

— THE EIGHT SHARP EXPRESS · FIELD GUIDE

Seven characters. Seven things worth *actually* *knowing* about AI.

You just walked through a desert town where every building taught one idea. This is that town on paper, so the ideas survive the drive home.

Each section is one character and one point. What they teach, why it matters, and a real example you can copy. **At the bottom of each one is a thing to try this week.** Not homework. Fifteen minutes, tops.

You do not need to be technical to use any of this. Every idea in here is something a business owner can do from a browser tab between phone calls. **Start with section one and stop whenever you want.** Section one alone is worth the read.

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How to ask - *the whole game is the brief*

**Bess "Boilerplate" Hardin**

AMERICAN BADGER · THE ROUNDHOUSE

Bess runs the forge where prompts get made. She has watched a thousand people type four words at a machine and then blame the machine.

"Four words and a prayer gets you oatmeal."

This is the one that changes your results the most, and it costs you nothing but thirty extra seconds of typing. AI fills every blank you leave with the most average answer it owns. Leave fewer blanks and it stops being average.

The mental model that works: **you are briefing a sharp new hire on day one.** Genuinely smart, fast, willing. Knows nothing about your customers, your town, your voice, or what you are actually trying to get done. You would never walk up to that person and say "write me a marketing email" and then be annoyed at what came back.

**GOAL. The outcome, not the task.**

"Get twelve past clients to book a review" beats "write an email." One tells it what winning looks like. The other tells it what shape to make.

**CONTEXT. Who you are and who is reading.**

Your business, your town, your relationship with this person. "These clients have not heard from me in a year" changes every sentence that comes back.

**CONSTRAINTS. Length, tone, and one ask.**

"Under 120 words, plain talk, one link, no fake urgency." Without limits it writes six paragraphs and three exclamation points, every time.

**EXAMPLE. Paste something good and say "this voice."**

The single highest-leverage line in the whole brief. One sample of your actual writing does more than any adjective you could pick.

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WHAT MOST PEOPLE TYPE

write me a marketing email

What comes back: "Dear Valued Customer, in today's fast-paced market." Six paragraphs. Three exclamation points. Every sentence true of every business on earth. Technically an email.

THE SAME JOB, BRIEFED

Goal: get 12 past clients to book a policy review before January rates change. Context: I own a 3-person insurance agency in Sandy and these clients have not heard from me in a year. Constraints: under 120 words, plain talk, one ask, no fake urgency. Example: match the voice of the note below.

What comes back: Names the rate change. Owns the year of silence. 110 words, one booking link, sounds like you on a good day.

THE POINT

Same model both times. Nobody upgraded the engine. *The brief is the only thing that got smarter.* When AI disappoints you, the brief is the first place to look, and about nine times in ten it is also the last.

TRY THIS WEEK · 10 MINUTES

Take the last thing AI wrote for you that came out flat. Do it again with all four parts. Same tool, same day. Compare them side by side.

Which one to use - *there is no such thing as "AI"*

**Sledge**

ROCK SQUIRREL · THE SWITCHYARD

Forty years coupling engines. He does not care which one is newest. He cares which one is right for the load in front of you.

"Nobody in your room went out and bought a handcar. You inherited it and you never got around to it."

People say "AI" like it is one thing you either use or you do not. It is a rail yard. Different engines, wildly different costs, and picking the wrong one is most of why people conclude it is either too expensive or too dumb.

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ENGINE	WHAT IT IS	REACH FOR IT WHEN
The Handcar	You, doing it by hand	Never, on purpose. It only moves while you are pumping. This is the Tuesday afternoon you have been calling normal.
The Bullet	A small, fast model	Sorting, tagging, triage, rough drafts. Costs actual cents. Throw a hundred jobs at it before lunch.
The Express	A mid-size model	Your daily driver, nine times out of ten. Writing, planning, answering, thinking out loud with you.
The Heavy Freight	A large model	Contracts, tangled problems, the thing you keep pushing to Friday because it needs real attention.
The Mega-Freight	A frontier model	Building whole systems. The town you just walked through was built by one of these.

THE COST THING

People hear "AI" and brace for a bill that never shows up. *The small engines cost cents to run.* Most of what a small business needs every day rides on the cheapest two.

THE POINT

Most of the room is still on the handcar for work a Bullet would finish before you set your coffee down. **Not because you compared the options and chose it.** Because it is what was already there and nobody ever handed you the yard map.

TRY THIS WEEK · 5 MINUTES

Name one job you do by hand every week that is boring and high volume. Sorting, tagging, first drafts. That is a Bullet job. You are paying for it in hours right now.

Plugging it in - *advice becomes work*



Birdie Cottonwood

AMERICAN KESTREL · THE SIGNAL TOWER

She works the switchboard, where the line from the AI meets the line to your actual business. Talks fast because she sees the whole valley from up there.

"Out of the box, it is a genius locked in a phone booth."

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Ask a fresh AI about your inbox and it will write you a genuinely lovely essay about inboxes. It has never seen yours. That gap between good advice and done work is the single biggest difference between people who find AI impressive and people who find it useful.

The bridge has a name you will start seeing everywhere: an **MCP server**. Think of it as a standard plug. One end goes into the AI, the other goes into a tool you already pay for. Once it is in, the AI stops describing your business and starts operating inside it.

PLUG IT INTO	WHAT STOPS BEING YOUR JOB
Email	Triage, drafting replies in your voice, catching the one that actually matters in a pile of ninety.
Calendar	Finding real time, booking it, prepping you for what is next with the context attached.
Your CRM	Notes written after the call, follow-up that actually happens, the client who went quiet getting noticed.
Files and docs	Reading the contract, pulling the number, comparing this one to the last four.
Your own records	Answering questions about your business with your data instead of the internet's average guess.

SAY THIS PART OUT LOUD TO WHOEVER IS NERVOUS

It asks **before it acts**. Reading is free and automatic. Sending, booking, paying, changing a record: that waits on your yes, every time. *You stay the one who decides*. The fear that it is off doing things behind your back is the most common reason people stall, and it is the easiest one to put down.

TRY THIS WEEK · 15 MINUTES

Connect one tool. Just one, and make it email. The moment it can see your actual inbox instead of the idea of an inbox, the whole thing stops being a demo.

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Skills are bricks - *explain it once, ever*



Boxcar Bea

CHUCKWALLA · THE FREIGHT DEPOT

She labels crates. Every crate holds a job that used to be explained from scratch and now runs from one word on the lid.

"One brick is boring. Snap four together and it runs your Monday without you in the room."

If you take one thing home, take this one. Most people use AI like a vending machine: walk up, explain the whole job, get a result, walk away, and re-explain the identical job next Tuesday. That re-explaining is the leak, and it is enormous.

A **skill** is a chore you explained once and then wrote down where the AI can find it. Your format. Your voice. Your rules and the exceptions to them. After that, one word runs it. Not a rough approximation of it. The version you already approved.



It compounds, which is the whole reason to care.

Ten prompts typed ten times is ten times the typing. Ten skills is a system that gets more capable every time you add to it, because they call each other.



It survives you being busy.

The thing you do well only when you have time gets done the same way on your worst week.



It is the only version that transfers to your team.

A prompt in your head helps you. A brick on the shelf helps whoever you hire next, on their first afternoon.



This whole game is bricks.

The portraits, the writing, the voice on the audio, the meeting history: every one of those came off a shelf that was already built. Nothing here was made for this presentation.

HOW TO FIND YOURS

Ask yourself one question: *what did I explain to somebody twice this month?* **That is your first brick, and you already know what it is.**

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THE TRAP

Everybody who gets excited about this builds ten and finishes none. **Build one.** Use it for two weeks until you would miss it if it vanished. Ten is a hobby. *One is a habit.*

WRITE IT DOWN NOW · WHAT DID YOU EXPLAIN TWICE THIS MONTH?

Where it gets things wrong - *and it will*

**Rusty**

GILA MONSTER · THE DINING CAR

He tells you three things about your own group and one of them is invented. He will not tell you which. He is the most useful character in the town.

"I said it the same way I said the true ones. That is the whole problem, kid."

This is the part nobody selling you AI leads with, so here it is in plain language. It will state something false in exactly the same confident voice it uses for everything true. There is no wobble, no hedge, no tell. It is not lying to you. It hit a gap and filled it smooth.

In the game, Rusty says the group meets on Tuesdays. It is Monday. Everyone catches it instantly and laughs, and then comes the question worth carrying home: **you caught that because you already knew the answer. What happens when you do not?**

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VERIFY WITHOUT FAIL	WHY THIS ONE
Anything with a dollar sign	Prices, quotes, totals, rates. The most expensive place to be confidently wrong.
Names and dates	The easiest thing in the world for it to smooth over, and the most embarrassing in front of a client.
Numbers you will repeat	Statistics, percentages, counts. Once you say it out loud in a meeting it is yours.
Anything legal or regulatory	Rules vary by state and change. Confident and current are different things.
Quotes and sources	It can produce a citation that looks perfect and points at nothing. Click the link.

THE FRAME THAT KEEPS YOU SAFE

Brilliant new hire, first week. Fast, tireless, occasionally certain about something they have no business being certain about. You would read that person's work before it went to a client. *Do that and this stops being a risk and starts being the reason you stay the boss of it.*

TRY THIS WEEK · 2 MINUTES

Ask it something you already know cold about your own industry. Watch how it handles the edge of what it knows. That calibration is worth more than any article about AI safety.

Memory - *the part that makes it yours*



Patch

DEPOT CAT · THE CONDUCTOR'S LOG

Patch has read every page of every meeting this group has ever had and can answer questions about any of it. Barely opens her eyes to do it.

"Depot cat is a job title, not a breed. Every depot has one. Not a single one of us was hired."

Everything above works for anybody. This is the one that makes it specifically yours, and it is the difference between a clever tool and something that feels like it works here.

An AI with no memory meets you fresh every morning. You re-explain your business, your clients, your preferences, your standing decisions,

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forever. Give it a memory and every conversation starts where the last one ended. It stops being a stranger who is good at writing.

**Decisions stay decided.**

You settled how you price rush jobs once. It should never ask again, and it should apply it without being reminded.

**People stay known.**

Who your clients are, what they care about, what happened last time. The context that lives in your head and nowhere else.

**Corrections stick.**

Tell it once that you hate a phrase and it should be gone for good. Repeating yourself is the clearest sign the memory layer is missing.

**Your own history becomes answerable.**

Meeting notes, calls, past projects. Recorded is not the same as usable. Usable means you can ask it a question and get your own answer back.

THE POINT

Patch is doing nothing exotic. Transcript in, memory out, questions answered. *Any group that keeps notes could have this*, and almost none of them do, because the notes go in a folder nobody opens instead of somewhere that can answer.

Start Monday - *what to actually do*

**The Conductor**

UNION STATION · DOORS CLOSE AT EIGHT SHARP

Runs the line. Cares about one thing: whether you get on before it leaves.

"Doors close at eight sharp. They always do."

The town you walked through was built over one weekend, on nights, by someone who is not a developer and has never opened a code editor. That is the argument, and it only works if you know why it was fast.

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It was not fast because of talent or spare time. **It was fast because the bricks were already on the shelf.** The portraits, the writing, the voice, the deployment, the meeting history: every piece was built earlier for something else entirely and got picked up and snapped together. That is the difference between owning a tool and owning a system, and it is available to every person reading this.

**This week: brief one thing properly.**

Goal, context, constraints, example. Ten minutes. This is the highest return on the smallest effort in the entire document.

**This month: plug in one tool.**

Make it email. Watch advice turn into work.

**This quarter: build one brick.**

The thing you explained twice. Use it until you would miss it. Then build the second one.

**Always: read the work before it ships.**

Especially anything with a dollar sign or somebody's name on it.

THE ONE TO SIT WITH

"I do not have time to learn this" is the most understandable reason in the world, and it is still the wrong answer. **It is already here. It is already this good.** *The clock runs whether you start or not,* and the gap it opens is the kind you notice only after it has already decided something.

LAST THING

Your business is full of chores waiting to become bricks. *You have just been doing them by hand.*

THE TOWN IS STILL OPEN

play.kaizn.ai works on any phone or laptop, any time. Walk back in, talk to anyone, and press E on anything that looks interesting. Everything in this guide is in there, and a few things are not.