Why AI Works for Some Talent Teams and Not Others

An executive summary of the insights report by Helen Chan, The Reagent Co in partnership with Fullstacked | November 2026

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

One talent leader built an HR bot on PlayLab, a platform that lets educators build AI tools without writing code. He worked with the organization's HR lead and chief of operations to load the policies and insurance information into it. The HR bot now "creates a first line of defense to protect individuals' time." At a different organization 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 consultants like me help?

Across a four week research sprint, I found 16 AI tools talent teams built or adopted. The ones that worked:

- **Turn messy data into answers:** A leave tracker that shows who is on leave and why, and live dashboards that replace day-long data requests.
- **Answer routine questions:** HR bots that answer common benefits questions and a chatbot that supports interns.
- **Check or draft people's work:** 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.

OBSERVATION

People often blame one of three things when AI doesn't work: the tool, the team or the budget. One pattern surfaced clearly. AI works best when a team builds or chooses a tool for a specific problem, and someone owns its rollout, use and upkeep.

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 teams that got results aimed at one expensive problem with the work written down, gave a builder real time, and planned for the change. The simplest way to start is to pick one costly piece of work, test the tool on past cases, and record your starting numbers. Almost no one I interviewed measured their starting numbers before they began, so I can't show a return yet. The five insights on the next page show what this looks like in practice.

Click here to read the full report

Click here to see AI Talent tools in action

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 people's decisions.
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 SNAPSHOT: SO IS YOUR PROBLEM READY FOR AI?

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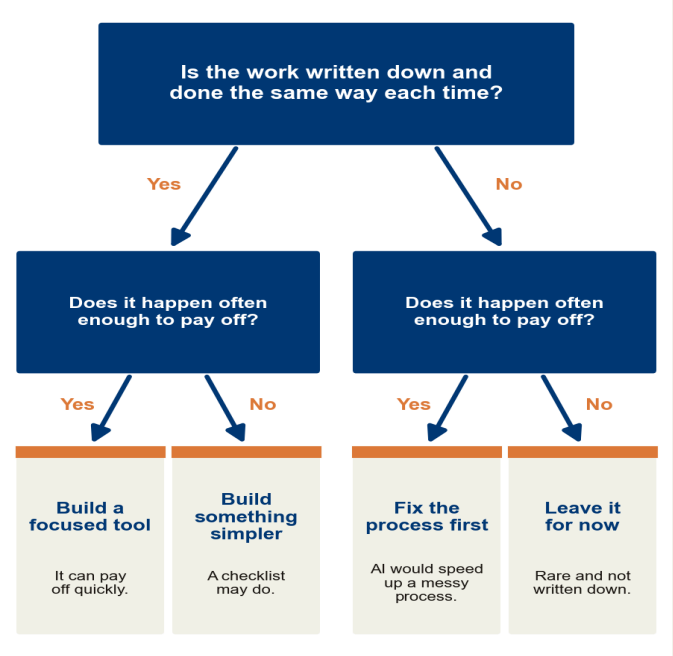
One multi-state charter school first tried cataloging every AI tool that might help its talent team. *"We very quickly realized we were boiling the ocean."* So the team started with its biggest talent problems instead.

I learned the same lesson building my own tools. My compensation generator only worked once we wrote down the rules for setting salaries and named who has the final say. Before that, a salary offer could take anywhere from a few hours to a whole week.

Questions to determine AI readiness



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Need advice to leverage AI for your talent workflow? Book 30 minutes with either of us.

Free tools: an AI champion role profile, readiness check and decision guide. Email me for any of them.



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