformations at some of Europe's large financial organizations, helping bloom the Netherlands' first digital bank, and leading award-winning AI initiatives at Virgin Money, I wondered: could I really build something meaningful starting from scratch? Just me and a simple question: what if software and humans could work like a team, amplifying each other?

That experiment became Claridora, and then 4 AI agents. Since launching my "How-to Guide to Agentic AI" and beginning interviews for my upcoming book "Care, Dare, Share: Lead and Thrive with Heart, Mind, AI" something unexpected happened. Board members, CEOs, and chairmen started reaching out, not for polished consulting presentations, but for honest conversations about their AI transformation struggles.

The pattern became clear: transformations were an art at the best of times, but now, with the advent of AI, they are crucially needed and require a real balance between difficult choices: on people, on processes, on methods, on strategy. Senior leaders are facing difficult choices with little basis of experience.

So in this Newsletter, I will tackle, week after week, the key questions senior leaders raise with me and propose a simple, practical, action-driven approach to solve them.

Last month, I watched a CEO with 30 years of experience fumble through a board presentation about AI strategy. When asked specific questions about implementation timelines, he deflected: "My team handles the technical details."

Here's the uncomfortable truth I've witnessed across dozens of Fortune 500 boardrooms: the most senior leaders are often the least prepared for AI transformation. And it's not because they lack intelligence or vision. It's because they fear not being fluent enough in the AI/tech space and so they watch it from a safe distance.

But here's what most consultants won't tell you: the leadership must come from the business, this is not a tech challenge, it is a fundamental business redesign challenge.

Start with Honest Self-Assessment

Picture this: You're in a strategy meeting, and someone mentions "graduated autonomy" in AI deployment. Do you nod knowingly, or do you ask what that means?

In my work with global financial services leaders, I've developed what I call the "Vulnerability Advantage." The executives who openly admit their AI knowledge gaps consistently outperform those who pretend to understand everything.

Take the banking CEO I advised recently. Instead of hiding behind buzzwords, he started every AI discussion with: "Help me understand how this impacts our customers." That simple prompt led to breakthrough insights that saved the company €50 million in misguided AI investments.

The reality? **If you're not personally experimenting with AI tools, you can't effectively guide your organization's AI strategy.** You don't need to become an expert, but you do need to develop a sense for what it can do, what it is and what it is not.

Master the Art of Strategic Prompting

Here's where it gets interesting. The same skills that made you a successful leader: asking the right questions, challenging assumptions, seeking diverse perspectives, are exactly what AI leadership demands.

But there's a twist. In traditional leadership, you prompted people. In AI leadership, you need to prompt both people AND systems. And the leaders who resist this hybrid approach are already falling behind.

The breakthrough insight: **Senior leaders who embrace being students again don't lose authority, they multiply it.**

Avoid the Delegation Trap

Now here's where most senior executives get this wrong. They delegate AI learning to their CTOs or Chief Data Officers, believing their role is purely strategic oversight.

Turns out, the real growth comes from understanding AI's tactical implications. When you personally wrestle with prompt engineering, you develop intuition about what AI can and cannot do. This tactical knowledge transforms your strategic decision-making.

Consider the insurance executive who spent two hours weekly experimenting with different AI models. Within six months, she could spot vendor overselling immediately or tech teams falling in love with certain providers because, partly, of the Silicon Valley learning trip they offered.

Her secret? She had moved beyond theoretical understanding to practical wisdom.

The uncomfortable truth: You can't lead what you don't personally understand.

Build Your "Graduated Autonomy" Framework

In my Care-Dare-Share leadership philosophy, I teach that transformation requires both courage to experiment and wisdom to scale gradually. This applies perfectly to AI adoption.

Here's the framework I've developed for large enterprises:

Level 1 - Personal Experimentation: Leaders use AI tools for their own productivity

Level 2 - Team Integration: Small-scale pilots with immediate feedback loops

Level 3 - Departmental Deployment: Controlled rollouts with clear success metrics

Level 4 - Enterprise Transformation: Full-scale implementation with human oversight

The leaders who try to jump straight to Level 4 consistently fail. Those who embrace being prompted at Level 1 build the judgment needed for enterprise success.

But here's the weight of this responsibility: your organization's AI future depends on your personal AI journey starting today.

Your Next Move Matters More Than Your Last One

The question isn't whether you're too senior to be prompted. The question is whether you're too proud to stay relevant.

I've seen brilliant leaders become irrelevant not because they lacked experience, but because they stopped learning. In the AI era, your willingness to be guided, questioned, and challenged isn't a sign of weakness, it's your competitive advantage.

Start tomorrow. Pick one AI tool. Spend 30 minutes experimenting. Ask your team to explain something you don't understand. Feel the discomfort of being a beginner again.

Because here's the truth that keeps me up at night: the leaders who refuse to be prompted today will be prompting their successors tomorrow.

What's been your experience with personally testing AI tools? Reply and tell me which area you're most curious to explore. I read every response.

Allegra

Next week: Why your AI strategy needs fewer dashboards and more humanity