

The Head of AI Starter Manual

A practical guide to your first 90 days — what to do, why it matters, and how to avoid the mistakes that slow everyone else down.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Understand Your Mandate

The promise your CEO made — whether they said it out loud or not

"Head of AI" is one of the hardest jobs in corporate America right now. Most people doing it are doing it alongside another full-time role. The job description rewrites itself **every 30 days** as capabilities shift.

Your CEO wants to build what Section calls a **Supercompany** — an organization that uses AI and inference instead of headcount alone to drive revenue, profit, and growth. The goal isn't productivity. It's transformation.

THE REALITY GAP

45% of businesses now have paid AI subscriptions. Only 12% are actually using AI in their operations. That gap — between access and real deployment — is the problem you exist to solve.

52%

of employees feel anxious or overwhelmed by AI's implications

85%

are only using AI as a Google replacement or summarization tool

3%

are genuinely proficient with automated, embedded workflows

Your 90-Day Targets

BY DAY 30

AI Manifesto complete. Exec team aligned on speed, ambition, and tool strategy.

BY DAY 90

Responsible use guidelines published. AI baseline measured. Leaders trained.

AT LAUNCH

Full capabilities live. 90% of employees in the platform. Momentum built.

PHASE 1 · DAYS 1-30

Set the Strategic Foundation

Goal: Radical alignment — from the CEO down — on the speed and ambition of your AI transformation

Every organization that skipped this phase had to go back and do it. Without it, teams run off in different directions. This phase locks in the blueprint — which determines how much investment you can ask for and what success looks like.

Build Your AI Manifesto — Not Just a Policy

01

Define your "Why of AI"

Tied to what your organization actually exists to do. **"We need AI because it's the only way to fulfill what we promised our customers"** is a rally point. "We want to cut costs" is not.

02

Declare your Level of Ambition

Two questions: **How fast do we need to move?** and **Will we use AI to Cut, Create, or both?** 90% of exec teams will say "both" — but left to their own devices, most managers only think about cutting. Say it out loud.

03

Write your Operating Norms

Prescriptive, not generic. Think: use AI daily, hunt for obsolete work monthly, exhaust AI before adding headcount, share breakthroughs publicly. Treat this as V1 — revisit every 90 days.

04

Get buy-in before you write — then publish relentlessly

The CEO's fingerprints on it are what give it legitimacy. Once it exists, keep coming back to it. Share it org-wide. Integrate into onboarding. You'll feel like you're repeating yourself. **That's the right amount.**

PHASE 1 (CONTINUED) · DAYS 1-30

Align on Tools and Agents

The decisions you make now determine how fast — or slowly — everything else moves

Give Everyone the Full Tool

Your power users are already comparing your sanctioned tool to Claude Code, Codex, and agentic platforms. If what you give them is weaker, one of two things happens — and both are bad.

TWO MISTAKES THAT LOOK LIKE CAUTION BUT AREN'T

Rolling out a hamstrung version. Novices conclude AI doesn't work. Power users go underground — and you've created shadow AI you can't govern.

Restricting access to pockets of the org. The middle of the organization, where most actual value sits, gets left behind entirely.

Make a Decision on Agents

Agentic capabilities are in the tools your employees already use. You need an exec-level point of view before launch.

OPTIMIZE FOR SECURITY

Purchase an agent-specific platform (Glean, Salesforce Agentforce). **Expect:** built-in governance, slower rollout, stronger guardrails.

OPTIMIZE FOR SPEED

Give employees access to Claude Code or Lovable to build personal agents. **Expect:** more innovation, more experimentation, more governance work on your end.

What you should have by Day 30

OUTPUT 1

An AI Manifesto every executive can articulate — with Why, ambition, and norms.

OUTPUT 2

A clear tool strategy — which enterprise LLM, capabilities enabled, approach to agents.

OUTPUT 3

Radical alignment at the exec level on speed and scale of ambition.

↓ Steal our [AI Manifesto template](#)

PHASE 2 · DAYS 30-90

Activate the Transformation

Governance, baselines, and activated leaders — everything needed to launch with real momentum

Baseline AI Proficiency — Don't Just Ask, Test

PHASE 1 · SELF-REPORTED

Ask people to describe how they'd complete actual AI-assisted tasks. Assess prompting skills and contextual judgment — not just frequency of use.

PHASE 2 · BEHAVIORAL

Once the platform is live, compare self-reported data to actual Weekly Active User numbers. The gap tells you exactly where to focus enablement energy.

L1 · NOVICE

Rarely uses AI
Anxious or skeptical. Unfamiliar with prompting.

L2 · EXPERIMENTER

Uses AI as Google+
Knows basics. No strong work use cases.

L3 · PROFICIENT ✓

Real individual use cases
Uses AI well and safely. Iterates on prompts.

L4 · EXPERT ✓

Builds for others too
Creates repeatable, scalable workflows.

12-month target: 80% at L3+, 20% at L4.

Baseline AI Proficiency — Don't Just Ask, Test

WHAT SECTION SEES IN STALLED ROLLOUTS

IC usage at 80%. Manager usage at 40%. The gap tells the whole story. Only 18% of employees say their direct manager actively expects them to use AI. 37% say their manager is completely silent on the topic.

OUTPUT 1

90% of eligible employees logged into the primary LLM platform

OUTPUT 2

AI proficiency baseline captured. 12-month KPIs set based on where you actually are.

OUTPUT 3

90% of managers trained on how to lead AI adoption — not just asked to support it

FINAL ADVICE

The Mistakes Worth Avoiding

Most of these are easy to prevent once you know to look for them

MISTAKE 01

Writing the manifesto, then forgetting it

The organizations with the strongest adoption keep coming back to their Why of AI. You have to feel like a broken record. That's the right amount.

MISTAKE 02

Hamstringing AI's capabilities

Not turning on automations, blocking agents, rolling out a weaker model version. If your sanctioned tool is less powerful, you've created shadow AI before you even launched.

MISTAKE 03

Deploying too many tools — or too few

Ask anyone in the org what 2 or 3 platforms they're expected to use. They should all give the same answer. If they can't, you have a problem.

MISTAKE 04

Outsourcing this to consultants

The speed and scale of AI transformation is too big to offload to outside parties. Consultants can accelerate. But this capability has to be built from the inside.

Be the voice of reason

Your employees are reading headlines that say AI will cure cancer, eliminate all jobs, or end civilization. None of that is useful. The best Heads of AI are **pragmatic optimists** — they engage with hard questions authentically, with patience.

FROM TAYLOR MALMSHEIMER

"I truly think this is one of the biggest opportunities most of us have faced in our careers. You've got a big job — and a big opportunity. Focus on some of the value creation and the positives, but do it in an authentic way."

Taylor Malmshiemer · COO & Head of Product, Section · April 2026