

How One Solo Counselor Used AI to Get Fridays Back

On paper, Leah's practice looked great.

She had a full caseload, a steady stream of referrals, and a waiting list that made her feel guilty every time she opened her email. Her clients liked her. Her work felt meaningful.

The problem was everything around the work.

Progress notes piled up until late at night. Insurance forms waited until the last possible moment. Referral letters ate entire evenings. Friday, which was supposed to be her "admin day," had quietly turned into an unpaid, eight-hour slog.

Leah wasn't burned out because of her sessions. She was burned out because of everything else.

When she finally tried using AI tools, it wasn't because she loved technology. It was because she wanted her Fridays back.

This is how she did it—without letting a robot anywhere near her actual therapy sessions.

The Breaking Point

Leah's week followed a pattern she didn't like to admit.

- **Monday:** Organized and hopeful, with a neat to-do list.
- **Tuesday–Thursday:** Sessions stacked, crises popped up, email piled up.
- **Friday:** No clients on the calendar "so I can catch up," followed by a full day of paperwork.

By Friday afternoon, Leah often had:

- A backlog of progress notes
- Several unpaid claims to chase
- At least one client still waiting on a summary letter or referral
- An inbox full of messages that needed more than a quick reply

She tried fixing it the usual ways.

- She stayed up late to "get ahead."
- She squeezed admin tasks into the ten minutes between sessions.
- She blocked time on her calendar for paperwork and then ignored the block when a client crisis came up.

Nothing stuck. The work wasn't hard. It was just endless.

One Friday, after writing almost identical emails to five different clients and still not getting to her notes, she finally said out loud, "I can't keep doing this."

That was her line in the sand.

Step 1: Choosing One Problem to Solve First

Leah didn't start with a grand plan. She started with one question:

“What boring task steals the most time from my week?”

When she looked honestly, the answer was clear: **email**.

She was rewriting the same phrases over and over:

- “Here’s how to get set up for telehealth.”
- “Here’s my cancellation policy and what that means for today’s session.”
- “Here’s what you can expect from our first meeting.”
- “Here’s how to request a superbill or documentation.”

None of these messages required deep clinical work. They just had to be:

- Clear
- Consistent
- Warm but firm when needed

So she decided:

“I’m going to stop writing these from scratch.”

If she could make email faster, she thought, maybe Friday wouldn’t feel so heavy.

Step 2: Building a Simple Template Library with a Little Help

Leah could have written all her templates by hand. But she was tired, and staring at a blank screen wasn’t helping.

So she used AI as a drafting assistant—not as an expert.

Her process looked like this:

1. Collect “real” emails

She pulled up past messages she had already sent: good, bad, and ugly.

For each type of email (welcome, telehealth instructions, cancellation, billing questions), she chose one or two versions that mostly worked.

2. Strip out personal details

She deleted names, dates, locations, and anything that could identify a client. What remained was the skeleton of the message.

3. Ask AI for a clearer version

She pasted the text into an AI tool and said something like:

“Rewrite this email so it’s clear, calm, and easy to understand at about an 8th-grade reading level. Keep the same meaning. I’m a counselor writing to an adult client. Don’t add anything new.”

4. Edit with her own voice

She read the result carefully. If something felt off—too casual, too stiff, too salesy—she changed it.

If the tool added something she wouldn’t normally say, she deleted it.

5. Save the final template

She copied the edited version into a place she could reach quickly:

- Email drafts folder
- Her EHR template system
- A simple document titled “Client Email Templates”

She repeated this for four main categories:

- New client welcome & intake instructions
- Telehealth setup and troubleshooting
- Cancellation and reschedule policy explanations
- “How to reach me / when I respond” boundaries

Within a weekend, she had a short library of messages that were:

- Clear and kind
- Aligned with her policies
- Ready to send with just a few edits

The next time she needed to send a tricky email, she didn’t start from scratch. She started from a template.

Step 3: Cleaning Up Administrative Writing, Not Clinical Notes

Email templates helped. But Leah still felt overwhelmed by “official” writing:

- Referral letters
- Progress summaries requested by clients
- Short documentation for schools or workplaces (with consent)

These messages made her nervous because they needed to sound precise and professional.

She did **not** want AI to invent any of this. But she realized it could help with presentation.

Her new rule:

“I’ll write the content. AI can help with clarity and structure.”

Her workflow:

1. She wrote a rough version of the letter in her own words, either inside her secure system or in a document that never left her control.
2. For anything she was allowed to anonymize, she removed names and details before using AI.
3. She pasted the text and asked:

“Please make this letter clearer and more organized. Keep the same meaning and do not add new information. Maintain a respectful, professional tone.”
4. She compared the original and revised versions, line by line.
5. She accepted changes that improved clarity and flow, and rejected anything that changed meaning.

The result: writing that sounded like her on a good day, without the brain fog.

She still owned the content. AI just helped her tidy it.

Step 4: Drawing Hard Lines Around Clinical Work

Leah knew that AI tools can’t be treated like colleagues, no matter how confident they sound. So she set some firm boundaries.

She decided AI would never:

- Draft diagnoses
- Decide treatment plans
- Write full clinical notes
- Communicate directly with clients
- Handle crises or risk situations

She also decided she would not:

- Put any client-identifying information into generic, non-HIPAA-aligned tools
- Copy and paste full session notes into AI
- Use AI to “shortcut” documentation she was responsible for

If she wouldn’t hand a task to an intern unsupervised, she wouldn’t hand it to AI.

This kept the line clear:

- **Clinical judgment, ethics, and notes** → always Leah’s job.
- **Admin writing, organization, and formatting** → AI could help, within limits.

Step 5: Reclaiming Fridays, On Purpose

After a few weeks of using templates and AI-assisted cleanup, Leah paused to see what had actually changed.

She noticed:

- She spent less time dreading email, because most messages had a starting point.
- Referral letters and summaries took one pass instead of three.
- Fewer clients wrote back confused about policies or telehealth, because the instructions were clearer.

That was enough to try a bigger experiment: **changing her Fridays**.

She made two decisions:

1. **Two Fridays per month would be completely off.**

No clients, no admin, no “just one more letter.”

2. **The remaining Fridays would be half days.**

Mornings for light admin and planning; afternoons reserved for rest or personal errands.

At first, she cheated. On her “off” Fridays, she still checked email “just in case.” She still opened her laptop when she felt anxious about falling behind.

But because so many routine messages now used templates, and because letters were easier to clean up, the admin pile simply didn’t grow as fast. There was less to fear.

By the second month, she realized something important:

“If I keep my systems simple, the work stays at a size I can manage.”

For the first time in a long time, she had stretches of Friday where nothing was urgent—and no part of her business was on fire.

What Other Solo Practitioners Can Steal from Leah

Leah’s exact tools and prompts don’t matter. Her thinking does.

You can use the same approach even if you hate technology or feel nervous about AI.

Here’s a simple way to start.

1. Pick one recurring writing task

Look for something you do at least once a week:

- New client welcome emails
- Telehealth instructions
- Cancellation policy explanations

- Simple referral updates

Choose the one that annoys you most.

2. Write it once like you would say it in person

Open a blank document and write the message in your natural voice:

- Imagine you're talking to the client in session.
- Avoid jargon and legalese in the first pass.
- Say what they actually need to know.

This becomes your raw material.

3. Let AI help with clarity, not content

Paste your draft into an AI tool and say:

"Please make this email clearer and easier to read at about an 8th-grade level. Keep the same meaning. Do not add new information. This is from a therapist to an adult client."

Then:

- Reject anything that feels wrong or off-brand.
- Adjust phrasing so it sounds like you.
- Make sure it still matches your policies and ethics.

4. Turn it into a reusable template

Save the final version where you can grab it fast:

- As a draft email with a clear subject, like "Template – New Client Welcome"
- Inside your EHR's messaging system
- In a simple document you keep open during admin time

Next time that situation comes up, you:

- Open the template
- Fill in the client's name and details
- Send, instead of rewriting the whole thing.

5. Review the impact after a few weeks

After three or four weeks, ask yourself:

- Did this save me actual time?
- Did it reduce stress?

- Did it create any new problems or confusion?

If it helped, you can repeat the process with one more type of email or document. If it didn't, you can tweak or drop the template.

The point is not to "use AI more." The point is to use **less of your energy on tasks that don't need your full clinical attention.**

The Quiet Win

Leah didn't turn her practice into a tech startup. She didn't automate therapy. She didn't let a bot write her notes.

What she did was quieter:

- She stopped rewriting the same emails over and over.
- She let AI help tidy administrative writing she had already created.
- She drew clear lines around what only she could do as a counselor.
- She used the time and energy she saved to reclaim part of her week.

For her, that meant getting Fridays back.

For you, it might mean:

- Evenings that don't end in paperwork
- One less day of "just catching up"
- More room in your schedule for rest, supervision, or your own life

You don't have to love AI, and you don't have to use it everywhere. But if you use it carefully, with clear boundaries, it can become what it should have been in the first place:

Not a replacement for you, but a small, quiet helper that takes the edge off the parts of the work that were never the reason you became a therapist.