

REPLACE, OR BECOME MORE

On AI, and the connection that turns a novelty into so much more of what you can actually handle.

By David Maruyama

THE VISION — ESSAY 2 OF 6

This is the second in a six-part series — a personal reflection on what AI actually changes, published every two weeks over the coming months. There's no pitch here and nothing for sale: just honest reflections on AI, and an attempt to actually act on them, in public, alongside anyone else figuring out the same thing in real time. Coming next: AI Is Learning From All of Us. Have You Noticed?.

Fourteen months ago, if you'd asked me what AI actually was, my honest answer would have been: I had no real idea. It was like a big, complex mathematical formula in front of me — I didn't understand a single variable. But that "I had no real idea" is exactly what opened my curiosity, and I started noticing the noise that was already out there, all around me.

Ads promised one thing. The news warned about another. A dozen YouTube videos explained it a dozen different ways, each panel pushing its own angle. There was no single, common concept to hold onto — every piece of content seemed to be selling its own version of what this was supposed to be. If I'm honest, I was skeptical of most of it, and confused by the rest.

Underneath all that noise, though, there was really only one question that mattered, and it still is: does this replace you, or does it make you more than you were?

I don't think that question gets asked directly often enough. It gets buried under feature lists and productivity claims, but it's the actual fork in the road. One path treats AI as a threat to be resisted, minimized, kept at arm's length until it goes away or someone else deals with it. The other treats it as a genuine multiplier of your own capability — not a replacement for your judgment, but an extension of it.

What changed for me wasn't a single moment. It was time spent actually using it — badly at first, then less badly — until I stopped experiencing AI as one fixed thing and started experiencing it as something that morphs into whatever a moment actually calls for: a researcher one hour, a writer the next, a strategist after that, sometimes a sounding board in the same conversation

where it was just doing research for me. That range is what makes it genuinely powerful. It's also what makes it hard to overstate the implications, because there isn't a part of life — work, decisions, how I learn, how I build — that stayed untouched once I actually understood what this thing could become.

Here's the part I didn't expect: the edge it gives you doesn't grow in a straight line. It compounds. The gap between someone who's genuinely spent the time and someone who's still treating it as a novelty doesn't open slowly — it opens fast, and quietly, until one day it's just obvious who's seeing possibilities the rest of the room hasn't gotten to yet.

I've watched that happen to colleagues. I've felt it happen to me, in both directions — moments I was ahead, and moments I realized, uncomfortably, that I wasn't anymore. That's not a comfortable thing to admit. But I think it's the actual truth of this moment, and pretending otherwise doesn't serve anyone reading this.

There's a wider version of this same choice, beyond any one person's career. Once you treat AI as a multiplier rather than a threat, it doesn't just change what you personally can do — it starts lowering the barriers that used to require capital, credentials, or a team to get past. Someone without any of those three can now build and create at a level that used to be reserved for people who had all three. That's not a small shift. It's the difference between a world where opportunity is gated by what you already have, and one where it's gated by whether you're actually willing to do the work of understanding the tool in front of you.

So here's my real question, underneath all the others: the tools to close almost any knowledge or skill gap are sitting in front of all of us, equally available. What's actually stopping you? Not the technology. Something else — time, maybe, or the discomfort of being bad at something before you're good at it, or the quiet comfort of staying a beginner because staying a beginner asks nothing of you.

I've had to answer that question for myself more than once already, across a career that's put me through a couple of these shifts before this one. I don't think this time is different in kind — I think it's just faster, and it's happening to everyone at once instead of one industry at a time.

Where do you actually stand on that fork right now — replace, or become more? If you've already chosen the second one, I'd like to hear about one specific thing AI has genuinely multiplied for you, not just done for you. And if

you're still standing on the other side, still deciding, that's real too — I'd like to hear what's actually holding you back. Not to talk you out of it. Just because that hesitation deserves to be seen as much as the momentum does.



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