

SOL RASHIDI

FORBES AI VISIONARY, LEADER, AND 21ST CENTURY MAVERICK

YOUR



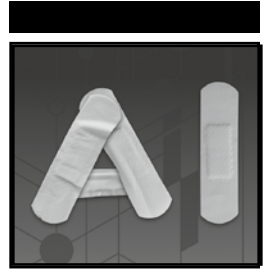
SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

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SCRAPED KNEES, BRUISED ELBOWS,  
AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM  
**REAL-WORLD AI DEPLOYMENTS**

FOREWORD BY **RICHARD GRECO**  
FORMER NASDAQ CEO





# Your AI Survival Guide

Scraped Knees, Bruised Elbows,  
and Lessons Learned from  
Real-World AI Deployments

Sol Rashidi

WILEY

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# About the Author



**Sol Rashidi** is an esteemed executive, leader, and influencer within the AI, data, and technology space. Having helped IBM launch Watson in 2011 as one of the earliest world applications of artificial intelligence and having completed more than three dozen large-scale implementations, she is at the forefront of ideation, conceptualization, design, and development of data and AI applications.

Sol has 8 patents granted, and has received the following awards:

- “Top 100 AI Thought Leaders”
- “The Top 75 Innovators of 2023”
- “Top 65 Most Influential Women”
- “Top 10 Global Women in AI & Data”
- “Top AI 100 Award”
- “Global 100 Power List”
- “Isomer Innovators of the Year”
- “Top 100 Innovators in Data & Analytics”
- “Chief Analytics Officer of the Year”
- “Chief Data Officer of the Year”

- “50 Most Powerful Women in Tech”
- “Forbes AI Maverick of the 21st Century”
- “Top 100 Women in Business”

Sol is an energetic business executive skilled at coupling her technical acumen with storytelling abilities to articulate business value with start-ups, scale-ups, business owners, private equity firms, and Fortune 100s that are leaning into data, AI, and technology as a competitive advantage, while wanting to preserve the legacy in which they were founded upon.

Sol has served as a C-suite member across several Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies, including the following:

- SVP, Chief Analytics Officer—Estee Lauder
- VP, Chief Data & Analytics Officer—Merck Pharmaceuticals
- EVP, Chief Data Officer—Sony Music
- VP, Chief Data & AI Officer—Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines
- Partner - Ernst & Young—Ernst & Young
- Partner leading Watson Go-To-Market—IBM

Sol is now an advisor, consultant, global keynote speaker, and fractional CDO and CAIO helping companies advance their business objectives. Her hallmark is to make the complicated uncomplicated and to help business leaders realize not everything needs to be cutting edge; sometimes innovation comes from cutting through the noise.





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# Foreword

Forget the buzzwords and ditch the hype. You hear *AI* everywhere, but what does it *really* mean? Is it robots taking over the world or something more practical?

As a seasoned tech entrepreneur and former NASDAQ space company CEO, I've seen my fair share of trends come and go. But trust me, AI isn't a fad. It's here to stay, and understanding it is crucial for anyone wanting to stay ahead of the curve.

That's where Sol's book comes in. Forget about dense technical jargon. Sol is a rare breed: someone who can explain complex concepts like AI in a way even "mere mortals" like us can understand. Think funny stories, real-world anecdotes, and practical advice, all rolled into one engaging read.

Here's why this book stands out:

**Cuts through the BS:** Sol separates fact from fiction, giving you a clear picture of what AI is and what it can (and can't) do.

**Actionable insights:** No more theory! Sol provides practical steps for deploying AI solutions in different industries, showing you how to put this knowledge to work.

**Down-to-earth approach:** Even if you're a tech newbie, Sol's relatable stories and humorous writing style make you feel like you're having a conversation with a friend, not a tech guru.

Whether you're a CEO, entrepreneur, or just curious about the future, this book is for you. It's not just informative; it's fun! Think of Sol as

your guide on an exciting journey into the world of AI. Trust me, you won't regret taking the plunge.

Dive in, explore, and emerge with a clear understanding of the AI revolution. Sol has got your back.

Richard Greco  
Former NASDAQ CEO

# Overcoming the Inertia

*“In a world that thrives on conformity, standing apart tests your resilience.”*

—Sol

I’m no Elon Musk or Peter Thiel. I’m not a Sam Altman (CEO of OpenAI) or even close to the geniuses who created neural networks or Watson and DeepMind. I’m not here to preach or prosecute on all the glories of artificial intelligence (AI), nor am I here to give you a technical dissertation on its intricacies. I’m not an academic or researcher, nor do I get paid to write code or promote vendors or tools.

I’m simply a practitioner who worked her way up through the corporate ladder—one who worked relentlessly with blind determination not knowing exactly where her career would go, one who eventually made it to the C-suite as the Chief Data Officer, Chief Analytics Officer, Chief Data and Analytics Officer, and Chief Data and AI Officer for many Fortune 500s, one who accidentally fell into the world of data in the early 2000s and into artificial intelligence in 2011 when I helped IBM launch Watson.

I never thought that doing AI deployments, I would face so many unexpected challenges, but the reality is that you can take a licking along the way because transformations involve change, and well. . . people are generally averse to change. This is why I have the scraped knees, bruised elbows, and wounded pride from my experience in real-world deployments. Over the years I’ve tried multiple approaches, implemented numerous strategies, and have had countless alignment discussions

selling, convincing, aligning, conceiving, designing, deploying, training, monitoring, and measuring the successes and failures—trying to figure out the art of AI deployments and how to balance the messiness with the possibilities. The approach I share with you in this book is practical and realistic, and it's based on real failures and successes where I've captured the lessons learned over the years.

I believe in the “crawl, walk, run” approach because I've seen what happens when you try to run without crawling first. What I will share with you is very pragmatic and grounded. There will be no selling or advising on anything that pushes you too far, and nothing in this book is based on theory, heresy, or academia. I will be realistic with you about what artificial intelligence can and can't do (right now), and I will help you sift through the hype.

This book is intended to help you start your AI journey and succeed, while familiarizing you with and minimizing the friction points that I have experienced. Many books you read will mention that you need a strategy, you need to pick a use case, you need data, and you need governance. I will outline for you, step-by-step, how to select a strategy, how to ideate, and how to select a use case, and I will provide you with an “essentials lists” rooted in real, roll-up-your-sleeves work.

I know how to do AI deployments because I've had the tenacity to take on early, unproven, and questionable projects that disrupt the status quo. I think and do things differently, and I'm perfectly fine with pushing boundaries and pushing people who lack imagination. Building the reputation of a “rogue executive,” I developed intuition, an innate ability to see the “art of the possible” and the “art of the practical.” This, combined with my relentless pursuit for progress and need to make an impact, has brought me to this point. It wasn't easy; it came with many sleepless nights where I doubted myself.

Furthermore, where I am today in my career has nothing to do with how I started my career. I was in sales at first and then became a project lead. At one point I was even a financial advisor for Morgan Stanley (Series 7 certified and all). Somehow in the early 2000s tech found me, and I pivoted. The real change occurred, however, when I helped IBM launch Watson in 2011. I fell in love with AI and have been doing deployments for some very prominent companies, since.

I'll be the first to tell you I'm technical but not a “techie.” I'm business minded but not the president of a Fortune 5 company. What I am, however, is an executive who doesn't mind rolling up her sleeves and getting into the details while also playing a strategic thought leader. I can pivot quickly between the two worlds. I pride myself on having an



entrepreneurial spirit and pushing boundaries where few have the energy. Over the years and through the trenches, I've built a backbone versus relying on a wishbone. I'm not afraid of the work or the challenges, and I stay grounded in my successes because I believe you're only as good as your last innovation.

With that, I will pass onto you the knowledge I've gained over the years. This book will give you real frameworks, techniques, how-tos, and approaches to make your AI journey a success beyond the hype of what you have read elsewhere. It's grounded in experience and from someone who has not been afraid of the work.

While some executives focus on self-promotion and preservation, I've focused on trying what most don't dare to do. I hope you like reading what I'm about to share!

## **Inertia**

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Like riding a bike, some things must be done before you can learn how to do them. You can read all the books and manuals you want, but nothing prepares you better than jumping in, trying, falling, and trying again! This is how AI is done. This is how life is done! AI is not a silver bullet! It's not a light switch that turns on! It is not a magical solution nor a quick fix. In fact, it can uncover some unpleasant realities about your business, its operations, your employees, and larger issues at hand.

I've been a business leader in the AI game since the days when flip phones were cool. From triumphs to face plants, I've seen it all. Learning AI for business? It's just like learning to ride a bike. It seems wobbly and impossible at first, but once you start pedaling, the most difficult part is done.

As mentioned earlier, I transitioned from a no-name project lead to an established C-suite executive (four times over) and fell into this space accidentally. I didn't study computer science or mathematics, and I sure can't write sophisticated code. However, I learned the ways, and you can too.

This entire book is crafted for you if you're:

- A business leader wanting to explore the benefits of AI without all the messiness and failures I've had to go through
- A business owner who thinks it will benefit the organization but don't know where to start
- A practitioner who wants to make a case for AI but doesn't have the experience of developing a strategy.

- A person who just wants to get into AI but doesn't know where to start
- Someone curious who just wants to be informed and educated about how it's done

Regardless of your role and reasons, just know that 70% of the success of your AI deployment has nothing to do with the technology. As a matter of fact, the tech is the easiest part of the lifecycle. Most of the work is dealing with human capital and relationships, aligning with goals, overcoming fears, picking the right strategy, picking the right use case, and finding the ambition, the energy, and the rogue in you.

It's also important to note that this book is not a guide or a manual for:

- large technology-based companies that are already deeply involved in AI innovation,
- nor is it for the researchers who are shaping the future of cognitive computing and machine learning.

Instead, it is a call to action for business leaders, business owners, practitioners, and the curious, who serve companies where technology has played a supportive role rather than a leading one. This book will be your compass and serve as your call to action.

There will be less emphasis on technical know-how and more emphasis on business acumen. Together we will explore the different types of AI deployments and how they will amplify and accelerate your everyday work, regardless of your maturity.

As you progress through the book, consider each chapter as a building block. The book is structured in a way to discuss different facets of deploying AI in the following manner:

- Chapter 2 is about leadership and finding the rogue executive within you. You must dare to be different to do this! There's a memoir of how I got started; I share with you my story so you know my humble beginnings and gain confidence in knowing that if I did it, you can too.
- In Chapter 3, we'll progress into some key principles I learned along the way about bending the rules but not breaking the spirit. It's focused on how to introduce AI into your company by following these steps: 1) asking yourself why you want to do this; 2) learning to pace yourself through better forecasting; 3) thinking through a strategy; and 4) thinking big, starting small, and scaling quickly.
- Chapter 4 is where we get into the weeds of things. It's long, it's detailed, and it will walk you through every step of an AI

deployment. I felt getting into the details early in the book would be of value to you.

- Chapter 5 is about knowing your biggest project killer: your team. We will discuss how to build one from scratch and how to work with people you've inherited. We'll talk about the virtues you want in people on your team, as well as the 10 AI archetypes of people you will consistently have to deal with but may not want to.
- Chapter 6 is about making sure that your AI deployments have a "human in the loop." This is about avoiding or creating any negative impressions or press internally, and externally.
- Chapter 7 gets into inspiration. I share with you 60 use cases, three across 10 industries and three across 10 functions, to help you become knowledgeable about what's happening in the space. The goal is to educate, but mostly inspire you. The world of AI and its experimentation is big, so I've consolidated a list to save you time on research.
- Chapter 8 is about AI jargon and its history. This chapter helps you understand the difference between machine learning and descriptive analytics. This foundation will then help you identify what is and is not AI; along with the evolution of the technology and how we got here.
- We then end with Chapter 9 on what the future holds and where we're headed. It also contains a wrap-up of key takeaways and essential lists.

## Who Is This Book For?

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As mentioned earlier, this book was written for business leaders, business owners, practitioners, people who want to get into AI, and the curious. Whether you're a C-suite executive, a mid-level manager, a data practitioner, working at a small company, or working at a large enterprise that is not tech-based, this book was written for you if any of these descriptions sound familiar:

- You work for or have a business that currently does not lean on technology as the primary product or service.
- You're in an industry that's legacy-based (i.e. transportation, insurance, brokerage firm, etc.), and bare-minimum tech was good enough until now, but you're expected to make investments and don't know where to start.

- You're a business owner who has made it based on great marketing, relationships, and your network, and now you need to "level up" to stay competitive and relevant.
- You have business pressures to increase profitability, improve consumer experience, increase personalized touch points, produce higher conversions, etc.
- You work for a company, and you fear your job will be replaced by AI, so you want to upskill, versus resist the movement.
- You're curious and want to learn how AI is shaping the world, but you need it described in approachable and non-techie terms.
- You are a small or medium-sized business owner who wants to do more with technology.
- You are an enterprise C-suite leader who is not a technologist and need to learn the practicalities of this space and how it may impact your domain.
- You are an AI practitioner who needs to educate your boss or is often asked how to approach AI.
- You want to get started in the AI space, but it's currently not connected to your career path.

Who this book is *not* for?

- You're in AI and work for a tech-based company like Google, Meta, or OpenAI.
- You're in deep research for an academic institution like MIT or Caltech.

## Organizational Benefits

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As a person new to this world, it's natural to think "Is it worth it?" or "Why go through all this effort?" This is especially true if things are fine the way they are. The simple truth is, if you don't, your competitor will. It's simply a matter of time. Staying relevant is a tough game. Putting in place practices that will maintain or grow your market share, increase your profitability, lower your cost of consumer acquisition, and enable efficiency and productivity is just good business practice. Whether you strive for growth, quality, or both, AI is a great solution.

By taking your first real step into exploring AI, it will do the following:

- Force you to look at your business processes and operations in ways you haven't before. You will discover core issues, not symptoms, that plague your day-to-day work.
- It will surface naysayers and those afraid to change from those who will help you evolve. You get a great view of your workforce and their attitude (and aptitude) toward change.
- You quickly identify those who are resilient and those who fold at the first sign of an obstacle. You need more of the former and less of the latter.
- It will test your own character and the type of leader you are. Are you cut out for leadership, and will you do whatever it takes to sustain and thrive?
- Do you have a growth-based mindset? Are you willing to act and not just talk about the future?
- It will test your ability to stay positive for your own well-being, your teammates, and your partners. Being known as “cheerfully resilient” (a term used to describe me during my Royal Caribbean days) is key. This stuff is hard, so how you react when trying something new will be observed by many.

## Business Benefits

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In addition to the organizational benefits, there are many business benefits. The business case for AI is that it gives business leaders and practitioners the information and resources they need without consistently relying on head count and investments as your typical business practices. You'd be amazed at how well it can help you accelerate, facilitate, and amplify your workloads and business processes with better consistency and quality. What's not to love? If you're still not convinced in overcoming the inertia of starting your first AI project, maybe this will help:

- AI has proven to improve the productivity of 61% of employees.
- Agents who use AI can handle 13.8% more customer inquiries per hour.
- Business professionals who use AI can write 59% more business documents per hour.
- Programmers who use AI can code 126% more projects per week.

- 54% of organizations state that AI has been a cost-effective measure for their business operations.
- Netflix claims to have saved more than \$1 billion annually using machine learning from its Netflix Recommendation Engine.
- AI helps you become more efficient, allowing you to maintain and control head-count growth, as market demands fluctuate.
- AI is great for capex investments. It allows you to make investments in an asset that can bring you long-term value.
- Your company stays relevant, allowing it to maintain its competitive advantage within your industry and local communities.
- You're taking a proactive step in evolving the business, which teaches your workforce the disciplines of adaptability, change, and thinking bigger.
- You're strengthening and testing your leadership abilities for yourself and the organization.
- You learn to do more with less. It's about working smarter, not harder.
- It's only a matter of time before your clients ask you about AI. You can speak the truth only if you've done the work. As a result, you're distinguishing yourself from your competitors and proving to be a better partner for your clients.
- If you have children, nieces, or nephews, it'll allow you to stay relevant and "cool." Heck, they may even ask to come intern for you. Mad respect!
- You will have better mastery over the politics of big projects. As brutal as the experience of failure is, the process of building teaches you a host of lessons.

## **Business Growth**

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And if all that isn't enough, here are some statistics of the space and its anticipated growth:

- Eighty-three percent of organizations worldwide claim that AI is a top priority for their business.
- The AI market is expected to grow twentyfold by 2030.
- The AI market in the United States is expected to reach \$299.54 billion by 2026.