

Did Your AI Come With a *User's Guide*?

If you've ever typed "Ope, sorry, I should've explained better.." to an AI chatbot — and then felt weird about apologizing to software — this guide is for you.

THE MIDWESTERN PROMPT STACK™ — SOUND FAMILIAR?

1. Apologize for asking
2. Underexplain the problem
3. Hint instead of asking
4. Apologize again
5. Thank the AI
6. Complain to your friends that ChatGPT is useless

This guide fixes the stack. Four sections. No fluff. Actual results.

Stop Apologizing *to the Robot*

The AI doesn't have feelings. I know that sounds obvious. And yet there you are, typing "*no worries if not!*" to a language model that absolutely cannot be worried.

The reason your AI outputs feel generic isn't because AI is bad at its job. It's because you're prompting like a Midwesterner at a potluck — bringing something just in case, not wanting to impose, hoping everyone figures out what you need without you having to ask directly.

AI needs you to be the direct version of yourself. The one you save for emergencies and family members who won't take hints.

WHAT YOU TYPE VS. WHAT YOU MEAN		
"Oh, no rush, but maybe if you have a sec..."	→	Do this now
"Could you maybe try that one more time?"	→	That was wrong
"Ope, sorry, I should've explained better..."	→	YOU misunderstood
"No worries if not!"	→	This is the 3rd time I've asked
"If it's not too much trouble..."	→	I pay \$20/month for this

THE FIX — A SETUP PROMPT

Before you ask Claude for anything, tell it who you are. This is called a system prompt. Think of it as the "here's what I need you to know on day one" you'd give a new hire — except this one actually retains it.

COPY THIS. MAKE IT YOURS. PASTE IT ONCE.

You are my business assistant. I run [business type], serving [describe your clients]. My communication style is [direct / warm / professional / casual].

When I ask for help with client-facing content, write in my voice – not corporate, not generic. If you need more context, ask me one question before you start. Don't apologize. Don't over-explain. Just help.

Where it goes: Claude.ai → Settings → Custom Instructions. Set it once. It applies to every conversation going forward. You never have to re-introduce yourself again.

That one step alone puts you ahead of most business owners using AI right now. Not because it's complicated. Because most people are too polite to demand it.

Say What You *Actually Mean*

Midwesterners are raised to communicate in layers. The request is in there somewhere — just wrapped in enough social padding that nobody feels put out. That works great at the church potluck. It produces unusable AI output every single time.

The AI cannot read between the lines. This is the one place in your life where being direct is not rude — it is the entire strategy.

WHAT MOST PEOPLE TYPE

"Write me a marketing email for my business."

WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

"Write a marketing email to my existing massage clients about a new 90-minute deep tissue package at \$120. Warm and personal — like I'm texting a regular, not sending a mass blast. Clear CTA to book online. Under 150 words."

Same ask. Completely different output. The second prompt has an audience, an offer, a tone, a format, and a length. Four constraints. Four constraints produce a usable first draft. Zero constraints produce something you'll rewrite from scratch and then blame the AI for.

THE FIVE THINGS A GOOD PROMPT INCLUDES

1

The task

What do you actually want? Be literal. "Write an email" is a task. "Write a 3-sentence reply declining this meeting" is a better one.

2

The context

What does it need to know to do it well? Client type, industry, situation, backstory.

3

The audience

A new client prompt reads differently than a long-term regular. Tell it who's on the other end.

4

The tone

Warm? Direct? Professional? Funny? "Sound like me" only works after you've told it what you sound like.

5

The constraints

Length, format, what NOT to include. "Don't make it sound corporate" is a valid constraint.

Claude's first answer is a draft, not a verdict. Say "make this shorter." Say "too formal." Say "nope." The back-and-forth is the work — and the AI is not offended. The AI cannot be offended. Use that.

You're Still *the Boss Here*

There are two versions of the AI story being sold right now. In one, the robot takes over everything and you lose your job. In the other, you plug in AI, walk away, and it handles your entire business perfectly while you sip coffee on a dock somewhere in Minnesota.

Both are wrong. And both conveniently leave out the part where you still have to think.

The businesses getting the best results from AI treat it like a capable new hire who hasn't met your clients yet. You'd review the draft before it went out. Same thing here.

WHAT AI GENUINELY DOES NOT KNOW

It doesn't know that one client who only responds to texts after 7pm. It doesn't know that your best referral source just went through something hard and this isn't the moment to follow up. It doesn't know the inside joke that makes your newsletter sound like you instead of a LinkedIn post from 2019.

You know those things. That judgment — built from years of actual relationships — is the part that doesn't get automated. It gets *amplified* when you use AI correctly.

THE PRACTICAL SHIFT — DO IT FIRST, NOT INSTEAD

Stop asking AI to do things *completely*. Start asking it to do things *first*.

"Write my newsletter" hands the wheel to something that doesn't know your people.

"Draft three opening lines for my newsletter about spring scheduling — I'll pick one and take it from there" keeps you in the driver's seat.

One produces content that could belong to anyone. The other produces yours. Human-in-the-loop isn't a limitation. It's the whole strategy.

It's a Tool. *That's Enough.*

The fear-and-noise machine around AI is real and it is profitable. Scared people don't explore — they outsource. They buy courses, hire consultants, wait for someone to tell them it's safe to start. The louder the alarm, the more someone is selling something.

Claude is a very sophisticated language model that has read most of the internet. It is not sentient. It is not magic. It is not going to solve every problem or ruin your career. It is a tool — a genuinely useful one — and like every tool, it works best in the hands of someone who understands what it's actually for.

ACTUALLY GOOD AT

- ✓ First drafts of almost anything
- ✓ Summarizing long documents fast
- ✓ Brainstorming when you're stuck
- ✓ Rephrasing what you've written
- ✓ Research starting points
- ✓ Templates you reuse constantly
- ✓ Thinking through decisions out loud

NOT GOOD AT

- ✗ Knowing current facts (has a cutoff)
- ✗ Knowing your situation without you
- ✗ Judgment calls needing context
- ✗ Reading a room
- ✗ Replacing your expertise
- ✗ Replacing your personality
- ✗ Knowing what matters to your client

You've been running a business. You know how to give direction, make judgment calls, and build relationships with people who have actual feelings. Those skills transfer directly to working with AI.



You're not behind. You just needed the manual. Now you have it.



NEXT STEP

Ready to see where AI actually fits in *your* business?

The AI Diagnostic Call is 60 minutes. We look at what you're actually doing, where the time leaks are, and where AI closes the gap.

Practical. No pitch deck. No upsell. No worries if not — just kidding. Book it.

BOOK YOUR DIAGNOSTIC CALL →

60 min · Via Zoom · jonisaisola.com