# AI Didn't Lower the Value of Expertise. It Raised It.

*When execution becomes a commodity, judgment becomes the premium.*

By Sreenath Pillai — Founder & CEO, Vertikals

Every week someone asks me, with real worry, whether AI is about to make expertise worthless. It's the wrong question — and the honest answer is the opposite of the fear. AI didn't devalue expertise. It repriced it, upward.

## The economics are simple

When something becomes abundant, its complement becomes scarce — and scarce things command a premium. AI made one thing radically abundant: the *production of output*. Code, copy, designs, analyses, first drafts of nearly anything. When producing output is close to free, the bottleneck moves to the thing that was always harder — knowing *which* output is right. That's judgment, and its price just went up.

## What expertise actually is

We talk about expertise as if it's a stack of facts. It isn't; a model holds more facts than any of us ever will. Expertise is the stuff that only comes from being accountable for outcomes over time: pattern recognition for how things fail, taste for what "right" feels like, the instinct that something is off before you can prove it, and the discipline to know what to ignore.

A model can give you ten ways to do something. It can't tell you which one quietly wrecks you in six months — because it has never been on the hook in six months. That "on the hook" is where expertise is forged, and it's exactly what the model lacks.

## The ratio just flipped

The expert used to spend most of their time executing and only a sliver of it deciding — writing the thing, building the thing, formatting the thing. AI takes over the execution. Now that same person can spend most of their time on the judgment calls and let the hands handle the rest.

That's not a smaller role. It's the same scarce judgment applied to far more problems — a multiplier on exactly the person you were afraid of losing.

## Who's actually exposed

Here's the uncomfortable part, worth saying plainly. If your entire value was *execution speed* — you were fast at the mechanical part — then yes, AI competes with you directly, and you should move up the chain quickly: toward judgment, toward taste, toward owning outcomes and relationships.

The people who get *more* valuable in this world are the ones who can look at a confident, fluent, wrong answer and say "no." That is a senior skill, and it is worth more now than it has ever been.

## If you're running a company

Two things.

**First, "fire the experts, save money with AI" is a trap.** The experts are the judgment layer that makes AI output trustworthy. Cut them and you keep the hands, lose the brain, then spend a year wondering why output went up while quality fell off a cliff.

**Second, invest in expertise on purpose:**

- **Pair your experts with AI** instead of replacing them — you get leverage on your best judgment.
- **Capture their judgment into your systems** so it scales past the one person who holds it in their head.
- **Protect the apprenticeship pipeline.** Juniors become experts by doing the reps. If AI eats all the entry-level reps, you starve your own future senior bench. Design the work so people still climb.

The people who spent a career getting genuinely good at the hard thing are about to be worth more, not less. The tool that was supposed to replace them is the one that just turned their judgment into leverage.

Bet on them.

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