Chapter 15

Leadership in the Age of AI (or SI)

Artificial Intelligence brings a familiar leadership responsibility into a new setting. We have always needed to examine information, question assumptions, and decide what action we can responsibly take. Now we can receive a persuasive answer before we have fully considered the question.

Chapter 14 examined independent judgment in the presence of bias and disagreement. The same discipline applies when we use AI. Its usefulness depends partly on our willingness to examine what it provides. Speed and confident language can help us work, but neither establishes that a conclusion is sound.

For the Servant Leader, the central question is how to use this capability to develop people, improve decisions, and strengthen agency.

Are humans even needed?

The question deserves a careful response. AI can perform work that previously required considerable human time and effort. It can organize material, draft language, compare alternatives, and suggest questions we might otherwise overlook. Those capabilities create opportunities to reconsider how work is done.

Leadership, however, includes responsibility for the purpose being served and the consequences of pursuing it. Someone must decide what matters, whose interests need consideration, what commitments can be made, and what risks are acceptable.

When I use an AI-generated recommendation, I remain responsible for accepting it. If the decision violates an agreement or harms a relationship, “The system recommended it” does not account for my choice.

The continuing human responsibility is to examine, choose, act, and learn from what follows.

Begin with purpose and context

Before asking AI for assistance, I need to clarify what I am trying to accomplish. An unclear request may produce polished language while leaving the actual problem untouched.

Suppose I want help to prepare for a difficult conversation with a senior officer who has breached confidentiality. Asking for “a strong message” leaves essential questions unanswered. What agreement was made? What information was

disclosed? What is established, and what remains uncertain? What authority do I have? What result should the conversation accomplish?

Clarifying those matters improves my own preparation before it improves the request.

I can then ask for questions that will help examine the breach, identify its effects, and establish responsibility for what follows. I still need to judge whether the proposed approach fits the person, the agreement, and the circumstances.

Again, *t*he *Communication Guidelines* and *The Power of the "Crucial Conversation"* in the PMP Toolbox remain useful here. Technology can help prepare an exchange; the leadership discipline governing that exchange still needs to be practiced.

Use AI to expand productive thinking

Productive thinking is a disciplined process of questioning, testing, and applying information in an organized way that expands our capacity to choose wisely and act appropriately.

AI can assist with parts of that process. I can ask it to identify alternatives, examine a proposal from another perspective, or suggest what information would be needed to test a conclusion. Its response gives me material to consider.

Useful requests include:

- "What assumptions does this proposal depend upon?"
- "What information would challenge this conclusion?"
- "What alternatives have we overlooked?"
- "What consequences should we examine before acting?"
- "Which parts of this recommendation require further verification?"

These questions become more valuable when I apply them to my own preferred answer as well. Asking AI to support a conclusion I have already chosen can reinforce the assumptions that most need examination.

The measure of usefulness is whether the work improves my capacity to understand the situation and choose responsibly.

Examine the response before relying on it

An answer can be well written and still contain an error, omit relevant information, or rest on an assumption that does not fit the situation. I need to examine what supports the recommendation and what would follow from using it.

That examination should be appropriate to the consequences. A suggestion for organizing a meeting agenda calls for a different level of scrutiny than a recommendation affecting someone's employment or an organization's financial commitments.

I ask what is established, what is inferred, and what remains unknown. When a factual claim matters to the decision, I verify it through an appropriate source. When the answer depends on local circumstances, I consult the people and records that can establish those circumstances.

I also examine the language. Does it express what I actually believe? Does it imply knowledge I do not have? Does it create a promise I am not prepared to keep? Once I adopt and use the response, those words become part of my conduct. Their origin does not reduce my responsibility for them.

Preserve empathy and ownership

AI can help me prepare questions for a coaching conversation. It cannot establish what another person is experiencing merely by generating an explanation.

If I describe someone as resistant, difficult, or uncommitted, the response may begin from the judgment embedded in my description. I need to distinguish what I observed from the meaning I assigned to it before seeking assistance.

The empathy discipline remains essential. I listen to the person's experience with appreciation and respect. I ask for clarification where needed and allow the person to speak for themselves. A plausible explanation generated beforehand must remain open to correction.

The same care applies to commitments. AI may help someone develop an action plan, but the person still needs to choose what they are prepared to undertake. A completed document does not establish ownership.

The *Action Plan Format* in the PMP Toolbox supports that work. The participant needs to identify the intended result, choose appropriate action, and make clear agreements about follow-through.

Develop people through the use of AI

A leader's use of AI can shape how others approach their work. If I routinely deliver finished answers and ask only for implementation, I may remove opportunities for people to develop judgment.

I can instead ask a team to examine an AI-generated proposal. What fits our circumstances? What is missing? Which assumptions need testing? What would we change, and why?

Participants can compare the proposal with their own initial thinking. They can identify useful contributions, challenge weak reasoning, and decide what further work is required. The exercise becomes an opportunity to practice judgment.

This extends the facilitation discipline established in Chapter 12. I provide purpose and structure while participants do the work of examination. Their authority must still be clear: are they recommending an approach, or are they authorized to decide?

The important outcome is what people become able to do with greater competence and responsibility.

Establish clear agreements about use

Organizations need clear agreements about where AI assistance is appropriate, what information may be supplied, and who must review work before it is used.

An existing confidentiality commitment applies when information is entered into a technology service as well as when it is shared with another person. Convenience does not change the agreement. Before providing information, the user needs to know what use is authorized.

Responsibility for review also needs to be explicit. Who verifies important claims? Who approves a recommendation? Who owns the final communication or decision?

These agreements should serve the work and be clear enough to follow. As with other accountability structures, an announcement is insufficient if people do not know what they have committed to do.

Remain accountable for results

AI can help us prepare more quickly and consider more possibilities. We still need to examine whether its use improves the work.

Did the decision serve its intended purpose? Were commitments honored? Did people develop greater understanding and competence? What errors or omissions became visible during application?

These questions connect technology to results. They also provide a basis for changing how it is used.

The PMP Toolbox materials *"Are Humans Even Needed in the Presence of AI?"* and *ChatGPT's Role in Supporting This Endeavor* provide further points of examination. Their value, like that of the other tools in this book, depends on thoughtful application.

Servant Leadership requires us to remain responsible for what our choices make possible for others. AI can extend our capacity to fulfill that responsibility. We must continue to exercise the judgment that gives its use purpose and direction.

Bridge to Chapter 16

Using AI makes the relationship between words and responsibility especially visible. A statement may be produced quickly, but a promise still requires someone to honor it. A recommendation may sound convincing, but its value becomes clearer through action and results.

Chapter 16 turns to Sustaining Credibility and Trust. People form their judgment of a leader through what they repeatedly experience: whether commitments are kept, whether difficult facts are acknowledged, and whether responsibility leads to corrective action. Whatever tools we use, that evidence remains the foundation of credibility.