



AI Mistakes Smart People Make

And the power moves that separate casual users from strategic ones

Three habits that limit your results

The polite trap

"Could you please help me write a policy, if it's not too much trouble..." AI doesn't need courtesy — it needs clarity. Hedging language dilutes the request.

Better: "Write a comprehensive remote work policy for a 150-person organization."

Accepting the default creativity level

AI has a dial, and most people never touch it. Tell it where to sit:

- **Conservative:** "Give me a by-the-book, traditional approach to..."
- **Balanced:** "A practical solution balancing innovation with risk management..."
- **Innovative:** "Be creative — suggest unconventional approaches to..."

Context amnesia

Starting a fresh conversation for every related task throws away the context you just built. Stay in the thread. Better yet, create a project that stores every conversation on a topic: "Building on our performance review discussion, now design the manager training." "Using the framework we just established..." "Taking the opposite perspective from what we just discussed..."

Four power moves

1. The perspective shift

Get multiple expert viewpoints in one prompt: "Analyze our new PTO policy from three perspectives — finance (budget impact), employees (fairness), managers (administrative burden). Show where they conflict and how to resolve the tension." You catch conflicts before they derail implementation.

2. The implementation autopsy

Prevent failure by imagining it: "Imagine this initiative failed spectacularly after six months. Conduct the post-mortem — what went wrong, who became resistors, what communication broke down? Now redesign to prevent those specific failures."

3. Time-travel testing

For decisions with long tails: "Fast-forward 24 months after implementing this policy. What unintended consequences emerged? What did we fail to anticipate? What would we do differently starting today?"

4. The meta-analysis

Understand the reasoning, not just the answer: "What factors did you weight most heavily? What assumptions are you making about our context? What would change your recommendation? What are you least confident about?" This tells you exactly where your human judgment is still required.

5. The rehearsal room

Before a difficult conversation, make AI play the other person: "Act as an employee who just learned their role is changing. I'll practice the conversation. Push back the way a real person would, then critique how I handled it." Ten minutes of rehearsal beats an hour of dread.

Time-savers

- **Reference points beat descriptions:** "Model this on Netflix's culture document, adapted for a healthcare organization" gets further faster than three paragraphs of explanation
- **Specify format upfront:** "Format as a table with pros/cons columns" — don't reformat after the fact
- **Build in iteration:** "If this isn't quite right, ask me what to adjust rather than starting over"
- **Make it cite real sources:** "Find current research on [topic]. Use only primary sources: .gov, .edu, .org, and peer-reviewed journals. Include dates and links, and flag anything you can't verify."

Emergency fixes

When the AI...	Add this
Gives generic responses	"Be specific to [your industry] and avoid generic advice"
Agrees with everything	"Challenge my assumptions and point out flaws in this approach"
Stays shallow	"Dig deeper into [specific aspect] with detailed analysis"
Stays theoretical	"Break this into specific, actionable steps with timelines"

One rule that outranks the rest: prompts are records. Your IT department can see them and lawyers can discover them in litigation. If you wouldn't want it read aloud in a deposition, don't type it. And never ask AI to help soften, hide, or dress up something dishonest.

Most people use AI like a smart search engine. Strategic users treat it like a capable consultant who never gets tired — but only if you ask the right questions the right way.

Want this as a session for your team or conference? This guide pairs with "AI Without the Anxiety: Making Technology Work FOR Your Team" — a plain-spoken session for leaders who don't need a tech background, just a clearer head and a starting point. heatherlambert.speaker@gmail.com · 615.434.5180