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AI and Employees: Empowering the Human in the Loop

AI shouldn't replace people. It should remove friction. And when we clearly define AI's role as serving humans, not sidelining them, fear fades.

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AI at work is about extending capabilities: taking repetitive tasks off employees' plates, improving accuracy, and making it easier to serve customers. It still depends on human judgement, context, and creativity. When people stay at the center, the partnership becomes a virtuous cycle: Humans improve the insights AI delivers, and AI accelerates human performance.

The best outcomes happen when it's built into where the work already happens, not bolted on later. AI should fit the way people actually work, like a glove fits a hand — a natural extension of how people get work done.

When work becomes less about wrestling with systems and more about solving problems for customers, job satisfaction and performance both go up.

How Out-of-Date Systems Weigh Down Employees

Many distributors are working through a maze of legacy systems — multiple ERPs, old POS systems, spreadsheets, and other tools. I know of one distributor who was managing data across more than 20 legacy systems. Another company was operating on a 1970s-era text-based point-of-sale system with limited visibility and usability.

The result is that instead of being easily accessible, data is often siloed, inconsistently updated, and prone to errors. Teams lose hours each week to manual data entry, duplicate work, finding the right information, and fixing mistakes.

It also makes it difficult to scale and onboard new staff. It's frustrating and draining.

The silver lining: The pain often becomes a catalyst for change.

When AI is embedded in your ERP, employees don't have to worry whether the system they're in has the correct information. The experience becomes consistent and reliable, no matter which ERP or workflow sits behind the scenes. That consistency removes stress and prevents embarrassing customer-facing errors.

AI also takes on tedious low-value work so employees can focus on what really requires their experience. For example, document and blueprint automation can cut quoting time from days or weeks to minutes and dramatically improve accuracy. Less clicking, fewer screens, and fewer procedural decisions free up energy for higher-value tasks.

One distributor even reduced onboarding and training time from four months to four days, which meant new team members could contribute and drive revenue faster. Another company went from four months to new team members' being fully productive within one, reducing training time by 75%.

Moving Toward Invisible Interfaces

AI should simplify work, not add yet another tool to learn. Increasingly, conversational automation lets employees

simply ask for what they need instead of navigating dozens of clicks across multiple screens:

“Who are the top 10 customers who haven’t purchased from us in the past 90 days? What should I reach out with?”

The answer comes directly — sometimes even spoken back — with recommended actions. Future-ready systems should feel effortless rather than forcing users to hunt through menus. When the system gets out of the way, people put their full focus on the customer in front of them.

Promoting Adoption by Building Trust
Technology that isn’t used is wasted. To unlock the full potential of AI, employees must trust and embrace it. That only happens when:

- It solves real pain points.
- It is transparent in how it works.
- It’s intuitive and easy to use.
- It validates recommendations against live system data employees already trust.
- It keeps the human in the loop where judgement and nuance matter most.

I did work for a construction company whose payroll manager feared automation would replace him. But once he saw how it removed tedious manual tasks from his plate, his fear turned into advocacy. When workers feel supported and not scrutinized, adoption will accelerate.

Tech Brain, Human Heart

The most valuable AI systems simplify work and amplify human strengths. They transform the employee experience by:

- Reducing cognitive load
- Eliminating errors and rework
- Accelerating onboarding and contribution
- Improving customer interactions
- Creating space for creativity, service, and expertise

When people can thrive, technology works.

