

HARTLEY RESOURCES

AI Gave Me Back the One Thing I Started My Business For

Everyone's arguing about whether AI will save us or replace us. I think that's the wrong question.

By **DJ Hartley** · Founder, Hartley Resources

Everywhere I look, people are talking about AI. Some say it's going to replace jobs, some say it's the greatest invention ever, and some say we should be terrified. Personally, I think the truth is somewhere in the middle. I spend a lot of my time showing business owners how to use AI, and here's what I've noticed: the biggest gift AI gives us isn't better emails or faster marketing. It's time.

Remember Why You Started Your Business?

Most business owners didn't start a company because they wanted to work 70 hours a week. They started it for freedom — freedom to spend more time with family, to take vacations, to stop worrying about money.

For me, that reason has a name. I started Hartley Resources because my son is autistic, and I need to be available for him. When he's having a hard day or he's home sick, I want to be there — without asking anyone's permission, and without that awful guilt of calling out of work one more time. I didn't build a business in spite of my family. I built it for them.

Maybe your reason looks different, but I'd bet the heart of it is the same. And yet somehow, instead of freedom, we end up answering emails at 10:00 at night, working weekends, and

missing baseball games, dance recitals, and dinners because "there's just one more thing to finish." Sound familiar?

Now imagine getting five or even ten hours back every week. That's what AI is doing for many business owners right now.

You Don't Need a Huge Staff Anymore

Years ago, only big companies could afford experts. Need marketing? Hire an agency. Need a business consultant? Write a big check. Need someone to write content? Another expense. Most small businesses simply couldn't afford that.

Today, AI can help you brainstorm ideas, write emails, organize projects, create marketing, answer questions, and even help you think through difficult decisions. Is it perfect? No. Do you still need your own experience and common sense? Absolutely. But AI gives everyday business owners access to knowledge that used to be out of reach.

Maybe We Can All Leave Work a Little Earlier

We've all heard the joke about the CEO on the golf course while everyone else is buried in paperwork. Maybe AI changes that. Maybe the business owner gets home for dinner, and the employee doesn't spend Friday afternoon doing reports that AI can finish in ten minutes. Maybe we stop wearing "I'm so busy" like it's a trophy. Wouldn't that be nice?

But Here's the Part That Makes Me Think...

AI is becoming incredibly powerful, and the companies building it know that. In fact, the people creating AI are starting to ask some really big questions — not about what AI can do, but about what happens if it becomes so good that it changes the way millions of people work.

The CEO of Anthropic (the company behind Claude AI) recently said we need to start thinking about what happens if AI replaces a significant number of jobs. He believes we may eventually need new ways to help people through that transition, and has even talked about the possibility of AI companies helping fund solutions if large-scale job displacement becomes

a reality. OpenAI's CEO, Sam Altman, has shared a similar concern. He's said that if AI creates enormous wealth, that wealth shouldn't benefit only a handful of companies, and he's talked about finding ways to make sure the success of AI is shared more broadly across society.

The very people building this technology aren't just talking about making AI smarter. They're asking, "If AI changes the world, how do we make sure everyone benefits?"

And that question hits home for me. I also work part time at a homeless shelter, and it's changed how I see all of this. When you spend time with people who are one bad month away from losing everything — or who already have — you stop thinking about the economy as a chart on the news. You start thinking about faces. Those are the very people a wave of job loss would hit first and hardest, the ones with the least cushion to fall back on. So when the same companies building this technology start talking about ways to soften that blow and even out the economic playing field, I pay attention. I find it encouraging. It tells me they're not only thinking about building incredible technology — they're also thinking about the responsibility that comes with it. Does that mean they have all the answers? Not even close. But I think it's a conversation worth having.

So... Should We Be Scared?

I don't think fear is the answer, but I don't think blind excitement is either. Like every major invention before it, AI will create opportunities, and it will also create challenges. The important thing is that we keep asking good questions while learning how to use it responsibly.

Here's What I Believe

I don't see AI as something that's replacing people. I see it as something that helps people. It gives small businesses access to expertise they never could have afforded before. It helps employees spend less time doing repetitive work. It helps business owners stop wearing "busy" like a badge of honor.

And maybe — just maybe — it gives us back the one thing we can never buy: time. Time with our families. Time to take a vacation without checking our email every hour. Time to volunteer, to coach Little League, to finally enjoy the business we worked so hard to build.

AI is one of the most exciting technologies I've ever seen, and it's also one of the most powerful. That means we should embrace it, learn it, and use it wisely — while continuing to ask thoughtful questions about where it's taking us. Because in the end, technology shouldn't just make us more productive. It should help us live better lives.



DJ Hartley

Founder of Hartley Resources, helping small businesses put AI to work — so they can get back to what matters.