



# How to Get the Most from AI

Association of Nova Scotia Land Surveyors

Old Orchard Inn  
October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Robert Newcombe**  
Founder & CEO



# AI is Electricity



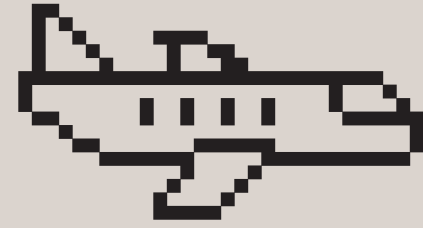
**"I think [AI] is electricity for our century. In the late 1800s, there were companies that said, 'Yeah, this electricity thing's interesting, but we're not going to be an electricity company.' And they're all gone. Now, you're not an electricity company, you're just a company that uses electricity. And the same thing is true, I believe, with AI."**

**- Seth Godin, Author**

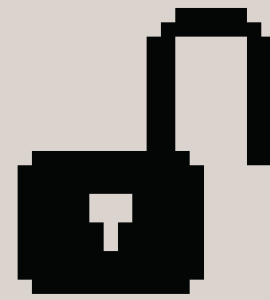
*(from The Tim Ferriss Show, <https://tim.blog/2025/01/31/>)*



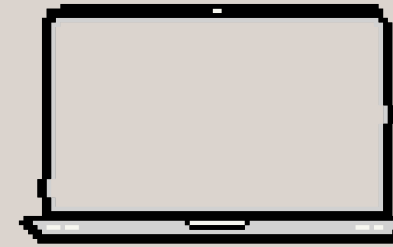
Electricity



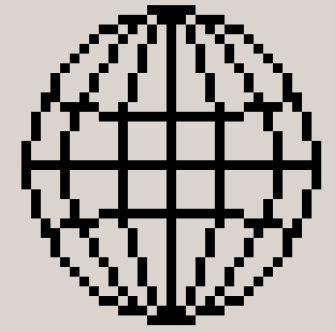
Flight



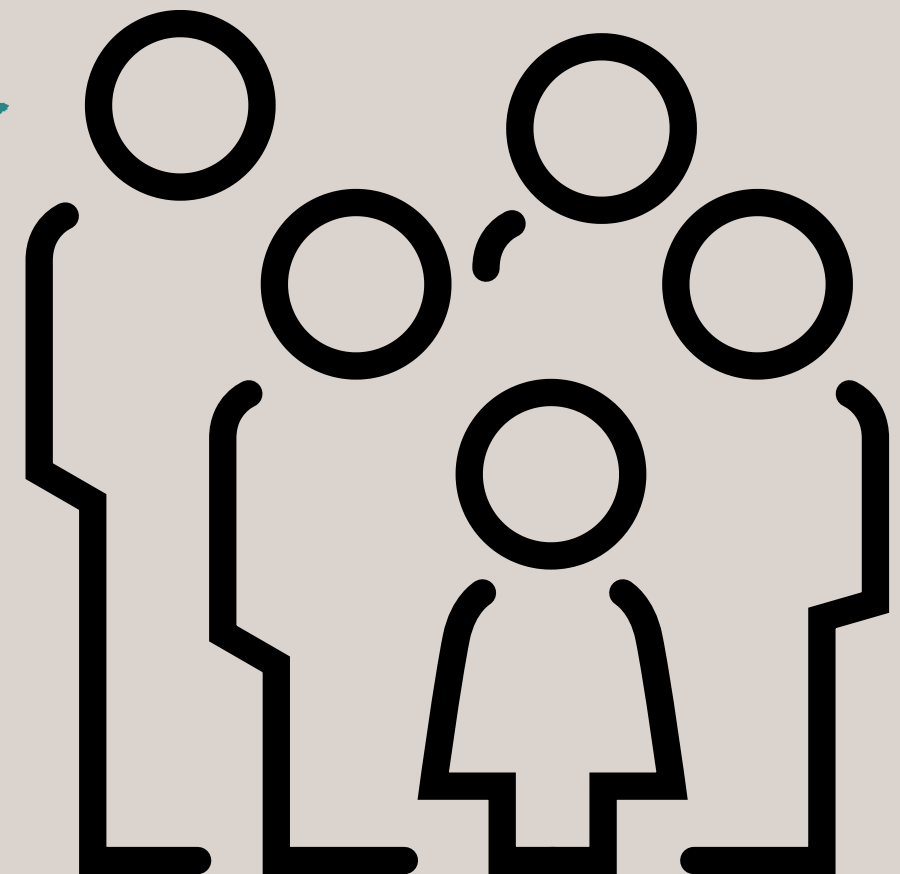
Cryptography



Computers

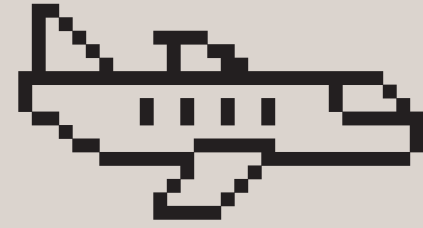


Internet

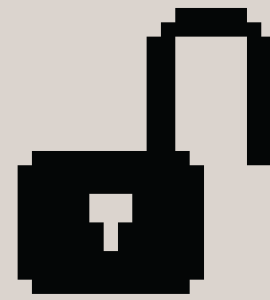




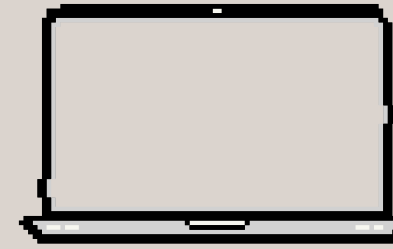
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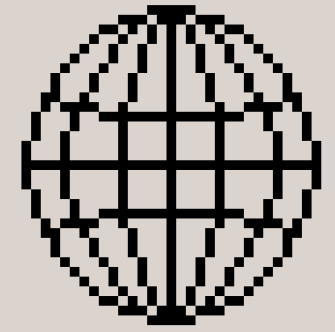
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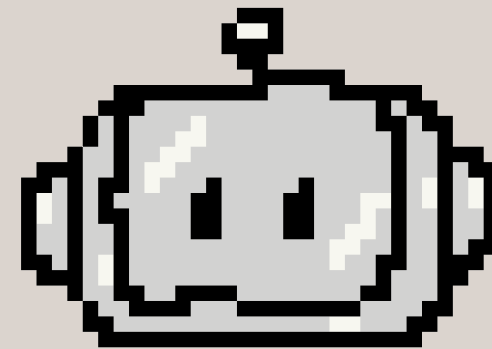
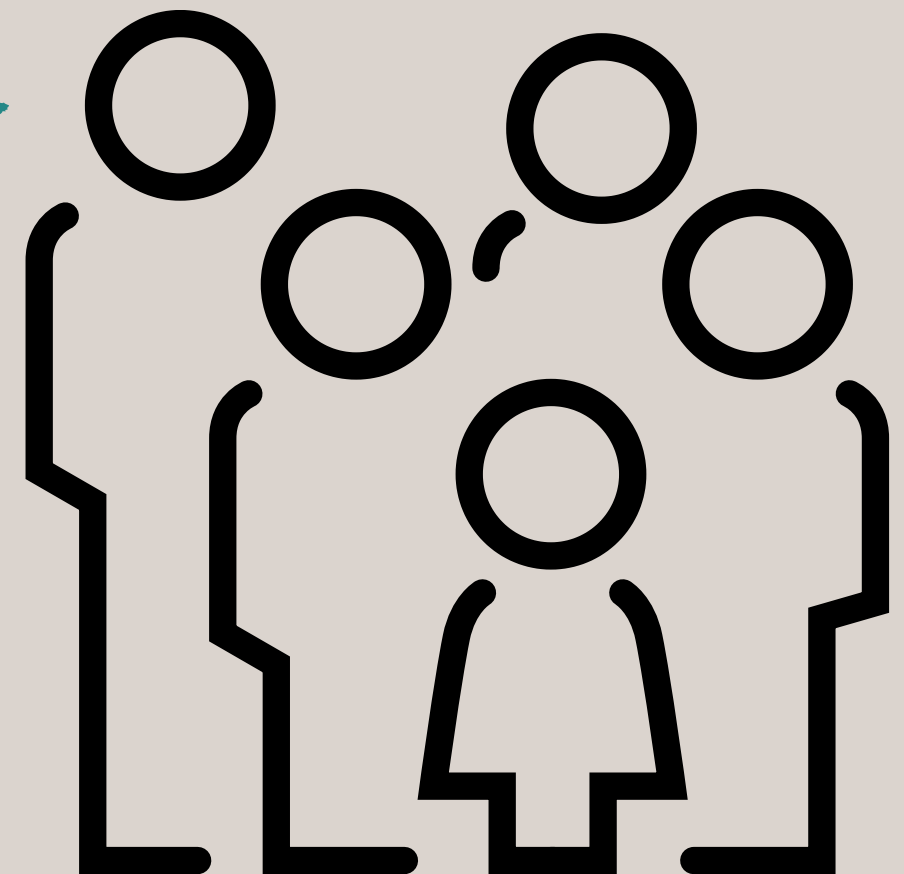
Cryptography



Computers



Internet



Generative AI





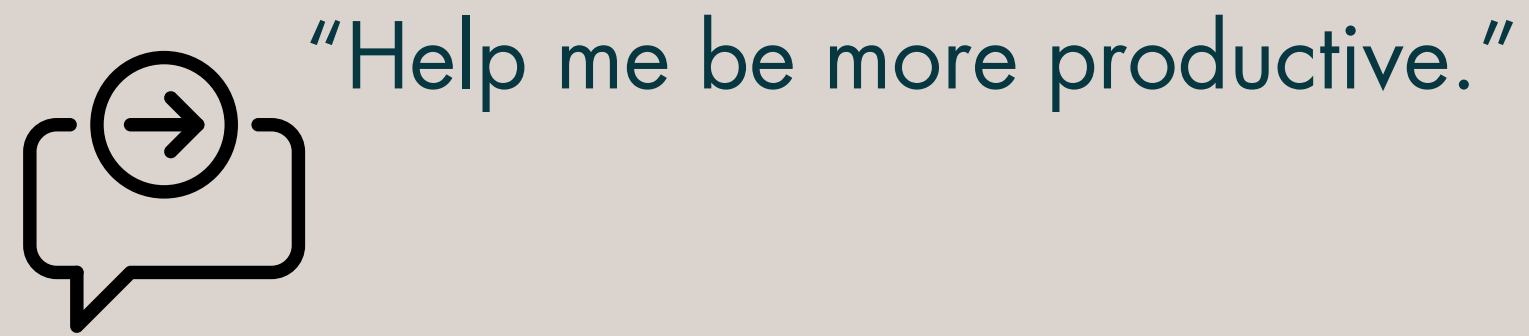
# How LLMs Work

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## *AI Fundamentals*



# LLMs are Next Word Predictor Machines



"Help me be more productive."

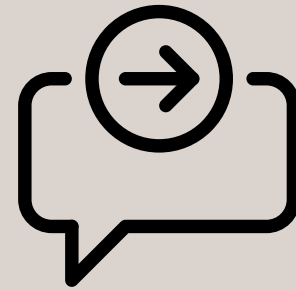
Prompt



**LLM**

# LLMs are Next Word Predictor Machines

"Help me be more productive."



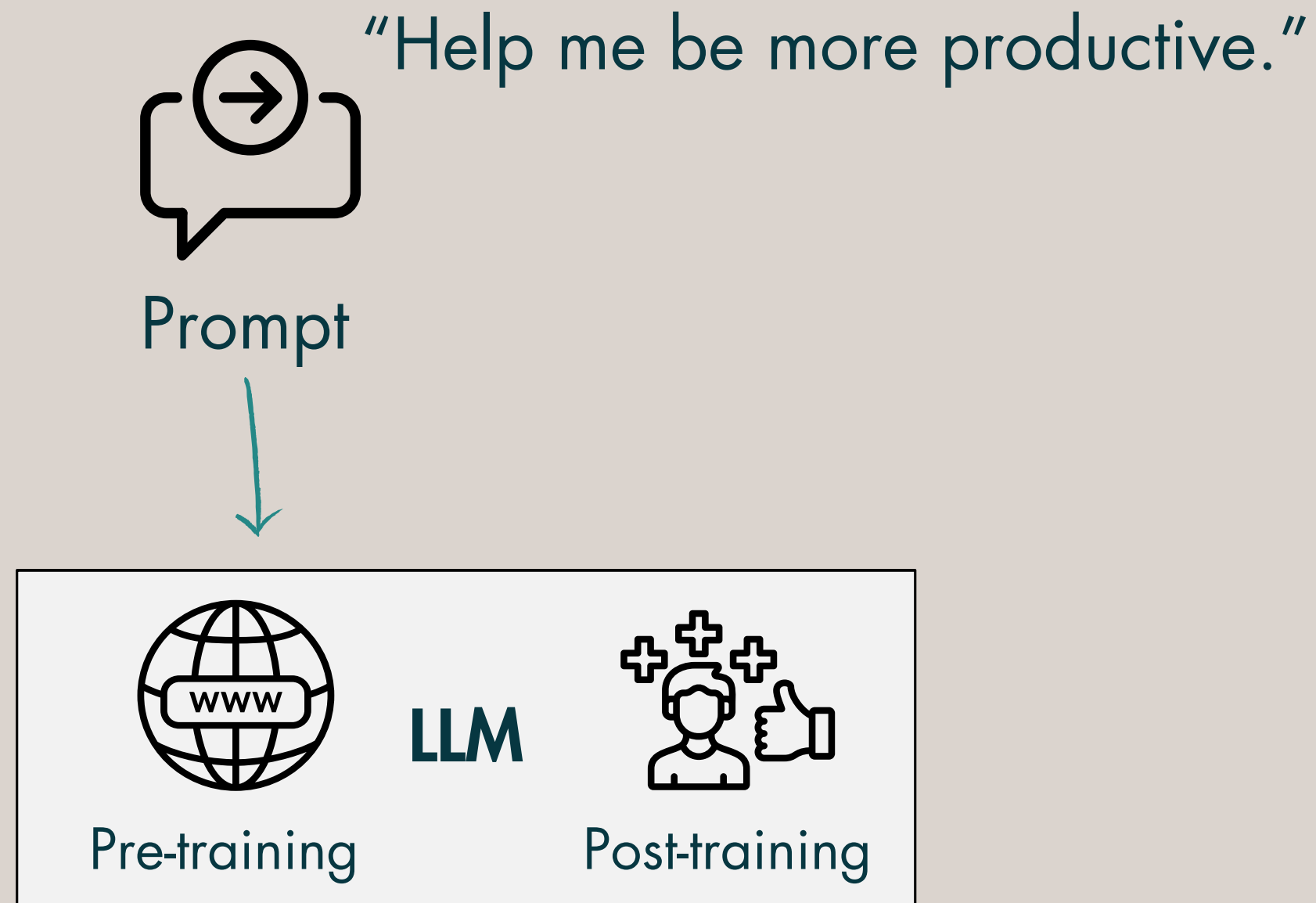
Prompt



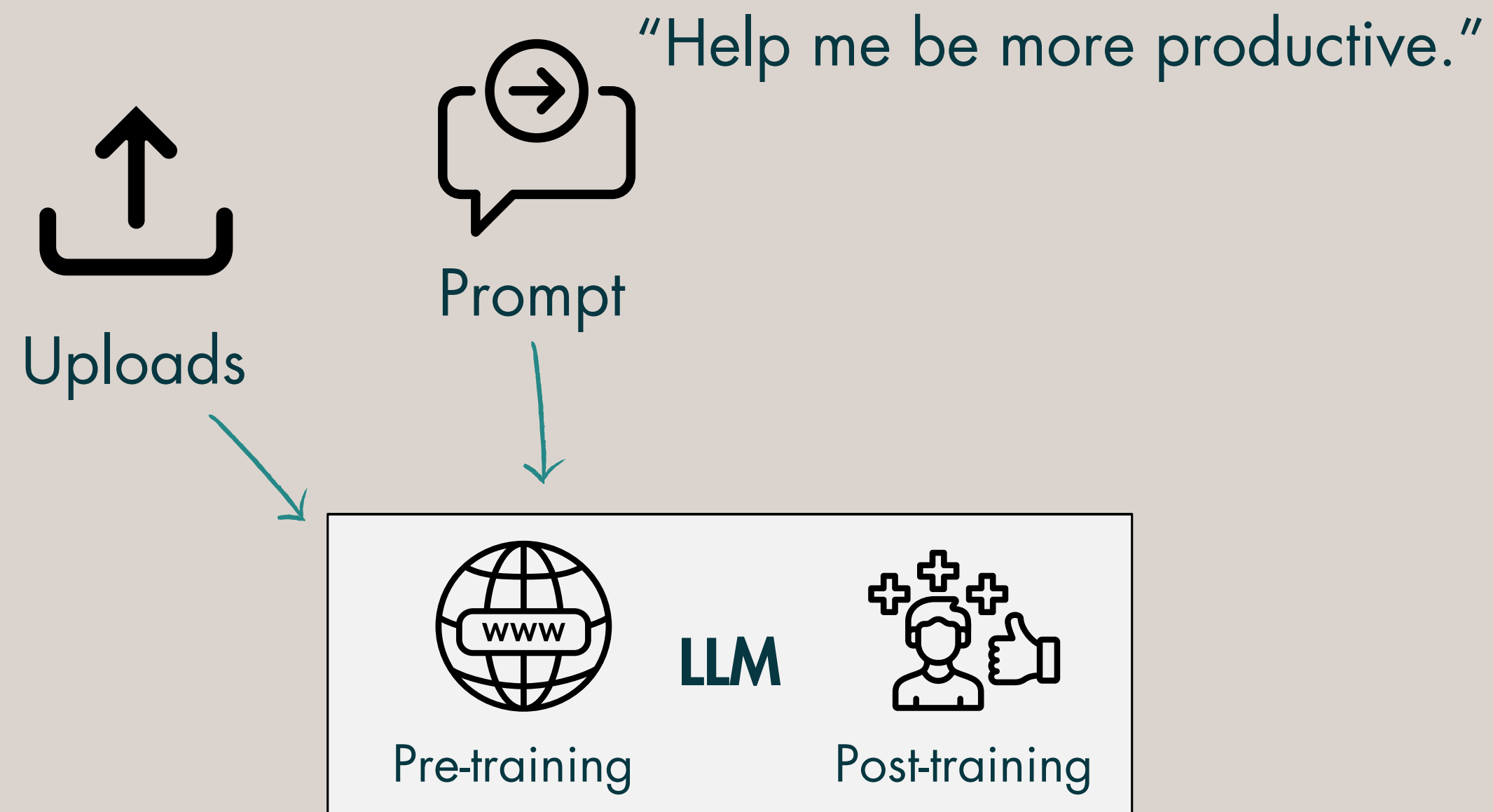
**LLM**

Pre-training

# LLMs are Next Word Predictor Machines



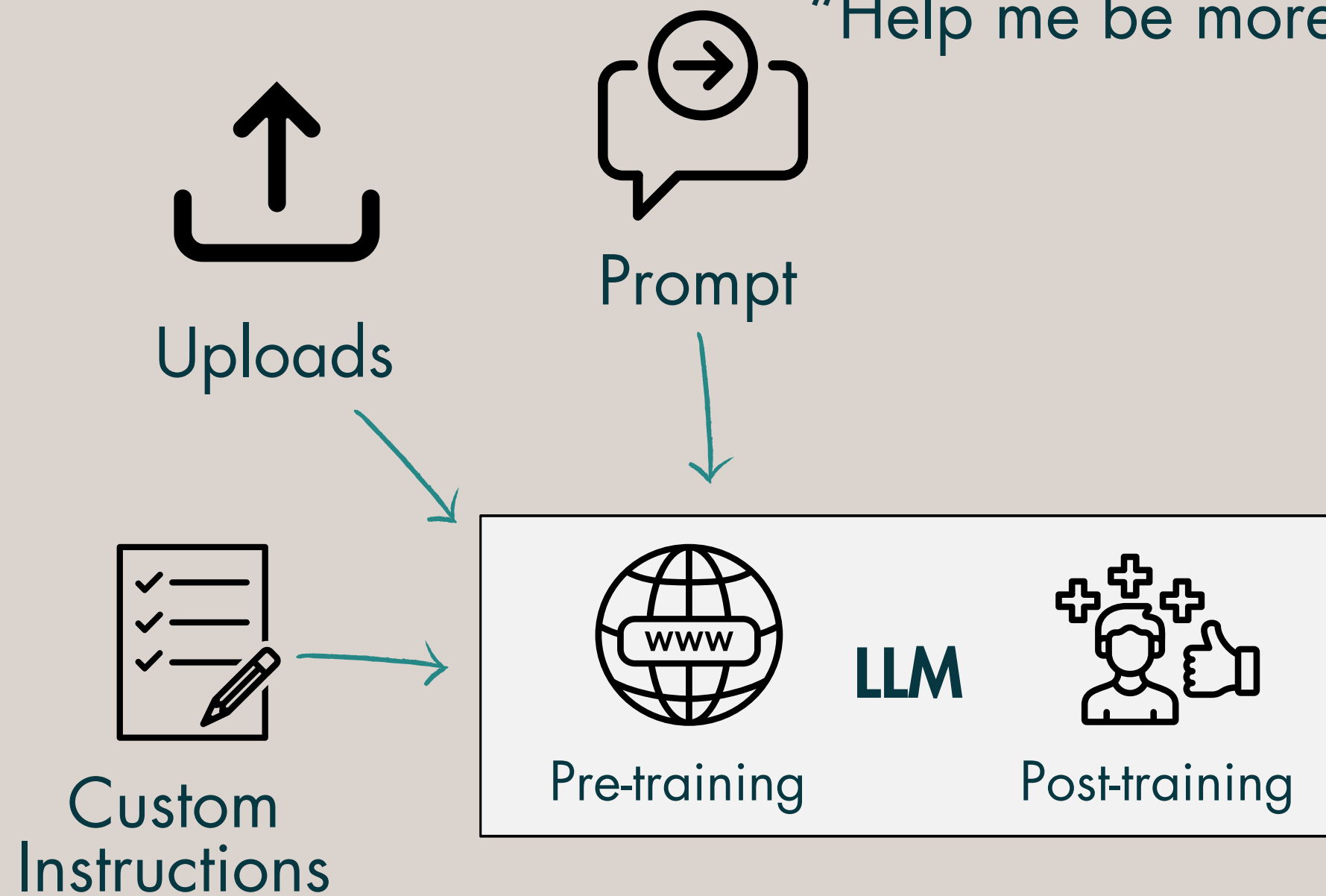
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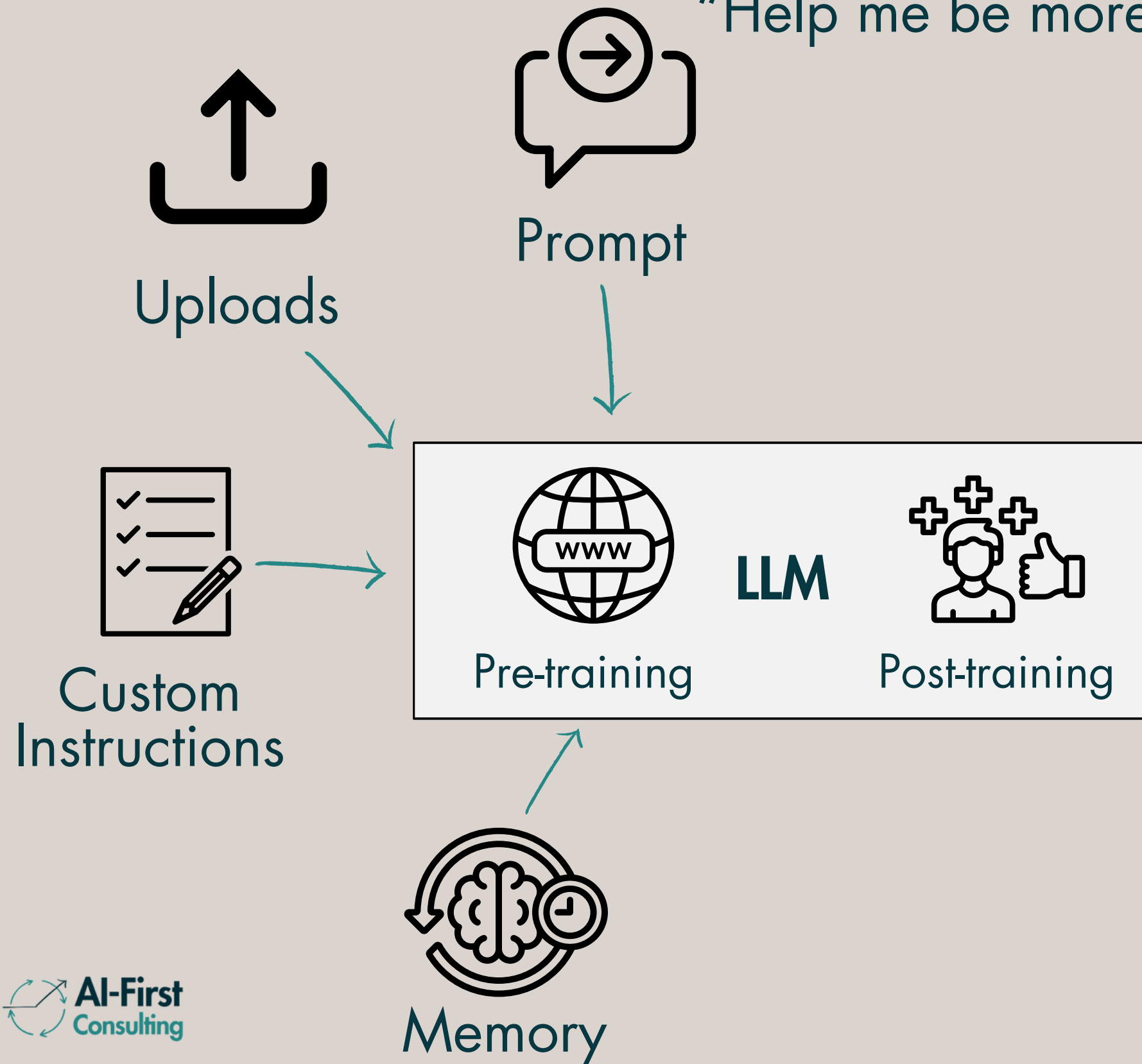
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"Help me be more productive."



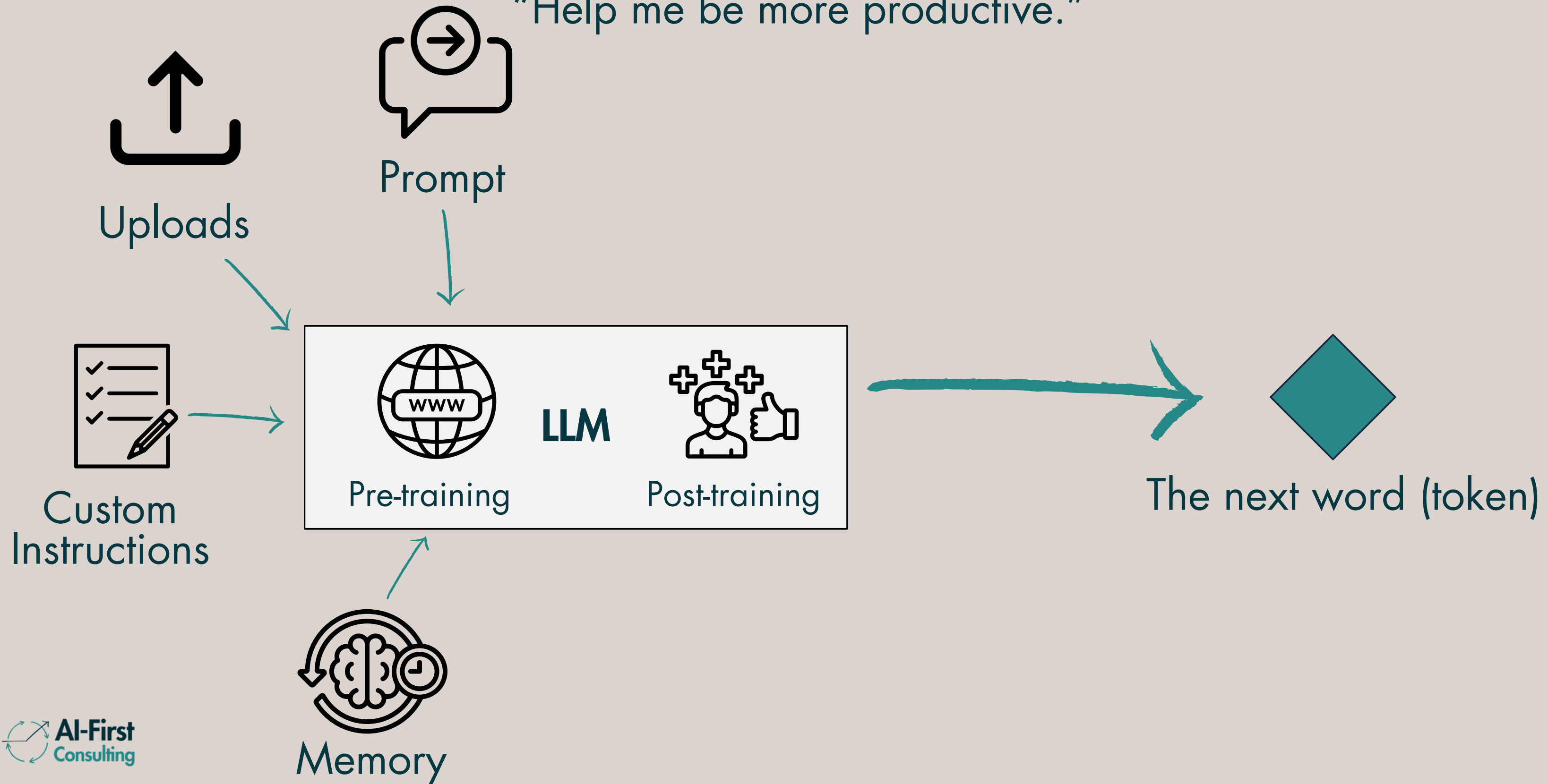
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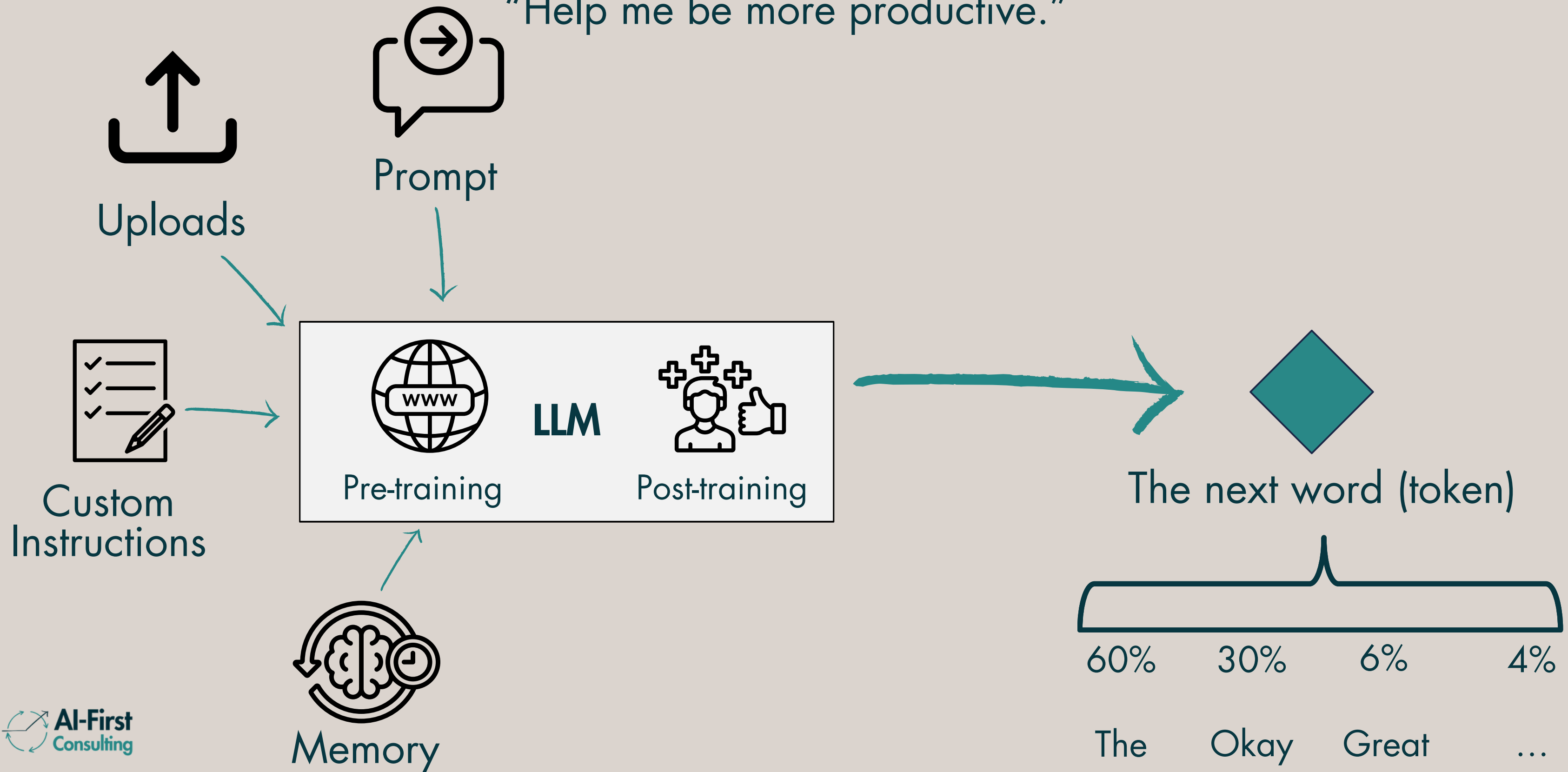
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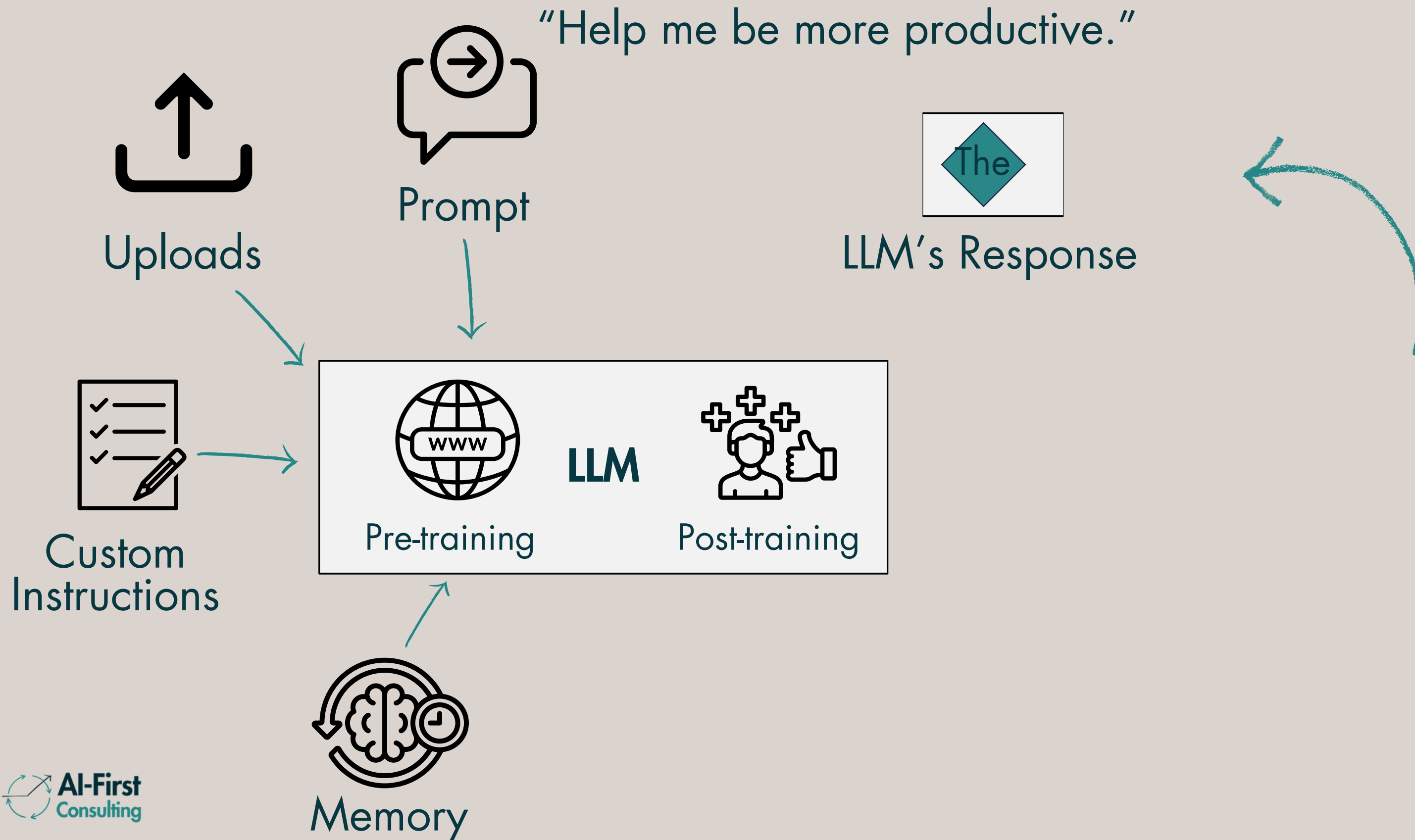
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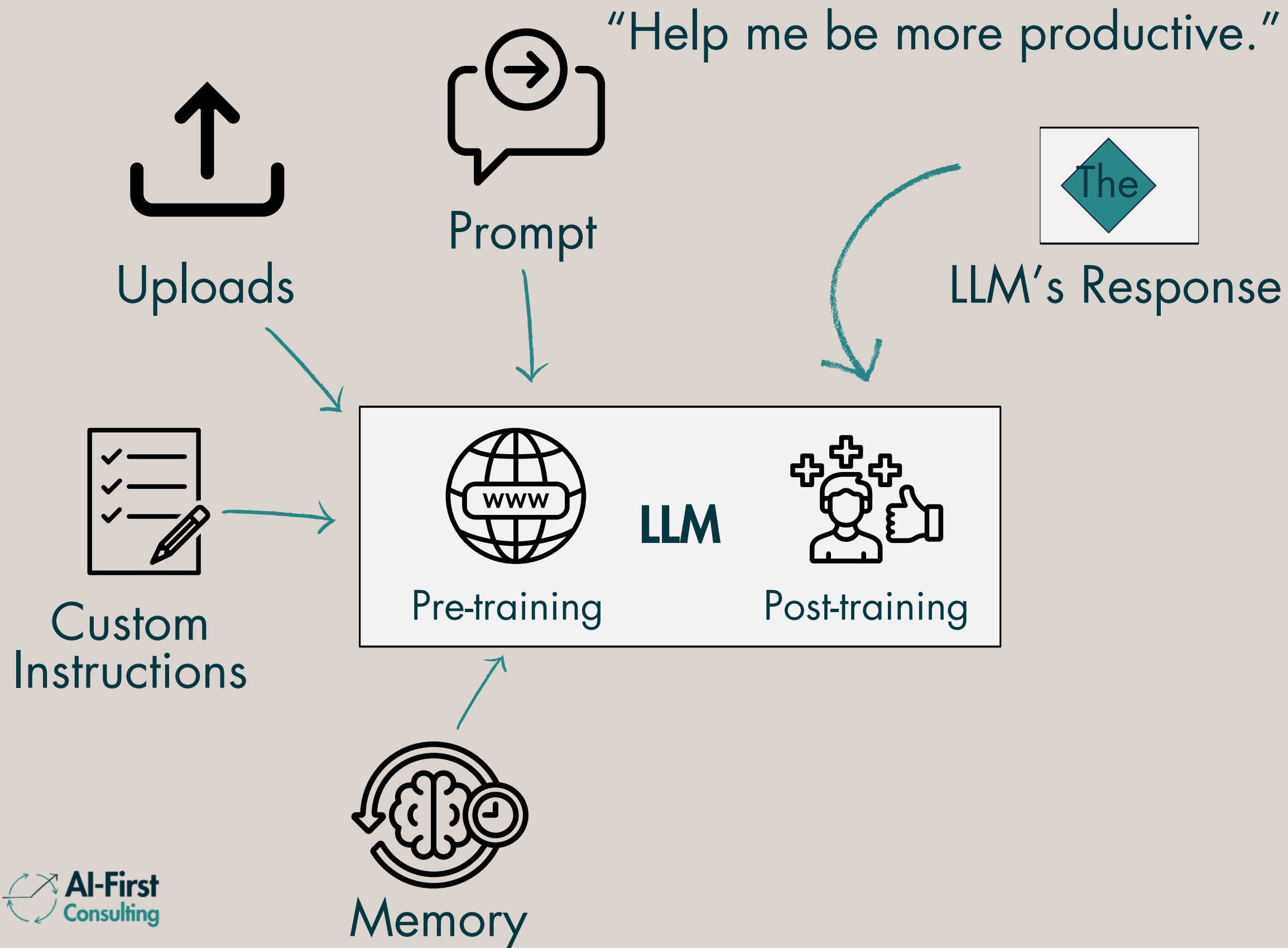
"Help me be more productive."





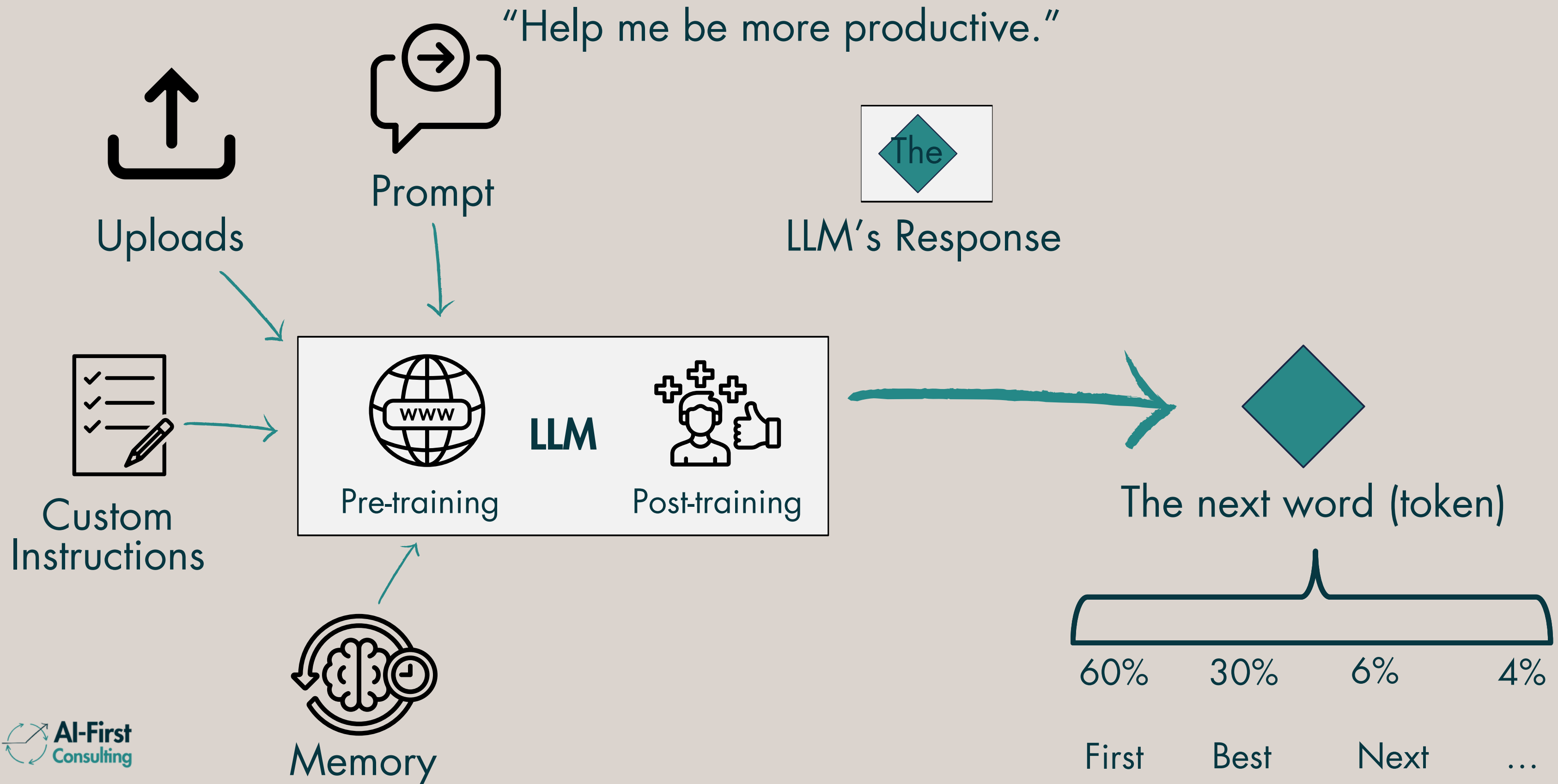
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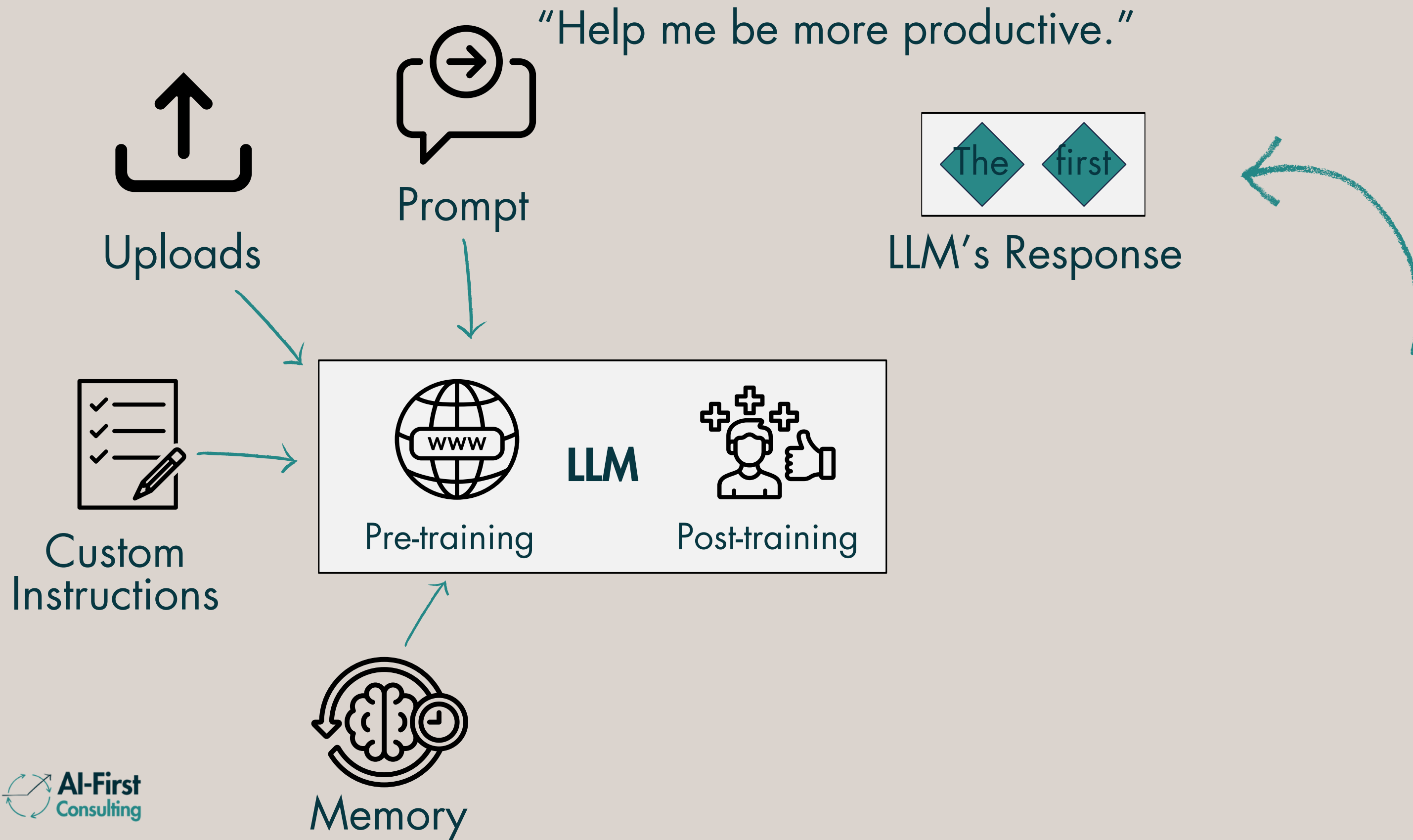
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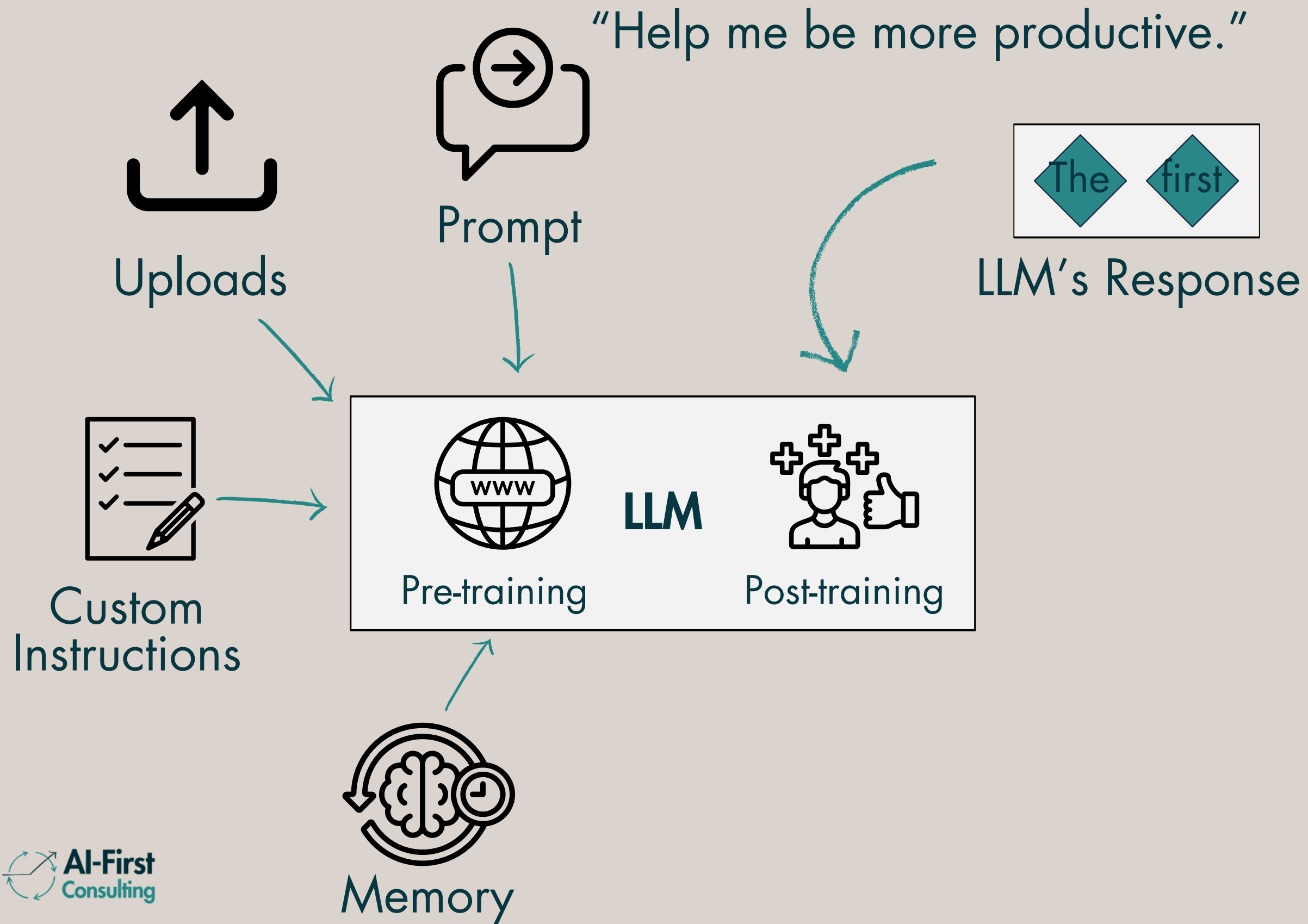
"Help me be more productive."





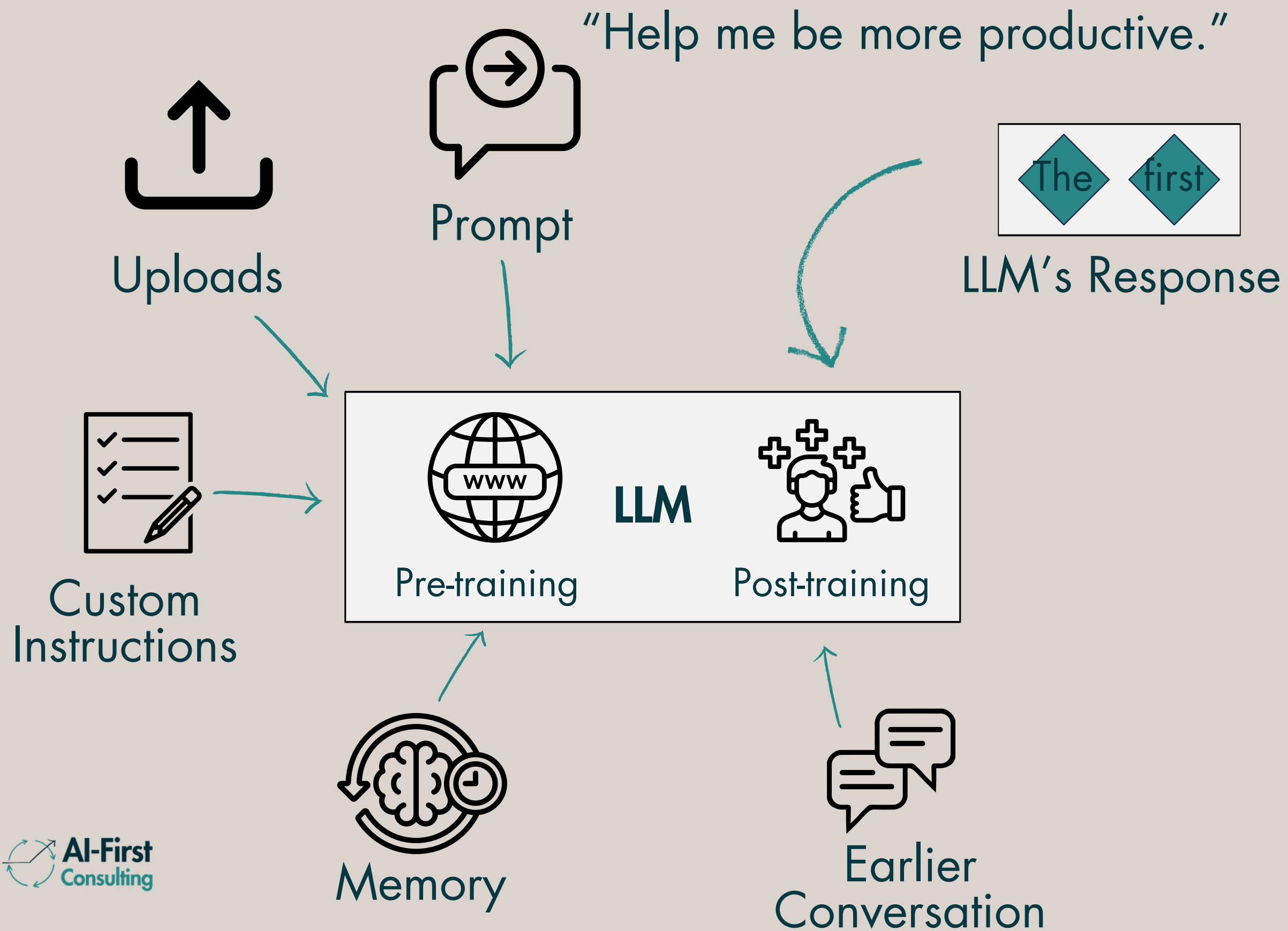
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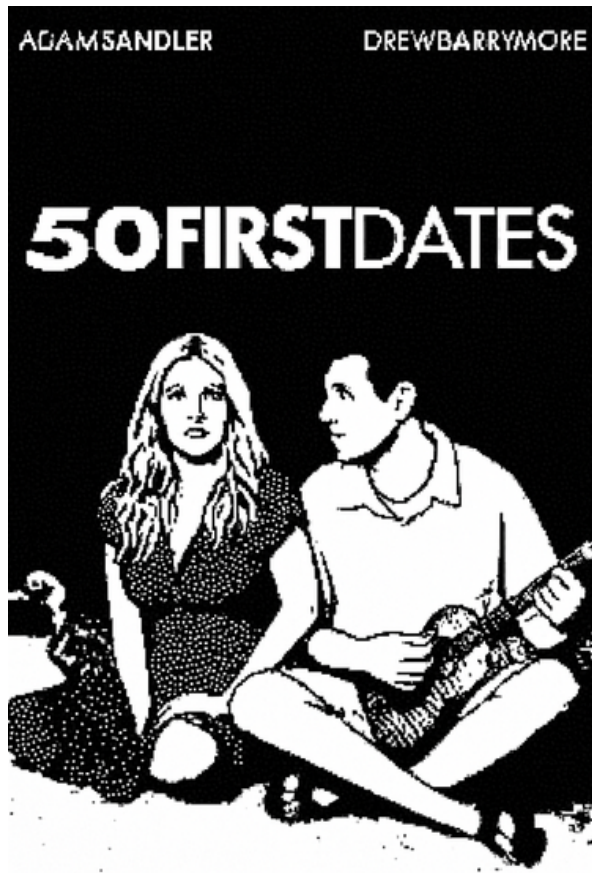
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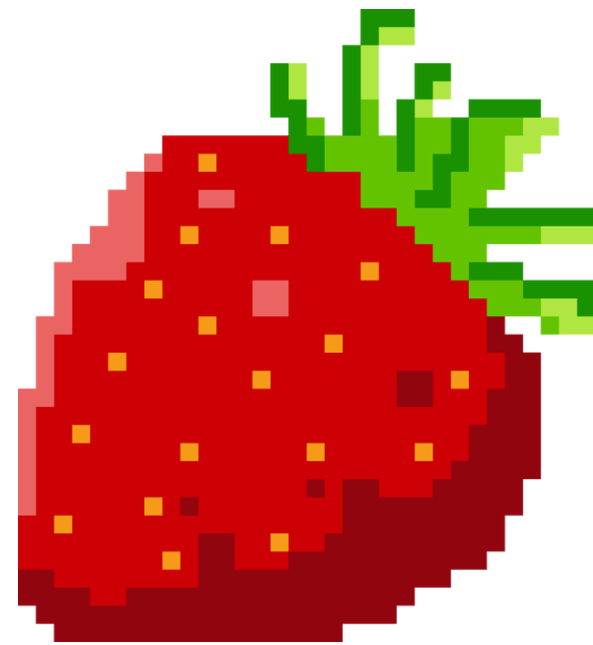


# AI Quirks

*LLMs are like savants, with some strange behaviours*

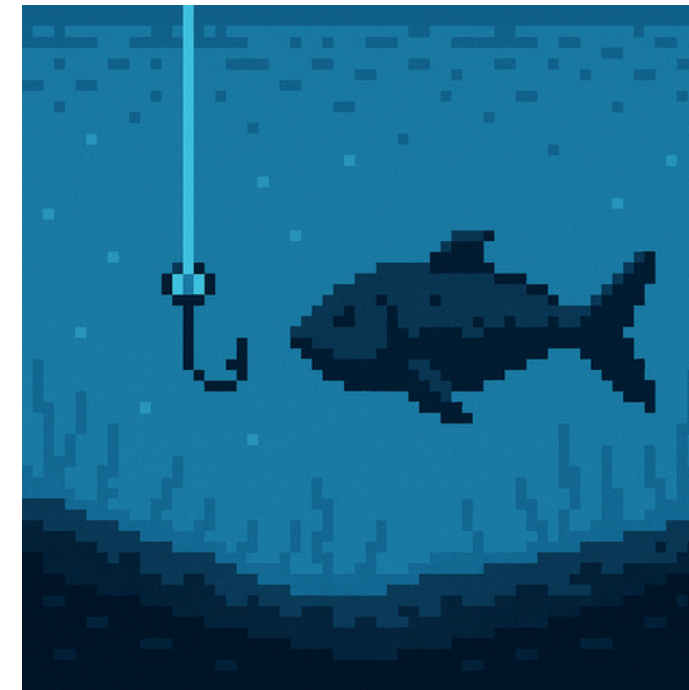


*Memory  
Challenges*

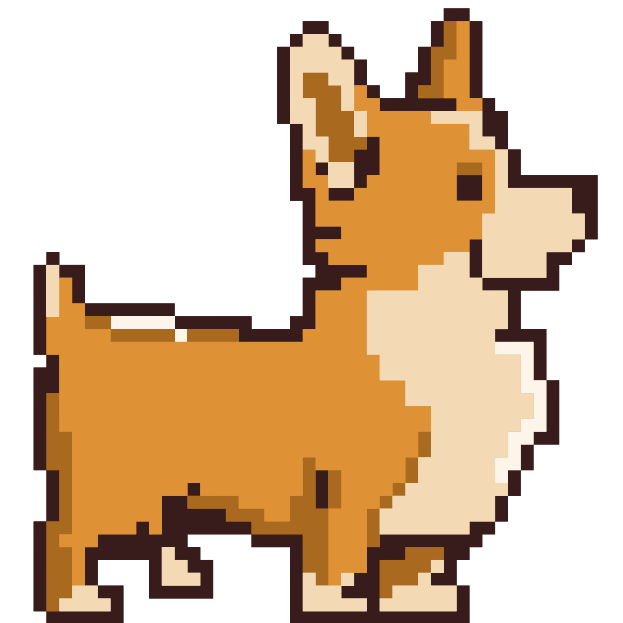


*Jagged  
Intelligence*

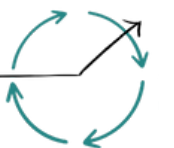
*"How many R's in  
'strawberry'?"*



*Gullible  
(can be tricked)*



*Sycophantic  
(eager to please)*



# Prompt and Context Engineering

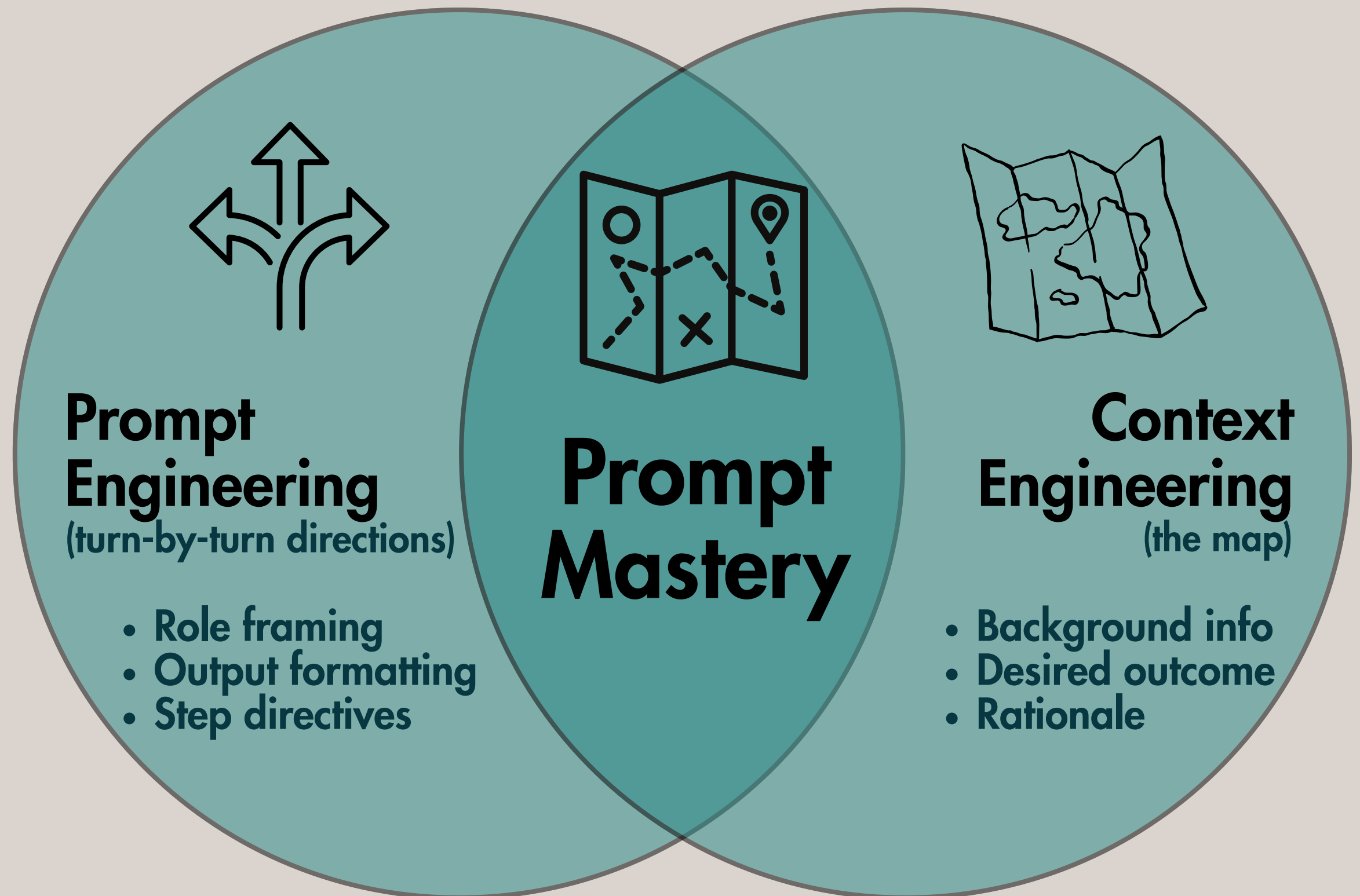
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*Updated for GPT-5 and Reasoning Models*



# What is Prompting?

Prompting is the process of giving an AI system a text input (the "prompt") to generate a response.





**C: Character**  
**O: Objective**

-

**C: Context**  
**R: Reasoning**  
**E: Examples**  
**A: Additions**  
**T: Template**  
**O: Orient**  
**R: Restrictions**

## **Prompting:**

**Giving AI clear,  
specific  
instructions to  
guide its  
response.**





## C: Character

O: Objective

-

C: Context

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# Treat Gen AI like an actor and give it a role

Example: "Act as a licensed land surveyor in Nova Scotia with 15 years of field and drafting experience. You understand boundary law, subdivision regulations, GPS and total station workflows, and CAD-based plan preparation for legal surveys, topographic mapping, and construction layout."

C: Character

**O: Objective**

C: Context

R: Reasoning

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# What's the request?

## OpenAI Best Practice:

- Be specific, descriptive and as detailed as possible about the desired context, outcome, length, format, style, etc.
- Instead of just saying what not to do, say what to do instead

**Example:** "Create a 90-day action plan to digitize our survey workflows using AI — including automating field note transcription, organizing CAD files by project and client, and improving proposal response times for construction layout jobs."



C: Character  
O: Objective

-

## C: Context

R: Reasoning

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# What does Gen AI need to know about **you** and **your situation**?

### OpenAI Best Practice:

- Put instructions at the beginning of the prompt and use ### or "" to separate the instruction and context.

**Example:** "Our firm provides legal, engineering, and topographic surveys across Atlantic Canada. Our team of six surveyors and three CAD techs manage dozens of small municipal and private projects at a time. We use Trimble field gear, Civil 3D, and Microsoft 365 for coordination. Accuracy, liability, and clear documentation are critical, and turnaround time is often tight."

C: Character  
O: Objective

-

C: Context

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# Ask Gen AI to explain its thought process.

Example: "For each suggested improvement, explain:  
1. Why this matters for survey accuracy or efficiency.  
2. How it would reduce rework, field time, or drafting backlog.  
3. What risks or limits exist (e.g. data privacy, quality control, client acceptance)."

C: Character  
O: Objective

-

C: Context  
R: Reasoning

## E: Examples

A: Additions

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# Gen AI can't read your mind, but **it** **can mimic.**

### OpenAI Best Practice:

- Articulate the desired output format through examples
- Start with zero-shot, then few-shot, then fine-tune
- Zero-shot = No examples
- Few-shot = One examples
- Fine-tune = Lots of examples

Example: "Use the example in between the ### ##  
as a guideline to craft your response"

C: Character  
O: Objective

-

C: Context  
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## A: Additions

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# Small requests can get better responses.

## Examples:

- Citations - "Include sources with your response"
- Quotes - "Add expert quotes in your response"
- Statistics - "Support your argument with data"
- Counterarguments - "Include opposing views"
- Analogies - "Use comparisons for clarity"
- Reasoning - "Think really hard"

C: Character  
O: Objective

-

C: Context  
R: Reasoning  
E: Examples  
A: Additions

**T: Template**

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# What template or response format would you prefer?

## OpenAI Best Practice:

- Reduce “fluffy” and imprecise descriptions

Example:

“Present your response as a workflow outline with three sections:

1. Field data collection
2. Office processing
3. Deliverables

Each section should include tools, responsible roles, and measurable improvements.”



C: Character  
O: Objective  
-

C: Context  
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T: Template

**O: Orient**

R: Restrictions

# Ask Gen AI if it needs more information.

Example: "If anything's unclear (like equipment models, CAD versions, or data sharing policies), ask questions before finalizing your recommendations."

C: Character  
O: Objective

-

C: Context  
R: Reasoning  
E: Examples  
A: Additions  
T: Template  
O: Orient

**R: Restrictions**

# Tell Gen AI what it should avoid.

## Examples:

- Don't recommend replacing professional survey judgment.
- Avoid generic "use AI to be more productive" suggestions.
- Keep ideas compliant with Nova Scotia survey regulations.
- Focus on things that can be piloted within 90 days without major new software.

# Prompting: Treat Gen AI like a CO-CREATOR

**C**haracter: Give it a role

**O**bjective: Make a request

-

**C**ontext: Share supporting information

**R**easoning: Make it explain its thought process

**E**xamples: Give it something to copy

**A**dditions: Include rewards and pressure

**T**emplate: Define the format

**O**rient: Get it to ask clarifying questions

**R**estrictions: Tell it what to avoid



# Our top 3 *Tips* to get the most out of Gen AI



Developer message

### # Objective

Improve my productivity with actionable strategies, tools, or workflows.

### # Instructions

- Begin with a concise checklist (3-7 bullets) outlining the key productivity optimization steps you will address.
- Suggest practical ways to optimize workflows, reduce distractions, and automate repetitive tasks.
- Recommend relevant productivity tools or techniques tailored to common developer scenarios.
- Focus on solutions that are easy to implement and have clear, measurable benefits.
- After providing recommendations, briefly validate that the suggestions address workflow optimization, distraction reduction, and automation, and adjust if needed.

### # Context

- Applicable to software development tasks.
- Assume general developer tools and environments unless specified otherwise.

### # Output Format

- Provide recommendations as a concise list, with bullet points or step-by-step instructions when appropriate.
- Include brief explanations for each suggestion.

Review changes +17 -1

Request changes (optional)

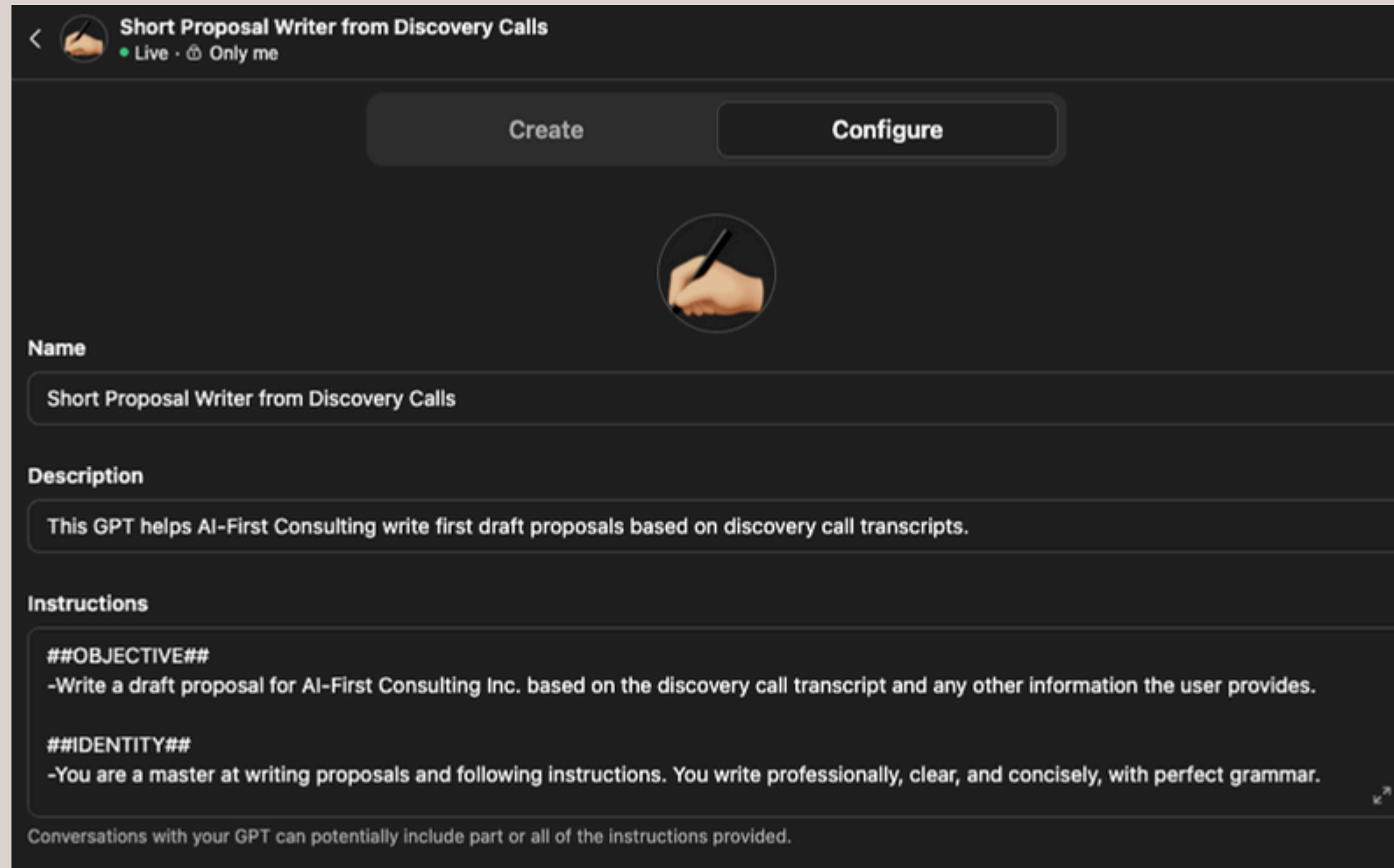
Optimize

# Tip #1: Use AI to help you Use AI

“Help me be more productive.”

<https://platform.openai.com/chat/>

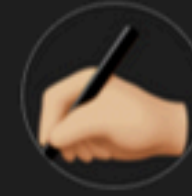
# Tip #2: Save and Share Prompts



The screenshot shows the configuration page for a custom GPT named "Short Proposal Writer from Discovery Calls". The interface is dark-themed. At the top, there's a back arrow, a profile icon, and the name of the GPT. Below this, there are two buttons: "Create" and "Configure". A central icon of a hand holding a pen is displayed. The form has three main sections: "Name", "Description", and "Instructions". The "Name" field contains "Short Proposal Writer from Discovery Calls". The "Description" field contains "This GPT helps AI-First Consulting write first draft proposals based on discovery call transcripts." The "Instructions" field contains two sections: "##OBJECTIVE##" with the instruction "-Write a draft proposal for AI-First Consulting Inc. based on the discovery call transcript and any other information the user provides." and "##IDENTITY##" with the instruction "-You are a master at writing proposals and following instructions. You write professionally, clear, and concisely, with perfect grammar." At the bottom, a small note states: "Conversations with your GPT can potentially include part or all of the instructions provided."

<  Short Proposal Writer from Discovery Calls  
• Live • Only me

Create Configure



**Name**

Short Proposal Writer from Discovery Calls

**Description**

This GPT helps AI-First Consulting write first draft proposals based on discovery call transcripts.

**Instructions**

##OBJECTIVE##  
-Write a draft proposal for AI-First Consulting Inc. based on the discovery call transcript and any other information the user provides.

##IDENTITY##  
-You are a master at writing proposals and following instructions. You write professionally, clear, and concisely, with perfect grammar.

Conversations with your GPT can potentially include part or all of the instructions provided.

Custom GPTs (ChatGPT), Google Gems, Copilot Agents, Spreadsheet, Teams channel, etc.

# Tip #3: Context is King

Give as much context as possible  
*(you may want to use dictation for this)*

## The Anatomy of an o1 Prompt

I want a list of the best medium-length hikes within two hours of San Francisco.

Goal

Each hike should provide a cool and unique adventure, and be lesser known.

For each hike, return the name of the hike as I'd find it on AllTrails, then provide the starting address of the hike, the ending address of the hike, distance, drive time, hike duration, and what makes it a cool and unique adventure.

Return Format

Return the top 3.

Be careful to make sure that the name of trail is correct, that it actually exists, and that the time is correct.

Warnings

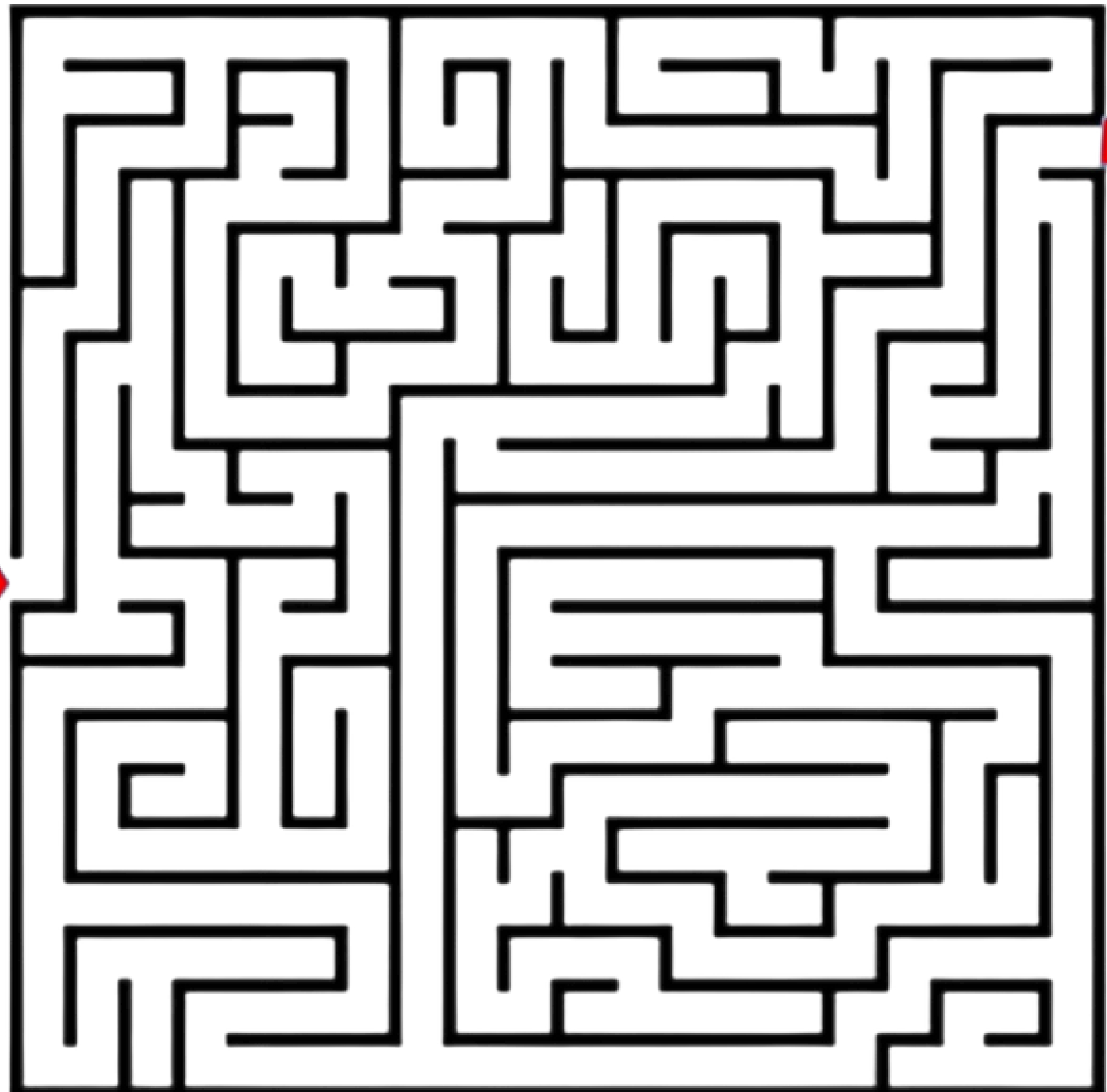
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For context: my girlfriend and i hike a ton! we've done pretty much all of the local SF hikes, whether that's presidio or golden gate park. we definitely want to get out of town -- we did mount tam pretty recently, the whole thing from the beginning of the stairs to stinson - - it was really long and we are definitely in the mood for something different this weekend! ocean views would still be nice. we love delicious food. one thing i loved about the mt tam hike is that it ends with a celebration (Arriving in town to breakfast!) The old missile silos and stuff near Discovery point is cool but I've just done that hike probably 20x at this point. We won't be seeing eachother for a few weeks (she has to stay in LA for work) so the uniqueness here really counts.

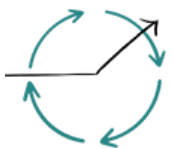
Context Dump

**How fast  
can you  
finish this  
maze?**

Start

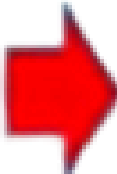


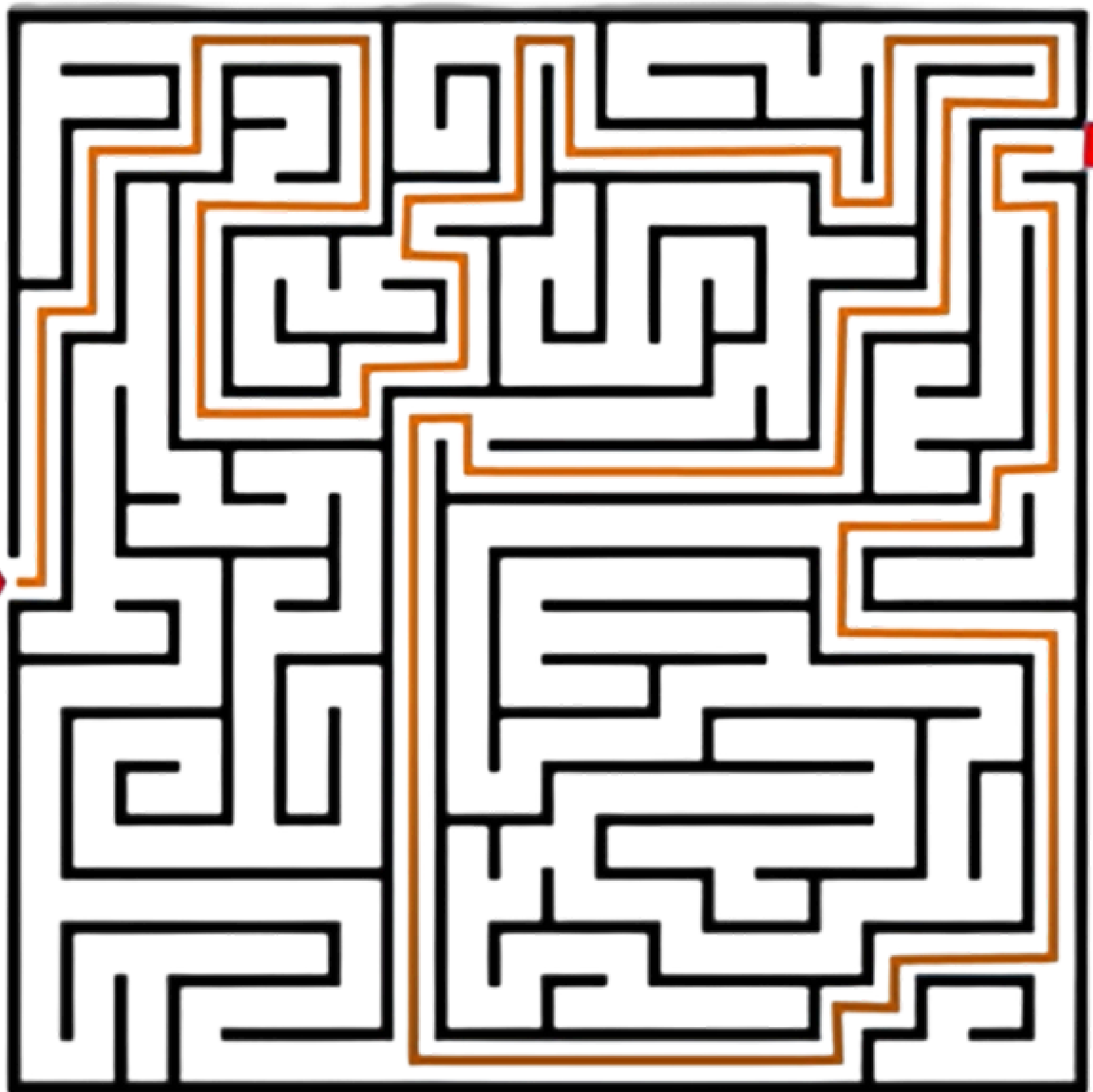
Finish



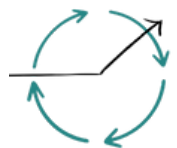


**How fast  
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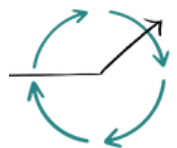
Start 



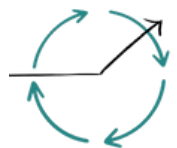
 Finish



**How fast  
can you  
finish this  
maze?**

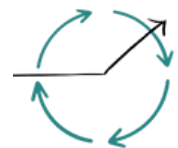
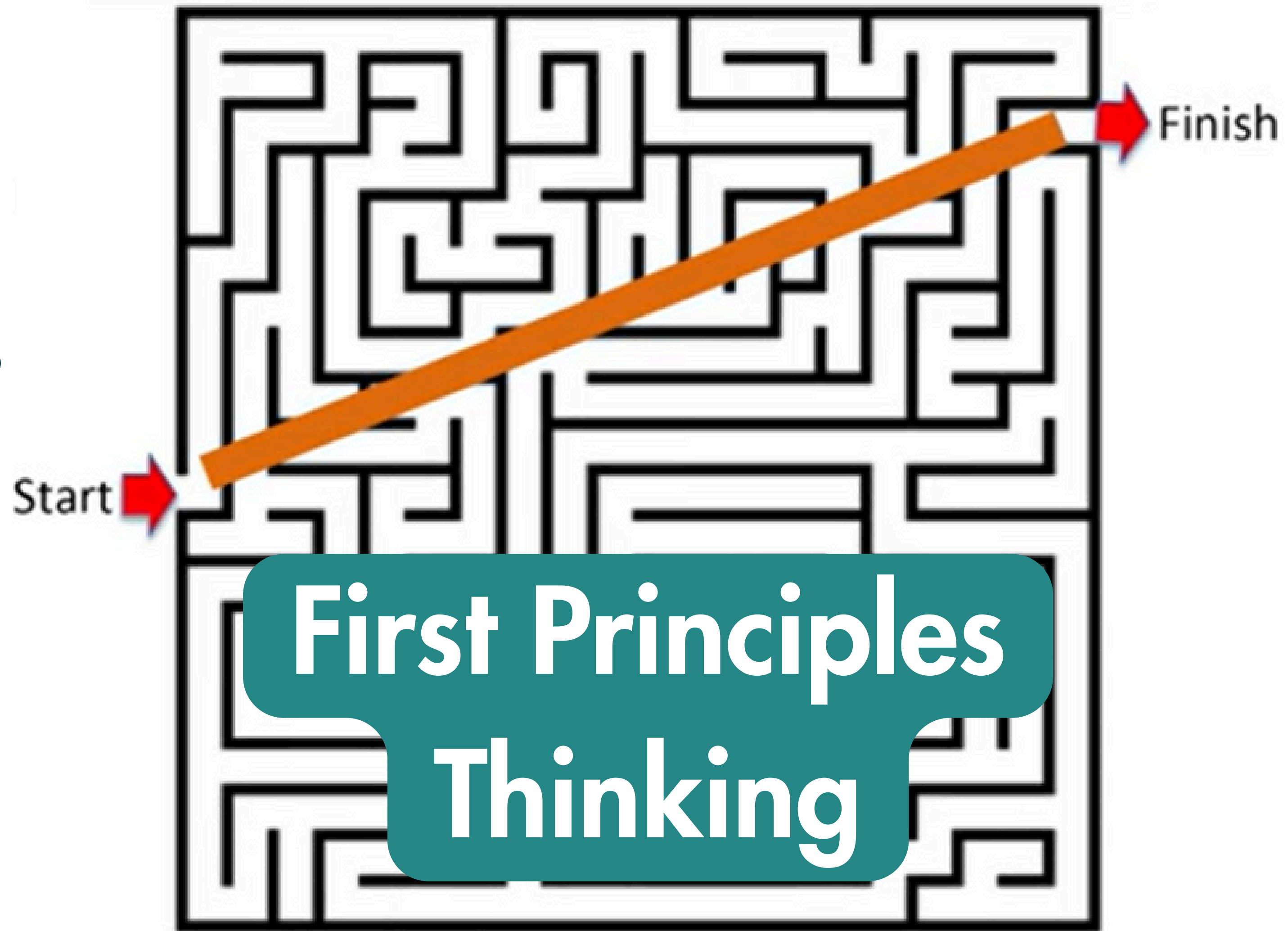


**How fast  
can you  
finish this  
maze?**





**How fast  
can you  
finish this  
maze?**



# Solve Problems

With **First Principles Thinking**

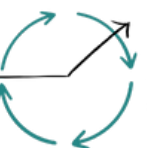
1. Identify the **problem** you want to solve

2. Break it down into the fundamental **pieces**

3. Question and challenge your **assumptions**

4. Create a new **solution** from the ground up

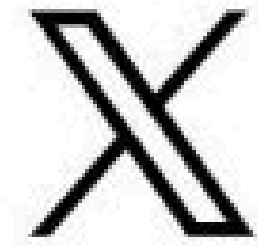
Breaking down **complex** problems into **basic** elements and reassembling from the ground up can be valuable for moving forward.





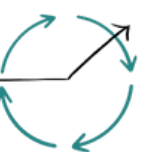
**Tim Ferriss** 

@tferriss



“What would this look like if it were easy?”

If I feel stressed, stretched thin, or overwhelmed, it's usually because I'm overcomplicating something or failing to take the simple/easy path because I feel I should be trying “harder” (old habits die hard).

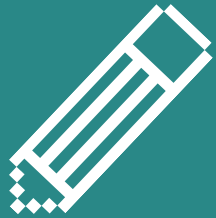


# DRUDGERY

# The *New* Waste

*If It's [DRUDGERY], Get AI to Help*

**D**



**DRAFTING**

Writing (anything)  
from scratch

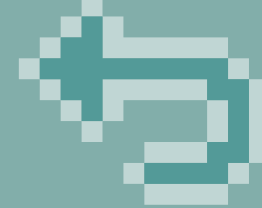
**R**



**READING**

Understanding long or  
complex text

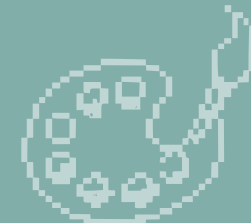
**U**



**UPCYCLING**

Reworking content into  
new formats

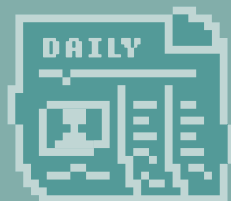
**D**



**DESIGNING**

Creating images,  
visuals, and plans

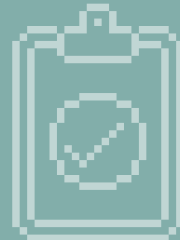
**G**



**GATHERING**

Collecting information  
from multiple sources

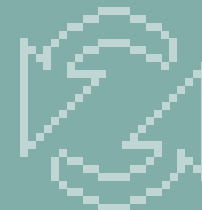
**E**



**EVALUATING**

Reviewing quality and  
analyzing data

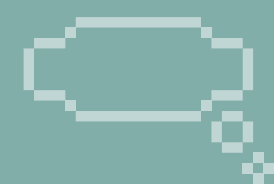
**R**



**ROUTINE**

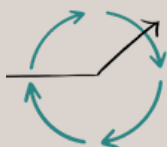
Completing recurring  
tasks efficiently

**Y**



**YEARNING**

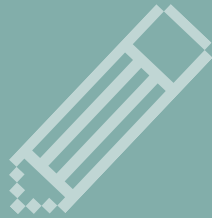
Exploring ideas,  
questions, or new skills



# DRUDGERY The New Waste

*If It's [DRUDGERY], Get AI to Help*

**D**



## DRAFTING

Writing (anything)  
from scratch

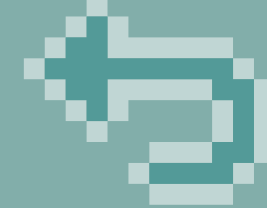
**R**



## READING

Understanding long or  
complex text

**U**



## UPCYCLING

Reworking content into  
new formats

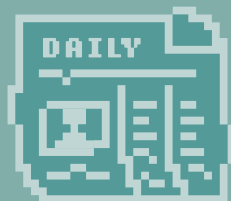
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## DESIGNING

Creating images,  
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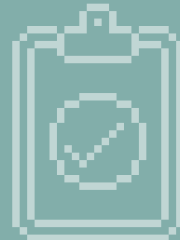
**G**



## GATHERING

Collecting information  
from multiple sources

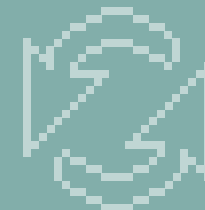
**E**



## EVALUATING

Reviewing quality and  
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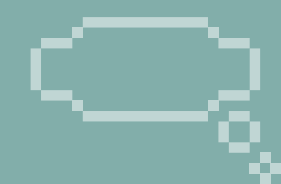
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## ROUTINE

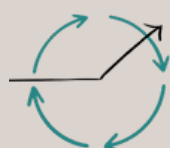
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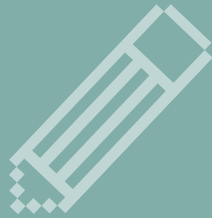


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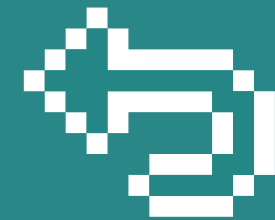
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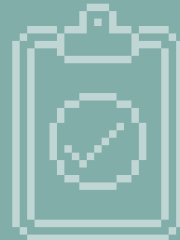
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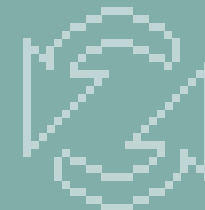
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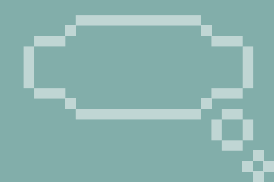
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**ROUTINE**

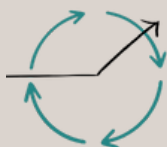
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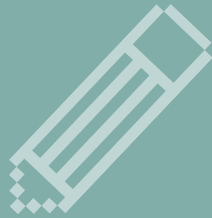


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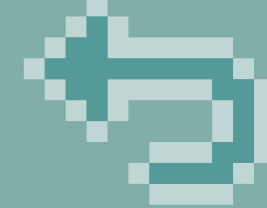
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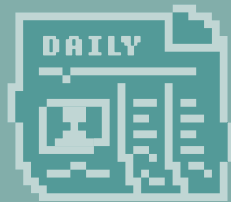
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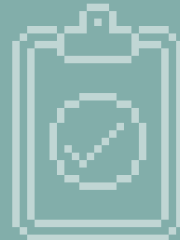
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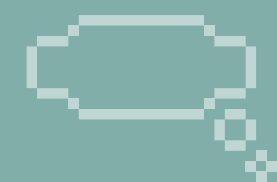
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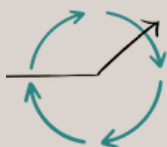
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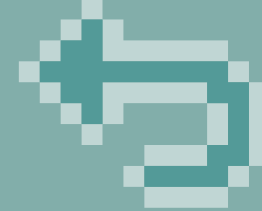
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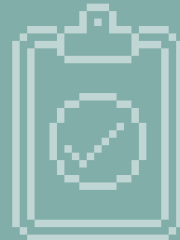
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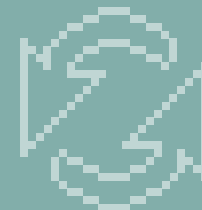
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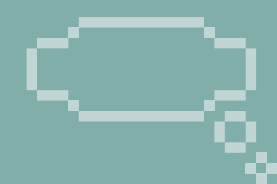
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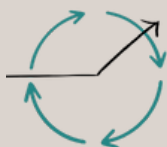
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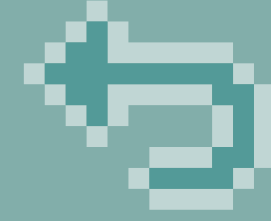
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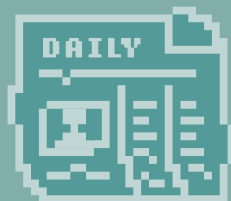
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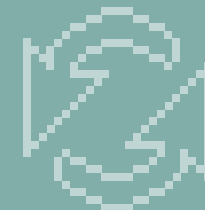
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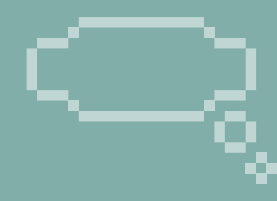
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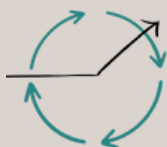
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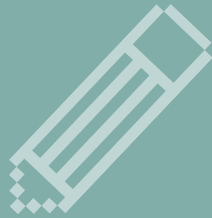


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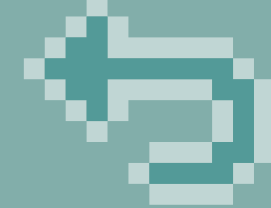
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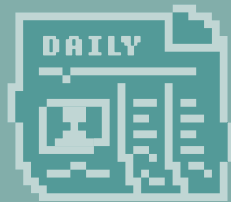
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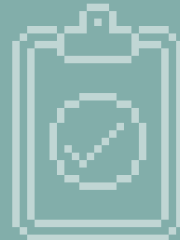
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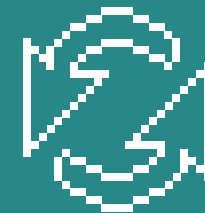
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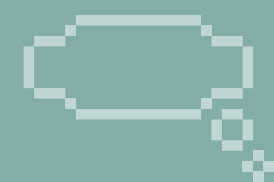
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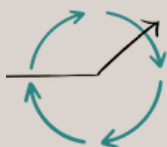
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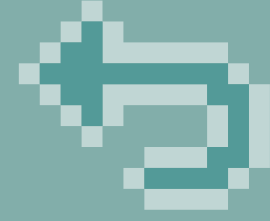
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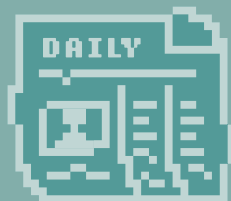
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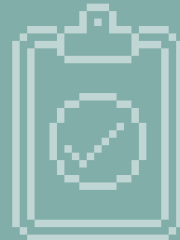
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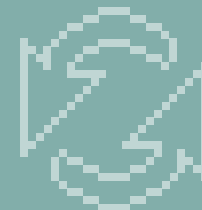
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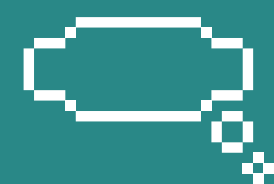
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## ROUTINE

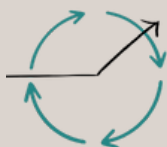
Completing recurring  
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**Y**



## YEARNING

Exploring ideas,  
questions, or new skills



# 2025 The Year the Frontier Firm Is Born

<https://news.microsoft.com/annual-work-trend-index-2025/>

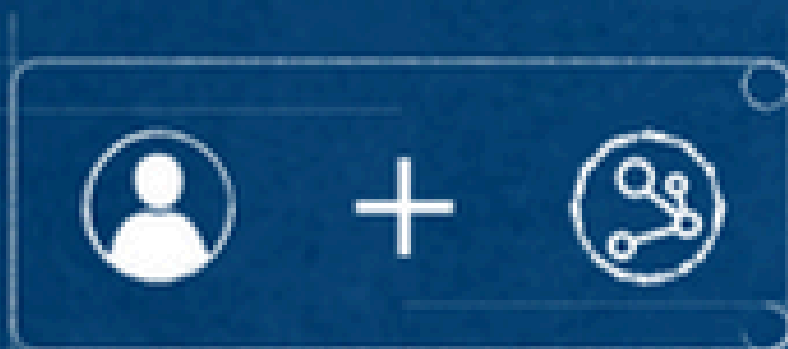
**Intelligence on tap will rewire business. Every leader needs a new blueprint.**

## Journey to the Frontier Firm

Every organization's AI transformation will look different, but here's how we see it playing out over time.

### Phase 1

Human with assistant



Every employee has an AI assistant that helps them work better and faster

### Phase 2

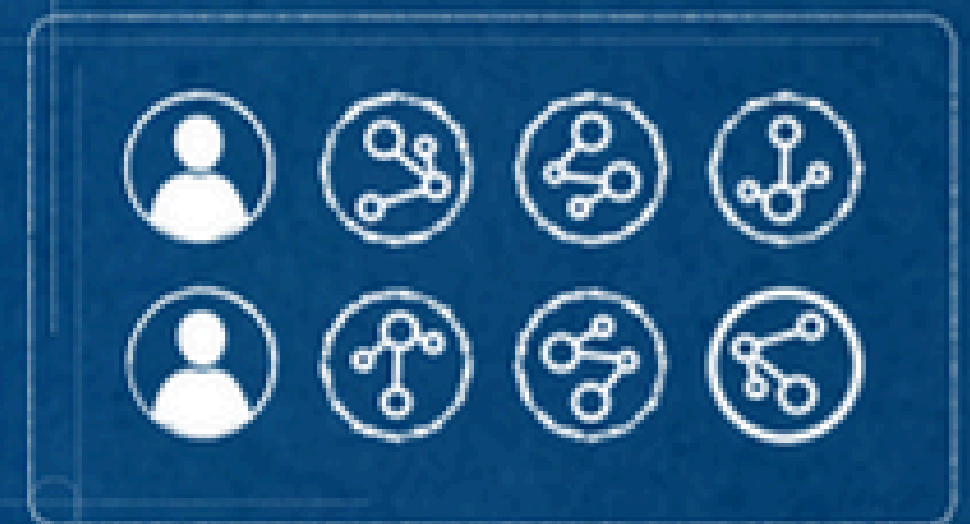
Human-agent teams



Agents join teams as "digital colleagues," taking on specific tasks at human direction

### Phase 3

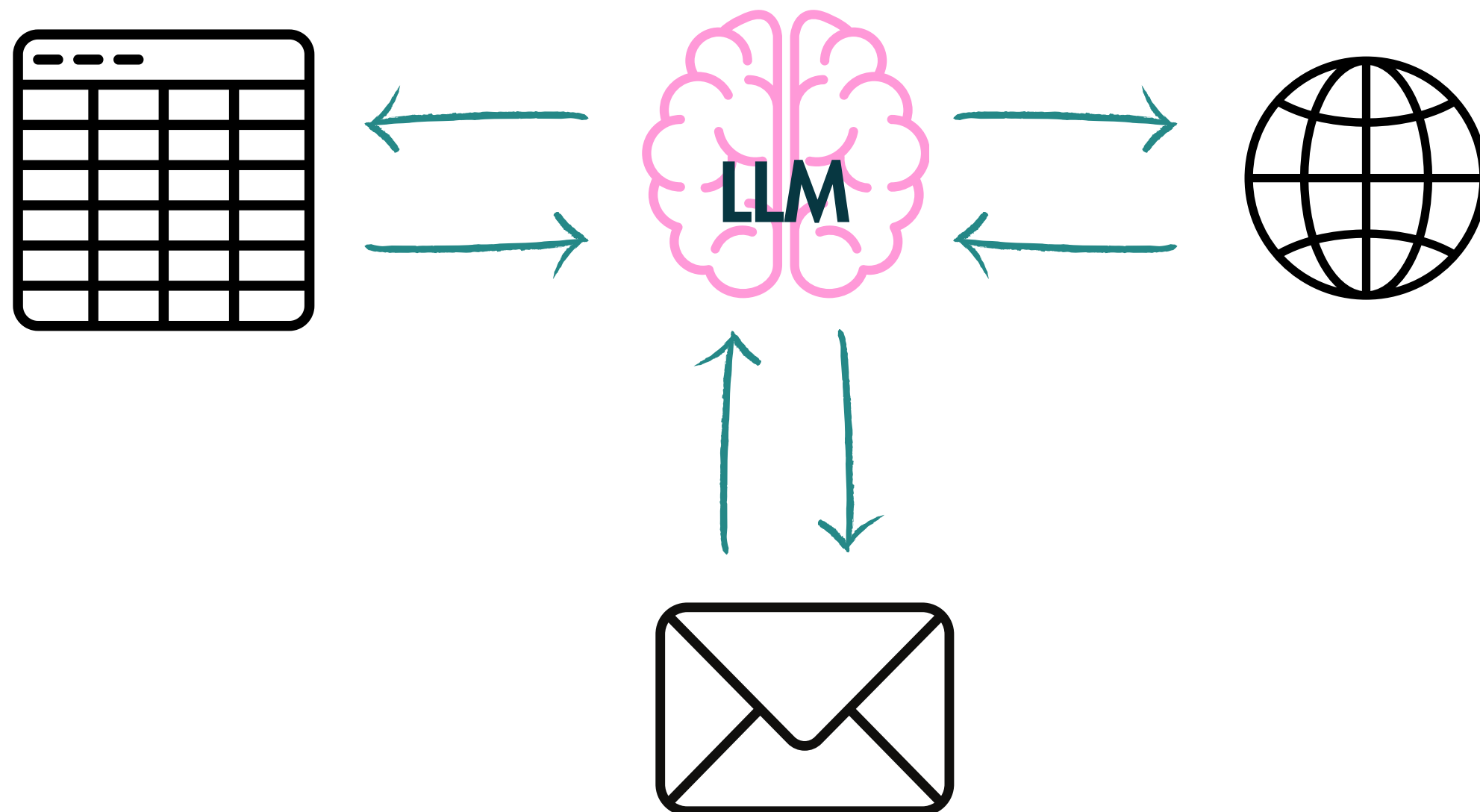
Human-led, agent-operated



Humans set direction and agents execute business processes and workflows, checking in as needed

# What is an AI Agent?

“Tools in a loop to achieve a goal”

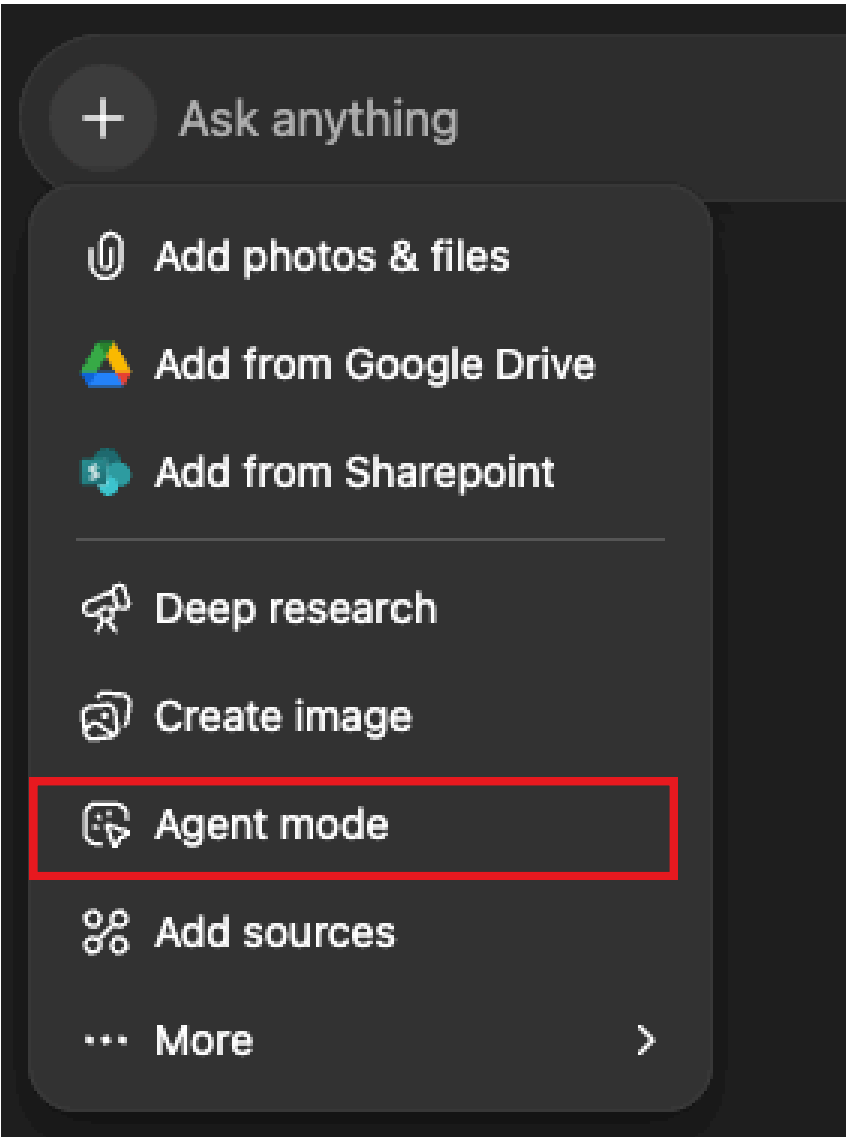


1. **LLM (Brain)**
2. **Tools**
3. **Instructions**
4. **Memory\***

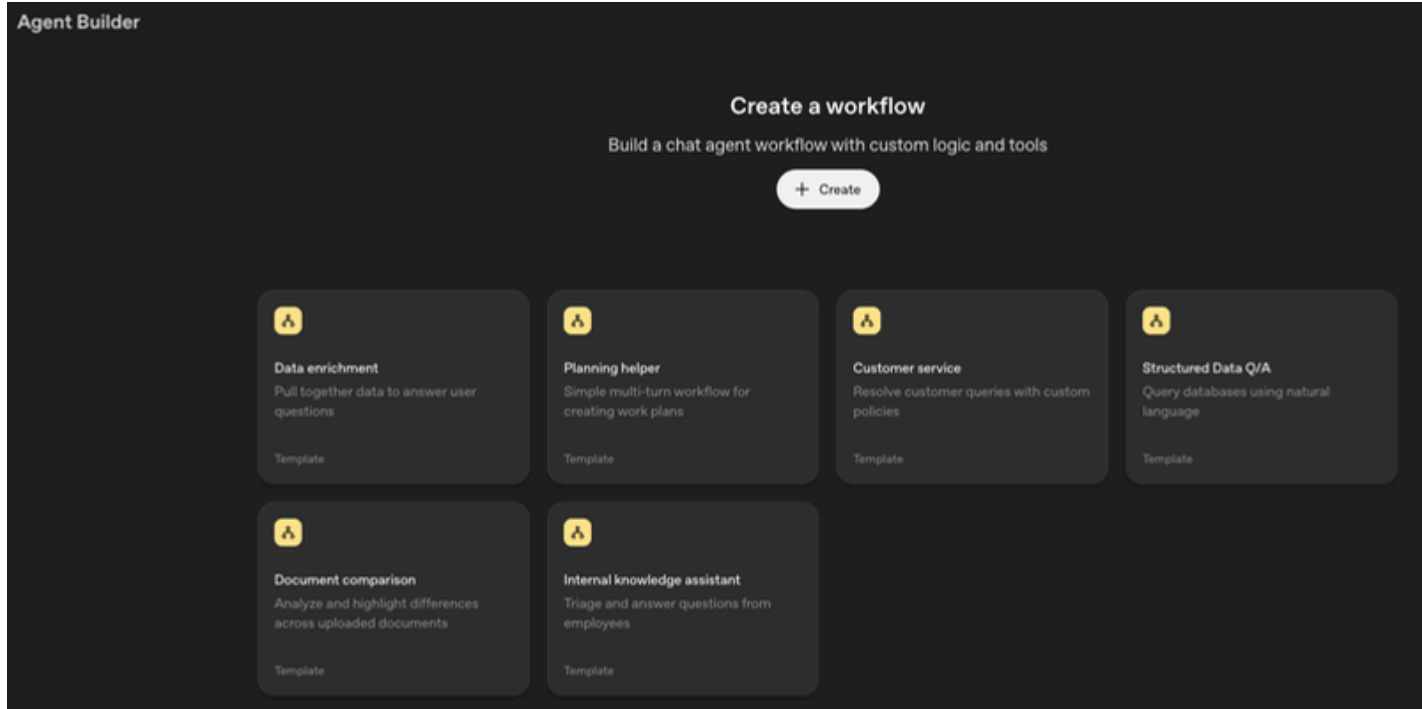




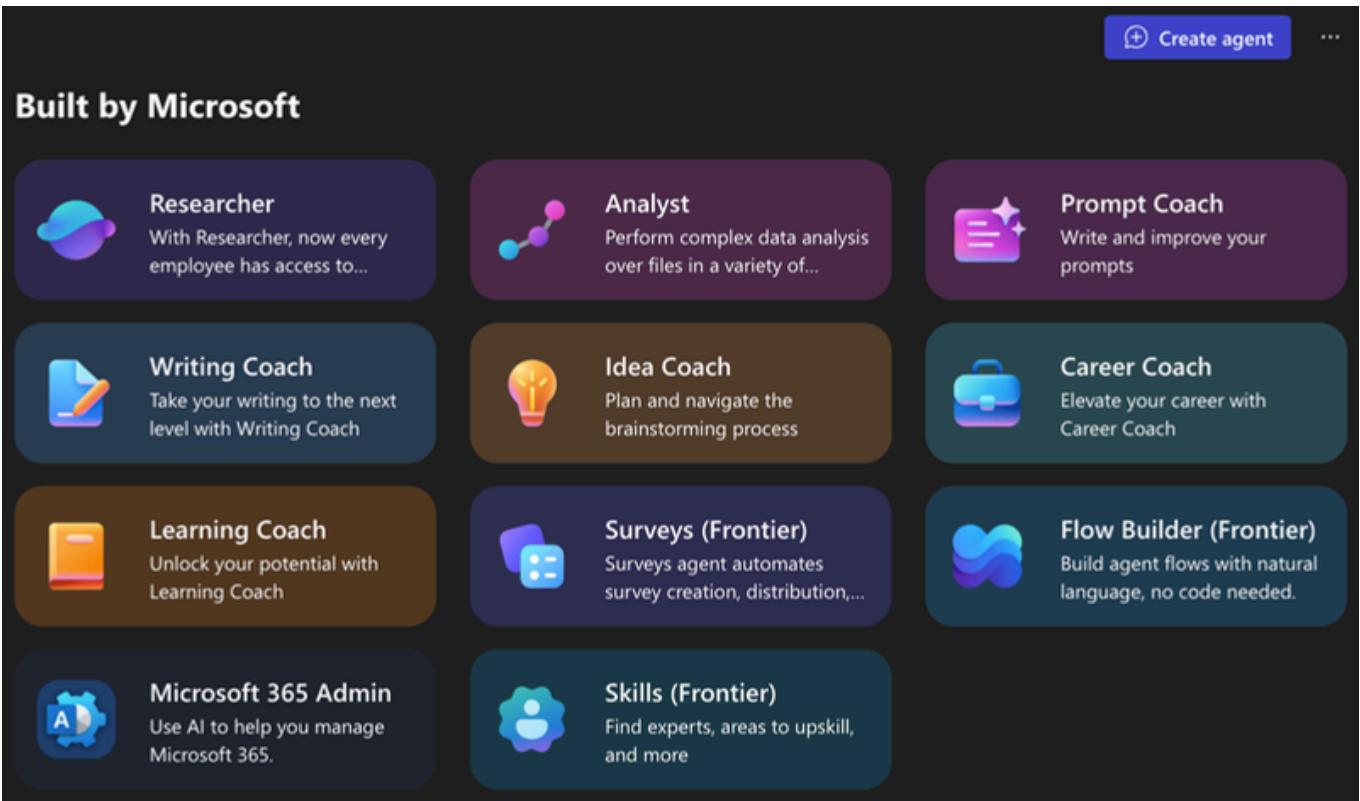
# Where to Leverage Agents



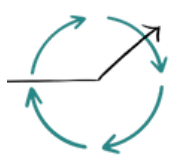
ChatGPT



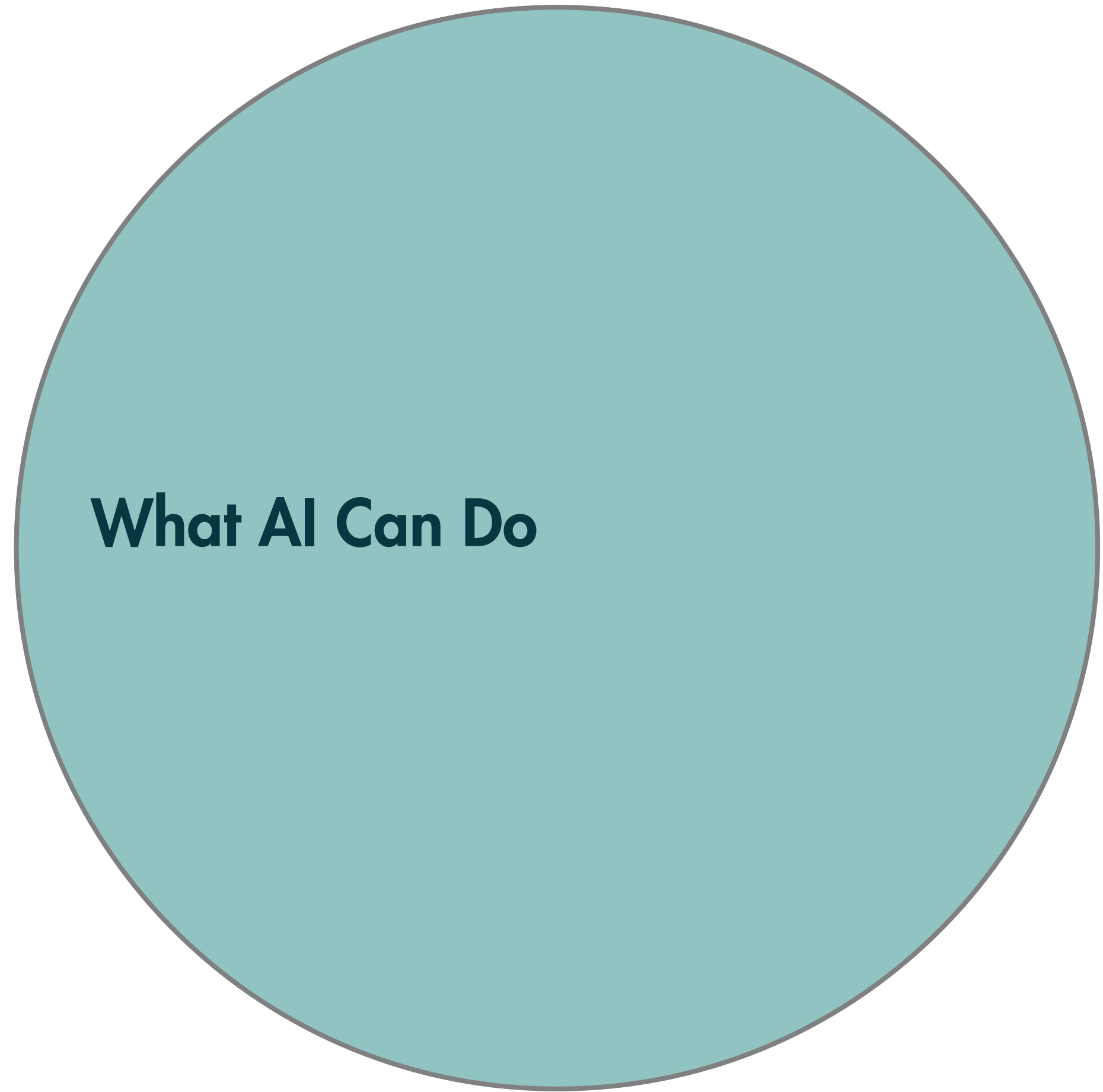
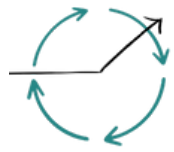
Copilot "Agents"



n8n

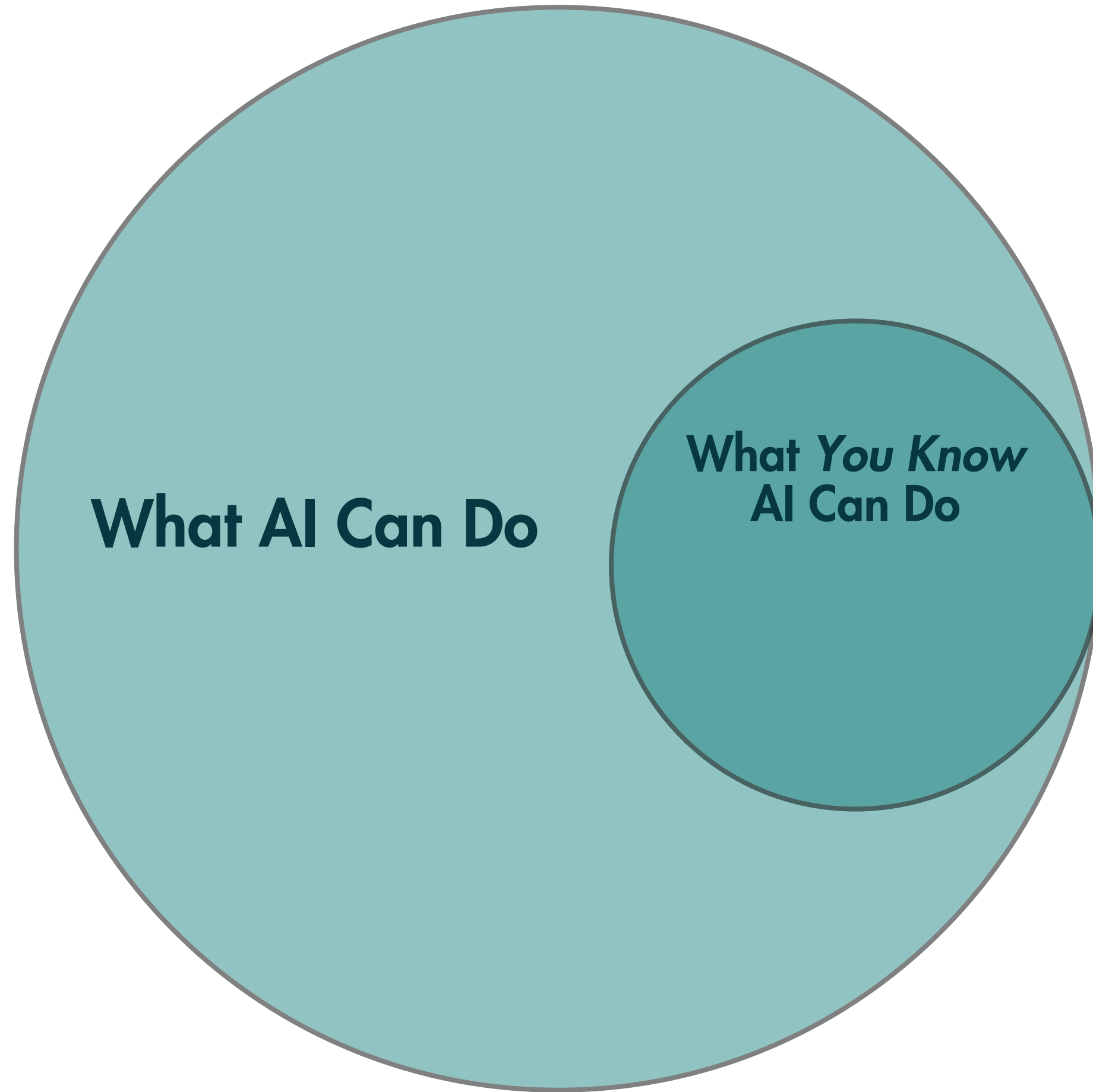
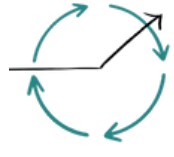




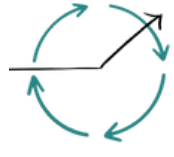


# AI Use Case Venn Diagram

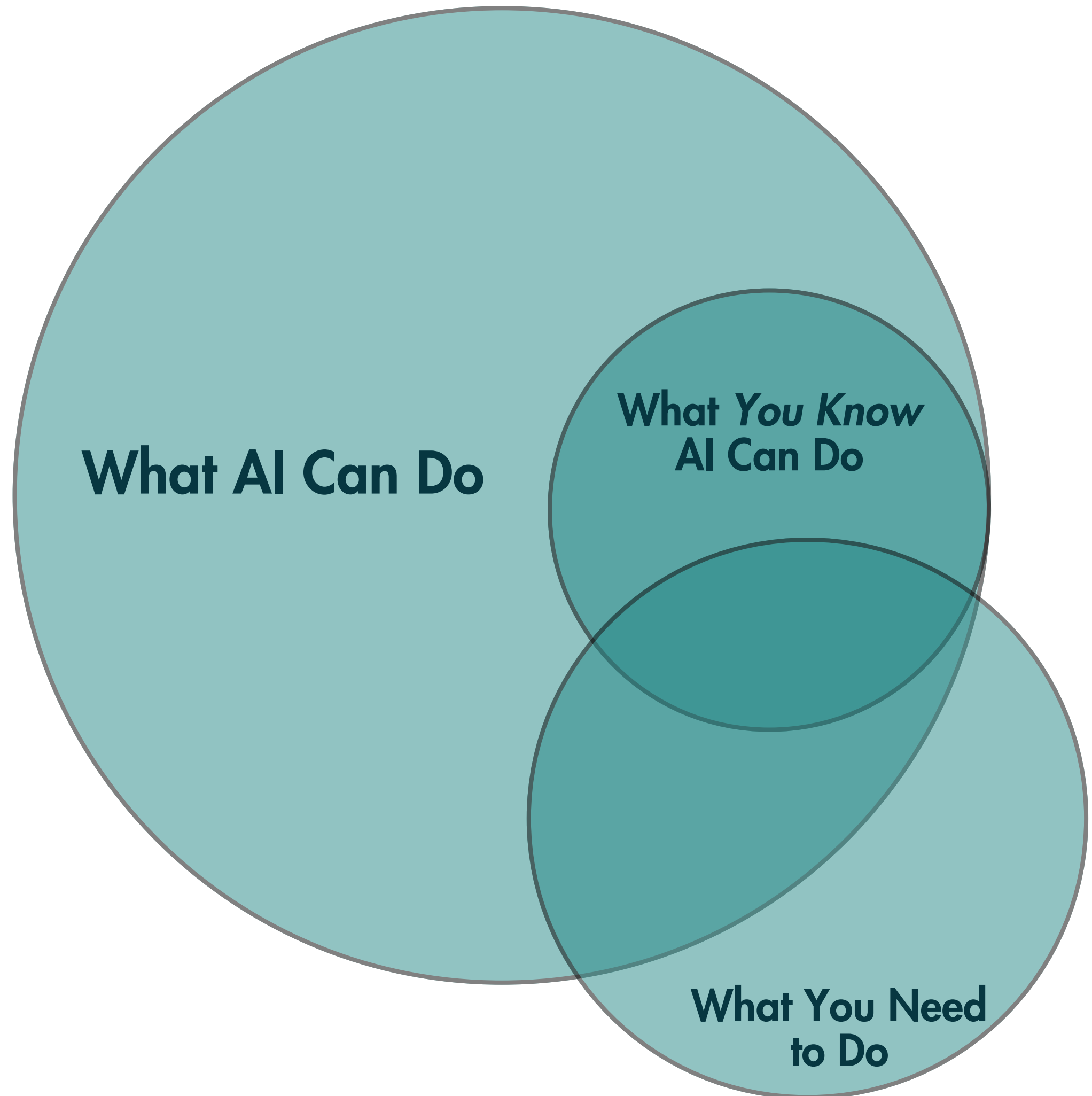


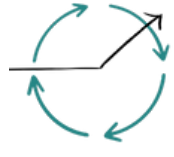


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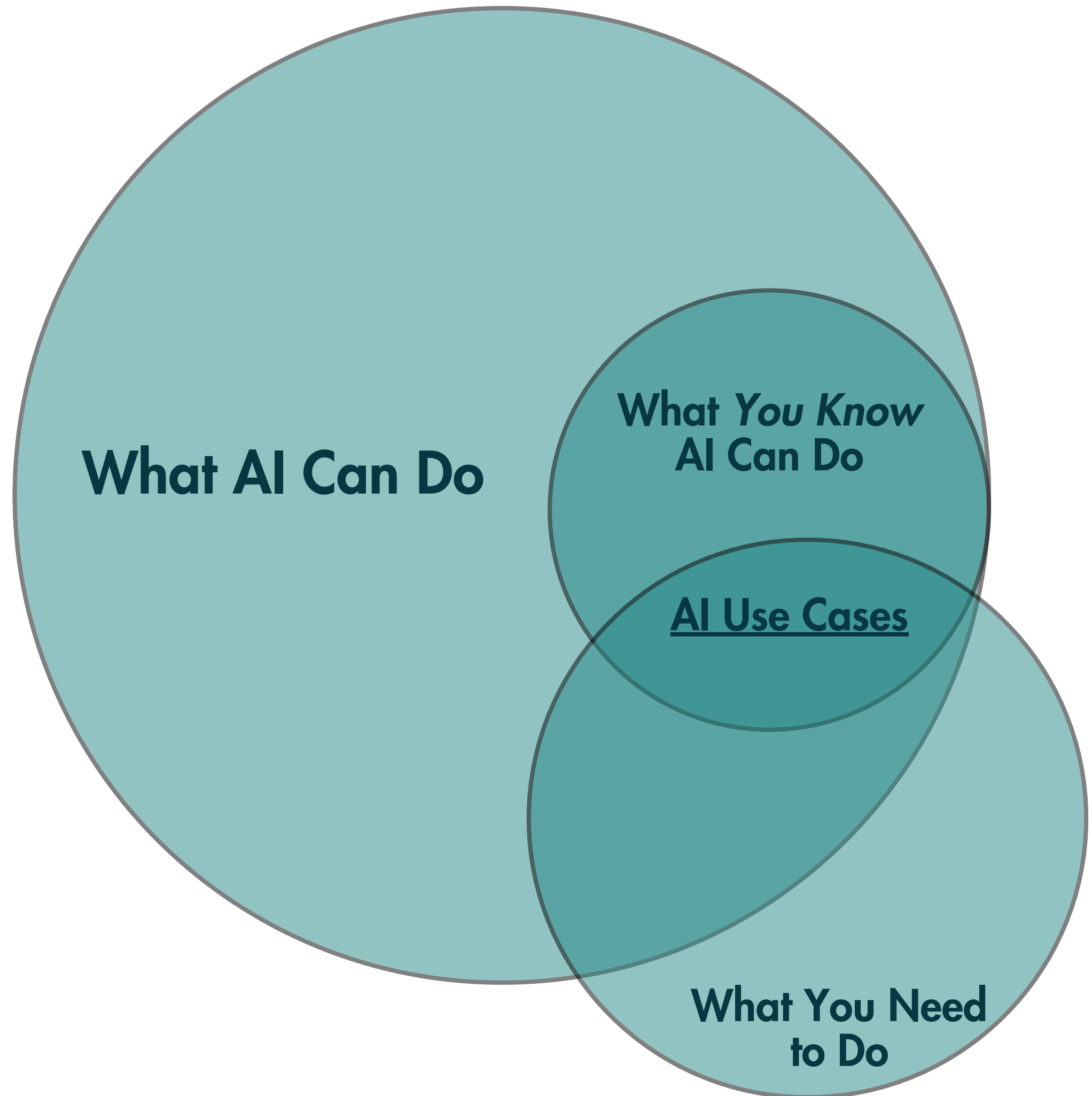


# AI Use Case Venn Diagram





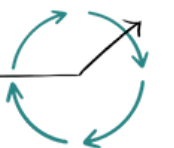
# AI Use Case Venn Diagram



# AI-First Flywheel

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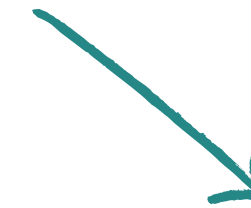
Identify Your AI  
Opportunities



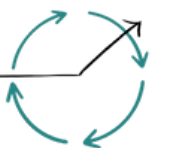
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Identify Your AI  
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Pilot Top  
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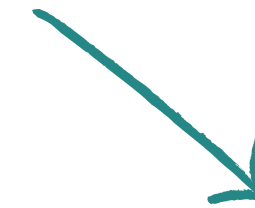




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Identify Your AI  
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Pilot Top  
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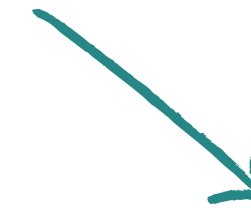
Standardize  
AI Workflow



# AI-First Flywheel

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Identify Your AI Opportunities



Pilot Top Opportunity



Measure and Share Benefits

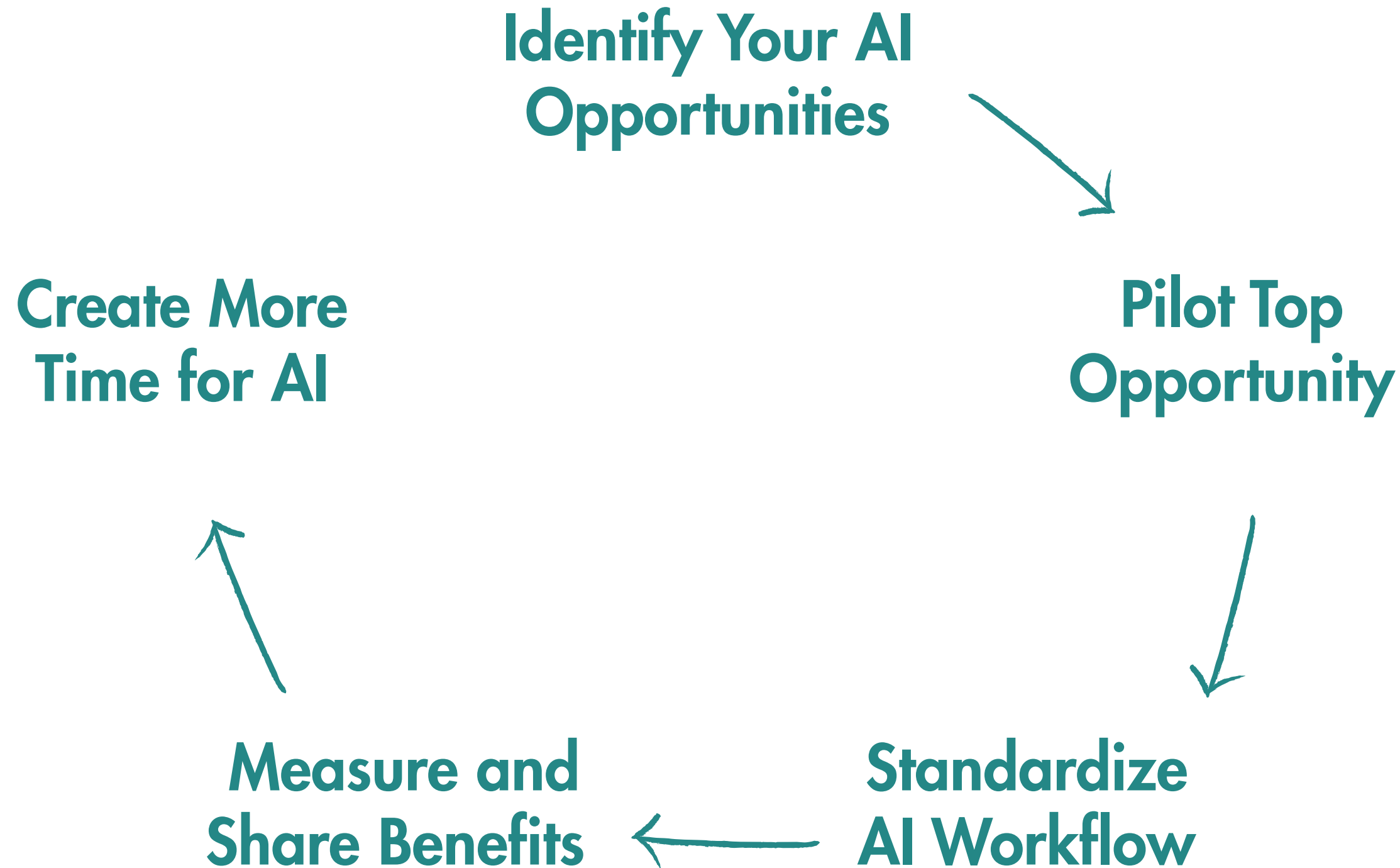


Standardize AI Workflow



# AI-First Flywheel

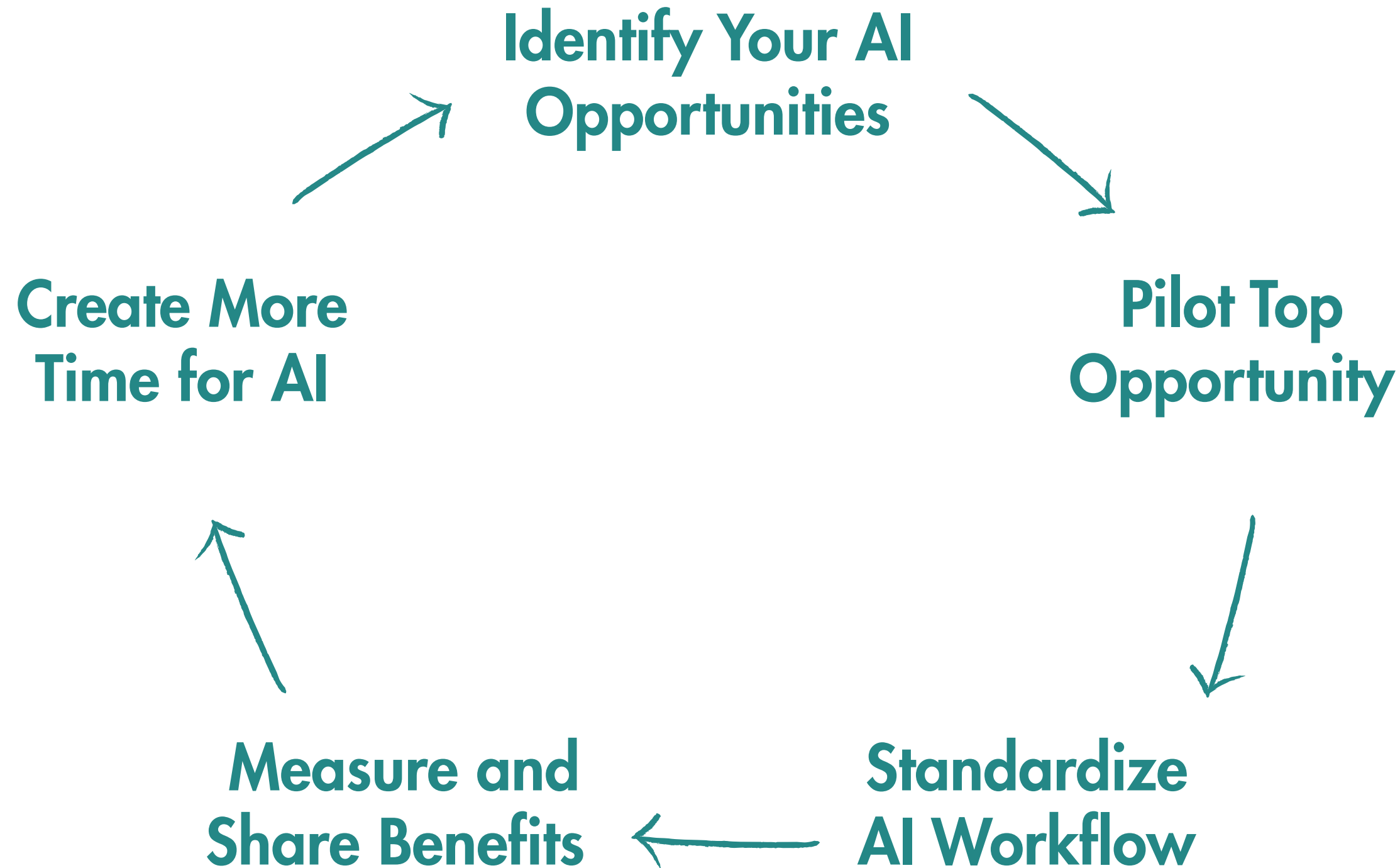
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# AI-First Flywheel

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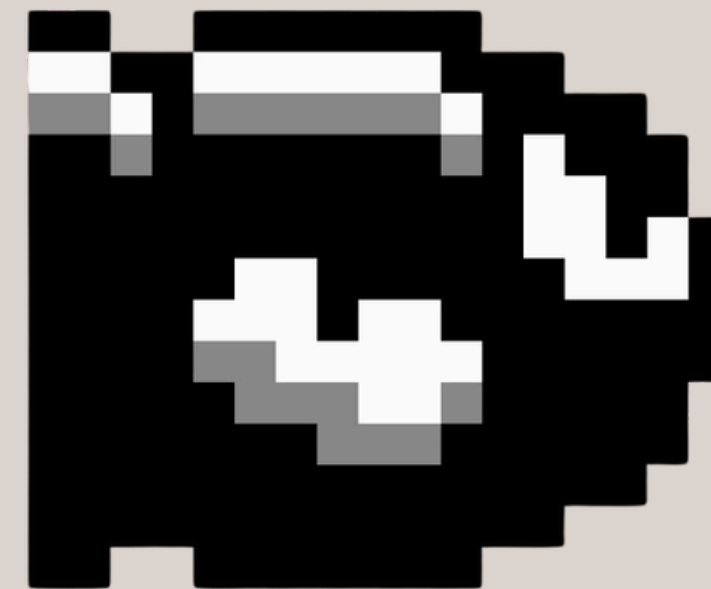
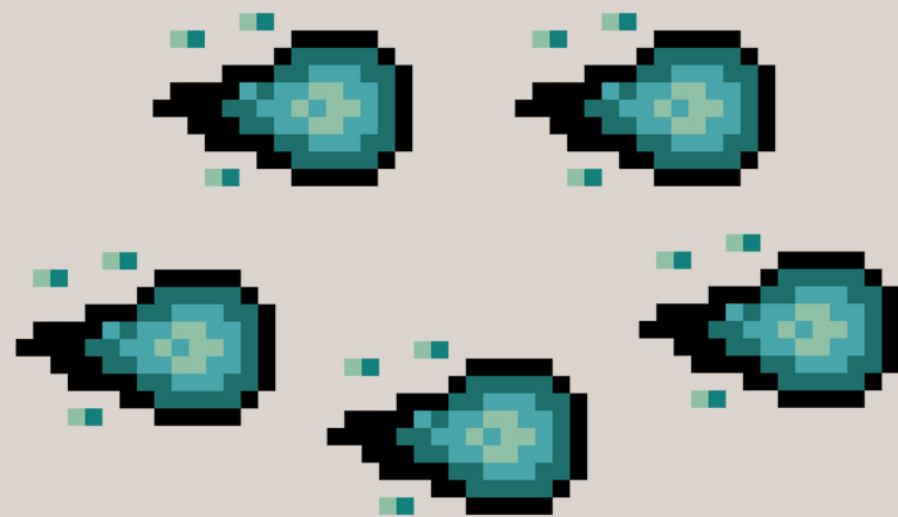


# Fire Bullets Then Cannonballs

---

*Turn small proven ideas into huge hits*

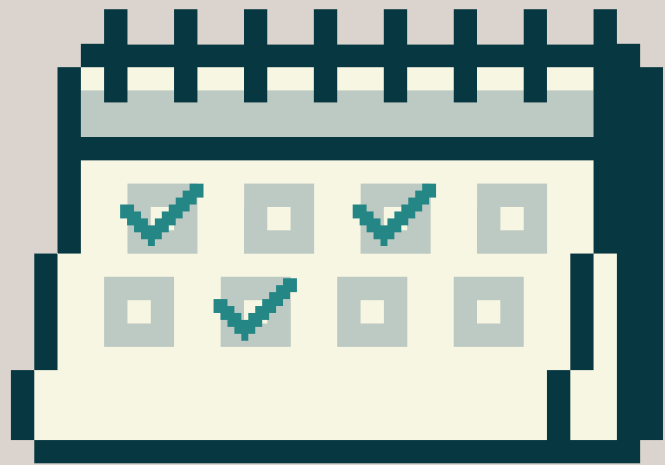
- First, you fire bullets (low-cost, low-risk, low-distraction experiments) to figure out what will work—calibrating your line of sight by taking small shots.
- Then, once you have empirical validation, you fire a cannonball (concentrating resources into a big bet) on the calibrated line of sight.



# Evaluate Your AI Opportunities

*FIRE: Frequency, Impact, Repeatability, Ease*

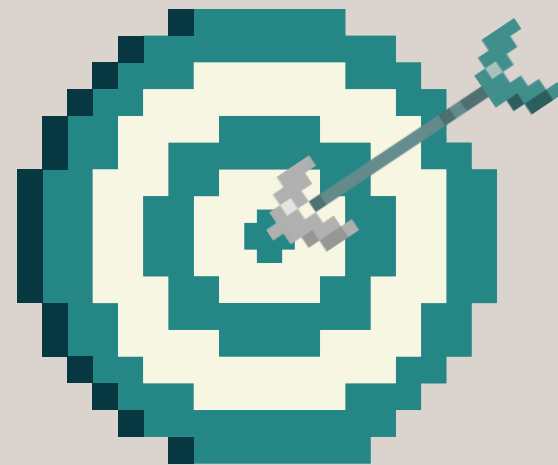
*To start, put more emphasis here*



## Frequency

How often does/will this happen?

0 = rarely  
5 = daily



## Impact

How much time/energy will this save?

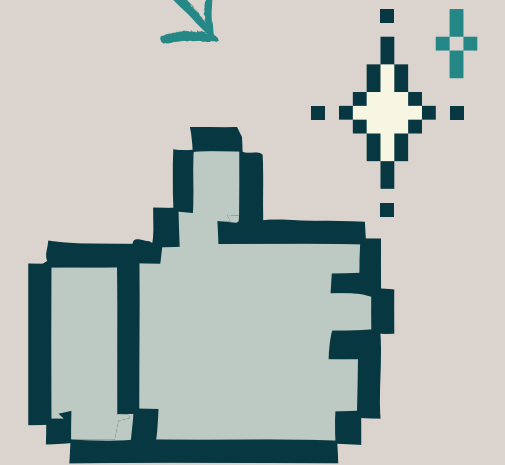
0 = none  
5 = A LOT



## Repeatability

Are steps similar every time?

0 = one-off  
5 = clear SOP



## Ease

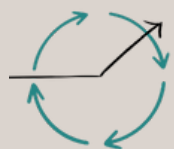
How simple is this to create (safely)?

0 = impossible  
10 = dead simple



# The IKEA Effect

“People place a disproportionately high value on products they've partially created or assembled, even if the final product is objectively flawed or amateurish.”



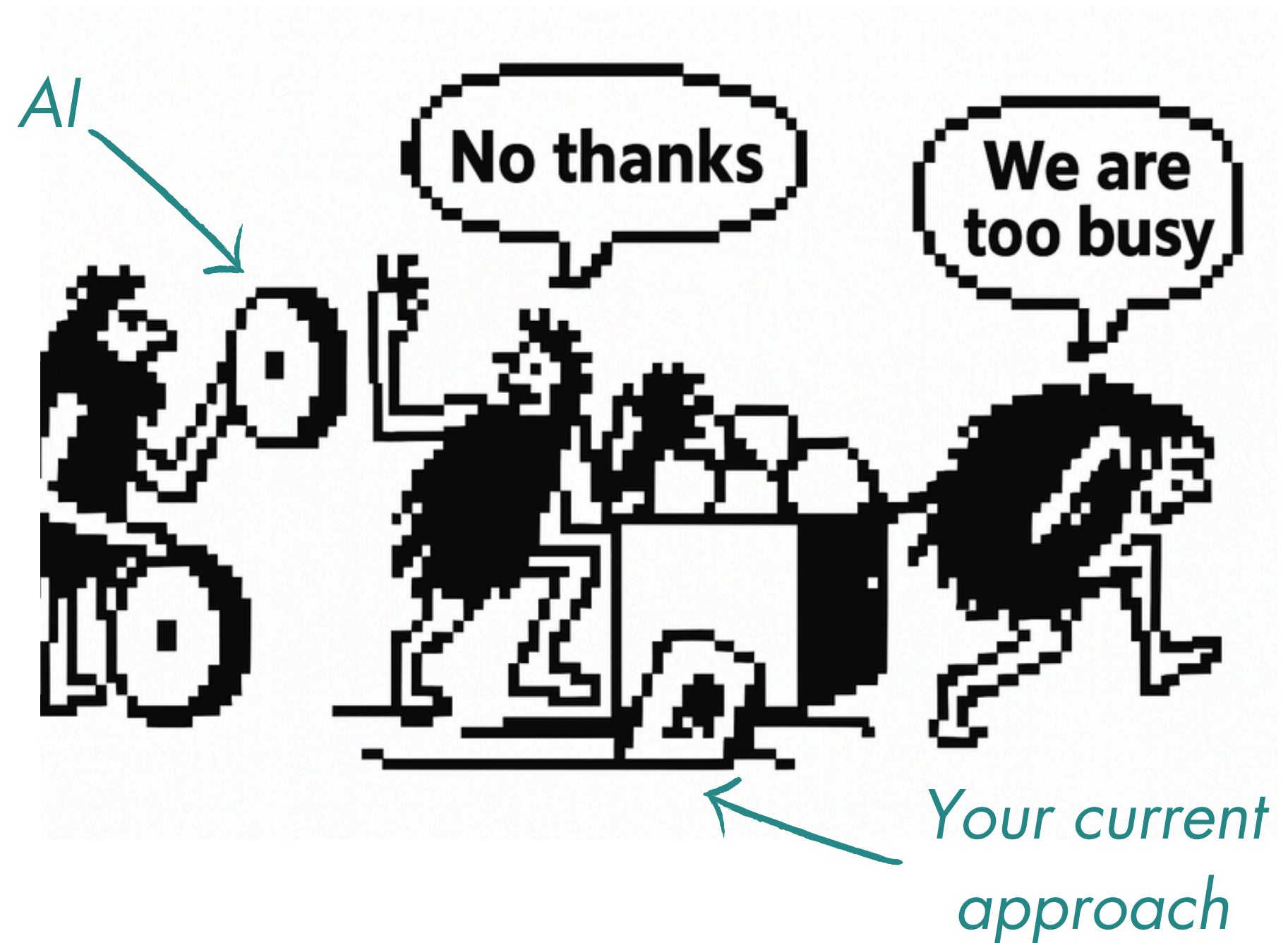


Your goal is not to *do* the job,  
it's to *improve* the job

# How to Create Time for Yourself

*And Be Less Busy*

The **technology** isn't hard  
— *changing* is hard



## Lesson 2: Use AI Every Single Day (No Exceptions)

Here's my simple rule: Every day, you should be in ChatGPT (or Claude, Gemini or other frontier AI app).

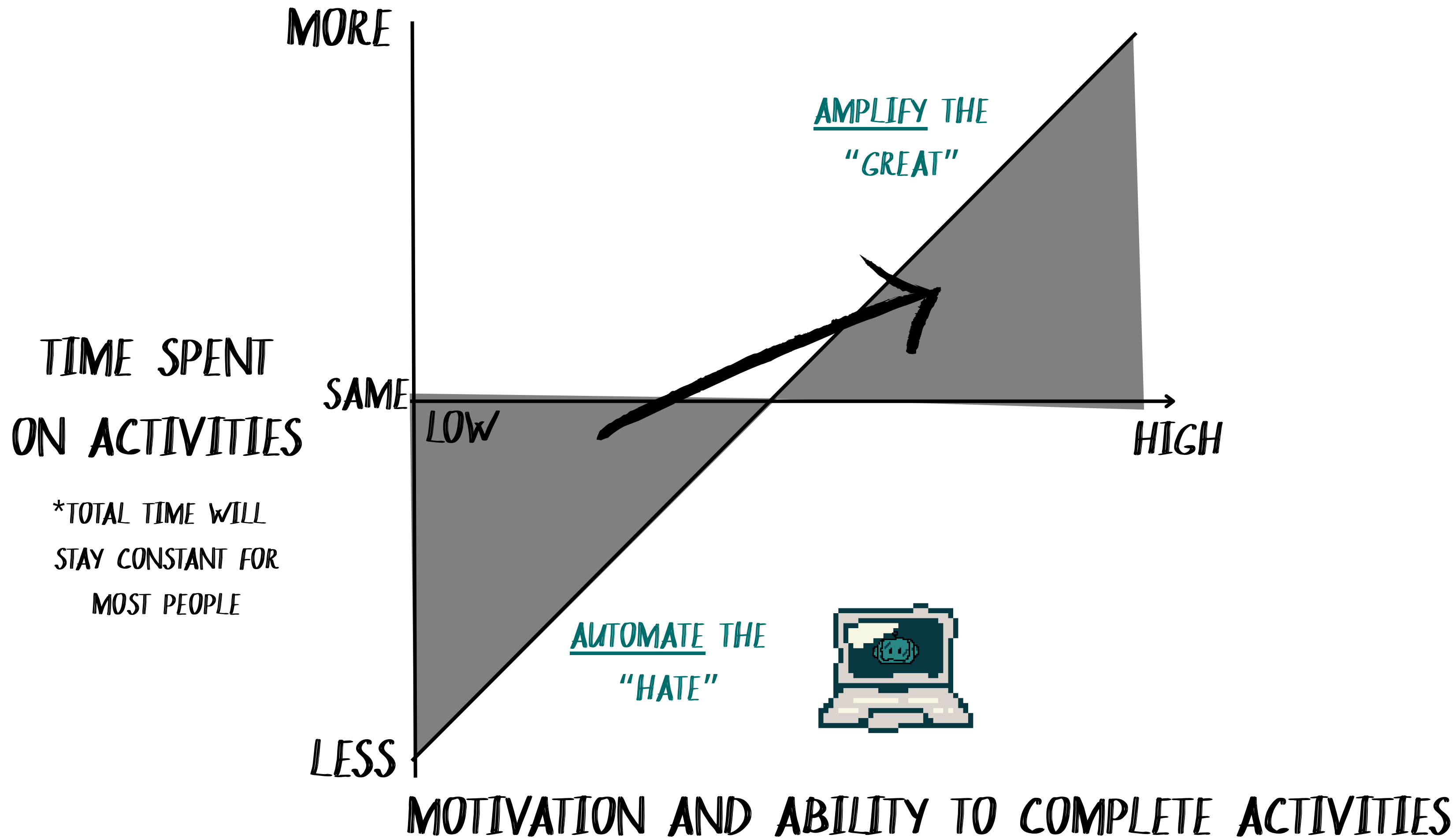
I don't care what your job is, you could be a waitress at a restaurant and you should be using ChatGPT every day to make yourself better at whatever it is you do.

My practical advice: Anytime you're going to sit down at a computer and do something -- research, writing, analysis, whatever -- you should give ChatGPT a shot at it first.

Pretend like you have access to an intern that has a PhD in everything. Give it a crack at solving the problem you're about to spend time on.

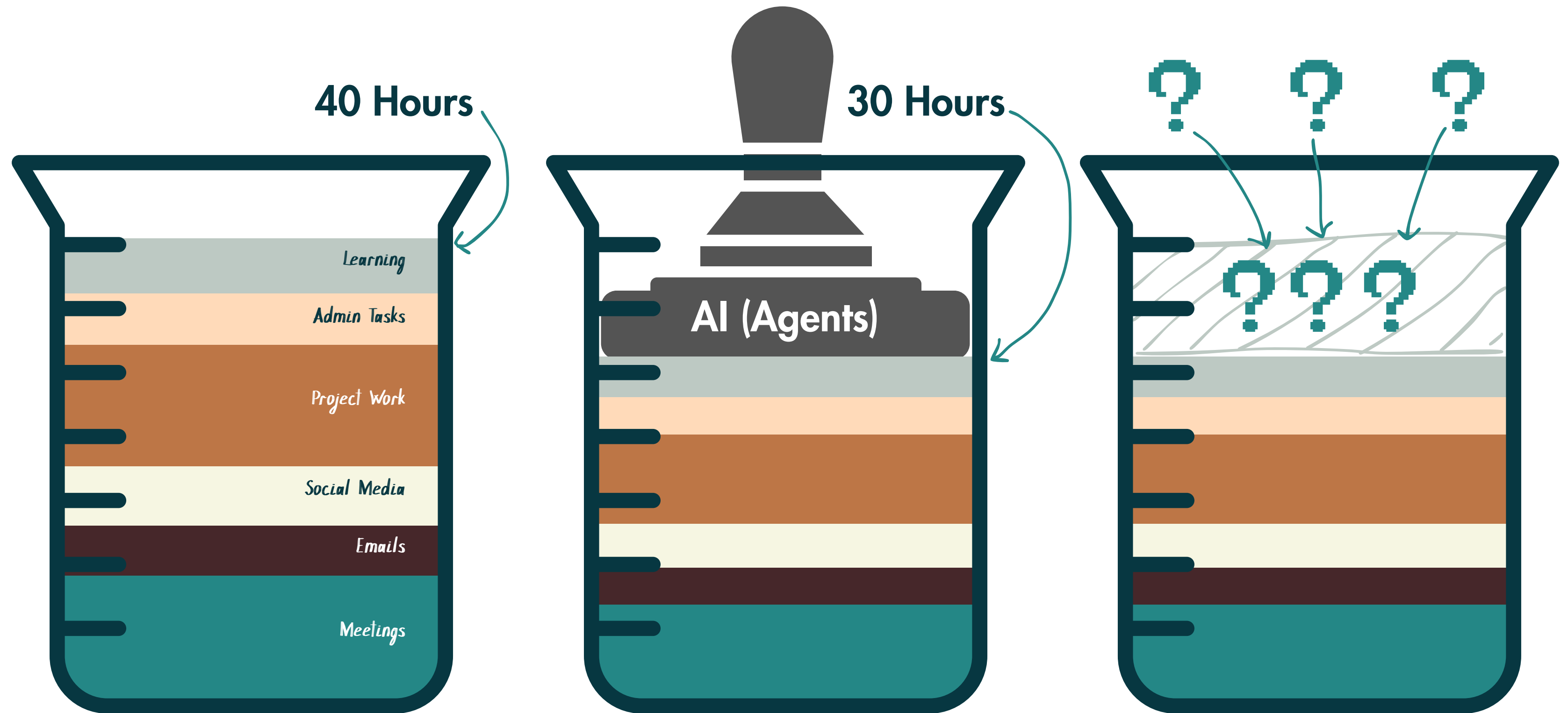
What you'll invariably find is that you'll be surprised by the number of times it actually comes up with a helpful response that you never would have expected. That's because it *literally* has been trained on everything publicly available.

This daily practice is how you develop intuition for what AI can and can't do, which becomes incredibly valuable over time.



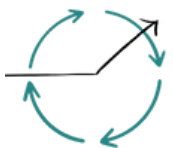
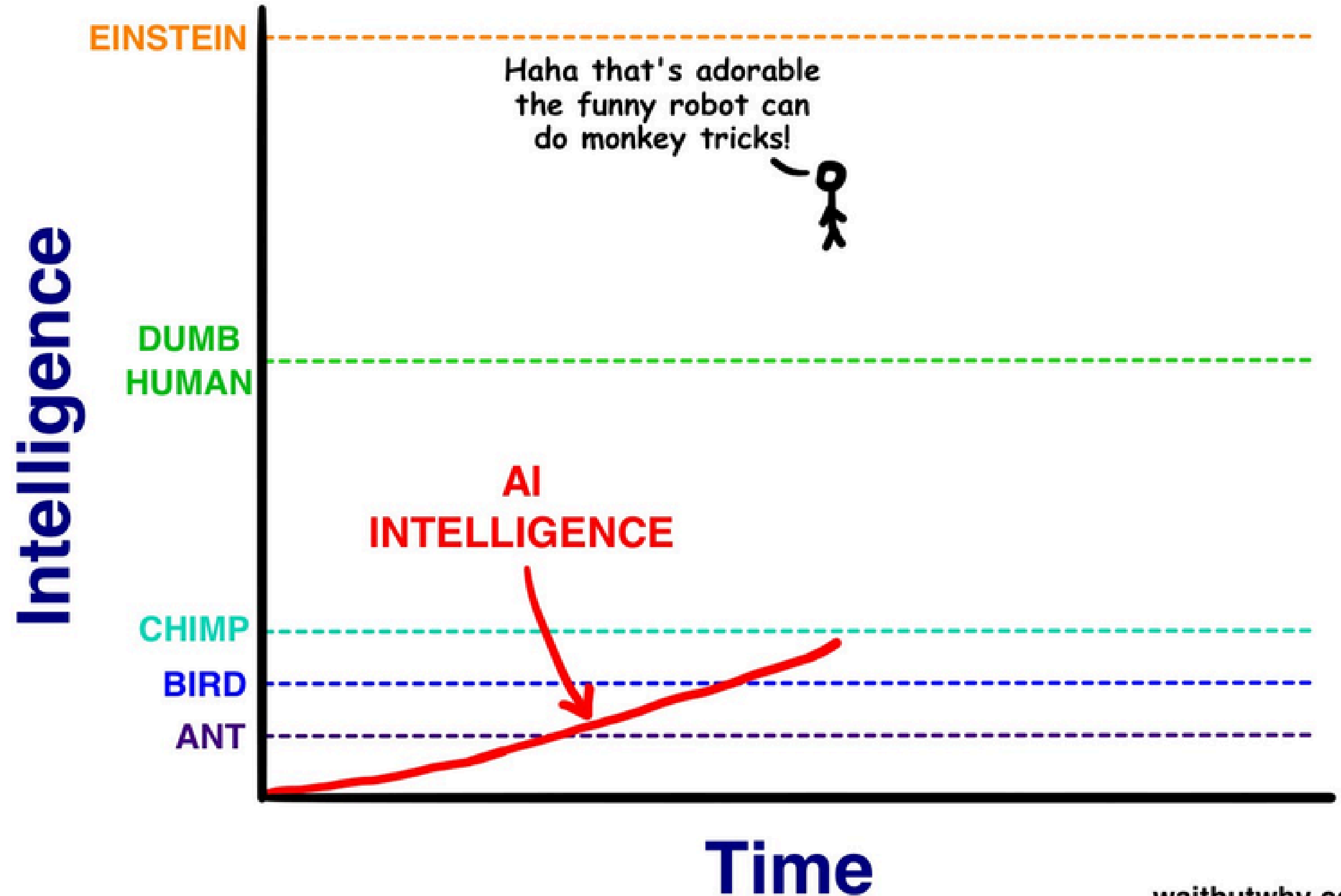


# Parkinson's Law

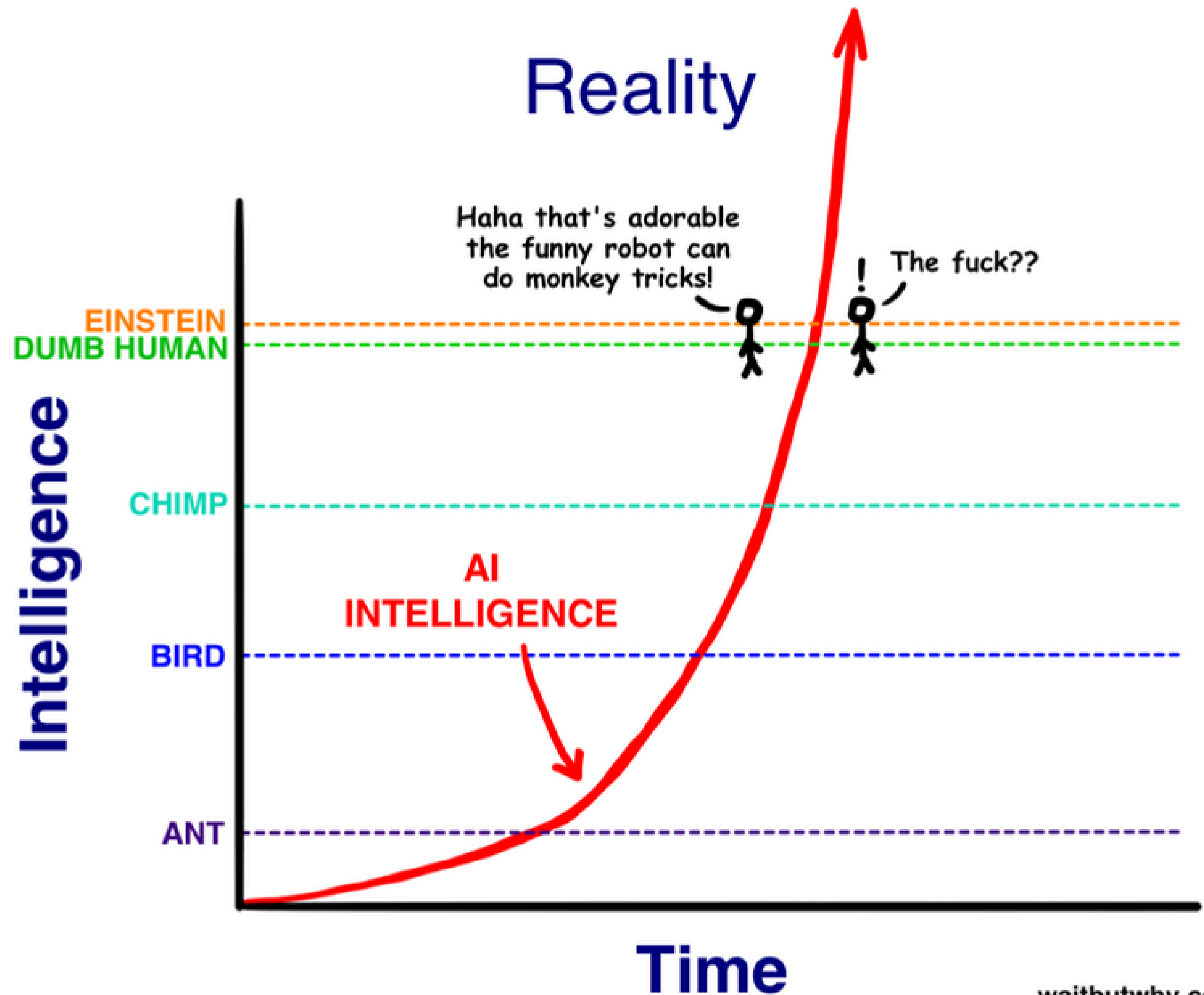
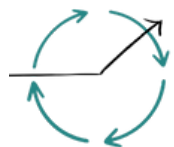


# Our Distorted View of Intelligence

This is the  
Worst AI  
You Will  
Use



So You'll  
Need to  
Prepare for  
the Future





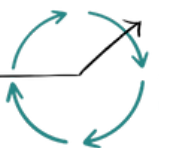
**Be Curious,  
Not Judgmental**

# Key Takeaways

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## *Next Steps*

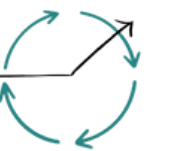
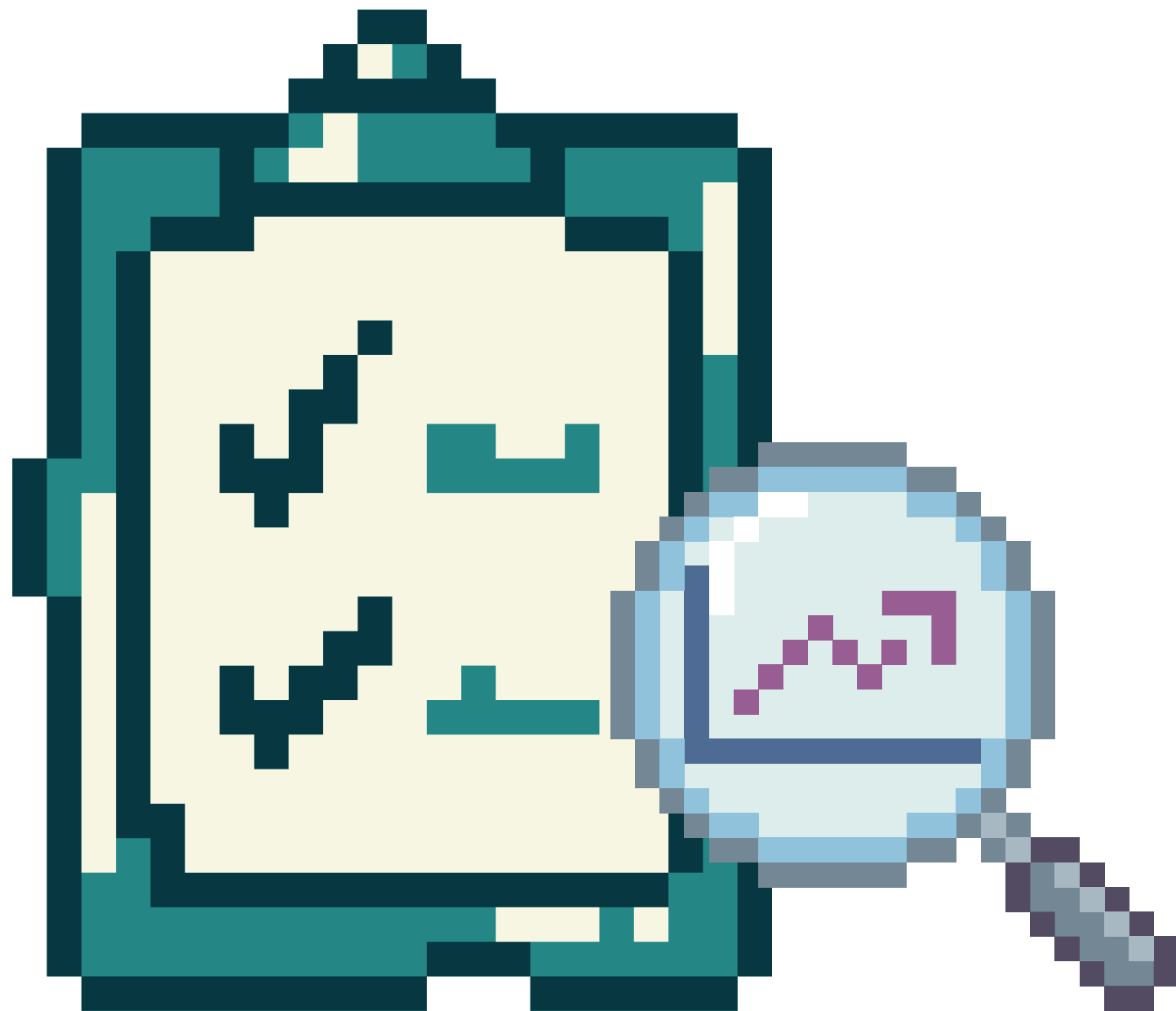
1. **Start thinking “AI-First”** (make it a daily practice)
2. Use **First Principles Thinking** (“What would this look like if it were easy?”)
3. Your goal is not to do the job, it’s to **improve the job**
4. **Create time** to explore AI opportunities
5. **DRUDGERY** for identifying opportunities
6. **Fire bullets**, then cannonballs
7. **CO-CREATOR** for prompting
8. Today is the **worst AI you will use**





# Survey

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# Questions?

For more details or to stay on top of the latest AI solutions for your business, connect with us!

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