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Fewer Clients. *Far Better.*

18 Months of AI Inside a Canadian Financial Advisory Practice

Shea Sanche, CFP®

Founder, Insight Planning

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This isn't a paper about prompts.

Eighteen months ago, I could barely spell AI.

Today, it's involved in almost every part of how I think about and operate my business.

I'm a financial advisor, not a technology expert. I've been in this industry since 1999. I've lived through multiple market cycles, four acquisitions, countless technology changes, and more business challenges than I care to remember.

I didn't start experimenting with AI because I wanted to become more efficient at writing emails.

I started because I was curious.

One thing led to another. I started asking harder questions, giving AI more context, and challenging it to do things I previously wouldn't have imagined delegating to technology.

Some of it worked remarkably well. Some didn't.

Along the way, AI became something much more useful than a productivity tool. It became a research assistant, analyst, sounding board, critic, and increasingly, part of the infrastructure supporting our business.

And something unexpected happened.

I stopped thinking about how AI could help me serve more clients.

I started thinking about how it could help me serve fewer clients, far better.

That distinction has fundamentally changed how I approach my practice.

What follows isn't a theory about what AI might do for financial advisors someday.

It's a collection of lessons, examples, and mistakes from putting it to work inside a real advisory business over the last 18 months.

There are no magic prompts here. No claim that we've figured everything out.

We're still learning.

But we've learned enough that I think some of it is worth sharing.

01

The most important lesson came before the technology

Like many advisors, I initially approached AI by looking for opportunities to automate things.

Could it write emails? Build reports? Research questions? Prepare meeting notes?

Absolutely.

But eventually I realized I was asking the wrong question.

I was asking how to perform existing work more efficiently without considering whether that work needed to exist at all.

A bad process doesn't become a good process because AI performs it faster.

It just becomes a faster bad process.

That realization coincided with a broader reassessment of my business.

We had accumulated complexity over the years. More people, more technology, more processes, more responsibilities, and more exceptions.

Not all of that complexity was creating value.

So I developed four principles that now govern how I approach decisions.

Essentialism	Is this essential?
Necessity	Is this necessary right now?
Simplicity	What's the simplest way to accomplish it?
Ownership	Who is accountable for the result?

Every meaningful initiative should pass through those four questions.

And every task should ultimately land in one of four categories:

Eliminate it.	Automate it.	Delegate it.	Do it yourself.

Notice that automation isn't the first option.

Elimination is.

We've eliminated processes, technology, meetings, and responsibilities that no longer justified their existence.

When we reviewed roles one at a time, most of the work in some of them could be automated or eliminated.

Our technology audit also led us to reduce the number of platforms in our stack by more than 40%.

Those changes weren't simply about cost.

They were about reducing friction, clarifying responsibilities, and spending our time on work that genuinely matters.

> THE LESSON
>
> **Before asking AI to automate something, ask whether that thing should exist.**

Be careful what you optimize. You can optimize good things and bad things equally well.

02

Phase one: Changing how people discover us

Our earliest major initiative was relatively straightforward.

We wanted to become easier to find.

Not just through traditional Google searches, but increasingly through AI-powered search and recommendation platforms.

The concepts are often called SEO, AEO, and GEO.

SEO is about helping search engines find and understand your website.

Answer Engine Optimization and Generative Engine Optimization focus on making your information understandable, useful, and potentially discoverable through AI-generated answers.

The distinction matters because the way people look for professional advice is changing.

Someone facing retirement, selling a business, managing an inheritance, or helping aging parents may not begin by searching for a financial advisor.

They may begin by asking an AI assistant a very specific question about their circumstances.

My objective was simple.

When the right person asks one of those questions, I want our expertise to be part of the information they can discover.

We began approaching content differently.

Rather than constantly talking about ourselves, we started addressing the questions people were already asking.

We developed guides, articles, educational resources, and decision-oriented content around real financial and life events.

We also worked on our website architecture, search visibility, Google reviews, and other signals that help people assess whether we're credible.

AI helped us research topics, identify gaps, organize information, analyze competing content, and produce material much faster than we could previously.

But speed wasn't the most important change.

> *We began writing for two audiences: the person asking the question and the technology helping that person find an answer.*

That changed how we structured our content.

It also reinforced a business philosophy I've believed for years.

Give away the knowledge. Charge for the judgment, implementation, coordination, and accountability.

Information is increasingly abundant.

Good advice is still scarce.

We're not claiming to have mastered AI search or measured every result of these efforts. Search platforms are changing constantly.

But we now have a much more deliberate approach to how our expertise gets discovered.

And much of the research and production work that once required outside resources can now begin inside our own business.

THE LESSON

Don't just use AI to produce more content. Use it to understand what your ideal clients are trying to solve, and make your expertise easier to discover.

03

Phase two: Building a business that doesn't depend on my memory

This has probably been the most consequential part of our journey.

For years, like many independent advisors, I carried an enormous amount of institutional knowledge in my head.

How we handle specific client situations.

Why certain decisions were made.

What exceptions exist in our processes.

Which team member knows how to do something.

What needs to happen when somebody leaves.

The business functioned, but too much depended on individual people remembering how things worked.

That's a risk.

An advisor can have an excellent business without having a well-documented business.

And those are not the same thing.

The Insight Playbook

We had attempted traditional procedure documentation before.

The problem was that conventional manuals became stale almost as soon as they were completed.

Nobody wanted to maintain them, and nobody enjoyed using them.

We eventually rebuilt our operating knowledge inside Notion.

The result was the Insight Playbook.

It houses our operating philosophy, organizational structure, responsibilities, procedures, client experience standards, financial planning processes, technology systems, and other institutional knowledge.

It isn't just a library of documents.

It's intended to be the written version of how the firm actually operates.

And it's become the foundation that makes many of our AI applications useful.

Without reliable information, AI has very little to work with.

It may sound intelligent. It may answer confidently.

But if the underlying information is incomplete, outdated, or wrong, the output is unreliable.

This led me to a principle that has become central to our thinking.

> *The AI is rented. The context is owned.*

AI platforms will change. Better models will arrive. Pricing and features will evolve.

Our institutional knowledge needs to remain ours.

Turning knowledge into something useful

Once the Playbook became more structured, we could begin using AI to interact with it.

Our team can ask questions about procedures, responsibilities, and documented standards rather than searching through folders or asking whoever happens to know the answer.

AI can help identify inconsistencies, missing documentation, and opportunities to simplify processes.

It can also help turn an operational decision into the corresponding updates, instructions, and communication needed to implement that decision.

The important distinction is that the Playbook remains authoritative.

AI can recommend changes and prepare updates.

People approve them.

A confident AI answer doesn't automatically become company policy.

> THE LESSON
>
> Document your business before trying to automate it. Otherwise, you're asking AI to operate on assumptions.

04

Using AI to understand the business itself

One of the more unexpected applications has been financial and operational analysis.

I began experimenting with using AI as something resembling a digital CFO or COO.

Not in the sense of replacing accounting professionals or business leadership.

More as an additional analytical capability.

A resource that could help me examine financial statements, reconcile information, evaluate expenses, test assumptions, and investigate problems.

In traditional businesses, this kind of work can require analysts, consultants, or substantial management time.

AI changes the economics of getting the first layer of analysis completed.

The technology audit

One example was our technology stack.

Like many businesses, we'd accumulated software subscriptions over time.

Some were essential.

Some overlapped.

Others had survived simply because nobody had taken the time to examine whether we still needed them.

We used AI to help analyze actual expense information and reconstruct what we were paying for.

Rather than relying on somebody's memory of which platforms we used, we started with the financial records.

Then we reviewed the function of each system.

What did it do?

Was another system already doing the same thing?

Was anyone using it?

Could the work be eliminated instead?

That exercise contributed to the reduction of more than 40% of the platforms in our technology stack.

The bigger lesson wasn't about software costs.

It was that AI made it practical to conduct a level of operational scrutiny that otherwise kept getting deferred.

Financial analysis and reconciliation

We've also used AI to help examine revenue information, compare financial scenarios, investigate discrepancies, and develop operating forecasts.

It can be particularly useful when information sits across multiple documents or systems.

But there's an important caution.

AI can produce very convincing financial analysis that contains mistakes.

We've caught errors, challenged assumptions, and had to reconstruct calculations from original source documents.

Our approach has become more disciplined as a result.

Start with the primary records.

Reconcile the source figures.

Separate facts from assumptions.

Recalculate important numbers independently.

And have qualified people verify consequential conclusions.

> THE LESSON
>
> **AI can make sophisticated analysis more accessible. It doesn't remove the need to verify the arithmetic or exercise judgment.**

05

Using AI during a major business transaction

This is one of the applications that changed my understanding of what these tools could do.

In 2026, I completed the sale of a segment of my advisory business.

The transaction involved an extraordinary number of moving parts.

Valuation.

Financial modelling.

Legal documentation.

Accounting considerations.

Client communications.

Operational transition.

Employee responsibilities.

Technology access.

And, throughout all of it, the existing business still needed to operate.

AI became a central working tool across the process.

From an uncertain situation to a decision

Rather than approaching it as a single problem, I used AI to help develop and compare several options.

We examined the commercial implications, operational consequences, potential risks, and likely outcomes of different approaches.

We used financial information to develop valuation scenarios and stress-test assumptions.

Legal and professional coordination

AI also became a preparation and coordination tool.

It helped organize facts, prepare briefing documents for legal and accounting professionals, and identify questions requiring professional judgment.

That didn't replace the lawyer.

It helped me engage with the lawyer more effectively.

Instead of arriving with a vague explanation of the situation, I could provide structured context, organized questions, and specific issues requiring attention.

In a transaction moving quickly, that mattered.

The speed wasn't AI alone. Many people and circumstances contributed.

But AI materially changed my ability to analyze, prepare, coordinate, and respond.

The hidden benefit: organizational continuity

The transaction also exposed something else.

A business transition isn't simply a financial transaction.

It's a transfer of knowledge, responsibilities, relationships, and institutional memory.

We used AI to help organize transition requirements, document procedures, develop communication materials, and coordinate operational workstreams.

The Playbook became particularly valuable.

The more knowledge we could document, the less the business depended on any one individual remaining in place.

And that brings me to what I think is the most transferable lesson from the entire experience.

> *Succession is as much a systems problem as it is a financial one.*

An advisory practice may have considerable value on paper.

But if its operating knowledge lives entirely inside the advisor's head, transferring that business becomes much harder.

AI didn't solve the human complexity of our transaction.

It helped me manage the informational and operational complexity while retaining responsibility for the decisions.

> THE LESSON
>
> **AI can be a serious analytical and coordination partner during complex business decisions. Human judgment, professional advice, and verified documents must still govern the outcome.**

06

Phase three: Improving the human side of financial advice

This is the part of our journey I'm most interested in now.

A great deal of discussion about AI in financial services focuses on productivity.

Meeting notes.

Email drafts.

Research.

Report generation.

Administrative automation.

Those are useful applications.

But I don't think they're the greatest opportunity.

The most valuable part of financial advice often has very little to do with producing information.

It involves understanding people.

Their fears.

Their values.

Their relationships.

What they're trying to accomplish.

And what they may not fully understand about themselves.

Financial planning is full of situations where the numbers are relatively straightforward but the decisions are not.

Retiring.

Selling a business.

Helping adult children.

Caring for aging parents.

Managing an inheritance.

Dealing with the death of a spouse.

The spreadsheet is rarely the whole problem.

The Insight 360° approach

Our Insight 360° Operating System was developed around the idea that financial advice should focus on helping people make better decisions during important moments in their lives.

AI supports that work.

It helps organize information, identify relevant questions, prepare for conversations, and synthesize what we've learned.

But the advisor remains responsible for understanding the client, exercising judgment, and guiding the conversation.

The goal isn't to put AI between the advisor and the client.

It's to reduce the friction that prevents the advisor from being fully present.

A simple example is post-meeting communication.

With structured meeting records and AI-assisted drafting, work that previously took about 20 minutes can sometimes be completed in approximately five.

The value isn't just the time saved.

It's the ability to follow up promptly, capture what mattered, and spend less energy reconstructing conversations afterward.

Another example is meeting preparation.

When a client has a long history with the firm, important information may be scattered across previous meetings and records.

AI can help assemble the relevant context before the meeting.

That allows the advisor to begin with a better understanding of what has happened and what may matter now.

But none of this works if the underlying records are inaccurate.

And no raw AI-generated meeting summary should be accepted as fact without review.

THE LESSON

AI should help advisors become more attentive, better prepared, and more consistent. Not more distant.

07

Client Chemistry: Better communication, not just more communication

I've used behavioural profiling in my practice for many years.

One thing experience has taught me is that people can have very different communication preferences.

Some want detail.

Others want the conclusion.

Some are comfortable making quick decisions.

Others need time, context, and reassurance.

Advisors have their own preferences too.

And sometimes we mistake a client adapting to our style as evidence that the relationship is working perfectly.

That realization led to another experiment: Client Chemistry.

The concept is to use AI as a tool for understanding communication differences and helping advisors adapt their approach.

Not to diagnose people's personalities or make important decisions for them.

To become more conscious of how our natural tendencies affect the relationship.

For example, a direct, decisive advisor may believe they're being helpful by getting straight to the answer.

A client who needs more context may experience the same conversation very differently.

AI can help the advisor examine that gap and consider a more effective way to communicate.

I've found this particularly interesting because it shifts the question away from how AI can communicate with clients.

Instead, it asks how AI can help **me communicate better with clients**.

Client Chemistry is early.

I don't have evidence to claim it improves retention or financial outcomes.

But I think the direction is worth exploring.

Because the deeper opportunity may not be replacing human interaction.

It may be improving it.

> THE LESSON
>
> **Communication quality isn't simply about what you say. It's about how the other person receives it.**

08

The most underrated AI asset is the conversation

We spend enormous amounts of time in conversations.

Client meetings.

Team meetings.

Professional discussions.

Strategy sessions.

Training.

Those conversations contain information that often disappears almost immediately.

Ideas, concerns, commitments, decisions, questions, and subtle details that matter later.

Historically, we relied heavily on memory and meeting notes.

Now, where appropriate and with proper disclosure and consent, we can capture transcripts and use AI to help turn those conversations into useful working information.

This changes the value of a meeting.

Instead of relying entirely on what someone remembered to write down, we have a richer record to review.

AI can help identify action items, recurring themes, unanswered questions, and relevant historical context.

But there's a distinction I consider essential.

A transcript is evidence of what was said.

An AI summary is an interpretation.

Those are not equal.

We've developed standards requiring AI-assisted meeting information to be reviewed before entering authoritative client records.

The original information needs to remain distinguishable from the AI's interpretation.

Because a small error in one summary can become a much larger problem if every subsequent system treats it as fact.

> THE LESSON
>
> **The conversation is an asset. But the quality of the record and the discipline of reviewing it determine whether that asset becomes useful.**

09

AI as a leadership sounding board

This has become one of my most personally valuable applications.

Running a business can be isolating.

Not every decision belongs in a team meeting.

Not every issue is something you want to discuss with employees, clients, or professional colleagues.

And sometimes what you need isn't an answer.

You need someone to challenge the question.

I've used AI extensively to examine business decisions, organizational problems, strategic options, and my own thinking.

One of the most important changes I've made is giving it permission to disagree with me.

In fact, I increasingly expect it.

I don't need another voice telling me that every idea is brilliant.

I need somebody willing to point out when I'm overcomplicating something, overlooking a risk, making assumptions, or confusing activity with progress.

I've also used behavioural frameworks and self-assessment to make the feedback more relevant to my own tendencies.

I know I can be a strong starter.

I also know that my enthusiasm for building things can sometimes outpace the discipline of finishing them.

AI has helped me recognize that tendency in real time.

And sometimes its most valuable contribution is telling me to stop.

Stop researching.

Stop refining.

Stop adding features.

Make a decision.

One lesson I've learned is that an adequate decision made at the right time can be more valuable than an exceptional decision made too late.

That doesn't mean accepting careless analysis.

It means distinguishing between uncertainty that matters and uncertainty that simply provides another reason to delay.

> THE LESSON
>
> **Don't train AI to agree with you. Train it to challenge you constructively.**

10

What didn't work

I think it's important to discuss the failures because they're part of the real experience.

AI is remarkably capable.

It's also remarkably capable of being wrong.

Confidently invented information

We've caught AI introducing names or details that weren't supported by source material.

In another case, we discovered that an apparently reasonable output contained information that hadn't been verified against the underlying records.

The problem wasn't that the answer looked ridiculous.

It looked convincing.

That makes these errors dangerous.

Our response has been to improve how we provide source information, verify outputs, and restrict AI from turning unverified information into authoritative records.

Overengineering

This has been another recurring issue.

Give AI a problem and it can produce an elaborate solution.

A framework.

A dashboard.

A tracker.

A governance process.

A review cadence.

Before long, you've built an administrative system to manage the original administrative problem.

I've had to repeatedly push back on complexity, including complexity AI helped create.

The fact that something can be built doesn't mean it should be.

Projects that didn't deserve to exist

We've explored AI agents and automation ideas that initially seemed promising but didn't survive further scrutiny.

Some required too much maintenance.

Some duplicated existing capabilities.

Others didn't solve a problem important enough to justify the work.

The correct decision was to stop rather than continue investing effort simply because we'd already started.

That's a useful result too.

AI doesn't know when you're wrong

Unless you create the right working relationship, AI can become a very sophisticated amplifier of your own assumptions.

If you begin with a flawed premise, it may help you build a compelling case around that premise.

I've learned to ask it to challenge the premise before working on the solution.

I've also experimented with using newer models to revisit previous decisions and look for omissions.

Those reviews reinforced the importance of treating prior AI work as revisable rather than authoritative.

Not everything should be automated

Some activities benefit from automation.

Others benefit from careful human attention.

And some should simply be eliminated.

The temptation is to measure success by the amount of work AI can perform.

I've increasingly come to measure it by how much unnecessary work disappears.

> THE LESSON
>
> **AI is not infallible. Build verification, restraint, and the willingness to abandon bad ideas into the way you work.**

11

Governance, privacy, and professional responsibility

Financial advisors operate in a trust business.

Clients share information that is deeply personal, financially significant, and often sensitive.

That responsibility doesn't disappear when technology changes.

It becomes more important.

Our approach is to treat AI as a support to professional judgment, not a substitute for it.

That means being deliberate about what information can be used, which systems are appropriate, how consent and disclosure are handled, and who has authority over the final output.

We also need to distinguish between public information, internal operating information, and confidential client information.

Not every AI service is suitable for every task.

A useful feature doesn't automatically justify giving a platform access to sensitive data.

Where financial planning, legal, tax, or compliance issues arise, qualified professionals retain responsibility for the work.

We don't allow an AI-generated answer to become an approved recommendation. A person with the authority and the accountability makes that call, every time.

None of this slows us down. It's what lets us move quickly without betting the relationship on a tool.

> THE LESSON
>
> **The trust is yours to keep. AI changes how the work gets done. It doesn't change who answers for it.**

12

Where this leaves me

Eighteen months in, the biggest change isn't a tool. It's a decision.

AI gave us capacity. The obvious move was to use it to take on more clients.

We went the other way. Fewer clients, far better.

A documented business that doesn't depend on my memory. Conversations I can be fully present for. Decisions made with more context and less friction.

That's the practice I wanted to build 27 years ago. I just didn't have the tools.

None of this is finished. We're still learning. If any of it is useful, take it.

Shea Sanche, CFP®

Founder, Insight Planning

Everything lives at sheasanche.com