JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

The AI Advantage: Power Up Your Team Now

AI is impacting business in a big way. VirtualDOO's Lloyd Thompson discusses how AI applications for business can challenge and empower your team.

James Schramko and Lloyd Thompson

James: James Schramko here, welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 1009. Today, we're talking about AI again, but we're going to talk about it in terms of your team. Because if you have a team, I bet you're like me thinking, Should I be hiring more people? Can the tools replace the people? Can the tools augment my people? We've had loose discussions around this on the podcast before. We're going to dive in pretty deep today. First, I want to introduce my guest, Lloyd Thompson from VirtualDOO, that's D-O-O. Hello, Lloyd. Good to see you again.

Lloyd: Thanks for having me again, James.

James: You're my friend, the ex-banker turned people-and-systems fixer upper for all these visionary entrepreneurs that you've been working with over there at VirtualDOO.com. We'll get more into that in a minute. But I want to ask you straight out of the gates, how significant is AI when it comes to team?

Why you need to get on board

Lloyd: I think this is huge. I think this is the biggest thing since the invention of the microchip. That sounds outrageous, I know. But AI everywhere, and we've had AI for a long time. But AI everywhere is such an enabler. And if I want to put that in terms of milestones or significant world events. Let's say we had the Industrial Revolution, the rise of automation, we have the microchip leading to computer technology, we've had the internet, and now AI everywhere.

And if I go down a rabbit hole, and I know I've spoken about this briefly before, but we had the Industrial Revolution, that was the rise of automation. And the people that didn't want to go with this, they were given the term the Luddites, because they were trying to sabotage the machinery. And it's a bit like, imagine now, if you had a business that didn't use the internet, I might call you a Luddite. I mean, even the dry cleaner is going to put their location on Google Maps.

And I think very soon, if you're someone that's not using AI and automation in your business, you might be referred to as a Luddite. And I think it's really important to get with this and not get left behind. And it's not just ChatGPT, which everybody is talking about. Even Microsoft Office is really coming to the game here. Remember Clippy, the paperclip?

James: Yeah.

Lloyd: Clippy's got a huge upgrade, and they're calling it Copilot. And it's making its way into Teams, and Word, and Excel, pretty much the whole OfficeSuite. And while there's still more to be released, you can find intelligent suggestions like, Hey, what about if we graph it like this? Or this could be ideal content. Or why don't we put your slides like this, like SlidesAI? So this is coming in nearly every common platform, there'll be an AI hook somewhere, even as common as Microsoft Office is going to have this. And so I think it's really important to get on board now so that you can take advantage of this productivity.

James: Some people were saying that about block chain though. And that's kind of disappeared a bit. Why do you think this isn't just hype?

Lloyd: I guess I've seen it myself. I mean, you've seen what automation did to the supermarkets, right? You used to be in there, you go in, and there'd be a line of people just bagging up your groceries and putting it away for you. Now you go in, there's like, I don't know, all of these computers you'd use and like, one or two people doing it.

I've personally seen the amount of content that's possible to create out of ChatGPT, as an example. Like I saw a demo the other day of someone took a book, they fed it to ChatGPT, they said, Summarize this into five paragraphs. They fed that into, I think it was slides.ai. It produced the pictures to go along with it. They fed that script to a tool that was able to then be like a voice actor and read the script.

And so they were able to present on a book that they'd never read in five minutes with a voice actor reading the script, like the power for content creation is incredible. And it's not just that, it's like the graphics as well. I mentioned that was built into SlidesAI. I've been looking at say, Midjourney. And I could say, Hey, you know, draw a picture of a panda with VirtualDOO written on its hat, and it will spit out a number of permutations of that.

And while that might not be as pleasing as me being, I have a conversation with a real person, say, Oh, tweak this a bit like this, is it going to be good enough for me to get started? I bet so. It's costing me very little. And, you know, it's here right now. This is the early version. It's already so powerful.

James: I think you've got an interesting lens on this. It reminds me of that 1940s quote from IBM's President, Thomas Watson, he repeatedly said, I think there's a world market for about five computers. So in hindsight, that's wrong. I remember observing the internet and thinking, there's something to this. My cousin put me onto it in about 1995, '96. And that's when I first started using it, before all the modern stuff.

I went back to it 10 years later, about 2005, and really started developing my own business. I really wanted to learn how to build a website, because I just knew, this is one of those doors we go through, and we don't go back. I do think the same with AI. And the evidence for me is, I'm using it. I'm using it, I'm seeing what it does, I appreciate that we're not going to go back.

I've actually commented on a friend of mine's video; he's had 14 million or 15 million views of this video. And it's around, don't use ChatGPT to do university assignments. I commented, or just do the work. And I've had 14,000 reactions, and a lot of them, especially younger people, are saying, No, no way, bro. I'd rather do something else. I'm going to use it.

And so there seems to be mass adoption for this. And like you, I've seen the change in supermarket lines. In fact, depending on which country I'm in, it becomes a stark contrast to me, because when I go to a developing nation, it's still line up and manual labor, like three people per check out. One person scanning the stuff, the other two people bagging it, right, and tying it up in ribbons and stuff.

And it fascinates me because of course, you know, we've all been outsourced to supermarket checkout clerks over here in Western society, we're doing all our own stuff. We're filling our own car with fuel, we're checking out our own food from the shop. That doesn't happen in developing nations. So I've seen the contrast that's kind of like a time machine. I think it's going down the path.

What Lloyd does for a living

Now, in your unique situation, you have been helping people with systems and teams, right? VirtualDOO. Just remind me, for the benefit of the audience, what are you hands-on with, in a day-to-day business, so that we can see through your lens?

Lloyd: Yeah, okay. So just briefly, what my business is about, we help busy online business owners get out of the day-to-day operations so they can focus on strategy, relationships, their passions, and shaking the tree for new business. And we do this by providing a director of operations on a fractional basis on a month-to-month subscription.

And how we do it is that director of operations is going to lead the team so the founder gets back their time, they're going to oversee projects and operations, so that will smooth out the bumps in the road, and we will drive process improvements so they can scale. So we're really looking at this from a team view, like how are things going to work with the team?

Where this AI plays into that is, you know, what are people doing? Is this something that just operations should be using? Or is it across the whole business? You know, should everyone be using this? And I'm very much of the view that while operations might be on the coalface, they might be the people doing more complicated customizations, using tools like Zapier and hooking Zapier automations into AI and so forth.

This is something for everybody in the business. You know, this is for people in sales and marketing, this is for people for finance, because all of those areas are going to have some area which can be automated and have benefit of productivity using AI.

Will some roles need to go?

James: What if those somebodies are the people who don't really need to be there? Because that's where I think it's really a founder's responsibility to understand the true impact of this. One decision might be, we'll get this piece of software, we don't need to hire anyone else anymore in that whole department, we just need an operator, someone who can run that software with expertise to be able to have an opinion on it.
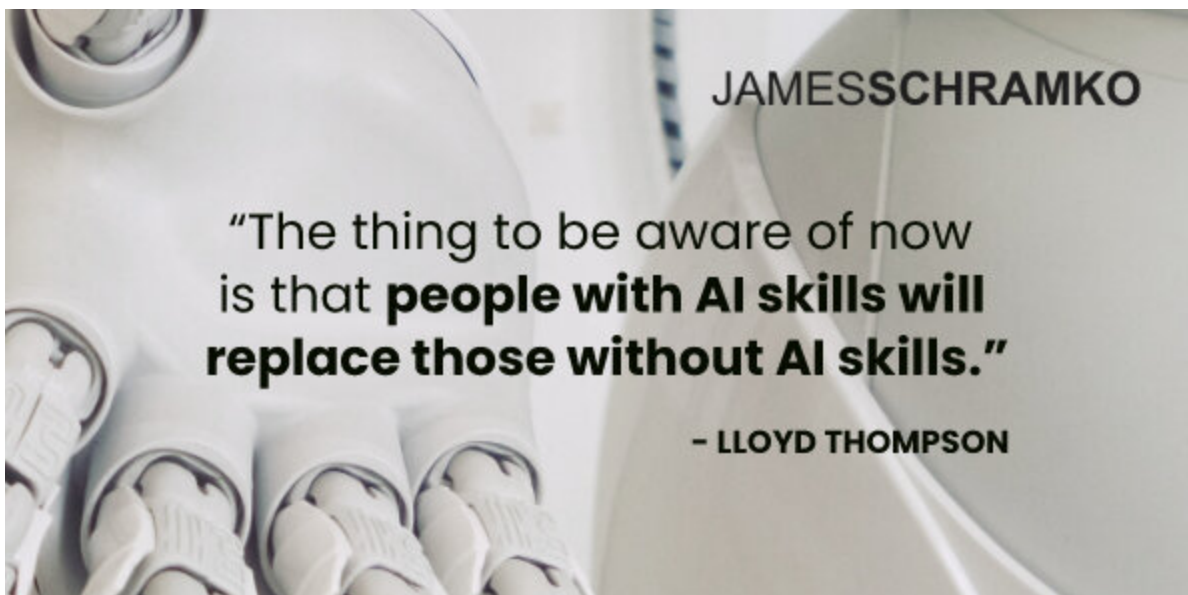
And I've covered this in previous episodes. I think that's where the shift is. Some roles like data entry, or generic content creation, I think they're definitely at risk. Where I think there's opportunities is people who are very good at content, very good at marketing, very good at coaching, very good at graphics, can rise above that risk zone and be operating the tools.

I think if you're at a high-level, strategic point of view, the founder needs to be aware of this because one decision on a tool or an augmentation process might actually completely change the org chart, right? I don't like those things that much, but it could completely remove a whole division or a strand. I expect it's going to change the way that that works.

What you really need to know now...

But you know what's interesting to me is you came from tech, you used to install software for banks. I guess it's like when I was at Mercedes-Benz, we would see whatever's in an S-Class will eventually trickle down to a C-Class. So when ABS became standard, anti-lock braking systems, eventually it's going to make it down to your everyday car. And then eventually all the clones will copy them and then all cars will have it, same with airbags.

So you've seen the big end of town, the big bucks, the high-level stuff, and it's trickling down into the hands of mere mortals like us, right? What do you think is important to know right now, if you're listening to this podcast? What's right now?

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"The thing to be aware of now is that **people with AI skills will replace those without AI skills."**

– LLOYD THOMPSON

Lloyd: I think addressing what those myths and misconceptions are are important. You mean, you talked about, you know, who's likely to be using it, we talked about graphic designers and content creators. I think one thing that I've heard a lot, you know, is this going to replace all jobs? And I think if we're looking at AI and automation, well, it definitely could replace a lot of jobs. And I think the thing to be aware of now is that people with AI skills will replace those without AI skills.

So I think it's really important. If you want to be productive, if you're someone in a team, you want to be picking up these skills. If you're the founder of a business, you want to be aware of capabilities. But if you've got a COO in your business, that's something you want them to be keeping a pulse on the channel and the team, who's using what?

So the first thing is, will it replace all jobs? I would say I don't think it's going to replace all jobs. But I think the important thing is making sure those skills are there, and making sure that people are upskilling. I think the other thing to be aware of is that it's not infallible, and it's an expression in certainly computing terms. And I can't remember the right way to put this, but crap in crap out.

James: GIGO, isn't it? Garbage in, garbage out.

Lloyd: Garbage in, garbage out, and various permutations of that expression. Is this good as what you put in? And what we've seen so far is ChatGPT is more accurate than ChatGPT3, four is better than three, and that's what the stats are saying. But when you do get an answer that's not correct, it's confidently wrong. And they call that an AI hallucination. And so it's really important that you've got to validate the sources or validate those answers.

It doesn't take too much looking to find out where AI has gone wrong in the public domain. And currently, I think there's still an investigation going on with Tesla about how a self-driving car using AI caused a fatality. And then also over at Amazon, there's a case where they were using AI as a part of its recruitment process, and it only put forward male candidates. So if you're going to put in a process, you need to validate the information that is coming through is correct.

James: But that's what some people are saying, they don't know what is going to happen because it's self-learning. Right? And it evolves, and it might escape the part where you can have an output control. Like, that's the doomsday, right? They've signed that declaration saying, Watch out, this is dangerous.

Could it turn off power stations? Or could it shut down the internet? Those sorts of things would be very interesting.

Why humans are still essential

I'm going to put forward a vote for the humans here and say, because I'm in a field where I feel like human expertise is critical, the emotional quotient and the experience required to do my role is not easily replaced by a computer, I'm going to say that. There are people in my industry who say they can be. I think they're wrong.

And I'm dialing up the human factor. We still have human support. We still have human coaching. And we have a human care on our content. And we're humans here recording this information. We didn't just strip a book and turn it into a talking robot video. You're a human, I'm a human. I would hope that for humanity, that's actually going to be rarer, and more valuable in the future. Do you think good humans are going to be more valuable?

Lloyd: I think so. And I think what you said about having that human connection, I think it will be more valuable. But I also think that you're going to want to raise their level of skill so they're only focusing on what's really, really important, and then they can use AI and automation or everything else. So taking that customer service example was a good one.

There are cases where chatbots used to be notoriously awful, and they are getting a lot better. And so that means that you can provide; you might not be able to provide for a service 24/7, round the clock service. Perhaps you can put in a 24/7 AI tool to field some of the most basic questions, and then leave the operators for the more niche, more…

James: I wish some companies would do that, you know, like, it took me a week or two to have PayPal turn on mass pay. It was quite hard to get through their robot chat thing, which is useless, it's not going to go and enable your account for this feature. They make it pretty - a lot of hurdles.

A lot of big companies do this; they make it almost impossible to speak to a human. Same with this whole, noreply@email, stop doing that. If you're listening to this episode and your emails say noreply@ when people try and reply back to tell you there's something wrong with your site or that they're having a problem with your product or whatever else, you actually want to receive that information.

So I'm not going to get overhyped about AI, but I want to know, okay, you've told us what some of the truths might be, that people who are good at AI might take over roles from people who are not. What are some misconceptions that people have that are wrong, in your opinion?

Lloyd: I think just going the other way, we talked about the kind of scenario where it might replace a lot of jobs. I think a more positive scenario is I think it's actually going to create a lot of jobs. I mean, I've already seen one out there for a prompt engineer.

James: Yeah, but that's the one job that replaces a lot of jobs. I think the net loss is significant in that role, probably. Same with these pros and cons. Like, you would hope that it's really good for medicine, you would hope that it's really good for solving hunger problems, etc. But it's also probably going to be used by criminals for hacking and for military purposes, or whatever. So I think there's pros and cons.

A measure of AI's significance

But I think the reality is, it's happening regardless. It doesn't matter what your opinion is about it. It's going on. For me, the test, I've got an acid test, and that is once a year I meet with regular people for a dinner. They're just normal people with normal jobs. They're not online people. And they were talking about it this year.

And that's probably the first time I can remember where they were onto something within five years of it becoming mainstream. Because they didn't know what Facebook was, they didn't know what Twitter was, they didn't know what Instagram was, they didn't know what ads were, they didn't know about vaccine harms, or any of that stuff until later. So they're pretty, sort of, just the main - I'd say, they're probably in the late majority, just past the average of the population.

But they knew all about ChatGPT. And it's affecting them, and some of them are in the teaching industries, etc. So that was interesting to me. The speed of market acceptance and awareness is dramatically different. I think, I mean, it's even happening at university level, of course, some people have to make policies around whether it can be used or not.

It's affecting the employment recruitment industry. We get people submitting - it's interesting - some work that was submitted, we asked ChatGPT if it recognized that or it was written by a robot, and it said no. And then we asked ChatGPT4 if it was, and it said yes. So I think there's quite an upgrade with each evolution of the software platform that comes out.

So it's going to happen quickly. I think one year from now, I'd like to look back on this podcast and say, Hey, you know, we talked about it fairly accurately. And I think we have a big responsibility.

How important is it to adopt AI?

Basically, on the panic meter, from really, really important to not that important, where do you think we are on a scale of one to 10? Zero being not important and 10 being it's absolutely, like, critical that we get across this?

Lloyd: I think we're close to an eight. I really do.

James: Okay, that's good to know. So where are you seeing your clients getting involved with it? What's on the ground, like, in the field?

Lloyd: Great example of one of my customers had an audit that he gives out, and it's a very high-value audit, it shows people - this guy works in videos, very quite well known. He would run through these steps with his team. And he'll be able to say, Right here, this moment, this video, this is the aha moment. This is the thing that people want. If you can replicate that, do these things.

And he's got so much information about what he can do to put this high-value audit together, and it was a 50-step process. And we were able to automate a lot of that. And so that now this process that used to take a very long time, now it just happens in a flash. And we can run it across huge amounts of video data, kick out the ones that are the real gold dust that should be replicated. But now we can feed that into AI and with that, I don't want to give too much away here, but we can get additional insights from the AI and help create additional information, additional content.

That is a huge, huge benefit for that business in terms of the scale for his business, and also how much more people he can help with more information that's straight off the bat. That's a more complicated, tailored solution. But there's also solutions out there just far simpler that will address everyday people in terms of what they're doing. So just going back to, I'm using AI and automation together. And typically, it starts with the automation before you get to the AI.

James: That was a good example. I want to jump in there. And I want to claim that one, because I was involved in that automation project. And I'm the one who said you should add AI to it. Because I can see the evolution is people are going to, they're going to see this tool and say, Oh, this would be great if it just had AI and told you what to do next. And that was the innovation, that's come straight out of a coaching call. And it's an example where I believe the market is moving fairly quickly. And you have to take the high road on that one, or you'll be left in the dust.

Lloyd: Well, let's hang on to that one for a minute. Because there's a couple of interesting things about that case, which are important.

Can you trust the data source?

So earlier, we were talking about, you can't always trust the data, right? And so, one of the things about this process is that we looked at all of the data and we're reporting on it. And I think that's something you should do, like if you've got some kind of process and I said, You've got to make sure you know where the information's coming from…

James: You have to calibrate it.

Lloyd: Yeah, you've got to validate it, you've got to look at it. Is it correct? Is it not correct? So reporting on it is super important. But then the reporting itself can become something you can feed back in, which is what happened in that process. And that place where you're able to look in and say, what's going on at this point in the process is super important. You can't just trust it.

And an example of someone I know a few years ago was working as a defense contractor. And they were using satellite images to spot tanks using AI. So this is five years ago, probably pretty scary to know what they're doing now. But they would be able to pick up a tank on the satellite.

James: Yeah, they would just be tracking the iPhone of the soldier.

Lloyd: [laughs] Yeah. This is what it's gotten to.

James: It's like those, the Strava is it, the cycling app?

Lloyd: Oh yeah.

James: The general public, they've identified all the secret Air Force bases because there's Strava circuits going round and round and round like a heat map on these - out in the middle of nowhere places. And it's the soldiers going for bike rides with their Strava. [laughs]

Lloyd: That's crazy.

James: If you have a phone, you are tracked and made.

Lloyd: Yeah, you're just giving all your information to the CIA in China and whoever else. [laughs]

James: Well, if you have TikTok on your phone, then you are definitely giving information to China, from what I've read. That's just the opinion that I've formed. But apparently, it can access a whole lot of information, like your geolocation, your elevation, your habits, etc. I would definitely not have that on my phone.

Lloyd: Wow, that's, elevation. That's crazy. Well, let's go back to the tank scenario for a moment, right? So they were using satellite images to spot, is this a tank? Is this not a tank? Now if you left this thing, so this is a good few years ago, if you left this thing running, and you didn't say, As a human, yes, that's a tank, no, that's not a tank; eventually what will happen is, it will carry on going but it can blur what it's learning.

So it might go, Oh that Hummer, oh I think that's a tank, so it will classify it as a tank. And then eventually, it just starts getting more and more broad until suddenly, there's more and more and more things that it thinks are tanks, which are not. So that's an example where it was important for them to just get a handle on what the data is, and then actually go, Yes, that is a tank. No, that's a Hummer. Yes, this is this. And that is a good example of where getting visibility of your data is important to make sure that it is good data.

And I would actually say that as we become businesses that are using more and more automation, more and more AI tools, then at a team level, I think it's important to make someone accountable for the data that the tool is using. And when I say accountable, what are they going to do? They want to make sure it's correct. They want to make sure it's stored in the right place.

So if you're working for a corporation, and you have sensitive data, they'll be very particular about what servers, where those machines are. So for example, Australia, they might consume a service by Amazon. But they'll be very particular if it's a bank to say, I don't want my bank's data being stored outside of Australia, or I don't want it stored in China for whatever sovereignty reasons going forward. So in terms of your team level, I would say, have someone accountable for the data, where it's stored, and making sure it's clean and secure.

James: This has always been my beef with people who build dashboards, is often you find the API is broken or flawed, or bringing in jumbled data, or drawing from the wrong source, or missing a certain category. And often, people have the wrong stats in front of them. What you just described about the tanks and it getting blurry, that's what happens when creators add more and more product lines to their business.

The original thing that was profitable might eventually become unprofitable, but they don't realize it because they've jumbled all their information together, and it all looks the same, they end up with a revenue less cost. But when you go down line by line on a regular basis in your dashboard, that actually shows you which products you're sponsoring.

You can actually be paying people to have your product if you get that wrong. And I've seen this before, just by chopping the bad products off, you lift your whole profitability, same as if you get rid of the lowest tier of your sales team, you'll lift your overall sales, because you're letting the high performers get the better closing ratio.

Now, the better dashboards these days, I'm using one that actually uses some predictive AI to tell you what your future revenues are looking like and what trends that it's observed. And I think that's a good use of it. But I really love that you're saying take responsibility for that source. Again, I think that's why people who are good at what they do will still have a role, because if your only role was to say that's good, that's bad, that's still really valuable.

If you want to get started...

Lloyd: Yeah, I think what we're talking about is already pretty advanced. And it might give the viewer or the listener some kind of concern, like, wow, that's pretty far down the road, like where do I just get started? Because it doesn't have to start that complicated.

Like just to be, even though I came from a technical background, it still started with just interacting with something like ChatGPT, just for curiosity, like what can it do? And I would say, if you're a business owner, just start small. Like, just get involved, just find out what it is, look in the ChatGPT, start using it instead of Google, just asking it some question.

James: Put it on your phone. That's what I did. Most people don't realize this. But you can make any browser destination an app on your phone. Right? You pull it up in Safari, I've got my iPhone here. And then you click on that little arrow down the bottom, there's a little arrow, which is where you would share it, and you scroll up, and one of them is Add to Homescreen, right? And you click on that, and now ChatGPT is on your home screen of your phone. That's where I'm using it fairly often.

I was actually around at your place, Lloyd, and I was showing you something that I'd learned about how to use ChatGPT to come up with some baseline content for socials, etc. And just by clicking on the button and talking, and you can have it seconds later, just get in the habit of using it is how I would start.

I would say install it on your home screen of your phone and start using it. Every time you would go to use Google, just think, is this a Google thing? Or is this a ChatGPT thing? Like if you want to find a gluten-free food within 10 kilometers of your home, that's a Google thing. If you want to find out, what does gluten free mean, then that's a ChatGPT thing.

Lloyd: I had a friend visit I haven't seen for years last night, and I wanted to make some watermelon jalapeno margaritas to rival what the Mexican place is doing. And I could have searched the internet for a long time to find that. But I just asked ChatGPT4, and out came the perfect recipe. [laughs]

James: The thing I love about it is that it's iterative. That when it presents you the first set of results, you can ask it to refine, change, or modify that, and it keeps going and holds the thread. Now I've got friends or clients who do this for each client, they actually have a separate chat for each client that becomes iterative over time.

So I could keep a separate chat for Lloyd, and I could help it define Lloyd's business, VirtualDOO, I could have it do the marketing plan, I could ask it for content prompts, etc. and channel prompts. And each time I work on that account with you, I could go back to that chat, and it's getting deeper and deeper and getting more and more conditioning.

For the uncertain team member

Lloyd: I feel like what we're doing right now, we're exchanging tips that have worked for us, it's really important to encourage the team, and just to let them know.

James: Let's talk about that. What if some of them, maybe there's someone in the team thinking, I'm not so sure about this AI, I feel a little bit insecure. I can see that it's happening. You know, am I in trouble? What do we do to celebrate and move forward together with AI, with the team?

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

"If you're starting with any task or process, it's important to **start with why, like why are we doing this?**"

– LLOYD THOMPSON

Lloyd: I think if you're starting with any task or process, it's important to start with why, like why are we doing this? And it's going to give us a competitive edge. That's a reason why. It's new skills. It's a job enhancement for you, we're going to help you. And we're not just going to throw them into the deep end, like good luck, go swim for yourself.

Start by leading by example, you know? As when you came over to my place and like Lloyd, check it out, this is what I've done on my phone. That's an ideal coaching scenario to run through your team. Hey, just look what I did. You know, I wanted to compare this product to that product. Or as an example, I gave my team the other day, I'm an Australian-based business, and I get paid in US dollars on a subscription basis, am I still getting the best deal with Stripe? So I asked ChatGPT.

This is an example of an analysis task, where I could have scoured the internet for this, this and this and this, but I just went to ChatGPT. And I asked it, you know, and I explained the scenarios I have to you. And I said, I want to know, what are the other players apart from Stripe and what their fees are, that would be an equivalent of receiving payment in US and getting it in Australian dollars? And it gave me all of the fees.

And then I was thinking, Well, is this up to date? Are these sources correct? So I asked it, give me the links to where this information is sourced from. And I was able to then go to these pages and pull out, yes, actually, in this case, it was correct. And as it happens, I've stuck with Stripe. So this was a really good scenario to play out with my team, like, Hey, this analysis task, I could have just gone fishing around the internet and wasted all this time. As it happens, I was able to just pull this out ChatGPT in one prompt.

And you could bring up something like having a regular town hall with your whole team and bring it up as like, this is what I've done. I was talking to someone else the other day. And what they've done is created a channel in Slack for AI. And people can just say, Hey, check this out, this is what I've just done. I've just created these new slides, check it out. And then they know someone else in the team who's using it, and someone else they can talk to. Oh, yeah. Can you show me how you did that?

So I think there's a few things there. It's coaching them. It's letting them know it's a job enhancement. Giving them examples. Let them know of other people, other businesses that are doing this. And yeah, if you create some kind of channel where everyone can be supported, I think that's the way to go about it.
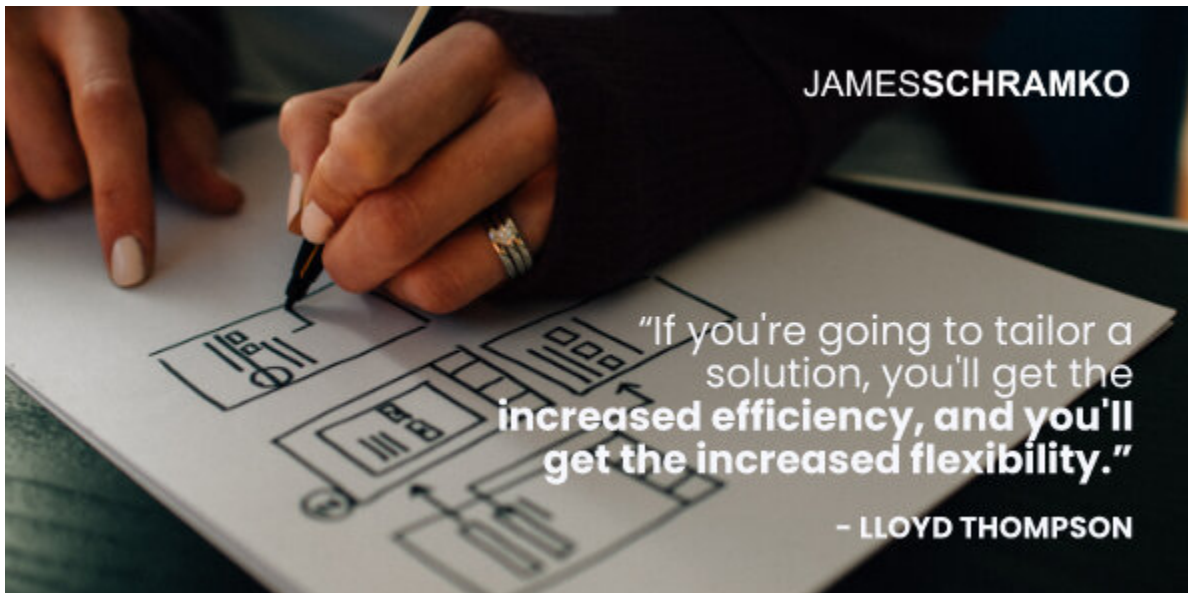
I don't know if you want to be saying people with AI will replace people without AI, that's probably a bit of a hard line. But these are ultimately, it's the competitive edge. We are, our competitors are going to be moving so much faster than us if we don't get on board.

James: I mean, I think it would be accurate to say that the hiring landscape is changing rapidly. And I mean, in my case, thankfully, the team listens to my podcasts, they transcribe it with the help of AI. I mean, we've been using AI transcription services for years. That's a great example where I said, Listen, there's no need to listen to this thing slowly and type it out by hand, please run it through the tool. Like, we were buying credits with Otter years ago.

So we embrace and use it. So everyone in my team knows, because they listen to the podcast, what I'm thinking. And they actually, they sometimes say, I really liked that chat you had with Lloyd. I've just added it to my homescreen. That's an example of what could happen. So this could be my training session for my team, because I do love leverage.

The role of customization

Now, how important is it that we customize AI for our own specific business needs, versus just going with the solutions that we see our friends share in their AI channels?

"If you're going to tailor a solution, you'll get the **increased efficiency, and you'll get the increased flexibility.**"

— LLOYD THOMPSON

Lloyd: This is an interesting tradeoff, and this applies to software in general, not just AI automation. If you're going to tailor a solution, you'll get the increased efficiency, and you'll get the increased flexibility. And yes, you'll move perhaps faster in the direction of your goals, perhaps. But the downside of tailoring is that you need to dial up your amount of support, you'll need someone with a skill.

So let's just give an example. If I was doing a classic process that comes up a lot, is I've got some kind of a service agreement, I'm going to send it to someone, someone's going to sign it. If they sign it in PandaDoc or DocuSign, I'm then going to send them an invoice, they pay the invoice, and then we schedule a meeting.

I could hook all that up in Zapier and have it run end to end. And then I'll need to make sure that someone is going to make sure that those zaps in the middle still run. So that's a perfectly good example. But that one, that example is quite a common process. You know, how many businesses are going to have an onboarding process where a service agreement is sent out, an invoice is sent, then I need to take payment followed by a meeting, right? That's going to be really common.

So in that case, instead of creating a tailored solution, I'd be more inclined to find a platform where that's all built in. And then all I'm doing is providing configuration, and there's just a load of platforms, and I'm sure you know, if you…

James: Like I do with my call scheduler or whatever.

Lloyd: Yeah. I mean, I know, I think, is it Dubsado and all these other platforms will hook in all of those things for you, right, they're platforms. So I guess the main point here is there's a tradeoff, you can go down and wire up yourself, if you need those customizations. If you don't, you can use a platform. So an example of customized, which is incredibly valuable, is the one we talked about that customer that I've served earlier.

James: And that would work if you're going to sell the tool, I think. If you're a Software as a Service, then that makes a lot more sense, if that's the product.

Lloyd: And so if you've got a really tailored, specific scenario, go down that, but the further you tailor, the more you're going down the case where you need to make sure you have that support. And back in banking land, I installed this trading platform from this company, they caught a few customers, and it blew my mind that they only had 17 employees.

And I said, How on earth can you have a trading platform that serves all these customers and only have 17 employees? They said, Well, what we do, anytime someone asks us for an enhancement, we put it into one version, everyone gets the same version. We don't say Bank A gets this version, Bank B gets that version, Bank C gets that version, because otherwise, we're going to need to start providing tailored support for all these differents. It's one platform, everyone gets the same thing.

And so that is a benefit. Now on being on the consumer side of something, if you use a platform, you configure it, but the more you go down the tailored road, the more money you're going to have to spend on support staff, if you're providing something.

James: Pretty much exactly what happened with Kleq for me. I just worked closely with the owner to have him build the system that was perfect for me. We've just actually installed voice, you'll love to hear this one. You can now leave voice notes in it, because a lot of people like voice for coaching. And now, every single user will be able to get that feature as it's rolled across the platform, because it was needed by two key operators. There's another lady, Stevie. She wanted it. And I thought it'd be a good idea. So it's in the platform, as the very first version rolled out yesterday.

Lloyd: Fantastic.

James: So I think it's good when you can have a power base of repeated needs. And then there's more people than one person who wants to use it. So that's really interesting. But for now, I think a lot of the stuff off the shelf, a lot of the software tools will do the job.

Learning the tools but playing it cautious

I think there's going to be incredible carnage in the market. I'd say, each day last week, I got pitched by a company who will strip a podcast down into show notes and bullets and stuff. People are building on top of the platform, and they're coming up with the same solutions. And there's a flood of people doing the same stuff. My friend, Matt Wolfe, he had so many new softwares arriving on the scene that he had to slow down his listings of them, and then he'd go back a few weeks later and a lot of them are already out of business. Right?

So there's going to be some key players. I think there's very choppy waters right now. I wouldn't commit too hard. I've said to my team, no annual subscriptions, just pay by the month. Because this thing may not be around, or it certainly won't be the best option in a year from now, we're in that zone.

But in a year or two, the established players will be there, you know, you'll have your Zooms, and whatever, the established players. And obviously, Microsoft are making a huge push to make all of their suite of tools, have it built in so that people don't need to go and create anything custom off that.

Lloyd: And that's a really interesting point as well what you're talking about, the big players. If you're going to create something that's an automated AI fashion, stick to the supported path. Because the more you veer off into the niche, like for example, if I'm creating a technical solution, I'm going to stick with tools and libraries that are out there, that are well established, and have a large group of people around there, either the company that provide support or large communities out there who can provide responses and say, Yeah, I've solved the same problem. This is how you'll hook up X to Y.

Now if you're a smaller business, you want to be using well-established platforms that will have the user base or have people with the expertise that you can talk to. So I would say stick to the supported path.

James: I love it. So in summary, AI is important, we should be aware of it. It is good to keep your hand in, it is coming no matter whether you like it or not. It will change the dynamic of your team, whether you like it or not. It will change the candidate pool. It's good to support your team and to get a handle on it as a group, and to educate your team, and to bring them on. That's exactly where we're at. We're using the AI carefully, and we're also keeping a very strong hand on a human aspect. Even on our support, it's like human support.

I think that's going to be my point of difference, we're going to maintain a very strong human connection. And we'll use AI to do any menial or repetitive tasks that I don't want my team to spend their valuable time on, while they could be doing proper human support. That's our position. And we need all the people we've got, but I can't see us hiring a lot of people. We haven't actually hired for many, many years. And we have a super mature team. So I'm just really happy with the size.

The trend James is seeing

And actually, in my peer group, guys like Ryan Lee talking about nano products, tiny little products, we've got guys like Kevin Nations talking about running his business pretty much by himself. I'm seeing a lot of people come off this big ego trip of having hundreds of team members and tens of millions of dollars coming back to keeping it real with a very small operation. Small team, happy life, life is good.

I've also seen a plethora, and I mean, like five or six or seven books lately talking about buying back time, or working half the amount of time and making twice as much, and those variations around the original, probably four-hour workweek. So I'm not claiming that spot. But there's more of a movement towards lifestyle business and lifestyle design, and building your business in a smart way. And I think these tools are a very leveraged way to run a good operation with a small team, and to do it smoothly.

If you are finding speed humps or brick walls in your business, and you're a high visionary, and you just can never get that systems or people stuff worked out, I implore you, get in touch with Lloyd, VirtualDOO, virtualdoo.com. He's a master at this, and he understands the playing field. That's why I wanted to bring him to my clients, because he knows tech, he knows people. He's actually one of those robots who can communicate.

But you're a rare breed my friend. And he knows his systems, everything from Agile to Kanban or whatever, you know, he can talk any of those systems. Lloyd, it's such a pleasure to have you on chatting about AI and team. What's your final wish for someone who's listening to this podcast, episode 1009 at JamesSchramko.com, what would you like them to think about as they wrap up this episode?

Lloyd: Just get involved with something. If you haven't already got involved with ChatGPT, just have a look at it, just ask it, what can you do? You know, it's super simple. Start with the most easy, simple scenario, just to dip your toe in the water and go from there. Start small.

James: Golden advice there. I hope you'll come back and share the evolution of this as it rolls out.

Lloyd: Love to. Thanks again, James.

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