

AN ACTION PLAN FOR LEADERS IN THE INTELLIGENCE AGE

BEYOND THE BOT™

10 phrases to turn A.I. anxiety into trust, connection and performance



SHAKIRA M. BROWN

Award-Winning Leadership Communication Strategist

National Keynote Speaker · Human Skills Expert · CPE-Approved Corporate Trainer

What's Inside

Ten short chapters for the conversations your employees/co-workers are having about A.I. right now, whether or not anyone has trained them for it. Each gives you a phrase, the psychology behind it and the exact wording.

- 01 Let's Talk About What This Does Not Change
- 02 What Are You Actually Worried About?
- 03 Here Is What We Know, What We Don't and When I'll Tell You More
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- 05 You Are Being Asked to Do the Part Only You Can Do
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- 08 What Would Make You Feel Safe Experimenting with This?
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ALSO IN THIS SERIES

Speak with Intent™ and Master the Message™ and Lead the Room™. Each available as a keynote, a half-day or full-day workshop, or a multi-week cohort program at shakirabrown.com.



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Introduction

Artificial intelligence did not create a technology problem in your organization. It created a conversation problem.

Somewhere in your workforce right now, someone is quietly wondering whether the thing their manager just rolled out is the thing that eventually replaces them. They are unlikely to say that out loud. What they will do instead is disengage, slow down, quietly resist or start looking.

Meanwhile the managers above them are often just as uncertain, and have been given a rollout plan rather than a script. So they say nothing or they say something reassuring that nobody believes; and the silence does the damage.

The ten phrases in this book are for those conversations. They are not about the technology. They are about what people need to hear from a human being while the technology is arriving.



Employees are not resisting A.I. They are resisting being changed without being spoken to.

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Shakira M. Brown

13

communication industry awards

14+

CPE-approved training courses

25+

years shaping how leaders speak

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THIS BOOK

The Gap Nobody Is Managing

Two numbers from a recent Workday study explain almost every stalled A.I. rollout in America.

83%

of professionals believe A.I. will make human skills more vital, not less.

65%

of managers recognize that employees will crave more human connection as A.I. usage grows. That gap between what employees feel and what managers see is where trust breaks.

93%

of active A.I. users say it frees them to focus on higher-level work like strategy and problem-solving. Those merely planning to adopt remain significantly less optimistic.

Source: 2025 Workday study of professionals and managers on artificial intelligence in the workplace.

The optimism gap between people using A.I. and people anticipating it is not a technology gap. It is a communication gap, and it is closeable.

THE TEN PHRASES

How to Use This Book

Each chapter follows the same three-part shape, allowing a manager to find the right words in the two minutes before a conversation they have been dreading.

WHY IT WORKS

The psychology behind the phrase

SAY IT LIKE THIS

Ready-to-use wording

USE IT TODAY

In your very next conversation

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Want to Better Understand Human-AI Collaboration?

Book a no-cost Workforce Human-A.I. Discovery Session. Together we will map where A.I. anxiety is actually showing up in your workforce and what can be done about it.

01

Let's Talk About What This Does Not Change

WHY IT WORKS

When change arrives, the human brain scans for what is being taken away. Until that scan comes back with an answer, very little else you say gets processed. This is why rollout announcements that lead with capabilities and efficiency land so poorly.

Naming what stays the same first gives people something solid to stand on. Only from there can they hear what is actually changing. It costs you one sentence and it buys you the rest of the conversation.

Be specific. Vague reassurance sounds like something a person says right before bad news.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Let's talk about what this does not change. Your role, your team and the judgment we rely on you for."

"Before I explain the tool, let me be clear about what is not on the table."

"Let's start with what stays the same, because that is most of it."

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Rollout announcements

Team meetings

One-on-ones

TRY THIS WEEK: Open your next A.I. update by naming what is not changing before you name what is.

02

What Are You Actually Worried About?

WHY IT WORKS

The objection people raise about A.I. is rarely the fear they hold. They will tell you the tool is inaccurate, the training was rushed or the workflow does not fit. Underneath is usually something closer to: am I still needed here and will I still be good at this?

You cannot address a fear that has not been said out loud. This question invites the real one without forcing it and it signals that you can handle the answer.

Ask it, then stop talking. The first response is often the surface objection. The second one, after a pause, is usually the truth.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“What are you actually worried about here? Not the tool. The bigger thing.”

“I want the real concern, not the polite version.”

“What is the worry you have not said out loud yet?”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Quiet resistance

Low adoption

Disengagement

TRY THIS WEEK: Ask one person this week what they are actually worried about, then wait through the silence.

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03

Here Is What We Know, What We Don't and When I'll Tell You More

WHY IT WORKS

Most leaders go quiet during A.I. rollouts because they do not have complete answers. But silence is not neutral. In the absence of information, people do not suspend judgment. They assume the worst and fill the gap themselves.

This three-part structure lets you communicate honestly without pretending to certainty you do not have. It converts an uncomfortable unknown into a managed timeline, which is a fundamentally different emotional experience for the person hearing it.

The third part matters most. A date, even a date to give another update, ends the speculation.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Here is what we know today, here is what is still open, and here is when I will update you."

"I would rather tell you what I don't know than let you guess."

"Nothing has been decided about headcount. When that changes, you will hear it from me first."

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Uncertain timelines

Pending decisions

Restructuring rumors

TRY THIS WEEK: Give your team a date for the next update, even if you have no news yet.

04

This Makes Your Judgment More Valuable, Not Less**WHY IT WORKS**

The single most useful reframe available to a manager right now is the shift from replacement to amplification. When routine work is absorbed, what remains is disproportionately the work that requires judgment, context, ethics, and relationship. That is not a consolation prize. That is the higher-value work.

Eighty-three percent of professionals already believe A.I. makes human skills more vital. Your people are prepared to believe this. They need someone in authority to say it plainly and mean it.

Then prove it. Point to a specific decision only they could have made.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

"This handles the first draft. It cannot make the call you made last quarter."

"The more this tool does, the more your judgment becomes the product."

"I am not automating your thinking. I am trying to give you more room for it."

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Reframing the tool

Skills conversations

Performance reviews

TRY THIS WEEK: Point to one recent decision only a human on your team could have made.

05

You Are Being Asked to Do the Part Only You Can Do

WHY IT WORKS

Reassurance that is vague reads as evasion. Reassurance that is specific reads as respect. This phrase works because it does not merely deny a fear, it replaces it with a defined expectation.

It also does something quietly important: it tells the person their role is changing honestly while affirming that the change is upward. People can absorb a great deal of change when they can see where they land.

Name the part. If you cannot name it, that is worth knowing before the conversation.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“You are not being replaced. You are being asked to do the part only you can do.”

“The work is shifting toward the things that need a person. That is you.”

“I need you further up the problem, not out of it.”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Role changes

Fear of replacement

Career conversations

TRY THIS WEEK: Name the specific part of the job you need a person doing, out loud.



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Maximize productivity and innovation together.

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06

Help Me Understand Where This Slows You Down

WHY IT WORKS

There is a large gap in optimism between people actively using A.I. and people anticipating it. The fastest way to move someone across that gap is not more communication about the tool. It is giving them authorship over how it gets used.

This question does that. It positions the employee as the expert on their own workflow, which they are and it produces better implementation decisions than any rollout plan written above them.

It also surfaces legitimate problems early, while they are still cheap to fix.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“Help me understand where this actually slows you down.”

“You know this workflow better than I do. Where does this break?”

“What would you change about how we are rolling this out?”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Implementation design

Workflow friction

Pilot programs

TRY THIS WEEK: Ask the people closest to the work where the rollout actually breaks.

07

Here Is Where I Still Want a Human in the Loop and Why

WHY IT WORKS

Ethical judgment is not a policy document. It is a series of small, visible decisions that people watch their leaders make. When you name a place where you are deliberately keeping a human in the decision, you are teaching your team what the organization actually values, not what the values statement says.

It also relieves a specific and rarely voiced anxiety: that no one is minding the line, and that speed will quietly win over care.

Say why. The reasoning is the part that transfers.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“Here is where I still want a person deciding and here is why.”

“The tool can draft it. A person signs it. That is not changing.”

“Anything that affects someone's livelihood gets human review. Full stop.”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Ethics and governance

High-stakes decisions

Compliance

TRY THIS WEEK: Name one place you are deliberately keeping a human in the loop, and why.

08

What Would Make You Feel Safe Experimenting with This?

WHY IT WORKS

Adoption stalls most often not because people cannot use the tool, but because they are afraid of being wrong with it in front of someone. If getting it wrong feels career damaging, people will simply not try.

This question moves the conversation from mandate to conditions. It also gives you a concrete list of the guardrails, permissions, or reassurances that would unlock experimentation, which is usually a much shorter and cheaper list than expected.

Then deliver on at least one of them quickly and visibly.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“What would make you feel safe experimenting with this?”

“What would you need from me to try it without worrying about getting it wrong?”

“If this goes badly on a first attempt, nothing happens to you. What else do you need?”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Low experimentation

Training rollouts

Psychological safety

TRY THIS WEEK: Ask what guardrail would let someone try the tool without fear, then build it.

09

I Don't Know Yet and I Won't Pretend To

WHY IT WORKS

Leaders consistently overestimate the cost of admitting uncertainty and underestimate the cost of false confidence. Your people can tell the difference, and a reassurance that later proves hollow does more damage to trust than the original unknown ever would have.

Admitting the limit of your knowledge credibly makes everything else you say more believable. It is one of the few moves that increases authority by appearing to give some up.

Pair it with what you will do, so it reads as honesty rather than helplessness.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

"I don't know yet and I am not going to pretend I do."

"I would rather be honest with you now than reassuring and wrong."

"That decision is above me. Here is what I am doing to find out."

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Executive uncertainty

Unanswered questions

Town halls

TRY THIS WEEK: Say I do not know once this week instead of offering a reassurance you cannot back.

10

Here Is What I Need You to Teach Me

WHY IT WORKS

Nothing dissolves the fear of obsolescence faster than being asked to teach. It reverses the direction of expertise for a moment and makes the person visibly necessary, which is the exact opposite of the story A.I. anxiety tells them about themselves.

It is also true. The people closest to the work almost always understand the practical realities of a tool better than the leaders who selected it.

This is the phrase that turns a rollout into a partnership, and it is the one most often skipped.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

“Here is what I need you to teach me about how this actually works on your team.”

“You have used this more than I have. What am I getting wrong?”

“I want you in the room when we decide the next phase.”

WHERE IT WORKS BEST

Reverse mentoring

Adoption champions

Team ownership

TRY THIS WEEK: Ask one team member to teach you something about the tool this week.

A Final Word

Every organization rolling out A.I. is running two projects at once. One is technical and well resourced. The other is human, mostly unmanaged, and it is the one that decides whether the first project succeeds.

The managers who navigate this well will not be the ones who understood the technology best. They will be the ones who kept talking honestly while everything was uncertain, who acknowledged what people were feeling before explaining what was changing, and who made it safe to say the quiet thing out loud.

That is a communication skill. It is learnable. These ten phrases are where it starts.

A.I. will not replace your people. But a manager who cannot talk about A.I. will lose them.

Thanks a million,

Shakira

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Not sure if you need help applying what you learned within your team or inside your organization?

Book a no-cost Workforce Human-A.I. Discovery Session. Together we will map where A.I. anxiety is actually showing up in your workforce and what can be done about it.

About Shakira M. Brown



Shakira M. Brown helps leaders communicate and lead through the biggest shift in how work gets done: artificial intelligence. Most A.I. keynote speakers explain the technology. Shakira teaches the human side of adopting it, the trust, language, and leadership behaviors that determine whether A.I. actually gets used well inside an organization. That distinction sits at the center of her proprietary Human-A.I. Trust Continuum™ framework, and it is the perspective still missing from most stages built for the A.I. conversation.

She built that perspective the hard way, first as a network television news producer (NBC, MSNBC, CBS, Oxygen), then as a Madison Avenue publicist for Fortune 100 brands including Microsoft, a newsroom-to-boardroom path that makes her frameworks land as practical rather than theoretical. She now delivers that expertise nationally as a keynote speaker, leadership communication strategist, and CPE-approved corporate trainer under the Speak with Intent™ brand, through her company, SMB Strategic Media & Workforce Training.

A 13-time communication industry award winner, Woman of Distinction honoree, and SHRM National member, Shakira consistently earns five-star ratings from live audiences. Her stages include the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Grace Hopper Celebration (AnitaB.org), the American Association of Orthodontists, Meeting Professionals International, and dozens of national associations, with insights featured in Bloomberg Businessweek, Crain's Chicago Business, Institutional Investor, BrandWeek, and Authority Magazine. In September 2026, she joined the Fall Cohort of the Goldman Sachs One Million Black Women: Black in Business program, one of the country's most competitive entrepreneurship accelerators.

Learn more, watch her speak, or check availability at shakirabrown.com.

CREDENTIALS AND RECOGNITION

- Winner of 13 communication industry awards
- Named a prestigious Woman of Distinction
- Five-star rated in post-conference participant surveys
- Former network television news producer for NBC, MSNBC, CBS and Oxygen
- Selected for the highly competitive NBC Page Program
- In 2026, Shakira was invited to join Cohort 10 of the Goldman Sachs One Million Black Women: Black in Business program, one of the country's most competitive entrepreneurship accelerators.
- Voting member, National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for nearly 25 years
- Former Madison Avenue publicist for Fortune 100 brands including Microsoft and HGTV
- CPE-approved corporate trainer with more than 14 approved courses
- Experienced panel moderator and event emcee

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You do not have an A.I. adoption problem. You have an A.I. communication problem.

The organizations that get this right are not the ones with the best tools. They are the ones whose managers know what to say.

Your words are already powerful.

This e-book is your first lesson in using them on purpose.



How would you feel if...

your managers knew exactly what to say when someone asks if A.I. is coming for their job?

A.I. anxiety surfaced in conversation instead of in your retention numbers?

your people saw A.I. as proof their judgment matters more, not less?

your rollout was slowed by real questions instead of quiet resistance?



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