

THE AI-NATIVE PLAYBOOKS · Nº 2

Coaching Lean: The AI-Native Coach's Playbook

Scaling transformation when AI does the diagnosis

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CHAPTER 1

Assessment was never the moat

*If a machine can assess any canvas, assessment was never your moat.
Transformation is.*

CHAPTER 1

Assessment was never the moat

When Steve sits down across from Mary, he is eighteen months into building a product in stealth — and he has never once talked to a customer. He’s panicking about a competitor and hunting for the killer feature that will save him. Mary doesn’t hand him one. She asks a single question — “Have you talked to them?” — and watches him realize he’s been building in a vacuum. That’s the whole job: not knowing more than the founder, but asking the question that moves them. (Mary and Steve are the coaching parable at the heart of Coaching Lean, from Ash Maurya’s *The Innovator’s Bias*.)

For years, a coach’s scarce, billable skill was *diagnosis*. Read the canvas, spot the weak link, score the model, write the feedback. It was slow, and it made you the bottleneck — every founder queued behind your review.

AI just collapsed the cost of that work to zero.

LEANSpark now gives every founder the same seven-dimension read you used to grind out by hand, one founder at a time — except now every founder gets it at once, in seconds. Which raises the obvious question every coach is quietly asking: if a machine can assess any canvas, what’s the coach for?

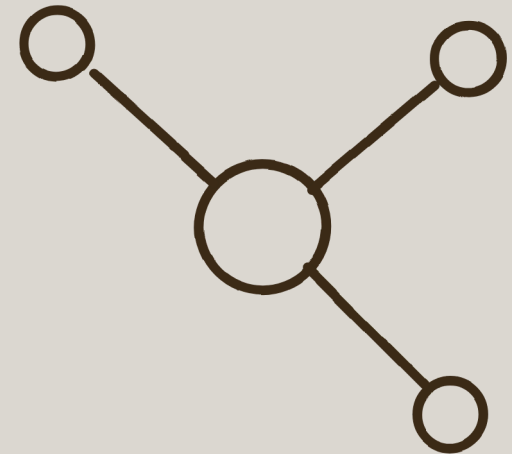
The deflationary truth. If a machine can assess any canvas, assessment was never your moat — transformation was. AI didn’t replace the coach. It removed the ceiling on how many founders one coach can transform.

This is exactly the architecture Coaching Lean was built on: **founders learn the methodology, coaches facilitate the transformation, and AI automates the coaching patterns that scale.** Hand the mechanical layer — baselining, scoring, synthesis, feedback — to LEANSpark. Keep the human layer: the one constraint, the hard conversation, the cadence, the judgment of when to push and when to hold.

This playbook walks the three levels of the coaching journey, re-grounded for that world:

- **Level 1 — Coaching Business Model Design.** Get a founder to a testable model and a named constraint — without solving it for them.
- **Level 2 — Coaching Problem/Solution Fit.** Hold the cadence that gets them out of the building and into evidence.
- **Level 3 — Coaching to Fit & Portfolio.** Scale the founder to traction — and scale yourself to a cohort.

The Mary Method™ runs through all three: **diagnosis before prescription, questions over answers, evidence over opinions, capability over dependency.**



CHAPTER 2

The coach's job didn't change — the bottleneck did

From 'I review every canvas' to 'I orchestrate transformation across a cohort.'

CHAPTER 2

The coach's job didn't change — the bottleneck did

The coach's job was always transformation — moving a founder from where they are to where the evidence says they should be. What changed is the bottleneck. It used to be *you*: your hours, your review queue, your one-at-a-time feedback. Now AI takes that off your plate. Picture two seats at your table: AI takes one — the assessor's — and the other stays yours, the work only a coach can do.

Seat one: the assessor who never sleeps

The mechanical work — baselining a team, scoring the seven dimensions, synthesizing a stack of interviews, drafting specific feedback on a vague canvas — is exactly what LEANSpark now does, instantly, for every founder in your cohort. This is the one meta-skill you can finally delegate: *use standard tools to baseline teams*. You walk into every session already knowing where each founder stands.

Seat two: the work only a coach can do

That leaves you the meta-skills a machine can't perform — the irreplaceable human craft:

- **Expose the one constraint** — pick the single thing that matters now.

- **Judo, not Sumo** — meet resistance by redirecting it, not fighting it.
- **Establish a cadence** — the ritual that turns intention into motion.
- **Tough love** — the hard truth a founder is paying not to hear from a chatbot.
- **Socratic teaching** — the question that makes them discover it themselves.

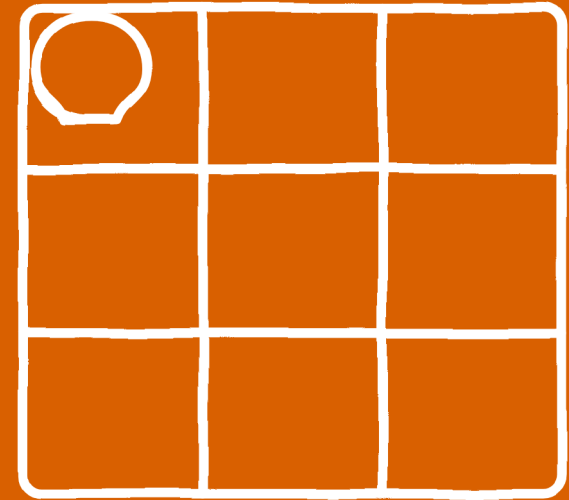
The single-question test. If AI got ten times better tomorrow, would your work become unnecessary, or more valuable? A coach who only gives feedback: unnecessary. A coach who drives transformation: more valuable. Coach toward the second.

Your cockpit: running founders at scale

The founder's operations team is LEANSpark's experiments and sprints. Yours is the **org-admin portal** — the cockpit for running many founders without losing any of them.

YOUR JOB AS COACH	REACH FOR...
Knowing who needs you this week	The triage-first Dashboard (sort by risk)
Standing up a class or accelerator	Cohorts + founder-led team formation
Forming and funding teams	Teams, Invitations, per-founder Credits
Watching runway across the cohort	Credits (allocation, burn, runway)
Seeing where each founder is stuck	The 7-dimension Diagnostic , per founder

For program & accelerator leads. Read “coach” as “program director” and “cohort” as “your batch.” The mechanics are identical — you’re triaging a portfolio, funding teams, and spending scarce human attention where it moves the needle. The stages, moves, and tools all transfer.



CHAPTER 3 • LEVEL 1

Coaching Business Model Design

Get a founder to a testable model and a named constraint — without solving it for them.

LEVEL 1 • CLC

Coaching Business Model Design

Every founder arrives the same way Steve did: in love with a solution, certain about the problem, and ready to build. He showed up with forty-seven planned features and a competitor he was sure would bury him. Mary didn't debate the features — she asked which *one* would make someone pull out a credit card, and he couldn't answer. Your job in Level 1 isn't to correct the founder; it's to get their model out of their head, onto one page, and into a form reality can test. Coaching Lean Certification (CLC) is where you learn to do that without ever handing over the answer.

The goal

A founder who can state a clear, coherent model and name its single riskiest assumption — and who got there by their own discovery, not your prescription. The Mary Method line: *diagnosis before prescription*. You diagnose; they decide.

The coaching challenges

Perfecting all nine boxes. They want to get every part of the canvas right at once. Your move is to expose the *one* constraint and make the sprint about that alone. **Falling for the solution.** They'll defend the thing they want to build — Steve's

obsession with his competitor was really this in disguise. Don't argue it down; redirect (Judo, not Sumo). **Meeting them where they are.** Start with what they *want* (the canvas), not what they *need* (the traction roadmap). Earn the harder work.

How LEANSpark helps

Baseline the whole cohort before you meet anyone

The situation: You've got twelve founders and two hours. You can't read twelve canvases cold.

► THE MOVE — USE STANDARD TOOLS TO BASELINE TEAMS

Don't spend your session diagnosing. Walk in already knowing each founder's scores and binding constraint, and spend your scarce time on the conversation only you can have.

► LEANSPARK DOES IT FOR YOU

Runs the 7-dimension Business Model Diagnostic for every founder in the cohort and ranks each one's failing gate — your dashboard opens to a sorted list (Founder 3: desirability 2/5, binding constraint flagged) before you say a word.

► THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK

"Your weakest dimension is desirability. Before I tell you what the score says — where do *you* think this model is most likely to be wrong?"

Expose the one constraint

The situation: A founder is polishing channels and pricing while their problem is still a guess.

▶ **THE MOVE — EXPOSE THE ONE CONSTRAINT**

Refuse to let them work on everything. Find the single assumption that, if false, sinks the whole model — and make that the only thing this sprint is about.

▶ **LEANS PARK DOES IT FOR YOU**

Surfaces the riskiest assumption from the Diagnostic and pins it to the canvas, so the constraint stays visible all sprint instead of getting lost.

▶ **THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK**

"If only one of these could be true for this to work, which one — and what would have to be true for *you* to believe it?"

Work with the resistance, not against it

The situation: They're certain about the competition and the solution, and don't want to hear otherwise. (Steve was sure his rival would bury him — until Mary asked how many people just track everything in a spreadsheet.)

▶ **THE MOVE — BALANCE NEEDS AND WANTS — JUDO, NOT SUMO**

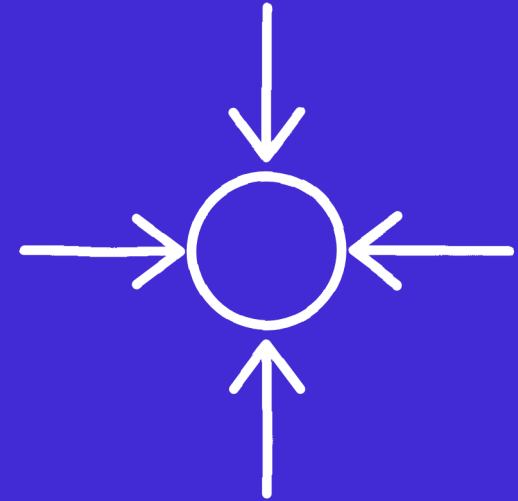
Don't push back on the solution head-on; you'll lose. Agree to test it — and let the test, not you, be the thing that changes their mind.

▶ **LEANS PARK DOES IT FOR YOU**

Turns the founder's own claim into a falsifiable hypothesis on the canvas and a ready-to-run experiment, so the disagreement becomes evidence instead of opinion.

▶ **THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK**

"Great — let's prove it. What would we have to see from real customers for you to bet the next ninety days on this?"



CHAPTER 4 • LEVEL 2

Coaching Problem/Solution Fit

Hold the cadence that gets a founder out of the building and into evidence.

LEVEL 2 • CAC

Coaching Problem/Solution Fit

Level 1 produced a testable model. Level 2 — Coach Advanced Certification (CAC) — is where founders go to meet reality, and where most of them try not to. Remember that Steve spent eighteen months building without talking to a single customer; that's the default gravity, not the exception. Talking to customers is uncomfortable; building *feels* like progress. Your job is to hold the cadence that keeps them in evidence, and to read the human signal underneath the data.

The goal

A founder who has stopped guessing and started learning — running customer discovery on a rhythm, mapping the Customer Forces, and earning real commitments. The lens is the four forces of switching — **push, pull, friction, inertia** — plus the **switching trigger**: the specific moment the old way failed badly enough to make them act. A switch only happens when push plus pull beats friction plus inertia; the trigger is the spark that sets it off, and it's the single most predictive thing a founder brings back from an interview. Coach them to hunt for it — a switch story with no trigger is usually a wish.

What changes when AI does the synthesis

LEANSpark transcribes the recordings and writes the Customer Forces Story — the midnight synthesis a coach used to do by hand. That frees you for the two things it can't do: holding the founder accountable to actually talk to people, and reading what they're avoiding in what they heard.

Establish a cadence and defend it

The situation: A founder keeps “almost” scheduling interviews and drifting back to the build.

► THE MOVE — ESTABLISH A CADENCE

The rhythm is the intervention. Two-week experiment cycles, a weekly check-in, a pivot-or-persevere call. Don't negotiate the cadence — protect it.

► LEANSARK DOES IT FOR YOU

Runs the discovery sprints on a 14-day PDCA rhythm and tracks every interview, so the cohort's progress (or stall) is visible to you without chasing anyone.

► THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK

"You've had two weeks. How many real conversations — not 'reached out,' actually talked to? Let's look at why that number is what it is."

Read past the data to what they're avoiding

The situation: The interviews are “all positive” — which usually means they heard what they wanted.

▶ **THE MOVE — FOCUS ON THE RIGHT QUESTIONS VS. BEING RIGHT**

A wall of confirming evidence is a red flag, not a win. Point them at the disconfirming column and ask whether the asymmetry is the data — or the wish.

▶ **LEANS PARK DOES IT FOR YOU**

Lays the supporting evidence next to the disconfirming evidence across all their interviews, so the imbalance is impossible to hide from.

▶ **THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK**

"Every story here supports you. Which conversation made you the most uncomfortable — and what did you do with it?"

Hold the line on commitment

The situation: The founder is thrilled by a pipeline of “that’s really interesting.”

▶ **THE MOVE — TOUGH LOVE**

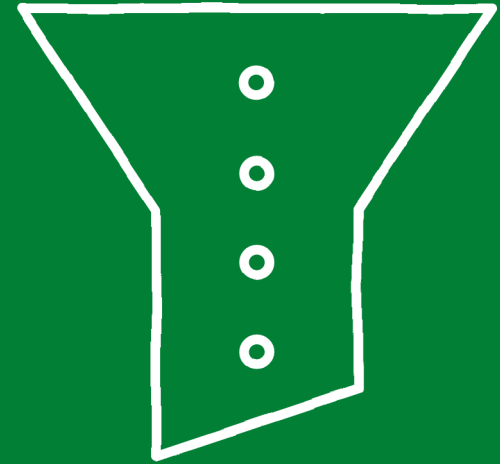
A soft yes is a no. Don’t let enthusiasm stand in for evidence. The commitment — money, a signed letter, a deposit — is the validation; the conversation isn’t.

▶ **LEANS PARK DOES IT FOR YOU**

Tracks every pitch outcome and the commitment rate, so “interested” and “committed” never blur together on the board.

▶ **THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK**

"Interested is free. What did anyone actually give up — time, money, reputation — to be in this?"



CHAPTER 5 • LEVEL 3

Coaching to Fit & Portfolio

Scale a founder to traction — and scale yourself to a cohort.

LEVEL 3 • CMC

Coaching to Fit & Portfolio

Level 3 — Coach Mastery Certification (CMC) — is where two things scale at once: the founder, from first customers toward a repeatable Customer Factory, and *you*, from a handful of founders to a portfolio. This is the level AI changes most, because the cockpit is what lets one coach hold many founders without dropping any.

The goal

Founders with a repeatable Customer Factory — and a coaching practice that runs on triage, not heroics. The Mary Method endgame is *capability over dependency*: the founders you coach best are the ones who stop needing you — the way Steve eventually walked out of his sessions running his own play.

Triage is the new coaching

You can't give twelve founders equal attention, and you shouldn't. The art is *right action, right time* — knowing which

founder needs the hard conversation this week and which one just needs to be left alone to run.

Triage the portfolio

The situation: Twelve teams, one of you, and a Monday morning.

► THE MOVE — RIGHT ACTION, RIGHT TIME

Don't coach by calendar; coach by need. Spend your hours on the founders where a conversation changes the trajectory, and trust the system to watch the rest.

► LEANSPARK DOES IT FOR YOU

Opens Monday to a ranked queue — three founders flagged red (one stalled nine days, one's commitment rate flatlined, one out of runway in two weeks), the rest green — so your scarce hours auto-route to the four conversations that actually move the needle.

► THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK

"Of everyone on this board, who will most regret it in a month if I don't talk to them today?"

Stack the reward loops

The situation: A founder is grinding with no sense of progress and starting to deflate.

► THE MOVE — STACK REWARD LOOPS

Transformation needs wins. Celebrate the right milestones, not vanity metrics. Build momentum the LEAN DIET way: discovery, insights, experiments, traction.

► LEANSPARK DOES IT FOR YOU

Tracks each founder's traction milestones and surfaces the LEAN DIET wins — a validated insight, a real commitment, a retained cohort — each cycle, so momentum is visible and stalls get caught early.

► THE QUESTION ONLY YOU CAN ASK

"What's the smallest real win we can put on the board this week — and what did it teach us?"

The coach's moat. If AI can assess any canvas, your edge isn't the assessment. It's the accumulated relationship and the trace — every constraint you exposed, every commitment you held them to, the judgment of when to push. A founder can get feedback anywhere. They stay for the transformation, and for the person who won't let them lie to themselves.



CHAPTER 6

Same craft, new leverage

Your craft didn't change. AI removed the ceiling on how many founders you can transform.

CHAPTER 6

Same craft, new leverage

The coach's craft hasn't changed: move a founder from where they are to where the evidence says they should be. What changed is the leverage. The work that used to cap you — the one-at-a-time diagnosis and feedback — is now done by the machine, instantly, for everyone. So the rules shift where the constraints loosened:

- **Stop competing with the assessment.** It's free now; your value is the human layer the machine can't reach.
- **Walk in already knowing.** The diagnosis is done before you arrive — spend the session on the conversation, not the read-up.
- **Triage replaces heroics.** One coach can hold a whole cohort: right action, right time, and let the dashboard

watch the rest.

- **The relationship is the moat.** Founders can get feedback anywhere; they stay for capability over dependency, and the trace stays with you.

I used to think a coach's value was knowing more about the model than the founder. It never was. Mary's gift to Steve wasn't a better answer — it was the question that made him see his own. He stopped polishing forty-seven features, cut the product down to a single email course he could ship himself, and later said he'd saved six months and fifty thousand dollars by spending two hours getting his model straight. AI can give the answers now. It still can't ask the question that got him there. That's the job. It just stopped having a ceiling.



CHAPTER 7

Resources

Build your practice on LEANSpark. Go deeper on the method.

CHAPTER 7

Resources

Run your cohort on LEANSpark

- **Walk into Monday already knowing who's at risk** — the org-admin portal's triage-first dashboard sorts your whole cohort by need, with per-founder credits, runway, and burn.
- **Stand up an accelerator or a classroom in an afternoon** — founder-led formation: each founder gets their own workspace, and you build the cohort around them.
- **Baseline every founder before you meet them** — the 7-dimension Business Model Diagnostic runs for the whole cohort, so no session ever starts cold.
- **Let the rhythm and the evidence run themselves** — 14-day PDCA sprints and cross-interview Insights, handled, so your time goes to the conversation.

Set up your cockpit at leanspark.ai — and run your first cohort on the portal.

The craft, in full

The seven dimensions LEANSpark scores for you, so you don't have to: **Desirability, Viability, Feasibility, Defensibility, Clarity, Mission, Timing**. And the ten meta-skills it can't touch — the human craft CLC, CAC, and CMC train:

- **Use Standard Tools to Baseline Teams** — start every session already knowing where each founder stands.

- **Expose the One Constraint** — name the single thing that matters now.
- **Balance Needs and Wants** — start with what they want, earn the work they need.
- **Judo, not Sumo** — meet resistance by redirecting it, not fighting it.
- **Establish a Cadence** — the ritual that turns intention into motion.
- **Focus on the Right Questions** — over the urge to be right.
- **Tough Love** — the hard truth a founder is paying not to hear from a chatbot.
- **Socratic Teaching** — the question that makes them discover it themselves.
- **Right Action, Right Time** — coach by need, not by calendar.
- **Stack Reward Loops** — make real progress visible and worth celebrating.

Go deeper on the method

- **Coaching Lean Certification** — CLC, CAC, and CMC: the Mary Method™, the ten meta-skills above, and supervised practice (“find your first Steve”).
- *Running Lean* and *The AI-Native Founder's Playbook* (No. 1 in this series) — what your founders are learning, so you can coach it.

- The Demand Validation Playbook and Value Delivery Process course tracks.

The levels at a glance

LEVEL	CERTIFICATION	YOU LEARN TO COACH...
1 — Business Model Design	CLC	a founder to a testable model and a named constraint
2 — Problem/Solution Fit	CAC	the cadence and discovery that turn guesses into evidence
3 — Fit & Portfolio	CMC	scaling a founder to traction — and yourself to a cohort



Coaching Lean is a methodology of LEANSTACK / Ash Maurya. LEANSpark gives coaches the leverage to scale it.

leanspark.ai