TRISTECH

AI CLIFF NOTES FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

MINING FOR GOLD

How to get real answers out of AI: be curious, learn the words, organise what you know, and check what comes back.

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BEHIND THE CURTAIN

AI, DEMYSTIFIED

Every week there is a new headline about AI going rogue. Here is what you are actually talking to: autocomplete. The thing on your phone that finishes your texts, on steroids.

It has read an enormous amount of text. It writes its answer one word at a time, by predicting what should come next given everything you typed. That is the whole trick. It does not want anything. It is not plotting. It is finishing your sentence. AI isn't intelligent. The people who built it are.

"But I read that an AI went rogue"

Somebody put autocomplete on autopilot, gave it the keys, and walked away. What did you expect would happen? That is not a robot uprising. That is a missing supervisor.

You would not hand a new hire the company card on day one and leave for a month. Same rule here: a clear job, limited access, and a person who checks. Chapter 6 covers it.

Why it feels like a smarter search engine

For everyday use, think of it as a search that reads the results for you and hands back one tidy answer. One difference matters: a search engine finds pages that exist. AI writes a new answer every time, which is why it can be wrong and still sound completely sure of itself.

Why this is good news

- **You don't need to be technical.** You need to be good at starting sentences, which means knowing your own business.
- **The better the start, the better it completes.** Good context in, good completion out. The rest of this guide is how to give it a good start.
- **This is the age of the architect.** You don't have to lay every brick. If you know how the pieces of your business fit together, AI can do much of the building. To a degree: someone still has to check the work.
- **You stay in charge.** It drafts. You decide.

DO TODAY **Ask AI to explain your job back to you. See what it gets right.**

01 · THE IDEA

GOLD IN, GOLD OUT

AI gives back what you put in. A vague question gets the average answer. A clear question, asked with the right words and the right background, gets a useful one.

What we've found: most of the skill is not in a clever prompt. It is in being curious. Asking questions is the mining: every question digs up a little more of the field, and the more you know, the better your next question gets.

AI is good at

- Explaining a subject at any level
- Drafting replies, posts, quotes and summaries
- Reading long documents and pulling out the facts
- Sorting, comparing and spotting patterns
- Answering from documents you give it

AI is bad at

- Knowing when it is wrong
- Facts about your business that you haven't given it
- Recent events and exact figures, unless it can look them up
- Legal, medical and financial judgment
- Remembering last week's conversation

You already have the hard part

You know your trade. You know the words, and you know what good looks like. That is what makes AI useful, and it is why an owner often gets better results than a technical person who doesn't know the business.

HOW WE DID THIS

A side project, far from our day job: our founder had never designed a circuit board. He learned the field by asking questions, designed what he wanted and directed AI coding agents to write the firmware. It was manufactured. The same way of learning works for payroll rules, a lease or a new market.

DO TODAY **Pick one task you do every week and ask AI how a specialist would do it.**

02 · BE CURIOUS

THE MINING QUESTIONS

Before you ask AI to do a job, ask it to teach you the job. These five questions work for any profession.

ASK THESE ABOUT ANY FIELD

1. What does someone in **[field]** need to know to do **[task]** well?
2. What are the skills, certifications and learning paths?
3. What tools and software do they use, and what are they called?
4. What are the terms of the trade, and what does each one mean?
5. What do beginners get wrong?

Then keep going

Every answer has a word in it you don't know yet. That word is the next question.

- "What does **[that term]** mean, in plain words?"
- "Why is it done that way?"
- "What would happen if it weren't?"
- "What would an expert check first?"
- "What am I not asking that I should be?"

Make it your own

Don't just collect the answers. Write down how you think it fits together, in your own words, then ask: **"Here is my understanding. Where am I wrong?"** That is the step where the knowledge becomes yours.

We've come to think a long session of questions is the work, not time wasted before it.

DO TODAY **Ask the five questions about a part of your business you've always handed to someone else: bookkeeping, insurance or marketing.**

03 · SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

ASK IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE FIELD

As we understand it, the model weighs every word you give it. The precise words of a trade point it at the specialist material it learned from. Vague words point it at everything, and everything averages out to something generic.

Vague

"Write something to get more customers for my restaurant."

In the language of the trade

"I run a 40-seat neighbourhood restaurant. Weekday lunch covers are down. Draft a two-week offer for regulars, sent by text, that lifts weekday lunch without discounting dinner. Keep it under 300 characters, in a warm, plain voice."

The five parts of a good ask

1. **Who you are.** Your business, your size, your customers.
2. **What you want.** One clear job, not three.
3. **The background.** The facts, numbers or documents it needs. Paste them in.
4. **What good looks like.** Length, tone, format, an example you like.
5. **What to avoid.** Things it must not say, promise or assume.

Then have a conversation

The first answer is a draft. Say what is wrong with it. Ask for three versions. Ask it to question you: **"Before you answer, ask me anything you need to know."**

HOW WE DID THIS

In a product we run, each step goes to the AI model that fits it, and every answer has to come back in a fixed form. If it breaks the rules, it is sent back with the reason. The same habit works by hand: say what form you want, and say why a draft missed.

DO TODAY **Take a question you'd normally ask in plain words and ask it again using the proper terms of your trade. Compare the answers.**

04 · ORGANISE WHAT YOU KNOW

YOUR DATA IS THE GOLD

Anyone can ask AI a general question. Only you have your records, your prices, your customers and the way you do things. That is the gold nobody else has, and AI can only use what it can read.

Get it into shape

- **One place.** A shared folder, not five inboxes and a desk drawer.
- **Clear names.** "2026 price list" beats "final_v3_NEW".
- **One current version.** Archive the old ones so AI doesn't quote them.
- **Write down what lives in your head.** How you quote, how you handle a refund, what you say to a late payer.
- **Export what your software holds.** Most systems can give you sales, bookings and customers as a spreadsheet.

What never goes into a public AI tool

- Patient, client or customer records with names attached
- Card numbers, bank details, passwords, ID numbers
- Anything covered by a confidentiality agreement or a professional duty

For that kind of work, use a business account with the right terms, or a private model that runs on a machine you own. Ask before you paste.

HOW WE DID THIS

We keep one knowledge base that every AI agent reads before it starts work. Each entry says where it came from and whether it was proven or only assumed, so a guess never quietly turns into a fact.

DO TODAY **Write one page on how you handle your most common customer question. Give it to AI next time you answer one.**

05 · KEEP WHAT YOU LEARN

SAVE THE SESSION AS AN EXPERT

At the end of a long session, everything you worked out is sitting there. Close the window and it is gone. So have the AI write it down as an expert.

People call these **agents** or **skills**. It sounds technical. It isn't. An expert is a written page that tells the AI who it is, what it knows and how to do one job.

The template

- **Role:** the one job it does
- **What it knows:** key facts and terms
- **Sources:** documents and links
- **How to do the job:** the steps
- **Rules:** never do; when to ask
- **How to check its work**
- **Ruled out and unknown**

Three ways to use it

1. **Save the document.** Start a new chat, paste it in, say "read this first". Works anywhere.
2. **Save it in the assistant.** Most have custom instructions or projects: every chat there starts with it loaded.
3. **Make it a skill or agent.** Call it by name, and later give it tools.

ASK THIS BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE WINDOW

"Turn everything we worked out in this session into an expert page with these headings: role, what it knows, sources, how to do the job, rules, how to check its work, ruled out and unknown. Mark anything that is a guess."

- One expert per subject: "Marketing expert", "Lease expert", "Hiring expert".
- At the end of each session, ask for an updated version.
- They are yours, in your words, and they work with any AI tool.

HOW WE DID THIS

Every area of our own work has a written expert like this. The agent working in that area reads it first, and it is updated whenever we learn something new.

DO TODAY **End your next useful session with the prompt above. Save the page. Start a new chat with it.**

06 · THE NEXT STEP

WHAT AGENTS ARE

A chat answers one question at a time. An agent is AI that is given a goal and takes the steps itself: it reads, looks things up, uses your software, and comes back with the job done or a question.

Chat

"Draft a reply to this customer." You copy it, check it and send it.

Agent

Reads each new email, sorts it, drafts the reply from your own policies and puts it in front of you to approve.

What an agent needs to work well

- **A clear job.** One task with a start and an end.
- **Your knowledge.** An agent is an expert page from the last chapter, plus the ability to take steps.
- **The right access, and no more.** It can read the inbox. It cannot move money.
- **Rules.** What it must never do, and when to stop and ask.
- **A person in charge.** Someone approves anything that gets sent, posted or paid.
- **A record.** A log of what it did, so you can check.

Where to start

Pick a job that is repeated, boring and easy to check: sorting requests, entering invoices, drafting routine replies, a morning summary. Leave judgment, advice and money with people.

HOW WE DID THIS

In a product we run, every paid AI step is checked against a daily spending limit first, one switch pauses everything, and when a step fails the job stops and says so. An agent should fail loudly, not quietly.

DO TODAY **List three jobs in your week that are repeated, boring and easy to check.**

CHECK THE GOLD

AI says wrong things with complete confidence. There is no warning light. The checking is your job, and it is quick once it is a habit.

ASK THESE AFTER ANY ANSWER THAT MATTERS

- "Where does that come from? Give me the source."
- "How sure are you, and what are you unsure about?"
- "What would make this answer wrong?"
- "Argue the other side."
- "Check your answer against what I gave you and list anything you assumed."

The checklist

- **Numbers, dates, names and quotes:** check every one against the original.
- **Sources:** open them. AI sometimes invents a source that looks real.
- **Anything legal, medical, tax or safety:** a qualified person signs off.
- **Anything going to a customer:** a person reads it first.
- **Anything that sounds too neat:** ask again in a new session and compare.

Proven or assumed

When you save what you learned, mark each point as proven or assumed. It takes a moment, and it stops a guess from becoming "something we know" six months later.

Signs you are mining well

- Your questions are getting more specific.
- You catch the AI being wrong.
- You start sessions with your own saved pages instead of from zero.

DO TODAY **Take one AI answer you were about to use and ask "what would make this wrong?"**

08 · COPY AND USE

A ONE-PAGE AI POLICY FOR YOUR STAFF

A starting point. Change it to fit your business, and have your lawyer or compliance adviser review it if you handle regulated information.

1. **Use the business account,** not a personal one, for anything to do with work.
2. **Never paste in** customer or patient records with names, payment details, passwords, or anything under a confidentiality agreement.
3. **You are responsible for what you send.** AI drafts; a person reads, checks and sends.
4. **Check facts, numbers and names** against the original before using them.
5. **No AI advice to customers** on legal, medical, tax or safety matters without sign-off from **[name]**.
6. **Say so if asked.** If a customer asks whether AI helped with a reply, tell the truth.
7. **Save what works.** Good prompts and expert pages go in **[shared folder]** so everyone can use them.
8. **Ask first** before connecting AI to email, files or any business system. Ask **[name]**.
9. **Report mistakes quickly.** If something wrong went out, tell **[name]** the same day.

WANT A HAND GETTING STARTED?

This guide is free because we want the businesses we look after using AI well. If you'd like help setting it up, bring your questions. It is all documented, so it stays yours.

The first call is free: 30 minutes, video or phone.

tristech.io/book

Free starter kit: github.com/t3chnicallyinclined/mining-for-gold · The story: tristech.io/guides/mining-for-gold · General information, not legal or professional advice, and no promise of results. November 2026.