



HOW TO BE A HIGHLY VALUED MARKETER IN THE AGE OF AI

*The Most Highly Valued **AI Edge**: Building a Highly Valued Marketing Department.*

PART 3 OF 3 · THE LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

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HOW TO BE A HIGHLY VALUED MARKETER IN THE AGE OF AI

Part 3: The Leadership Playbook

The first two parts of this series focused on the skills marketers need to thrive in an AI-enabled world.

Part 1 covered the upstream skills (before the prompt): the ability to diagnose the business issue, frame the right question, identify the purchase barrier, and give AI the context it needs to be useful.

Part 2 covered the downstream skills (after the prompt): the ability to turn AI-assisted thinking into sharper plans, better sell-in stories, stronger creative briefs, and more commercially grounded recommendations.

In both the upstream and downstream, the marketer is using AI as a collaborative partner.

But there is a third piece that matters just as much: The role of the team leader.

If every marketer uses AI in their own way, the result will not be transformation. It will be fragmentation.

Some people will use AI to sharpen thinking. Others will use it to create more slides, more ideas, more copy, and more activity. Some will trust it too much. Others will barely use it at all. And without clear expectations, managers will have a hard time coaching the difference between better work and faster work.

That is why the next skill set belongs to leaders.

The role of the commercial marketing leader is not simply to encourage AI usage. It is to build a department where AI helps marketers become better thinkers, sharper strategists, and more valuable business partners.

THE SEVEN LEADERSHIP MOVES

The Leader Playbook

These are the seven moves that separate teams where AI creates real value from teams where AI just creates more activity.

01 *Define where AI should be used*

02 *Define where human judgment is required*

03 *Create standards for "good"*

04 *Coach the question, not just the output*

05 *Reward judgment, not just speed*

06 *Build common tools, prompts, and rituals*

07 *Train for capability, not just capacity*

*The role of the leader is to build a department where AI helps marketers become **better thinkers, sharper strategists**, and more valuable business partners.*



THE LEADER PLAYBOOK

Define where AI should be used

The first job of leadership is to make choices.

AI can support a wide range of commerce, shopper, and trade marketing work, but that does not mean every use case should be treated equally. Leaders should identify the highest-value areas where AI can improve the quality of thinking, speed up the work, or help marketers see patterns they may have missed.

HIGH-VALUE AI USE CASES

Retailer opportunity diagnosis

Shopper insight synthesis

Category & business review development

Purchase barrier identification

Retail media planning

Creative territory exploration

Sell-in narrative development

Test design

Measurement & reporting synthesis

Competitive & marketplace scan

The key is not to pick everything. The key is to choose the use cases where AI can create meaningful leverage and where consistent adoption can raise the standard of work.

A leader should be able to say, “Here are the places where we expect AI to be part of the process.” It gives teams permission to use AI and creates consistency. It prevents AI from becoming a random side activity used only by the most curious or technically confident people on the team.

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Define where human judgment is required

Just as important, leaders need to define where AI should not be the final decision-maker.

AI can help synthesize information, generate options, pressure-test assumptions, and identify patterns. But it cannot own the commercial judgment that makes marketing valuable.

AI CAN SUPPORT

- Synthesizing information
- Generating options
- Pressure-testing assumptions
- Identifying patterns

HUMANS MUST OWN

- The final strategic recommendation
- Retailer relationship nuance
- Commercial feasibility & brand judgment
- Budget tradeoffs & scale decisions

This is where many organizations risk getting AI wrong. The goal is not to outsource judgment. The goal is to improve judgment.

A strong AI-enabled department should not be asking, "What did AI say we should do?" It should be asking, "How did AI help us think more clearly, and what do we believe is the right call?"



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Create standards for "good"

Leaders need to define what "good" looks like for AI-enabled work. Without standards, teams can mistake volume for value. More polished language can make weak strategy look stronger than it really is.

A STRONG AI-ASSISTED OUTPUT SHOULD BE:

STANDARD	THE QUESTION TO ASK
Specific	<i>Is this tailored to the shopper and retailer, or generic?</i>
Grounded	<i>Does it connect to the real business problem?</i>
Assumption-clear	<i>Are the underlying assumptions stated and testable?</i>
Barrier-connected	<i>Does it address a real purchase barrier?</i>
Commercially realistic	<i>Can this actually be executed within constraints?</i>
Measurable	<i>Can we define what success looks like?</i>
Actionable	<i>Does this lead to a clear next step?</i>
Defensible	<i>Can someone explain and defend this to a stakeholder?</i>

These standards help teams use AI as a thinking partner, not a content machine. The question is not, "Does this look good?" The question is, "Is this specific, grounded, realistic, and useful?"

That is how leaders keep AI from polishing mediocre thinking.

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Coach the question, not just the output

Coaching the prompt, framing, context, and judgment are as important as assessing the final product.

Managers are used to reviewing the final product: the deck, the recommendation, the brief, the plan. In an AI-enabled department, they also need to review the thinking process that created it.

A great coaching question is: "What did you ask AI, what context did you give it, and how did you decide what to trust?"

That one question tells a manager a lot:

Did they understand the business problem?

Did they give AI the right context?

Did they treat the output as a draft or an answer?

Did they apply judgment before recommending?

This is one of the most important leadership shifts. AI coaching is not just about improving the final deliverable. It is about helping marketers become better at asking, framing, evaluating, and deciding.

Those are the skills that will separate highly valued marketers from AI-dependent marketers.



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Reward judgment, not just speed

Speed alone is not the goal; better marketing solutions are.

The most obvious benefit of AI is speed. But if AI only helps the department produce more work in less time, it may create efficiency without creating more value. The real opportunity is to use AI to make sharper calls.

DON'T JUST REWARD

Speed. Volume. More slides. Faster turnaround.

REWARD INSTEAD

Better diagnosis. Sharper strategy. Stronger decisions.

THE BEHAVIORS THAT MATTER MOST

Better diagnosis

Clearer strategic choices

Stronger shopper & retailer specificity

Smarter testing plans

More disciplined measurement

Better sell-in stories

The best AI-enabled marketers will not be the ones who simply produce the most. They will be the ones who use AI to improve the quality of their thinking and the strength of their decisions.

Celebrate the marketer who used AI to uncover a better insight. Reward the team that used AI to pressure-test a plan before presenting it. Recognize the person who used AI to simplify a complex story into a clearer commercial recommendation.

That is how AI becomes part of the culture, not just part of the workflow.

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Build common tools, prompts, and rituals

Teams with common tools, rubrics, and forms will have consistent, predictable success.

Leaders can accelerate adoption by creating shared tools and rituals that make good AI usage easier and more consistent. The goal is not to make everyone use AI in exactly the same way. The goal is to create a common language and standard of quality.

SHARED FRAMEWORKS TO BUILD

- Standard prompt templates for common workflows
- A shared intake format for business problems
- AI-assisted diagnosis frameworks
- Guidelines for using AI in retailer planning
- Coaching questions for managers
- Examples of strong and weak AI-enabled outputs
- A regular forum for sharing what is working

When teams have shared frameworks, they can learn faster. Managers can coach more effectively. And the department can build capability instead of relying on scattered individual experimentation.



THE LEADER PLAYBOOK

Train for capability, not just capacity

High-value marketers train beyond the "how to" basics.

Many AI trainings focus on the tool: how to prompt, how to summarize, how to generate ideas, how to make a deck faster. That training is foundational, but it is not enough.

Commercial marketing teams need training that connects AI usage to the actual work of shopper, commerce, and trade marketing.

TOOL TRAINING

"How to use AI."

Prompting, summarizing, generating ideas, making decks faster.

CAPABILITY TRAINING

"How to use AI to become better at your job."

Diagnosis, barrier identification, narrative building, smarter testing.

CAPABILITY TRAINING TEACHES MARKETERS TO USE AI TO:

Diagnose retailer opportunities

Identify purchase barriers

Synthesize shopper behavior

Build stronger category stories

Improve retail media strategy

Develop better sell-in narratives

Design smarter tests

Interpret performance thoughtfully

*Tool training teaches marketers how to use AI.
Capability training teaches marketers how to use AI to become better at their jobs.*

BUILDING THE FUTURE

Building the AI-empowered marketing department

AI can take on more of the time-intensive work that often slows down marketing teams: summarizing information, comparing options, drafting starting points, synthesizing performance data, and exploring creative directions.

That should create more space for the work that matters most.

- Better diagnosis.
- Sharper strategy.
- Stronger ideas.
- More effective selling.
- More meaningful growth.

But that will not happen automatically.

It requires leaders to set expectations, define standards, coach the process, reward judgment, and build the shared systems that help marketers use AI well.

The highly valued marketing department of the future will not be the team that uses AI the most. It will be the team that uses AI to **think better, decide better,** and create better commercial outcomes.

PART 1 · UPSTREAM

***Curiosity. Context.
Problem Framing.***

PART 2 · DOWNSTREAM

***Discernment. Taste. Test-
and-Learn. Commercial
Judgment.***

PART 3 · LEADERSHIP

***Define. Standard.
Coach. Reward. Build.
Train.***

The goal is not simply to help marketers move faster.

The goal is to help them become more valuable.

A WORKSHOP FROM APERTURE

At Aperture, we have developed a workshop to help commerce, shopper, and trade marketing teams build the upstream and downstream skills needed to work effectively with AI.

If your team is trying to figure out how to get more value from AI without losing the commercial thinking that drives growth, I would be happy to share more.



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