

Running a business with AI — the *honest* version.

I told the class I'd put this together — the real story, not the LinkedIn one. Here's what I built, why I built it, what actually worked, what didn't, and the parts you're welcome to steal.

— THE PREMISE

**Most people use AI as a faster typist.
I tried to use it to make *better decisions*.**

The common move is to ask AI to do the work faster — write the email, draft the deck, summarise the doc. Useful. But the real money in a business isn't in how fast the work gets done. It's in the quality of the decisions behind the work: which client, which pitch, which week to push and which to rest.

So I pointed AI at the decisions instead of the typing. To do that well, I had to build two things around it. Neither is clever software. The surprising part is how plain they are.

— WHAT I BUILT

Two things. One belief.

The belief: AI is most valuable when it improves your thinking, not when it replaces it. Here's what that turned into.

A personal operating system — how I make my own decisions, written down.

A growing set of short, plain-language documents that capture how I handle my recurring calls: how I run a sales conversation, close out a week, decide what's actually worth doing. Each is "living" — it has a date and a rule for when to update it. My AI reads the relevant one before it helps, so it works my way instead of guessing. It's not software. It's mostly just well-organised writing — and that's the whole trick.

A product — the same idea, pointed at other people.

Software that helps business-development people prepare for the high-stakes conversations that decide whether a deal closes — the rooms that get won or lost before anyone walks in. Same belief, same operating system underneath. It exists to prove the method makes things, not just notes.

— WHAT TRAVELS

The parts that aren't mine to keep.

The specific documents are mine. The principles behind them aren't — they'll work for anyone. These did the most work.

Sequence is strategy

The order you do things in matters as much as the things. No step skips the one before it. Most “AI mistakes” are really skipped steps in disguise.

Write it down, keep it alive

A decision you’ve written down once is a decision you don’t keep re-making. Give each note a date and a trigger for when to revisit it, so it stays true instead of going stale.

AI informs; you decide

The moment a tool starts making the call instead of you, stop. Its job is to put good thinking in front of you. The judgment stays yours.

— *I built the product the same way — it surfaces the thinking and never steers the decision.*

Augment, don’t replace

It’s a coach in your pocket, not a stand-in for your team. It gives you direction; it doesn’t do the work or write in your voice for you.

— *Think what spreadsheets did for accountants. The work changed; it didn’t vanish.*

Process, not a prompt

A prompt gets you a faster mess. A process gets you something you can trust. Mine is five steps — and you can have it (just below).

Build it around your life

The system exists to protect your time and attention, not to eat them. If it’s making you busier, it’s the wrong system.

— THE WORKING METHOD

The five-step rule I make AI follow — *every* time.

This is the single most useful thing here. Before any AI does real work for me, it has to walk these five steps. Steal it wholesale.

- 1 Goal.** What am I trying to achieve, and why does it matter? Say it out loud first.
- 2 Success.** How will I know it worked? Define the finish line before you start.
- 3 Plan.** Show me the plan before doing anything.
- 4 Approval.** Wait for my go-ahead.
- 5 Execute.** Then — and only then — build, research, or deliver.

It feels slower for about a week. Then it’s much faster — because you stop redoing work that quietly went the wrong direction.

Two more rules I never skip. Assume anything you paste into a public AI tool could one day be public, so never put client or confidential information into one. And treat every output as a draft you own and check — never a final answer you trust blind.

— WHAT I LEARNED

The honest scoreboard.

WHAT WORKED

- Writing the system down was the unlock. Once a decision lived on paper, AI could help with it reliably.
- Pointing the same method at a product turned a year of scattered notes into something real.
- The five-step rule killed most of the wasted effort, almost overnight.

WHAT DIDN'T — AT FIRST

- Starting with prompts instead of a process. It just made the mess arrive faster.
- Trying to do it all at once. The system has to grow one decision at a time or it collapses.
- Forgetting that the tool is the easy part. The thinking is the hard, valuable part — and it's still all you.

The biggest lesson: AI didn't make the thinking optional. It made good thinking worth more.

— STEAL THIS

Want to try it? *Start here.*

Build your own operating system

FIVE SMALL STEPS

- 1 Pick the one decision you make most often — a pitch, a weekly review, a hiring call. Write down how you **actually** make it. Short, plain, one page.
- 2 Put a date on it and a trigger: "update this when ___ happens." Now it's alive, not dead.
- 3 Paste it to your AI and make it follow your document — not improvise. Watch how much better the help gets.
- 4 Add the five-step rule above as a standing instruction. Make the AI earn each step.
- 5 Repeat for the next decision. In a few months you'll have an operating system — not a folder of prompts.

Before you let AI run any part of your business

FIVE QUESTIONS

- 1 Who decides — me, or the tool? (If it's the tool, stop.)
- 2 Could this leak something I can't take back?
- 3 Did I give it a process, or just a prompt?
- 4 Is this a draft I own — or something I'm trusting blind?
- 5 Does this make my life better, or just my output bigger?

— ONE MORE THING

That's the show-and-tell.

Thanks for the nudge to actually write this down — I'd been meaning to. If any of it is useful, take it and run. And if you ever want to talk through how to point it at your own work, my door's open.

Talk it through: cultmath.com **The product:** [Aligned to Act — alignedtoact.com](https://alignedtoact.com)

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