Why AI Works for Some Talent Teams and Not Others

An Insights Report from Helen Chan, The Reagent Co. | November 2026

The AI Help Desk That Said, "Talk to a Human"

At Washington Leadership Academy, a public charter high school in Washington, D.C., Eric Collazo built an HR bot on PlayLab, a platform that lets educators build AI tools without writing code. He worked with the school's HR lead and chief of operations to load the school's policies and insurance information into it. Speaking at EdFuel's 2026 Virtual Talent Summit, he described what the bot does now: it "creates a first line of defense to protect individuals' time."

At a different nonprofit whose talent leader I interviewed, employees can also ask a help desk agent their questions. "It's not effective," this talent leader told me, "because we haven't fed in all the things that it needs to be able to answer all the questions." Employees ask it a question, and the agent replies, "You need to talk to a human."

Same Kind of Tool. Only One Worked

How is it that talent teams are building the same AI tools but with different results? In my research and interviews with HR leaders and practitioners, I aimed to answer a few questions:

1. What separates talent teams that get results from AI from those that don't?
2. What's the simplest way to start with AI and get a return that matters?
3. How can a consultant like me help, and when is it worth going beyond a quick fix to build an AI-fluent talent team?

How I studied it. Over a four week sprint in 2026, I interviewed nine talent leaders and practitioners: talent leaders at two charter school networks, a recruiting leader at a national education nonprofit, a former chief operating officer of a national education nonprofit, a talent acquisition leader at a global technology company, an HR leader at an 85-person startup, a people leader who has run HR at a large healthcare organization and at a research foundation, and two consultants who advise schools. I describe them by role, not by name. I also attended EdFuel's 2026 Virtual Talent Summit, where talent leaders from schools and nonprofits described the AI tools they had built, and I read the newest research and guidance on AI at work. Finally, I drew on my own experience building six AI tools in my last in-house role.

A CAUTION BEFORE GOING FURTHER

This is not a controlled study. I treat patterns and learnings as a hypothesis for further tests and to inform higher quality practices in the AI and HR space.

What talent teams are actually building

Across research and interviews, I found 16 AI tools that talent teams built, chose or tried. The ones that worked do four kinds of work:

- **Turn messy data into answers:** Uncommon's leave tracker that shows who is on leave and why, and Washington Leadership Academy's live dashboards that replaced day-long data requests.
- **Answer routine questions:** Washington Leadership Academy's HR bot and a research foundation's intern chatbot.
- **Check or draft people's work:** Uncommon's goal checker, a startup's self-review assistant, and six tools I built myself, including a resume screener, a scoring calibrator and a compensation generator.
- **Bring candidates in:** a healthcare organization's career fair chatbot.

One pattern surprised me. AI works best when a team builds or chooses a tool for a specific problem, and someone owns its rollout, use and upkeep. The AI that teams switched on without a clear owner mostly fell flat. It led to an applicant-ranking feature nobody uses, a help desk agent that sends people to a human instead, and an automated screening trial that came out "good, not great."

The AI tools I found during this research sprint

AI Tools	What it does	Who built or chose it	Source
Leave tracker	Turns leave records into an analysis of who is out and why	Amanda Craft, Uncommon Schools	Summit
Goal checker	Scores every home-office staff goal for whether it can be measured. Now rolling out to team leads.	Amanda Craft, Uncommon Schools	Summit
HR question bot	Answers routine policy and insurance questions	Eric Collazo, with the HR lead and chief of operations, Washington Leadership Academy	Summit
Live data dashboards	Replaced data requests that took one to two days, sometimes a week	Eric Collazo, Washington Leadership Academy	Summit
Self-review assistant	Asks employees about their year and drafts the write-up. Managers then review it in about an hour.	The startup HR leader	Interview
Career fair chatbot	Lets candidates build an application by text message	A vendor, chosen by the people leader	Interview
Intern chatbot	Answers interns' policy questions in several languages	The people leader's team	Interview
Candidate Scoring Calibrator	Checks hiring manager scores against evidence from application materials and interview transcripts against the agreed-on selection rubric. The tool flags discrepancy to inform final decision making.	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Resume Screener	Builds a memo of top resumes based on intake meeting and hiring criteria to support hiring managers in deciding who to advance for interview	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Compensation Generator	Generates reports to justify salary offers for hiring and promotions that apply the rules for setting salaries based on role band and years of experience while ensuring internal equity stay in place	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Job description creator	Drafts job descriptions from a role's responsibilities and criteria	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Role band check	Checks which salary band a role belongs in. Validated with an A/B test.	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Interview guide generator	Builds interview questions tied to a role's selection criteria	Helen Chan, in my last in-house role	My own work
Applicant-ranking feature	Ranks applications inside the applicant tracking system. Unused.	Came with a charter network's applicant tracking system	Interview
Help desk agent	Answers employee questions, but sends many to a human because its information was never fully loaded	A charter network's help desk	Interview
Automated screening trial	Screened applications for a few high-volume roles. "Good, not great."	Tried by a charter network's talent team	Interview

OBSERVATION

People often blame one of three things when AI doesn't work: the tool, the team or the budget.

THE OBVIOUS EXPLANATIONS

A better tool, a more skilled team or a bigger budget.

WHAT I FOUND

In the cases I studied, none of the three explains it on its own. What separated the teams was how they approached AI and how ready they were.

It isn't always the tool. A people leader I interviewed described a third bot built for the same job: answering interns' questions at a research foundation. The three bots run on three different platforms. Washington Leadership Academy built its bot on PlayLab. The charter network uses an agent that sits on its help desk. The foundation adapted technology it already owned. ***The software doesn't explain the results. What each team puts into its bot does.*** The two teams that loaded their policies have bots that work. The foundation's team also tested before trusting. For about two months, it asked the bot every question it could think of and corrected its answers before anyone relied on it.

It isn't always the team. Skill makes it easy to build a tool. It doesn't tell you whether the tool fits how your team actually works. Amanda Craft of Uncommon Schools is a people leader and an advanced builder. Yet two tools her team built in Gemini had different outcomes.

- The first was a leave tracker. Uncommon handles 300 to 400 leaves of absence a year, but its systems were "built to run payroll accurately, not to actually do strategy or analysis." Nobody could easily see who was going on leave or why. In about eight hours, Amanda built a tool that turns 1,200 lines of payroll records, across seven types of leave, into a picture of "what's happening on the ground in our schools." Her team uses it to plan substitute coverage and spot patterns behind leaves. She checked its accuracy by running the same analysis in Claude. What once took up to four hours of data cleaning now happens "three times a week whenever I want it."
- The second was an HR chatbot meant to answer staff questions. When the EdFuel Summit moderator asked where AI had fallen flat, Amanda chose this example. The bot may have worked technically: "even if we were getting it to work," she said. But the team couldn't track how many questions came in or verify the answers. "It didn't allow us to run our teams with the level of support that we wanted to." So they abandoned that approach and started rebuilding in Zendesk, a help desk platform they already used.

The team was invested in AI, and their skill made both tools easy to build. Yet, the team had to start over on the HR chatbot. While the leave tracker produces an analysis the team can check against its own records, the chatbot, even if it worked, gave the team no way to see how many questions came in or whether the answers were right. The tool that lasted in its first form was the one the team could check.

It isn't always the budget. One Chief People Officer described fellow HR leaders whose organizations rolled out AI to everyone, then kept spending. "The tokens are running out," the leader said, but nobody knew how they were being used or whether productivity had improved.

- The leader's own organizations "didn't have huge amounts of money to spend on technology." At a healthcare organization facing a severe nursing shortage, the problem was losing candidates after career fairs. Nursing students would leave an email address at the booth, but by the time recruiters followed up, their interest had faded. "I want to catch as quickly as I have your interest," the leader said.
- The solution was a chatbot. Students scanned a barcode at the booth and started a conversation on their phones. The bot answered questions about jobs and benefits while building their profiles in the hiring system. "You don't even have to apply." Recruiters then reached out to schedule screening interviews.

- A vendor built the tool, while the team supplied its roles, openings, and policies. “It was not very expensive,” the leader recalled. Previously, only 10 to 15 of every 100 students who visited the booth applied. With the chatbot, about 50 did.

More spending hadn’t guaranteed results elsewhere. Here, a modest investment aimed at one well-understood problem made a measurable difference.

Engineers see the same thing. Info-Tech Research Group, which advises IT leaders, reaches the same conclusion from the engineering side. Its guidance on building AI agents puts it plainly: “Production readiness doesn’t come from the model, it comes from the architecture underneath it.” The model, it says, “is a commodity. What differentiates your system is the tools, integrations, and scenarios you design.” It insists that teams can see every run, because “you can’t optimize what you can’t see.” It also calls for people to approve high-risk actions before an AI agent takes them. The starting point is different, but the lesson is the same: what a team builds around the tool decides what the tool can do.

So if it isn’t the tool, the team or the budget, what is it? In every case I studied, the difference came down to two things: approach and readiness. Approach is how a team aims AI: at one specific, costly problem, with a way to check that it’s working. Readiness is whether the team and the organization are set up to use it: the tool has what it needs, someone owns it, and people get support to change how they work. The five insights below show what each looks like in practice.

Five insights - At a glance

1	**Start with one expensive problem, and write the work down first.** The tools that worked solved a problem the team already felt, using rules someone had written down.
2	**AI tools often live and die with one person.** Every tool that worked traced back to one person. Few were set up to outlive that person.
3	**The tool is the easy part. Getting people to change is the hard part.** Champions, practice and a clear reason to change decide whether a working tool gets used.
4	**Let AI check people’s decisions, and leave the decisions to people.** The most advanced teams never let AI decide about people. They use it to check the decisions people make.
5	**Hours saved are the smallest part of the payoff.** The bigger wins are more output from the same team and work that never happened before.

Insight 1: Start with one expensive problem, and write the work down first

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Roll out a capable AI tool, and people will find good uses for it.

WHAT I FOUND

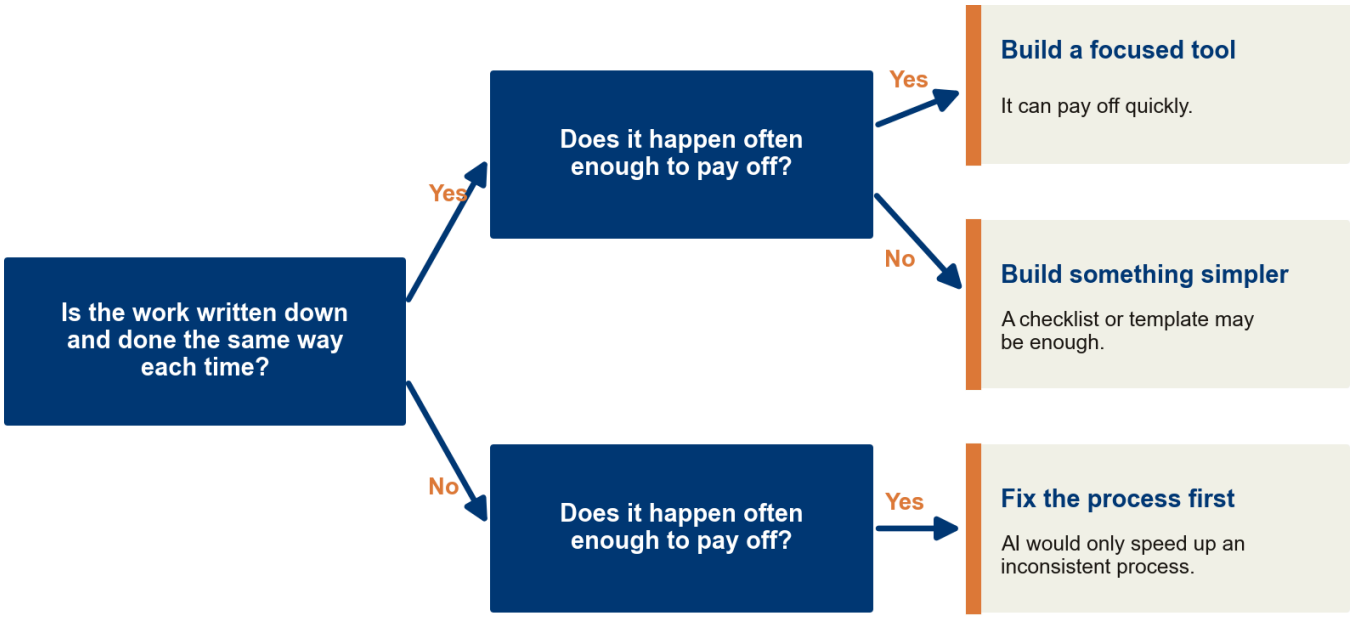
The tools that worked went after one specific, costly problem, and ran on rules the team had already written down.

It is not uncommon for talent practitioners to have access to AI that they're not using or optimizing. A talent leader at a charter network told me their applicant tracking system includes a feature that ranks applications, but "they don't use that at all. And I don't know why." Owning a feature is not the same as having a use for it. Selecting a use case is often the first strong decision you can make when deploying and getting value from AI. At EdFuel's 2026 Virtual Talent Summit, Amanda Craft said Uncommon Schools first tried cataloging every AI tool that might help its talent team. "We very quickly realized we were boiling the ocean." The team "just started with what are our biggest talent problems."

Even if you pick a strong use case, the approach matters. The healthcare career fair chatbot was built by a vendor, and it still needed the team's own material: "you need to put in your roles, your opportunities, all of that stuff, policies." Selecting a use case and sound methodology is supported by Anthropic's guide for sales leaders which asserted that what a team gets from AI "depends on what the organization has built around it," including "whether the team's best methods are written down where everyone can run them." A former chief operating officer of a national education nonprofit makes the same point whenever job interviewers ask where to start with AI: document how people currently work, step by step, then find one simple automation and build from there.

I saw the same thing when I built my own AI tools. Building them showed me where our process was missing or unclear. For example, I built a scoring calibrator to check hiring managers' scores against an agreed-on selection rubric, but my team had never agreed on when a selection rubric was final, or where the final copies should be saved so the tool could grab the right inputs. Similarly, I wanted to build a compensation generator that would efficiently generate salary offers for new hires so that we wouldn't stall when speed matters the most: confirming an offer. Previously, generating an offer would take anywhere from a few hours to a whole week, and the variability put hiring at risk. In order to build this, I still had to hunt down and align on written rules for setting salaries, while also forcing us to name the approvers.

So how do you know when a problem is ready for AI? This is the decision path I use:



If it's rare and not written down, leave it for now.

MY ADVICE

- List the three talent tasks that cost your team the most hours or cause the most mistakes. Pick one.
- Write down what a tool would need to know to do it well: the policy, the rubric, the rules. If you can't write it down, fix the process first. That's your first project, and it isn't an AI project yet.
- Before anyone relies on the tool, run it on 10 to 20 past cases where you already know the right answer.
- Before you start, ask three questions. Is this aimed at one specific problem? Have we given it what it needs? Can we check that it's working?

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Insight 2: AI tools often live and die with one person

Even a well-aimed tool needs a champion to build it and keep it going. An AI champion is ideally someone close to the work, who can build or purchase AI and take ownership of it.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

The usual picture of an AI rollout is an organization buying licenses and training everyone to use them.

WHAT I FOUND

Every AI tool that worked traced back to one person who decided to build it or bring it in. A few spread across a whole company, but many were used only while a leader kept pushing them.

When I asked an HR leader at an 85-person startup whether people used AI on their own or had built something together, the answer was, "AI on their own is how I would characterize it." The one shared tool, a self-review assistant, was one the leader built personally. It reached the whole company, but the leader never wrote a guide to running it: "because I was the primary user, a lot of the time I didn't have to do that."

The pattern isn't unique to talent teams. Anthropic's guide for sales leaders, Building an AI-Native Revenue Organization, describes what it hears most: "half the team barely touches the AI it already has, the best sellers build their own skills and prompts that no one else uses."

The teams that moved past one person did it on purpose. At EdFuel's 2026 Virtual Talent Summit, Eric Collazo described how Washington Leadership Academy started with a small group of early adopters and built out from there. His advice to other leaders: "find out who those folks are. You don't have to do this alone."

I personally learned this the hard way. Six of the tools listed in the table above are mine, built in my last in-house role leading talent at a national education nonprofit. Each addressed a problem my team faced every week. I tested them before releasing them, including an A/B test for role banding and validation of the compensation generator. While I led the team, we used the tools.

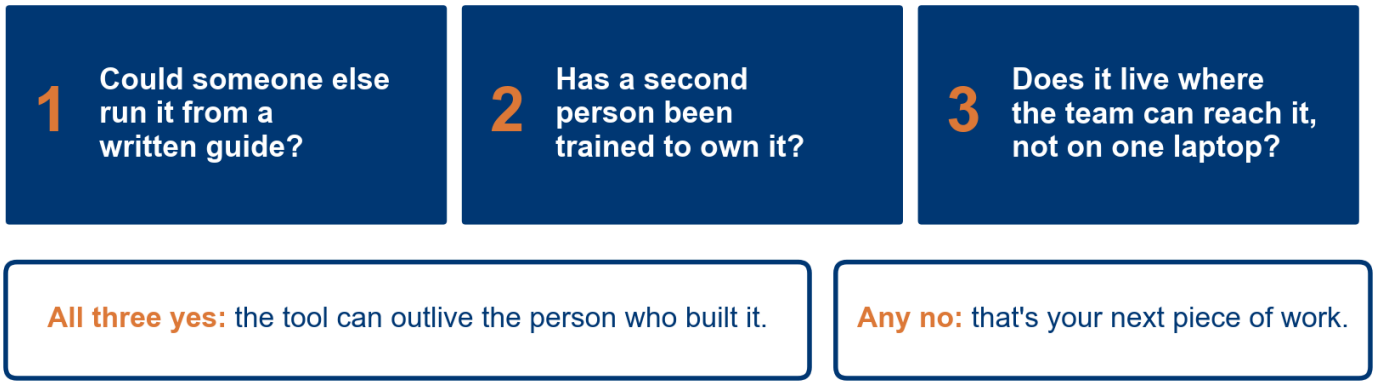
Then I left. As far as I can tell, what remains is occasional, one-off use. A colleague has run the resume screener and interview guide generator a couple of times. I honestly don't know whether anyone still uses the compensation generator. A handful of people using a handful of tools isn't the same as a team that works this way.

Looking back, the tools held up, but building them took far more time than I expected. I did it on nights and weekends while running a team. Before leaving, I'd started working with our chief information officer to make the tools accessible beyond my own setup. But I never finished that work or trained a second and third person to own them. Info-Tech describes this exact trap: AI builds that stall as "fragile demos" that can't "scale beyond a single developer's laptop." Doing it right would have been about half my job. AI for Equity, which runs the AI Innovation Index for school systems,

recommends dedicating 25–50% of an AI leader's time to the work, with other responsibilities reduced accordingly. Nothing came off my plate.

Ironically, building those tools was the most energizing work I'd done in years. It's a big part of why I now help other talent teams do it, with the time and the second owner I never had.

So how do you know whether a tool will outlive the person who built it? Three questions tell you:



MY ADVICE

Find your builder. Someone on your team is probably already using AI on their own, maybe on nights and weekends. Ask everyone two questions: What do you use AI for in a normal week? And what have you tried and dropped, and why? The answers will show you who your likely champion is, and what your team has already learned the hard way. Before you call a tool done, run it through the three questions above. Any no is your next piece of work.

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Insight 3: The tool is the easy part. Getting people to change is the hard part

A champion can build a tool and use it well. My own experience shows that isn't enough. The tools that lasted were the ones a whole team learned to use, and that takes deliberate change management.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Once the tool works, people will use it.

WHAT I FOUND

A working tool is not the same as a tool people use. The teams that kept using AI treated it as a change. They listened to concerns, chose champions for their judgment and coaching, and moved skills gradually from one person to everyone.

Change starts with expectations. A recruiting leader at a national education nonprofit warned that if people expect AI to "drastically reduce their workload," they end up "not showing up to the things that they need to show up for or being underprepared for it." So when this leader decides to bring in a new tool, the decision comes with "a clear why" and a clear explanation of how each person's role is changing. If AI now does the resume screening and interviewing scoring, then the team's job must transition to approving or adjusting the screened resumes and scored interviews, while becoming hiring coaches for the managers they support. In an even better scenario, strategic work that's been on the back burner can now be assigned to teammates whose time is freed up through leveraging AI.

Even leaders who want AI often lack the skills to lead it. A talent leader at a charter network rated both the team and themselves "about a two" out of 10 on AI fluency, and said, "I would really love to learn." The organization's only AI rule is to use Gemini and nothing else, and as far as this leader knows, nobody enforces it. So the gap isn't just skill. The organization hasn't given people clear rules either.

Teach For America saw the same thing at scale. After its AI hackathons, "most prototypes sit dormant" within 30 days. The tools weren't the problem: there was "no standing meeting to iterate, no peer group to troubleshoot with, and/or no regional champion." The people who kept going "had a continuity structure like a practicum cohort, a regular Community of Practice call, or a regional champion checking in." At the summit, Erica Beal of School Leader Lab offered a simple place to start when helping people build these skills: "live model with them and not take for granted that they know what you're talking about."

> *"The first person had a peak experience, whereas the second person had a system. The difference here was continuity."*
>
> *— Teach For America, AI Impact Report 2026, on two teachers who built AI tools at the same workshop*

Readiness has two halves. The first is people's judgment. JST People Strategy, which reviewed 50 competency models, puts it well: "AI doesn't add a competency. It raises the bar on every competency you already have." Basic fluency comes from training. Real judgment comes from practice on real work. The second half is what the organization gives people: approved tools, clear data rules, an owner and time. Gartner's AI Roadmap lists "Create an AI change management plan" among its early steps. The graphic below helps a talent leader see whether their team's AI problem is weak skills, weak organizational support, or both, so they know what to fix first. How to read the graphic:

1. Across the bottom: what does your organization give people? Approved tools, clear rules about data, someone who owns AI, and time to practice. Little of that puts you on the left. Most of it puts you on the right.
2. Up the side: how good is your team's judgment with AI? Not how often people use it, but whether they know when to use it, check its work and protect sensitive data. Still learning puts you at the bottom. Strong puts you at the top.

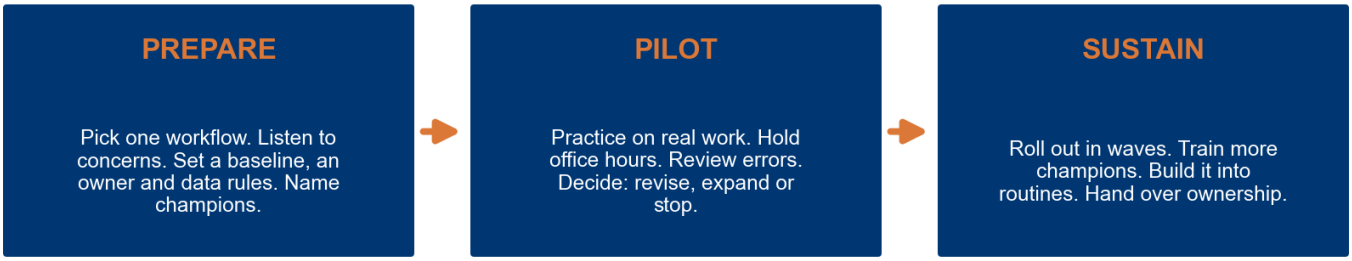


Readiness grid built with Brett Chappell at Fullstacked.

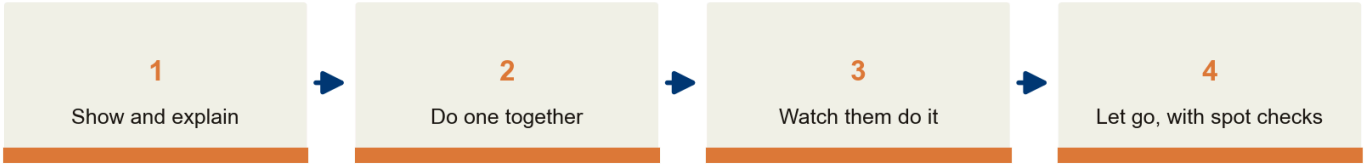
Want to know where your team stands? Email me for the AI readiness check.

Resistance is information. When people push back, the reason tells you the fix. A skill gap needs practice. A worry about reliability needs testing and checks. Extra workload needs a redesign. An unclear policy needs a decision. A worry about privacy needs clear data rules. A former chief operating officer of a national education nonprofit told me staff pushed back with, "I don't want AI reading what's on my desktop. I don't want to give AI access to my inbox." Teach For America found that resistance among its teachers was often "about values, not skills." Those concerns deserve a real answer: say where your team will not use AI, and why.

Change happens in stages. Washington Leadership Academy rolled AI out in stages, from early adopters to all staff to students. I recommend the same shape, moving skills from one person to everyone along the way.



Inside every phase, skills move gradually, first from expert to champions, then from champions to everyone:



When I sketched how I would staff this today, I landed on about one champion for every 10 to 20 people actively using a workflow, starting with one to two protected hours a week. That's a working hypothesis, not a benchmark. I'd also choose champions carefully. Technical skill alone isn't enough. The best champion has sound judgment, can coach a colleague without taking over, and has the trust of peers. A former skeptic can be the best choice.

Want to know how to spot your AI champion? Email me for my AI champion role profile.

MY ADVICE

Treat pushback as information. Ask what would make the new way useful, or unacceptable, and fix that.
Pick champions for judgment and coaching ability, not just enthusiasm, and give them protected time.
Put your AI rules on two pages before anyone touches real data. Paycor's free template is a good place to start.

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Insight 4: Let AI check people's decisions, and leave the decisions to people

As teams grow comfortable with AI, they face a harder question: which decisions should it be allowed to influence, especially in hiring, pay and performance?

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

AI in hiring and pay means AI making the call, with all the bias risk that brings.

WHAT I FOUND

None of the tools I found made a decision about a person. Where AI earned its place in hiring and pay, it was a second opinion. It flagged ratings that didn't match the rubric and offers that looked out of line, and a person looked into every flag.

Unchecked human judgment carries its own risk. Across about 3,000 employees, a people leader saw managers write glowing reviews for people with real problems. That becomes a legal risk when someone is let go and "they come back and show you performance review documentation in the last five years where the manager has given them great feedback." The leader planned to pilot AI guidance for managers writing reviews, starting with HR's own 50 people.

Where AI does touch a decision, people stay in charge.

- At an 85-person startup, the self-review assistant asks employees about their year and drafts the write-up, and then the manager reviews it. The employee supplies the substance, and the tool organizes it.
- At the summit, Amanda Craft shared: "AI does not make decisions at all, related to people, and that's, like, a very hard line." But Uncommon does use AI "to audit human decisions because, like, as humans, we also have bias." It flags overall ratings that don't match rubric scores, and offers that look unusually high or low.
- Alex Horowitz of AI for Equity is in agreement. An HR bot can answer how many sick days you get, but "I suspect you are not having employees go to that HR bot and say, Oh, I'm having this issue with my manager, like walk me through it, because that's not repeatable."
- My scoring calibrator was built with this in mind too. It compares each hiring manager's scores with the evidence in the application materials and interview transcripts, against the agreed rubric. When they disagree sharply, it flags the gap for the talent partner and suggests questions to probe the evidence behind the decision. The hiring manager still decides.

So what *do* you hand to AI? Two questions can help: What kind of work is it? How much does a wrong answer cost?



Want help deciding what AI may draft, check or never touch? Email me for the AI decision guide.

MY ADVICE

Draw your line in writing. Name which decisions AI may draft, which it may check, and which only people make. Then say it out loud. Uncommon tells every candidate, on its application, that people read every application.

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Insight 5: Hours saved are the smallest part of the payoff

Leaders who fund this work will eventually ask for ROI. The answer is bigger than hours saved, but only if you measure it.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Measure AI by the hours it saves.

WHAT I FOUND

Hours saved were real, but the bigger wins were more output from the same team and work that never got done before. Almost nobody measured either, so they couldn't make that case to leadership.

Time saved is the easiest win to see. At the 85-person startup, the self-review assistant cut the time people spent on self-reviews from "five to six hours" to about one. It didn't just save time: "People are saying there's actually a better product than what I wrote last year, more coherent."

The biggest payoff can be work that never happened before. At the summit, Amanda Craft said that without the tool, Uncommon would have checked a sample of staff goals once, which "would have taken, like, probably a week or two." Now it checks every goal automatically. Her bigger point: "a lot of this work just wouldn't have been done without it." Anthropic's guide makes the same warning: "if you build the case for AI on hours saved alone, the value tops out at the cost of those hours."

I saw this with my own scoring calibrator. Before it, each talent partner checked hiring managers' scores on their own. There was no way to see scoring across the organization, or for me to know whether each check was done with integrity. The calibrator gave me that view during internal mobility hiring. Few teams can show any of this yet. Only two of the nine leaders I interviewed could put a number on the problem they wanted solved, so treat the figures here as examples, not benchmarks. The payoff comes in three kinds:

FASTER

The same work in less time

5-6 hrs → 1 hr

Time per self-review at an 85-person startup

MORE

More output from the same team

10-15 → 50

Applicants per 100 career fair visitors, with a chatbot

NEW

Work that never happened before

Every interview checked

Score gaps flagged across the organization in time to shape final decisions, from my scoring calibrator

MY ADVICE

Before you start, pick one measure of activity and one measure of results, and write down where they stand today. Then track all three kinds of payoff. When you make the case to leadership, lead with more output and new work.

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Closing - My three questions, answered

I ran this research while building a consulting practice for talent leaders who want to modernize their HR functions and earn a strategic seat with the C-suite. Here's how I'd answer the three questions I started with.

1	**What separates teams that get results from AI?** Not the tool, the team or the budget. The teams that got results aimed at one expensive problem with the work written down, gave a builder real time, and planned for the change.
2	**What's the simplest way to start with AI and get a return that matters?** Start with one costly piece of work, test the tool on past cases, and record your starting numbers. I can't show that return yet. Almost no one I talked to could, because few measured before they began.
3	**How can a consultant like me help, and when is it worth going beyond a quick fix to build an AI-fluent talent team?** The quickest help is one workflow and one tool. Building an AI-fluent talent team is worth it once a team has written processes, a champion and leaders who measure results. Most teams I talked to hadn't checked whether they were there yet.

What a talent leader should do first

If you take one thing from this report, take this order of operations:

☐	**Pick one expensive problem.** The talent task that costs the most hours or causes the most mistakes. (Insight 1)
☐	**Write down what the tool needs to know, and test it.** Run it on 10 to 20 past cases before anyone relies on it. (Insight 1)
☐	**Find your builder, and protect their time.** Give them real hours, and take something off their plate. Make sure the tool can outlive them. (Insight 2)
☐	**Plan the change, not just the tool.** Listen to concerns, choose champions for judgment and coaching, and release skills gradually. (Insight 3)
☐	**Decide what AI may draft, check or never touch.** Write it down, and tell candidates and employees where people make the call. (Insight 4)
☐	**Record your starting numbers.** One measure of activity and one of results, so you can show all three kinds of payoff. (Insight 5)

What I'm building next

These three free tools come straight from what I learned. Each one is in progress.

AI champion role profile	What to look for in the person who carries AI on your team: judgment, coaching ability and the trust of peers. (Insight 3)
AI readiness check	A quick self-check on two things: your employees' judgment with AI, and what your organization gives them. It's based on your own view of your team, so it isn't a skills test. Your answers show where you stand and what to fix first. Built with Brett Chappell at Fullstacked. (Insight 3)
AI decision guide	A one-page template for writing down which decisions AI may draft, which it may check and which only people make. (Insight 4)

Which would you use first? Email me and tell me. Your answer decides what I build first.

How I can help

I've spent 20 years working in talent, from consulting Chief HR Officers in my early career to leading recruiting and talent teams nationally for Teach For America, and then KIPP Foundation. In the past year I've built and tested AI tools for talent decisions. I now partner with Brett Chappell, founder of Fullstacked, to offer these consulting services. Brett has twice been the first-ever people executive at a growing organization, and he brings deep experience in HR systems and payroll. Together, we cover both the talent decisions and the systems they run on. But the right support depends on your goals, your readiness and the size of the problem, so every engagement starts with yours.

Every team starts in a different place, so we start with one tool for your biggest problem.

Start with one tool

Tell me about one painful piece of work. We'll build a working version, and your team uses it on real work for a week before you commit to anything bigger. We also train a second person to own it, so the tool outlives its builder.

Try one now:

Hiring | Onboarding | Certificate check

If the tool works, we can talk about fixing the whole workflow or finding where AI fits across your team.

Let's talk

Want to talk through any part of this report for your team? Book 30 minutes with either of us.



Helen Chan - The Reagent Co.
Book 30 minutes | hchan@thereagentco.com



Brett Chappell - Fullstacked
Book 30 minutes | brett@fullstacked.ai

APPENDIX

What Informed this report

- **Interviews.** I interviewed nine talent and HR leaders between October 19 and November 12, 2026. They include talent leaders at two charter school networks, a recruiting leader at a national education nonprofit, a former chief operating officer of a national education nonprofit, a talent acquisition leader at a large company, an HR leader at a startup, a people leader with healthcare and foundation experience, and two consultants who advise schools.
- **Summit.** EdFuel's 2026 Virtual Talent Summit on October 27, 2026. At this public summit, Jamey Roberts of Charter School Growth Fund moderated the AI panel, with Erica Beal of School Leader Lab, Alex Horowitz of AI for Equity, Amanda Craft of Uncommon Schools and Eric Collazo of Washington Leadership Academy. Ryan Osborne of EdFuel led the session on performance management.
- **Reading.**
  - EdFuel, 2026 Virtual Talent Summit, October 27, 2026. AI panel: Jamey Roberts (moderator), Erica Beal, Alex Horowitz, Amanda Craft and Eric Collazo. Quotes are from the session recording's transcript.
  - Washington Leadership Academy. PlayLab. Uncommon Schools.
  - AI for Equity, Leader Condition-Setting self-assessment (fall 2026), part of its AI Innovation Index.
  - Anthropic, Building an AI-Native Revenue Organization, September 2026. A guide for sales leaders; I use its frameworks, not its customer results, which are self-reported.
  - Info-Tech Research Group, Develop Your Agentic AI Prototype (public summary page). I quote its conclusions, not its member-only figures.
  - Teach For America, AI Impact Report 2026. Includes a survey of more than 3,400 first- and second-year teachers.
  - Gartner, The CIO's Guide to Building an AI Roadmap That Drives Value (AI Roadmap, seven workstreams).
  - JST People Strategy, From AI Fluency to AI Competency.
  - Paycor, AI Acceptable Use Policy Template.
- **What I can't claim.** Most of the people I interviewed work in or with schools and nonprofits. The corporate research points the same way, but I haven't yet tested these patterns with talent leaders at large companies.