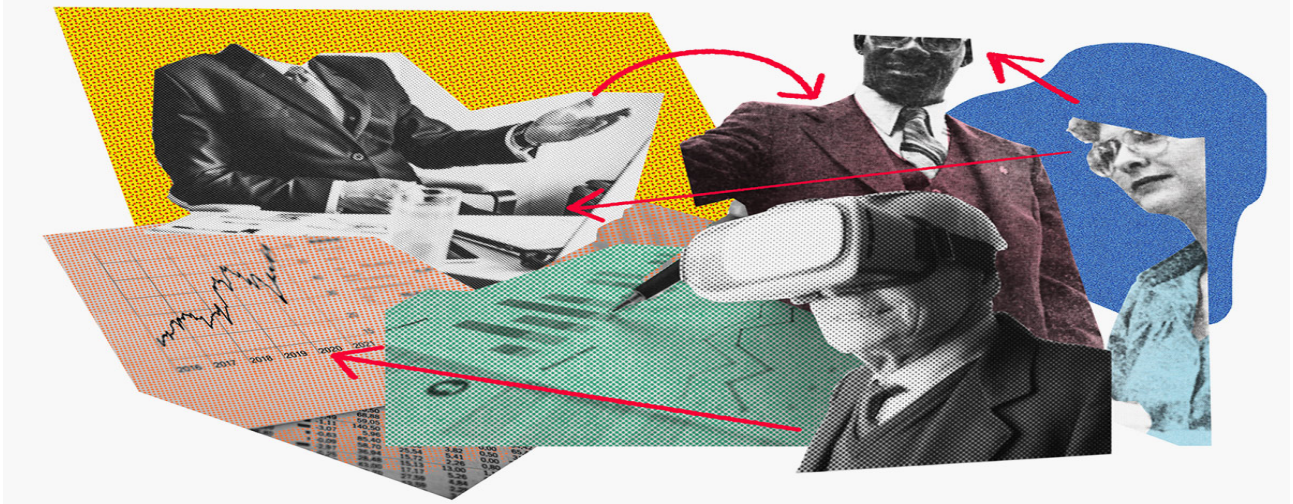


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5 Ways to Future-Proof Your Career in the Age of AI

by [Dorie Clark](#) and [Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic](#)

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Aaron Marin

Summary. What can we do personally to stave off the displacement that may happen as a result of AI? In this article, the authors offer five strategies to future-proof your career in the age of intelligent machines: 1) Avoid predictability. It's important to remember that AI isn't generating new insights; it's a prediction engine that merely guesses the most likely next word. 2) Hone the skills that machines strive to emulate. 3) Double down on "the real world." 4) Develop your personal brand. 5) Develop recognized expertise in your field. Even if AI performs "first draft" functions, it still has to be double-checked by a trusted and reliable source. If that's you, you'll continue to be sought out because you have the authority to vet AI's responses.

Since last fall, artificial intelligence — in particular ChatGPT and its recently unveiled successor, GPT-4 — has taken center stage in conversations about the future of business, work, and learning. ChatGPT became the fastest-growing consumer application in history — outpacing Instagram and even TikTok — and Google lost \$100 billion in market cap after a botched AI product demonstration raised questions about its ability to compete.

The stakes are high, not just for companies, but also for individuals hoping to navigate potentially massive implications for their own careers. For years, pundits have assured us that the key to surviving AI disruption was leaning into creativity and other (theoretically) unique human skill sets. But the new wave of AI is rapidly demonstrating that it can do far more than crunch numbers and analyze data: It can also create professional-level art and design (see DALL-E and Midjourney, among others) and create articles and copywriting that could displace many journalists and marketers.

We believe it's no longer useful to debate whether this tool is "smarter" or "better" than us. The tools are here, and they're already being widely used. What matters to us — Tomas, the author of the new book *I, Human: AI, Automation, and the Quest to Reclaim What Makes Us Unique*, and Dorie, a consultant and keynote speaker on personal branding and career development — is how we can better ourselves by using them.

Of course, there are nearly infinite tactical applications for AI. For instance, we can speed up our productivity by using GPT-4 or other tools (such as Microsoft's Bing, which now integrates GPT-4, or its recently launched Copilot for all things work) to assist with brainstorming, creating drafts of emails, or performing rapid and complex research.

But above and beyond specific use cases, we're interested in exploring the question of whether there might still be strategies that professionals can deploy to generate unique value, even as AI begins to showcase its prodigious (and exponentially increasing) power. In other words, what can we do personally to stave off the displacement that may happen as a result of AI and future-proof ourselves in the age of intelligent machines? Here are five strategies we find especially critical.

Avoid predictability.

It's important to remember that AI isn't generating new insights; it's a prediction engine that merely guesses the most likely next word. At the micro-level, it's helpful: "thank" is indeed often followed by "you." But at a macro level, its suggestions tend to homogenize, and they're only as good as the wisdom of the crowds, which is often the exact opposite of wisdom. In the famous words of Oscar Wilde, who would probably not have been a heavy user of ChatGPT: "Everything popular is wrong."

And yet, this aspect of generative AI can be a powerful tool if you use it right. For instance, if you want to understand how most people think or feel about something, including their prejudices and misconceptions, you can use GPT-4 to access this common knowledge — or ignorance. But if we simply deploy the tools without question, their algorithms and nudges may turn us into more predictable creatures who eventually all start to sound the same.

Consider that whenever we let Gmail autocomplete our searches or emails, we relinquish a bit of originality and uniqueness, turning AI's prediction into a self-fulfilling prophecy that makes us more predictable. While GPT-4 is a powerful tool for ideation and initial drafts, if you want to stand out, you may be better served (in some cases) by doing the opposite of what it suggests, because you'll be bucking conventional wisdom. Just as some corporations have recognized that boilerplate "corporate speak" turns off customers, we may discover the advantage of sounding like ourselves — and embracing our own personality, serendipity, and unpredictability — when everyone else is turning to AI.

Hone the skills that machines strive to emulate.

There's no question: GPT-4 has been trained to be respectful and polite (especially now that previous — ahem — vulnerabilities have come to light). Its responses display empathy (“I am sorry my answer upset you”), self-awareness (“I’m just an AI model and my answers are based on training data”), and even creativity (producing ingenious haikus about inequality, impersonating Elon Musk, and generating an infinite number of cheese jokes in multiple languages). But — to reiterate — those responses are based on text prediction, and AI is not capable of experiencing or displaying the human version of these soft skills.

As Tomas has argued extensively, humans are wired to respond to genuine emotions — so actually knowing and caring about what others think and feel, truly understanding yourself, and being capable of creating something machines cannot is an essential strategy to set yourself apart in the age of AI.

Double down on “the real world.”

GPT-4 — like AI in general — is confined to the digital world, inhabiting a virtual cage of 0s and 1s. Sadly, so are many human activities these days. But it's essential to recognize that one thing AI can't disrupt is our analog, in-person connections with others, so it's important to carve out time and safeguard those. As Harvard Professor Arthur C. Brooks summarizes the research, “Technology that crowds out our real-life interaction with others will lower our well-being and thus must be managed with great care in our lives.” Artifacts of pre-pandemic life like having meals with colleagues, attending conferences, and initiating conversation with a stranger may seem less pressing now that we've gone so long without them. But they represent an opportunity to build connections and gain insights that simply aren't possible through AI — and thus, they represent a unique competitive advantage we still possess.

In a similar vein, original research — actually talking to people and identifying new insights — becomes critical, because AI can only connect past dots and information it's already been presented with. When you tap into information that isn't (yet) online through your lived experience or novel interviews and conversations, you're adding something genuinely new to the cultural conversation that wouldn't be possible through AI.

Develop your personal brand.

AI tools have reached sufficient quality that they may well decimate the lower and middle ends of the market in many professions (for instance, copywriters and designers on freelance marketplaces, or those who work with cost-conscious customers eager to shake off expenses in favor of a free option). In some cases, AI may even match the quality with professionals at the highest echelons — but it's almost certain those industry leaders won't

get displaced, and it's because of the strength of their brands. Just as art-world buyers will pay exponentially more for a “real Rembrandt” rather than an equally beautiful painting by one of his lesser-known contemporaries, corporate leaders will likely continue to pay a premium to work with people viewed as the “top of their field” — partly as a statement of quality, and partly as a brand statement about whom they associate with and what they value. As one example, even the local tire shop or florist can use AI to create a logo. But only those with discernment and real money — so the thinking goes — can afford to use an elite group of agencies. The rise of AI doesn't change the fact, crucially tied to human nature, that branding matters.

Cultivate expertise.

GPT-4 and other AI technologies are prodigious researchers that can summon a cavalcade of facts almost instantly. Unfortunately, some of those facts aren't true — a form of the “hallucinations” that have, heretofore, plagued AI. (Indeed, one reader contacted Dorie asking where he could locate one of Dorie's Harvard Business Review articles that ChatGPT had referenced. Unfortunately, this particular article didn't exist.) Thus, while AI is an extraordinarily valuable tool, it can't always be trusted to deliver accurate results — at least at this point. That's why it's so valuable to develop recognized expertise in your field. Even if AI performs “first draft” functions, it still has to be double-checked by a trusted and reliable source. If that's you, you'll continue to be sought out because you have the authority to vet AI's responses.

AI technology has the power to transform our professional lives — perhaps in the very near future. By following these strategies, we believe you can find ways to identify and provide unique value, even as GPT-4 and other technologies advance. Even in changing times, that's the clearest path to career insurance for yourself.

- **Dorie Clark** is a marketing strategist and keynote speaker who teaches at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and has been named one of the Top 50 business thinkers in the world by Thinkers50. Her latest book is *The Long Game: How to Be a Long-Term Thinker in a Short-Term World* (HBR Press, 2021) and you can receive her free Long Game strategic thinking self-assessment.
- **Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic** is the Chief Innovation Officer at ManpowerGroup, a professor of business psychology at University College London and at Columbia University, co-founder of deeper signals.com, and an associate at Harvard's Entrepreneurial Finance Lab. He is the author of *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? (and How to Fix It)*, upon which his TEDx talk was based. His latest book is *I, Human: AI, Automation, and the Quest to Reclaim What Makes Us Unique*. Find him at www.drtomas.com.