# The Playbook 2026

## Real strategies that executives are using to build AI-native companies

In every category, a new leader will emerge in the AI era – and it's not necessarily a startup. It's the company whose leaders understand and execute on the AI opportunity to scale intelligence and make their teams faster, leaner, and higher-output.

We gathered 5 c-suite executives from burgeoning AI supercompanies to share how they recognized the business opportunity, brought their team on board, and executed on the ground. In this working playbook, you'll learn from them directly – and gain strategies to take back to your own company.

## The top 5 strategies for being an AI-native company

### ① The CEO should be the first head of AI.

As a leader, your conviction on AI cannot be outsourced to a hire. The CEO's role is to set the vision, fund the transformation, have their own "holy shit" moment, and drag the team with them (if necessary).

## ② Let chaos reign, then rein it in.

Give employees room to experiment **before** standardizing. Use what they build to identify patterns and then consolidate the best skills, workflows, and platforms.

## ③ Hire for AI-native problem solving.

Stop grading candidates based on stories from past jobs. Give them a real task with full access to AI, and evaluate the outcomes based on how they think, orchestrate, and apply judgment.

## ④ Build the rails before output accelerates.

AI moves the bottleneck rather than eliminating it. As AI dramatically increases the amount of work your organization can produce, the systems that govern that work have to scale too.

## ⑤ Make your AI initiatives "batteries included".

Identify work that occurs across many teams, codify the best way to do it, and give employees a ready-made AI workflow that improves through repeated use.

# The 10 Things I'm Telling CEOs

with Greg Shove,
Section

AI transformation is now a leadership discipline, not just a technology initiative. CEOs and functional executives need to own the urgency, fund the transformation layer, and personally understand what it takes to build an agentic workforce.

**"You cannot outsource your conviction to somebody else."**

The near-term work is less glamorous than the medium-term opportunity: build small wins, create organizational muscle, and use that credibility to buy time for higher-risk, higher-reward bets. Leaders should be ambitious about the destination without pretending the transformation happens overnight.

### 1 Build your own AI chief of staff.

Leaders should learn hands-on by building an agent for themselves. The point is not the specific use case – it's understanding the pain, maintenance, context, and upside of an agentic workforce at keyboard-level.

### 2 Pick one lighthouse team and go deep.

Broad access creates a foundation, but transformation compounds when one committed team gets significantly more enablement, support, and room to redesign how its work gets done.

### 3 Maintain a "cut" roadmap and a "create" roadmap.

Efficiency alone is uninspiring. Every leader should identify what AI can remove and what new products, services, customer experiences, or business models it can create.

**The practical takeaway:** Lower your expectations for immediate transformation, raise them for the medium term, and make AI ownership explicit across the leadership team. Fund adoption as seriously as you fund infrastructure, manage inference like a business resource, and create as aggressively as you cut.

## How to Lead Through an AI Pivot

with Eric Vaughan,
IgniteTech

IgniteTech treated AI as an existential company pivot, not an optional adoption program. After a year of tools, education, incentives, and company-wide "AI Mondays," leadership concluded that the missing variable was belief – and rebuilt the workforce around people who were ready to operate AI-first.

**"We measured effort more than we measured aptitude.
Then we measured attitude more than aptitude."**

## ① Make AI belief a talent requirement.

Upskilling can't convert everyone. IgniteTech began testing both AI aptitude and willingness to work differently, then made attitude, effort, and experimentation core performance expectations..

## ② Make R&D part of every job.

Employees are expected to spend part of their working time researching, testing, and sharing new AI approaches. Monthly all-hands meetings are now AI innovation demos, not standard company updates.

## ③ Replace point-agent chaos with a harness.

The end goal isn't employees managing dozens of AI agents. It's AI orchestrators that coordinate specialized agents on their behalf, escalating only the work that requires human judgment.

**The practical takeaway:** Be radically clear about the company's AI direction, give people time and support to meet it, and evaluate whether they are genuinely moving with you. Once the team is aligned, keep structures fluid – the tools, workflows, and best practices may need to change monthly.

# The Journey to an AI-Native Workforce

with Mike Blandina,
Snowflake

Snowflake activated its workforce by deliberately allowing a period of structured chaos. Nearly 10,000 employees were given access to internal AI tools and told to build, producing 18,000 skills in three months and revealing where the most valuable employee demand actually existed.

**"The goal isn't AI adoption.**
**The goal is changing how work gets done."**

The goal was never to put all 18,000 experiments into production. Snowflake used the activity to identify patterns, find unexpected builders, and turn the best ideas into governed enterprise agents – including a sales agent that replaced 250 dashboards and now handles roughly 30,000 prompts a day.

### 1 Reward visible value.

Mike used an agent swarm to identify teams and individuals producing meaningful output, then celebrated them through a "wall of fame." Recognition created positive pressure without turning token usage into the goal.

### 2 Start with experimentation, not a governance forum.

Early committees are good at finding reasons **not** to move. Give employees bounded room to explore, monitor what happens, and introduce heavier governance after the organization understands the opportunity.

### 3 Early adoption is measured in prompts. Mature adoption is measured in outcomes.

High prompt counts can signal low sophistication. Snowflake now looks at actions, pull requests, completed work, movement into test environments, and whether skills spread to other teams.

**The practical takeaway:** Your AI strategy should scale learning, not just usage. The organizations pulling ahead are the ones that systematically turn employee experimentation into reusable workflows, shared knowledge, and better ways of working.

## Operationalizing AI Through Talent and Team Design

with Yossi Levin,
Fiverr

Fiverr's AI transformation began by giving teams the freedom to experiment, build agents, and discover new ways of working. As adoption accelerated, the challenge shifted from encouraging AI use to operationalizing it.

Today, Fiverr is redesigning how work gets done across the full product lifecycle. From hiring and onboarding to ideation, development, deployment, and business operations, AI is becoming embedded in the way teams operate, while humans increasingly focus on judgment, creativity, and domain expertise.

"AI changes the craft –
not the need for craftsmanship."

## 1 Centralize the winning skills.

A dedicated team evaluates competing skills and agents, selects the enterprise standard, and removes local alternatives. Repeatability matters because one team's custom process can destabilize the work around it.

## 2 Interview new talent in the AI-native environment they'll work in.

Give candidates internet access, AI tools, and a task they cannot reasonably complete manually. Evaluate the richness of their prompts, how they deploy agents, and how they think.

## 3 Build a semantic layer for self-service data.

Business users need safe access to company data, but simple language can hide complex definitions. Encode those definitions so employees and new hires can ask ordinary questions without accidentally making decisions from the wrong query.

**The practical takeaway:** Encourage experimentation inside a shared framework, then standardize fast. Hire for curiosity and AI operating ability, and codify your institutional knowledge so new hires can onboard and start providing value fast.

# Rewiring a Company to Run on AI

with Sam Rhea,
Cloudflare

Cloudflare built an internal AI environment that gives employees broad model and system access while keeping inference, data connections, and costs visible and controllable. But the adoption breakthrough didn't come from the platform alone – it came from discovering the work employees actually wanted to stop doing.

> **“AI is an okay tool.**
> **It’s a phenomenal tool maker.”**

Cloudflare created a “magic email alias” and told employees to send it their homework. A small internal team manually fulfilled hundreds and then thousands of requests, identified recurring patterns, and converted the most common needs into reusable skills and workflows inside Cloudflare OS.

### 1 Do things that do not scale to find what should.

The manual request service exposed real demand. As clusters of similar AI requests emerged across the organization, Cloudflare knew which workflows were worth codifying into high-quality context, reusable skills, and automation.

### 2 Give employees a safe front door to AI.

Cloudflare routes inference through an AI gateway and system access through a shared MCP portal. Employees can use the right model and approved company data without local setup, while the company retains visibility and control.

### 3 Token limits should follow value, not a universal rule.

Cloudflare watches aggregate spend and investigates outliers – but high usage can be a reason to invest more when an engineer or salesperson is producing exceptional customer or business impact.

**The practical takeaway:** Don’t give everyone a blinking cursor and call it transformation. Create a channel for employees to hand over repetitive work, study the patterns, and turn the best requests into governed, reusable workflows that return time to higher-value human work.


## Will your company scale AI or stall again?

Book a Meeting