

THE MINDSET SHIFT BEHIND AI ADOPTION

The ~~Four~~ Six Traps of AI Adoption

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makersmanifesto.org

THE PROBLEM

**We can build faster, so we skip
the thinking.**
It feels like productivity. It isn't.

**The build is getting
dramatically faster**

**The pressure to keep
up is now on Product**

**We stop asking “should
we?”**

FEBRUARY–MARCH 2026

96 product leaders, all feeling the pressure

96

product leaders I spoke to about how they were using AI

01

Wildly different understanding

Of AI, and of what it would mean for them, their teams and their customers.

02

Questioning everything

Nobody knew which lessons from 20 years of building software still held.

The rule book had been thrown out. We needed a new one.

45

cross-disciplinary experts and
operators

4

values

16

principles

HOW TO MAKE GREAT PRODUCTS

Introducing the Makers Manifesto

Core principles for how to make great products in an AI-driven world —
created by a global group of cross-disciplinary experts and operators.

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TODAY

Six kinds of thinking we skip when we rush

01

Tokenmaxxing

We skip thinking about value

02

The Abandoned Junior

We skip thinking about what good looks like

03

"It's Live!"

We skip thinking about adoption

04

The Fire Hydrant

We skip thinking about what customers are ready for

05

"AI Ate My Homework"

We skip thinking about consequences

06

Lipstick on Legacy

We skip thinking from first principles

IF YOU TAKE ONE THING AWAY

Don't rush to keep up.
Rethink.

TRAP 01 OF 06

Tokenmaxxing

When we're racing to keep up, we skip thinking about value. We measure activity instead, because it's easy to count.

THE WAY OUT

07 Measure what drives value

What we choose to measure shapes what gets built.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN IT WHEN...

A leaderboard of who uses AI most, and your job is dependent on where you sit

“% of code written by AI” is the headline metric in the board deck

PRs up 3x, velocity up 3x... but what changed for customers?

THE STORY: UBER

Uber spent its 2026 AI coding budget by April

Sound familiar?

- Heavy AI use heavily encouraged
- An internal leaderboard ranked teams by AI usage
- The year's budget gone, four months in
- No quantifiable benefit for customers

Don't rush to keep up. Rethink.

"That link is not there yet."

Andrew Macdonald, COO, asked whether the usage was producing more for customers

TRAP 02 OF 06

The Abandoned Junior

When we're racing to keep up, we skip thinking about what good looks like. So when AI gets it wrong, we just fix it ourselves.

THE WAY OUT

06 Make context explicit

Your agents are only as good as the context you give them.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN IT WHEN...

"It doesn't write code the way we like it written"

"The documents it writes just aren't very good"

"So now we just do it ourselves"

THE STORY: AN HR TECH SCALEUP

“So now we just do it ourselves”

Sound familiar?

- They tried AI. It didn't write code or documents the way they liked it
- “The way we like it” lived in people's heads
- Reliant on individual use, have not setup as an organisational capability

Don't rush to keep up. Rethink.

**You'd never abandon
a new hire in their first
week.**

So why do it to your agents?

TRAP 03 OF 06

“It’s Live!”

When we’re racing to keep up, we skip thinking about adoption. We call it done the moment it ships.

THE WAY OUT

09 Make for adoption

Adoption, monetisation and retention are now what making means.

YOU KNOW YOU’RE IN IT WHEN...

Ticket closed, party popper in Slack... three months later, hardly anyone uses it

Launch is the last line on the plan, and nobody owns what comes after

Adoption is somebody else’s job

THE STORY: OMIO

Omio reset what “done” means

- Aimed to drive repeat usage, created a subscription product for the first time within the category
- First product live within 3 months, spent 6 months refining the packaging mix & revenue impact
- As well as subscription uptake, average order value & number tickets per customer also increased

Don't rush to keep up. Rethink.

**Live isn't the same
as loved.**

Done is when customers adopt it wholeheartedly

TRAP 04 OF 06

The Fire Hydrant

When we're racing to keep up, we skip thinking about what customers are ready for, and expect them to adopt it all.

THE WAY OUT

08 Match pace to readiness

What customers are ready for is where value is won or lost.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN IT WHEN...

Customers close the “What’s new” pop-up without reading it

Sales and support hear about features from customers

The same customer is in three betas at once

They can't find what they use every day, because it moved again

THE STORY: FIN (FORMERLY INTERCOM)

Fin: 3x the output, and the restraint to match

- Increased throughput (av PRs per person) **x3** over 12 months with same team
- Just build and get it front of customers
- Customers started complaining that they couldn't keep up, product coherence wasn't there
- Now manage one major release per quarter, with minor feature updates and refinements inbetween

Don't rush to keep up. Rethink.

“One of the biggest bottlenecks to progress is with humans.”

Darragh Curran, CTO

TRAP 05 OF 06

“AI Ate My Homework”

When we’re racing to keep up, we skip thinking about consequences. We let the AI decide and hope for the best.

THE WAY OUT

16 Humans sign the work

You can delegate decisions. You cannot delegate accountability.

YOU KNOW YOU’RE IN IT WHEN...

An agent emails a customer something nobody approved

An unsourced AI statistic ends up in the board pack

The postmortem’s root cause: “the model”

THE STORY: AIR CANADA

Air Canada tried to blame its own chatbot

- Its chatbot promised a grieving customer a refund that wasn't policy
- Air Canada argued it wasn't liable for what its chatbot said
- The tribunal ruled against it: ordered to pay the customer C\$650
- The headlines had a bigger impact

Don't rush to keep up. Rethink.

"A remarkable submission."

The tribunal, Moffatt v. Air Canada

TRAP 06 OF 06

Lipstick on Legacy

When we never stop to rethink, we skip first principles and bolt AI onto the product we already have.

THE WAY OUT

01 Understand the problem worth solving

04 Be more ambitious

YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN IT WHEN...

Every screen has a new sparkle icon

A “summarise” button on things nobody wanted summarised

Last year’s roadmap, with “AI” added to every line

THE STORY: THE WINNERS

Winners rebuild from first principles

Fin (formerly Intercom)

Rebuilt the company around its AI agent. It was do or die.

~\$3.6B

Salesforce deal agreed, June 2026

Pendo

Rethinking analytics with Novus, an agent that manages your product for you.

Novus

Analytics, rethought as an agent

Discoveree.com

I rebuilt my own product from scratch.

6 weeks

From blank page to rebuilt product

If you don't do this for your customers, someone else will. Be more ambitious.

RECAP

Six traps, six ways back to thinking

Tokenmaxxing



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The Abandoned Junior



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"It's Live!"



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01 + 04 First principles, more ambition

YOUR TURN

What's the smallest step you could take tomorrow?

Give it to your agents

Add the manifesto to their context, and A/B test what changes.

Use it for your next retro

The four values make four good columns.

Run a session with your team

Pick one value: where are we skipping the thinking?

Name your trap

Pick the trap you're in this week, and the principle that gets you out.

DON'T RUSH TO KEEP UP. RETHINK.

Download it. Share it. Pledge.

Help your organisation be one of the winners in this crazy AI world we find ourselves in.

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VALUES

Purpose over possibility

Everything may be possible, not everything is worth building.

WHAT IT'S NOT: "Everybody's a builder". Shipping more because it's cheap, whether or not it's worth making.

Learning loops over launch plans

Loops fueled by understanding compound quickly.

WHAT IT'S NOT: Shipping as the definition of done. Mistaking synthesis for understanding. Fixed plans in a shifting landscape.

Value realised over effort spent

Customers pay for outcomes, not for our craft.

WHAT IT'S NOT: Tokenmaxxing leaderboards. Features shipped but no extra value created. Vanity metrics dressed up as value. Mistaking activity for progress.

Human accountability over full automation

You can delegate decisions; you cannot delegate accountability.

WHAT IT'S NOT: "The AI did it." Consequential decisions without human oversight. Lay-offs dressed up as transformation.