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SF TECH WEEK

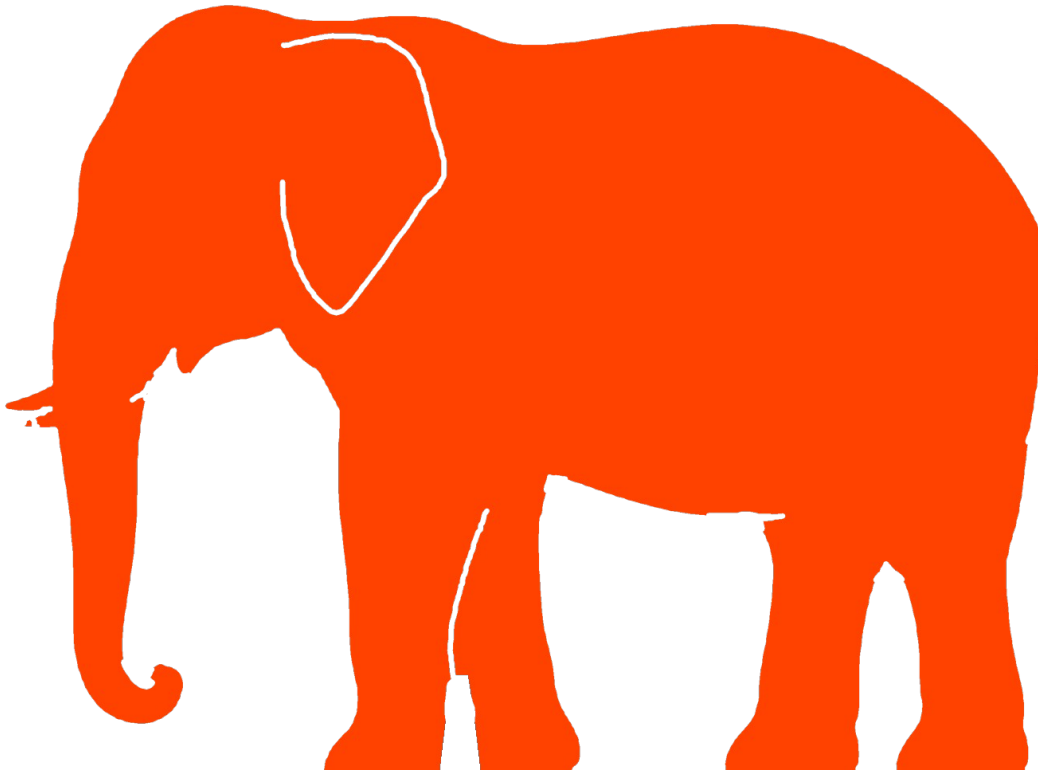
SF TECH WEEK · LIVE VIRTUAL FIRESIDE CHAT

The Elephant in the Algorithm

The people side of enterprise AI

Thursday 8 October 2026 · 10:00 to 10:45am PT · Virtual

Matt Perry, Co-Founder & CEO
Rob Cannon, PhD, Co-Founder & CPO



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WHERE WE ARE

Hysteria in both directions.

ONE CAMP

"The world is ending tomorrow."

THE OTHER CAMP

"This is the most amazing thing ever."

Nobody knows exactly what happens next. The best approach is preparation: lean in, and figure out how to harness it.

PERSPECTIVE

For AI, it's 1993.

The technology has arrived. The real work, and the real retraining, is only just beginning.

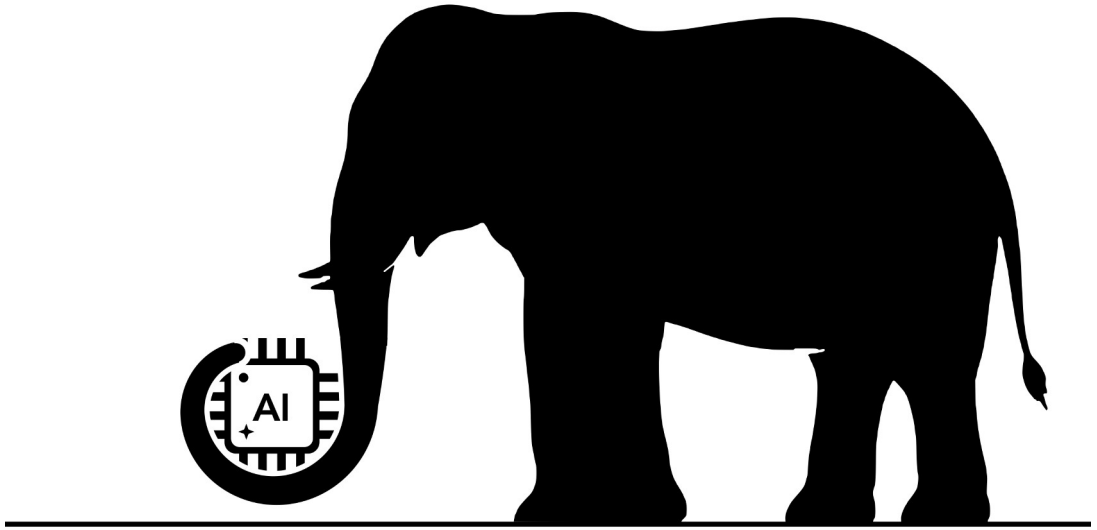
1993

THE GOOD NEWS

A powerful tool, only as good as what you bring to it.

Knowledge, experience, tweaking and crafting shape what comes back.

Left to its own devices, it won’t come up with the answer, especially in creative work. It needs to be a collaboration.



WHO WE ARE

Your hosts.

Matt Perry

Co-Founder & CEO, Average Robot

Thirty years in marketing and creative. In recent years, AI strategy and building AI solutions.

Rob Cannon, PhD

Co-Founder & CPO, Average Robot

Organizational psychologist. Studied at the University of Cambridge, PhD from the University of Sydney. More than twenty years guiding people through change, including ten years at Sony.

Together: co-authors of The Elephant in the Algorithm, and co-hosts of its podcast.

THE QUESTION FOR TODAY

AI is a people question.

So what do we do with it?

56%

of workers, the largest group, sit in what PwC calls the “engine room”: their skills aren’t scarce, and they’re not far along the AI learning curve.

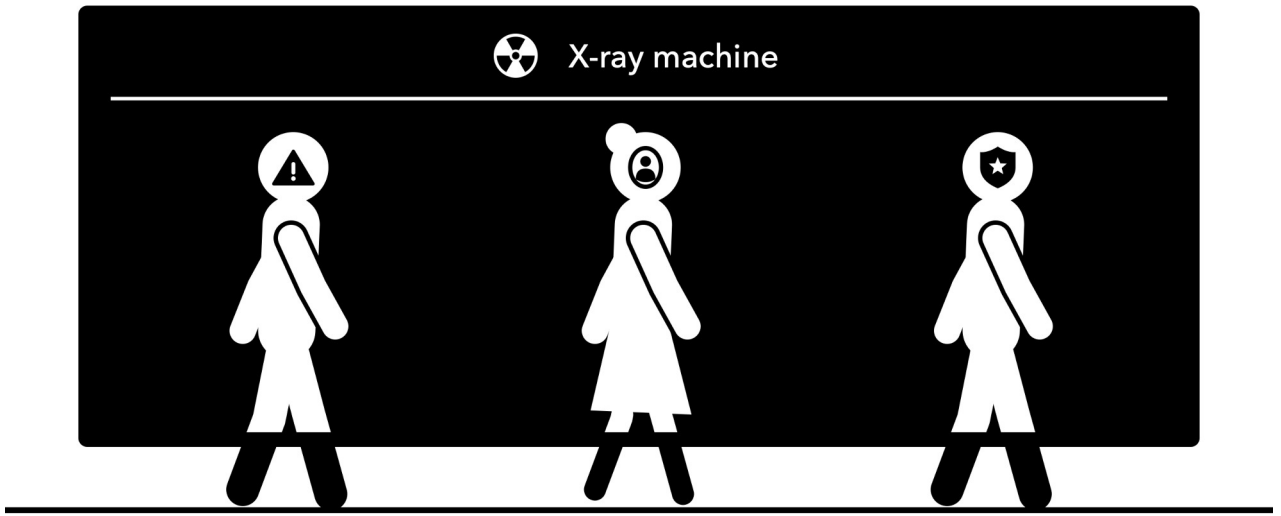
PwC, 2026 Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey: 49,364 workers in 48 countries and regions.

Source: PwC press release, 29 Sep 2026. https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2026/companies-risk-losing-ai-savvy-employees.html

THE RESISTANCE FRAMEWORK

Resistance comes in three kinds.

Deal with it by understanding what each kind is about.



01
Threat to self

02
Identity

03
Intelligent resistance

Five kinds of threat. AI can trigger every one.

The SCARF model, David Rock (2008)

S

Status

"Will my expertise still count when anyone can make a first draft?"

C

Certainty

"What will my job look like a year from now?"

A

Autonomy

"Who decides how I work now: me, or the rollout plan?"

R

Relatedness

"Will I still be doing this with people I trust?"

F

Fairness

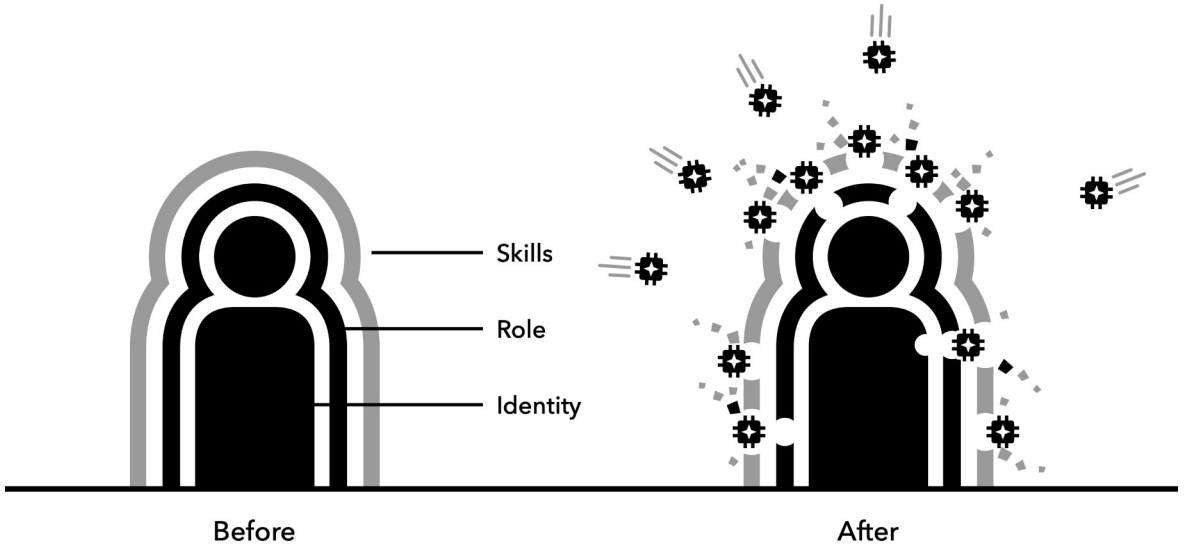
"Who keeps the time saved, and who carries the risk?"

“Where is my value?”

If my job can be automated, what am I even worth?

Professional identity runs deeper than role and skills. Roles and skills can change while identity holds.

An illustrator or a copywriter working with AI models uses slightly different skills in different ways, and is still an illustrator or a copywriter.



Sometimes resistance is your experts warning you.

Especially in creative work, pushback can mean what comes out of the machine isn't up to scratch. It may look good, and still be missing something:

- Authenticity
- Brand voice
- Meeting the client brief

Resistance is all data. This kind can be the most valuable.



WHAT LEADERS DO WITH IT

Listen for the warning signs.

01	Name the kind	Threat to self, identity, or intelligent resistance. Each one needs a different response.
02	Ask where it points	Where is it telling you to pay attention, fix something, or step in?
03	Keep the useful friction	Some resistance is protecting quality. Treat it as information, then act on it.

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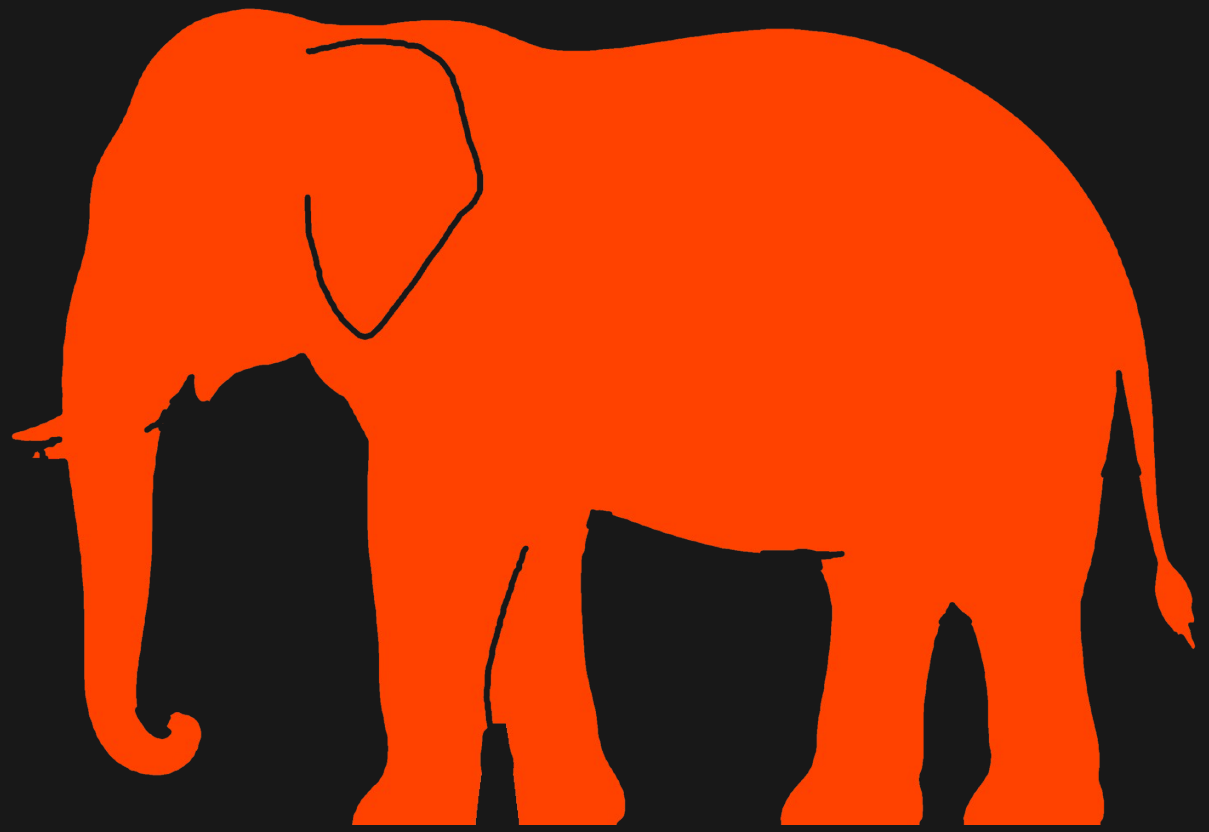

THE BOOK

The Elephant in the Algorithm

Matt Perry and Rob Cannon, PhD

Everything we talked about today, in full: the people side of enterprise AI.

Everything from today
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