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WHY STARTUP WINS IN AI ERA ?

1. AI and Jobs: The "Leverage" Argument

Levie's main point about jobs isn't just that AI won't replace them, but that it will **augment** them, giving employees massive leverage.

- **The Concept: Automating "Unstrategic" Work.** Think about a typical office job. A huge amount of time is spent on tasks that are necessary but don't directly contribute to the company's biggest goals. This includes things like summarizing meeting notes, finding information in old documents, filling out standard reports, or categorizing customer feedback. Levie calls this "unstrategic" work.
- **The "AI Agent" as a Super-Intern.** He imagines a future where every employee has AI agents working for them. These agents will handle the unstrategic tasks. For example, an AI could automatically analyze all incoming sales contracts, flag non-standard clauses, and summarize the key terms for the human lawyer, who can then focus on the complex negotiation strategy.
- **The Result: Increased Productivity and Growth.** When employees are freed from this busywork, they can focus on high-impact activities: talking to more customers, developing new product ideas, and solving bigger problems. This makes each employee far more productive. As he says, a 50-person company can operate with the impact of a 500-person company. This accelerated growth, in his view, will create *more* demand for human workers, not less.

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2. Cloud vs. AI Transformation: The Battle for Belief vs. Implementation

Levie draws a powerful contrast between the rise of cloud computing (which Box was a part of) and the current AI revolution.

- **The Cloud Era (Early 2000s):** The biggest challenge was **convincing people to believe** in the cloud. Businesses were scared. They asked: "Is it secure? Can I trust my data to be on someone else's server? Is the internet fast enough for this?". Companies like Box had to spend years educating the market and overcoming skepticism.
- **The AI Era (Today):** The situation is the complete opposite. Thanks to personal experiences with tools like ChatGPT, **everyone already believes** in the power of AI. The challenge is no longer about belief; it's about **implementation**. The new questions are: "How do we make AI safe? How can we make it reliable and prevent it from making things up? How do we connect it to our company's private data without security risks?".

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3. Unstructured Data: Turning a Digital Attic into a Goldmine

This is perhaps the most important technical concept Levie discusses.

- **What is Unstructured Data?** Imagine all the data in a company. A small fraction is **structured**: neatly organized in rows and columns in a database (like a spreadsheet of sales numbers). The vast majority (around 80-90%) is **unstructured**: it's the messy stuff. This includes everything from emails, Word documents, PDFs, legal contracts, and presentations to images, videos, and audio files.
- **The Old Problem:** Traditional software is great at analyzing structured data but terrible at understanding unstructured data. It could *store* a PDF, but it couldn't *read and understand* the text inside it. This meant that the most valuable information in a company was effectively locked away in a digital attic, impossible to search or analyze at scale.
- **AI's Superpower:** Modern AI, especially Large Language Models (LLMs), is built to understand human language and context. It can read, summarize, and answer questions about all of this unstructured data. This transforms that messy data from a simple storage problem into a **massive strategic asset**. A company can now ask questions like, "What are the common risks identified across all of our contracts from the last five years?" and get an instant answer.

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4. Startup Opportunities: Finding the New "Nouns and Verbs"

Levie uses a clever metaphor to describe where the biggest startup opportunities lie.

- **The Idea:** He says new technologies create new "nouns" (things we can build) and "verbs" (actions we can perform). Before the internet, the only way to "book a flight" (verb) was through a "travel agent" (noun). The internet created new nouns and verbs: you could now "book online" (new verb) using a website like "Expedia" (new noun).
- **Applying it to AI:** Levie argues AI is creating a new wave of nouns and verbs for business. A task that used to require a "human consultant" (noun) to "perform a compliance audit" (verb) can now be done by an **"AI agent" (new noun)** that can **"continuously monitor for risks" (new verb)**. The biggest opportunities are in creating these new AI-native solutions for professional work that never had dedicated software before.

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5. Business Models: From "Per Seat" to "Per Task"

The way companies pay for software is about to fundamentally change.

- **The Old Model: SaaS (Software as a Service).** This is the dominant model today. You pay a subscription fee for each employee who uses the software. It's often

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called a "per-seat" license. For example, a company pays Microsoft a certain amount per employee, per month for access to Office 365.

- **The New Model: Consumption-Based.** With AI agents performing tasks, it no longer makes sense to charge based on the number of human users. Instead, companies will charge for the **volume of work the AI performs**. This is a "consumption" model, similar to how you pay for electricity—you only pay for what you use. A company might pay based on how many invoices the AI processes, how many lines of code it writes, or how many customer service tickets it resolves. This model is powerful because as the cost of AI technology goes down, the profit margins for these companies can go way up.

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6. The "Core vs. Context" Principle

Levie explains why large companies won't just build all this AI technology themselves, creating a huge opportunity for startups.

- **The Concept:** Every business has two types of activities:
  - **Core:** This is the company's unique, value-creating function. For Disney, it's creating beloved characters and stories. For a pharmaceutical company, it's discovering new drugs. This is where a company should focus all its innovation.
  - **Context:** This is everything else that's necessary to run the business but isn't unique to it. This includes HR, accounting, IT support, and legal paperwork.
- **The Strategy:** Smart companies focus their resources on being the best in the world at their **core** and buy best-in-class solutions for their **context**. Disney won't build its own accounting software; it will buy it from a company that specializes in it.
- **The AI Opportunity:** The same logic applies to AI. A company like Disney will build custom AI to help its animators (core), but it will *buy* AI software from startups to analyze its legal contracts (context). Building everything in-house is too slow, expensive, and risky.