



# AI Ignition

## Ignite your AI curiosity with Brian Solis

**Beena Ammanath (Beena):** Hi, everyone. Welcome to *AI Ignition*. My name is Beena Ammanath. I'm the executive director of the Deloitte AI Institute Global. And today on *AI Ignition*, we have Brian Solis, a world-renowned digital anthropologist, award-winning author, and a futurist who serves as the head of global innovation at ServiceNow.

Brian, thank you so much for joining us in today's show, and I'm excited to having this conversation with you. Let's start with a little bit about your background, your journey so far. You are a leading voice in AI today, and I would love to share with our audience. What's your journey been like?

**Brian Solis (Brian):** Oh, Beena, thank you for this opportunity. I don't even know where to start. It's been, it's been a bunch of Ctrl-Alt-Deletes, I think for all of us. With every technology revolution, there has been something new to learn and a whole lot to unlearn. And I started my career in Silicon Valley, in technology, back in the '90s. And it was early on then that I realized that one of the things that Silicon Valley—one of the few things that Silicon Valley—wasn't good at doing, at least at the time, was casting a human lens on technology. That's when I decided to adapt the field of anthropology to digital studies and to research how technology was affecting behaviors, at every level, whether that was in the context of consumerism or in the context of users or in the context of employees or students, teachers, etc.

And I wrote research forecasting where those behaviors could evolve. And I advised companies to design the types of either go-to-market strategies or technologies that were going to either keep up with or get ahead of these evolutions as we saw them. And then, along the way, I realized that there was an opportunity to play that out in future scenarios, as to what markets could look like or what opportunities could look like or what business transformation could look like.

And also started writing research and books and then speeches and advisory on all of these things, and that—not to give you my whole CV, but that—was the most impactful time of my career, because being partnered with thinkers, and publishers like that, really put us in a place—in a global place—that allowed our research and our insights to actually influence the evolution and future of business transformation. And I'll never forget that. And now, here I am as the head of global innovation at ServiceNow and having a lot of fun.

**Beena:** Yeah. So, you know, I love the fact that you've been part of this tech journey for a while. And so in your view, why has AI sparked such deep anxiety around worker displacement, especially compared to past waves of automation or technology changes that we've seen?

**Brian:** Oh, I don't even know where to start, Beena! We've had some amazing conversations about this already, and I can't pretend to try to re-create them, but I will tell you that since we spoke last, I watched this video with Geoffrey Hinton, who's often considered the Godfather of AI, and he was with Steve Bartlett, the host of Diary of a CEO. And it was probably one of the most sobering conversations I've witnessed in a long time to the point where I had to stop what I was doing and record a video with my reaction, and I never do that. And he forecasted all of the jobs that we were going to lose. And he also basically painted a grim picture for the future of humanity.

I decided to think about why conversations like that, of course, to answer your question, panic everybody. Because, as a futurist, that would be one of the scenarios you have to plan for. And you have to plan for those certain aspects of timelines as to when these things can happen and to what extent, and then what are the resulting impacts, so that you could plan ahead for that.

And perhaps it's that discipline combined with optimism—which I'm a hopeless optimist—I want to reverse engineer those potential scenarios to help people better understand the role that they can play in defining their own future, defining their own opportunities. And for the most part, many people are still trying to understand what it is, how it works, and how they can collaborate with Generative AI in order to even get work done today, let alone in the future. And the people who are running organizations—and I'll stop right after this—people who are running organizations also don't have answers to what the other side of this looks like, and so they're automating. They're using AI in very limited capacities. But very few—and I know you can appreciate this—very few are reimagining what their future organization, their future role of leadership, the role of their employees, can look like in partnership with artificial intelligence.

**Beena:** So true. And you know, Brian, a large portion of our audience are actually C-suite and executive leaders from across functions in an organization. So, you know, going a little bit deeper on the opportunities, what insights can you share with leaders on identifying and seizing opportunities to drive that innovation before going deep in their journey?

**Brian:** I would love to say so much in so few minutes, but I would say that the greatest thing would be to start with a vision. Where do you want your organization to go? And you can't answer that question if you haven't taken a step back to appreciate just how disruptive this really is. I'll tell you the catalyst for me to start thinking at a deeper level was when Vinod Khosla, the noted venture capitalist, published recently that businesses don't understand what's about to hit them in the next 10 years as the rules of engagement change.

And then he followed that line on with, there's only 200 people in the world that understand what's really happening. And I said, well, wait a minute, I want to make that 201. I want to also be one of the folks who understand why the rules of engagement are going to change, and how to help C-suites think bigger, dream bigger.

Because then once you can communicate with that vision, then you can lead your organization—people, technology investments—to achieve that vision and understanding that that vision is going to evolve over time as AI and other technologies evolve over time. So I will say that the first bit of advice that I would say is that in order to transform your thinking and your organization, you have to start by disrupting yourself.

**Beena:** And a little bit more detail into that. So what do you mean when you say leaders should disrupt themselves?

**Brian:** I would say it starts with the mind shift, understanding that artificial intelligence, the consumerization of it, was on the horizon. But also things like, we're in a post-COVID world that we're still trying to navigate. We live in the most polarized society that I think I've personally ever witnessed, and each one of those in their own right requires transformation.

And in order to transform, you have to see things differently than the way you saw it in your work yesterday. And that mind shift is really about forcing an entirely new perspective to see different trajectories and outcomes as a result of these disruptions. And in order to see that, you have to first unlearn and unsee the world as you see it.

And lastly, to be more specific, we have a hard time doing that because we're human beings. Change is hard, and we tend to make decisions based on all of the experience and successes and failures that we've had over time. So when we don't know what to do, we

did before. And when we do that, we limit our opportunities and our outcomes to iteration and not innovation.

And so to have that mind shift is to give yourself the gift of learning and unlearning, to see what you couldn't see before, to do what you couldn't do before.

**Beena:** Yeah. So true. And, you know, Brian, one of the findings in our State of AI report we put out in January was that technology moves at its own pace, but the adoption of the technology in an organization moves at the pace of the organization's culture and change methodology, right? So it is so crucial to have that mind shift.

So tell us a little bit on how can we drive a cultural shift. We've talked about a leadership mindset shift. But, you know, there needs to be a change even from an organizational culture perspective. What does mind shift look like from an organizational culture perspective?

**Brian:** As someone who's worked in transformation and innovation my whole career, I could tell you that the biggest catalyst to change is culture. The biggest inhibitor to change is culture. And as a result, I spent years also working with culture leaders. People like, Jason Korman. I'll share Jason Korman's story because it's the most unique.

There's amazing people, like Amy Edmondson, who talk about the culture of organizational transformation and the importance of culture. But what they did was they studied the behavior necessary to achieve outcomes that were so unique, like innovation, or digital transformation, for example. And they were able to humanize that science from a leadership perspective. In order to be able to get people to change, people had to, number one, see themselves in that story, and then to believe that they played a role in the outcome, which meant that they had to have a shared vision and a shared incentive, and a shared motivation into achieving that vision. And it kind of comes back to where we were earlier in the conversation, which is if you don't have that vision, if you can't articulate what the future looks like; say, what could AI transformation look like in our organization 18 months from now? And how will we know that we're on the right path along the way? If we can't articulate that, then you can't have a culture that brings that AI transformation to life. defines the project and its value proposition. Ramp up on that basic idea: It's exciting, interesting, pertinent, and not very technical.

**Beena:** Yeah. So true. And I think having that vision is crucial. But then, you know, more on when you move into the execution or implementation phase, how do you make sure you're on the right track? How do you track for what success looks like? Because it's such a new way of doing things. What are some guidelines? What have you observed that works in making sure you're on the right path towards a vision?

**Brian:** Gosh, well, you're probably the foremost expert here in how you help C-suites achieve that vision and measure the progress. But I think if we go back to articulating that vision and what—it's called a motivational future state. And that future state has what that looks like, but also the KPIs or OKRs or whatever it is that your culture embraces, to be able to then measure progress towards that, which means that those also have to be defined. Hence, going back to mind shift, I felt like we needed a new type of leader for these times. Someone willing to say "I don't know what I don't know" and to invest in then the things, the people, the insights, necessary to be able to then to define, "OK, this is what our future looks like and this is what's possible with this technology." Then I want to reverse engineer the steps necessary to get there, and then define the measures that people can subscribe to or ascribe to in their work that allows them to see the impact that they're going to have in achieving this vision at every step.

Now, the other thing that I will bring up is that there was—I think it was last year—there's a great report that I saw in addition to yours—because I'm a big fan of that report you published earlier this year. I have quoted so many things from that report in my presentations.

**Beena:** Thank you

**Brian:** And another one that you reminded me of was from Gartner, where they said you have to break that vision into three different stages. One is the quick wins, which builds the confidence, which brings people together. All of the things you need, like your COE or your advisory council, your governance. And then they said also to achieve that vision, think about differentiated use cases, because if everybody is doing the same thing, even with something as advanced as AI, all you're doing is creating a new AI-powered status quo.

And then, last but not least, they said to also invest simultaneously in the transformational initiatives that are going to allow you to break the trajectory away from everyone else. And so, I know that this gets complex pretty fast. But again, if you can't articulate a vision at each one of those levels, then we're going to need to understand how to empower you as a leader to start leaning in that way.

**Beena:** Yeah. And, you know, a conversation that doesn't happen as often as it should is the workplace transformation, workforce transformation. What are some of the best practices that you've seen evolving in terms of tactically driving that workforce transformation?

**Brian:** There are certainly no shortage of articles these days that talk about the future roles in the workforce. And they all happen to start with AI—AI soothsayer! And I wonder, you know, who's thinking of these jobs and if people are just sort of like running them through Generative AI to say “what are the jobs of the future?” So that that starts my answer, which is, I advise companies, once they understand the vision, or at least start asking questions about what's possible, then what we can do is start to get some tangible elements to then look at the workforce and audit it. If we want to achieve this and this is what we have, what we are missing are these things. And then, what of that is achievable by AI agents today and as they evolve? What will be necessary to have human orchestration, management, and collaboration? And then, right then and there is when you as a leader with the leadership team can start to be able to define: what are the jobs we need, what are the skills we need, how are we going to get people there, and how are we going to balance them with AI and train them to be able to execute? And by the way, this is what success looks like. And this is how you'll be measured toward success. Because it's essentially what we do is, we'll say these are the AI roles of the future. Or we might say something as basic as, what we want is to people to embrace AI in their work so that they can free up time for deeper work, more meaningful work, more creative work. But then we'll stop, and we won't define what that is, how to get those skills, and how to measure success. So I do believe that we have to do the hard work of starting with that vision and then auditing the workforce against that vision to understand what are the decisions we need to make and roadmap it out to help bring the workforce along for the ride.

**Beena:** And, you know, one of the biggest obstacles is there is a lot of fear about AI just, you know, that still is prevalent. “AI is going to take over my job.” That is a fear that's still prevalent amongst the workforce who don't understand AI or are not AI savvy. And what you're describing can help mitigate the fear that fundamentally exists among the employees that are not AI savvy. So, I love what you said.

Do you see any specific industries which are advancing more in AI compared to other industries? And why do you think that is happening? What are some of the best practices that they are implementing to move faster?

**Brian:** Oh, this is a good question because, as you know, we just published at ServiceNow the AI Index.

**Beena:** Yes.

**Brian:** And this is the second year in a row. And I think the most fascinating outcome was, as you know, we saw AI maturity regress year over year by nine points. Last year, the average score out of 100 was 44. This year, the average score is 35 out of 100. And I studied then how would we—we broke out the data by industry. So finance, manufacturing, etc., and it was pretty consistent across the board. I mean maybe a point here or there. But everybody took a step backwards this year. And the answer, the reason, that we heard most often was because the speed of acceleration, speed of change, trying to get their arms around Generative AI, then AI agents, and now what an enterprise could look like.

It's overwhelming and still not having things in place, like governance, for example. And when you can't have those things in place, it's very hard to be able to lead a workforce in easing their fears, but also giving them tangible steps towards creating career longevity with artificial intelligence. So, in some specific work that I've done separately from the index, we just hosted a manufacturing summit, and I was very pleasantly surprised at how bold some manufacturers have been in experimenting with artificial intelligence, in terms of robotics lines, computer vision—areas where it, while complicated, were also easier—or not easier, but more realistic to launch some pilots. In fact, that was so eye-opening that I have a meeting this Friday specifically to dive deeper into more advanced case studies that aren't public in the manufacturing sector. But I'm curious, Beena, what industry are you seeing accelerate?

**Beena:** So, the ones that we are seeing the most is financial services and life sciences and health care. I think a big part of it is because it's such a data-rich industry. That just eliminates that very first problem. I'm smiling at your manufacturing example because, you know, it just wasn't called AI; it was called data science and IoT. But we did a lot in manufacturing at that time, and now it's coming back.

In fact, I am a huge believer that there might have been use cases that you wanted to use, but the technology was not there. So, you know, it's so important to look back and see what was experimented and has technology advanced now that you can bring back some of those use cases? I do believe manufacturing is way [more] advanced than we give credit for. So not surprised to hear that.

Brian, you and I participated in that discussion on the AI Maturity Index. And one of the things that came up was, as we get looking a bit ahead, are leaders dreaming big enough? We talk a lot about AI use cases and what needs to be done, but how do we get to the point where it's a fundamental shift, to what you speak in mind shift. It should be not just about making things faster or driving more savings or optimizing. Those are good places to start—the quick wins. But how do you get to that big vision if you are not an AI-native company? If it's something that's new to the organization, how do you get to that vision that we've talked about?

**Brian:** It comes back to the humanity of it all. And also the change management. And actually, change management is terminology I don't... I don't like to use it because it sort of takes the human out of the equation. So let's bring it back to culture. I think the easy answer is you have to want to believe that you don't have it figured out, and that's a hard trait to find in any leader. And the reason for that is because they're supposed to know what to do. They're supposed to have it all figured out. They're supposed to be surrounded by the people who have all of the insights. I read this really interesting study. It was called the "CEO Confessional." And I can't remember the company that published it, but the two things that stood out is that amongst AI-savvy CEOs, that they felt that they were getting better direction from AI than from their own boards of directors and also their own leadership teams. And that says a lot, which means that then if we go back to your question, you have to want to believe that you have something to learn and something to unlearn, and that mind shift, that perspective—you also have to believe that you don't have either the full or the right perspective going into these conversations. So I'll give you an example. We just recently entered officially the CRM space. And you often hear in CRM, you'll hear about salesforce automation, you'll hear about marketing automation, you'll hear about CPQ. But what we don't, as an industry, focus on a lot of times are the own or the buy side of the relationship.

So as you and I both know, it's less expensive and more strategic to keep a customer happy than it is to try to acquire a new customer. So if you think about the perspective on the own side of the equation, we see it as a cost center and not as a growth engine. And on the own side of the equation, we set up things like tier-one service or self-help, or we'll put into place chatbot experiments. But if you think, Beena, you as a human being, or me as a human being, we're both customers of many different types of businesses. Neither one of us wakes up one day and says, "I sure hope I get to call a contact center," or "I sure hope today that I get to talk to a chatbot and run endless loops of not getting my questions answered or the outcomes I desired."

So when we think of these things as cost centers, they come at the cost of experiences or customer experiences. So that perspective shift has to say, how can I make investments now on using technology to improve the experiences of customers on the own side or the buy side of the relationship, so that they feel just as amazing and valued as they did when we acquired them originally? And AI now allows us to scale that for that personalization, that understanding, that integration of that journey, that consistency. And if we look forward in terms of AI agents, we'll have agents that could be dedicated to customers who will be able to go and get them the information or the insights that are necessary without all of the complexity involved. And with the right strategies, we can turn those into growth opportunities. So we're not just take it out cost within the organization, but we're cultivating relationships to the benefit of the customer and to the business.

**Beena:** I love that example and the description that you just gave. Brian, a couple of questions before we let you go and take your flight: one is if you had a crystal ball, what would be your short-term and long-term prediction for the future of AI in the enterprise? What would you tell clients?

**Brian:** Let me get my crystal ball here. [laughs] I think the short term—OK, so do we want the short-term vision prediction or the aspiration?

**Beena:** The prediction. Where do you think it's going to go?

**Brian:** Well, where it's going to go is we're going to see in the short term a lot of iteration and automation, and not that there's anything wrong with that. We'll see a lot of optimization. It's just because that's what we know how to do. We take technology and we use it to do what we did yesterday better, faster, more scalable, less expensively tomorrow. And so that's the near term 12, 18, 24 months—longer. It's just, if we've learned anything going back to the industrial revolution, that's what we do. But artificial intelligence also offers the opportunity to do what we didn't do yesterday. That's the first technology where I'm doing more than looking at a crystal ball. This is where a lot of my analysis, my research, my advisory, my listening, is going, and so if you think about then—I'll give you the context and then the prediction. If you think about the ability to do what you didn't do yesterday, that means that you have to define what you didn't do yesterday and start experimenting in new frontiers. And so where I see the more we call them "AI-forward companies." We know AI-native companies are already moving in this direction. We will now start to see org charts where we see AI with employees to achieve that future motivational state that we talked about. These are going to be our AI pacesetters that we studied in our AI Index.

These are also going to be some of the AI innovators who are just absolutely looking to explore incredible opportunities. And so once we see that in, say, within the next 24 months, what you'll start to see is what we call an "exponential organization." So rather than the linear growth we're used to, we'll see that linear growth, but then also exponential outcomes in many ways that we've seen from startups in Silicon Valley. So that will be net-new use cases that we haven't mentioned yet.

**Beena:** Or entirely net-new industries. I do think that is an opportunity to go even bigger and beyond the boundaries defined so far. So, Brian, this has been great. And, you know, I wish we could continue the conversation longer, but how can people stay connected? Where can they follow you? Can you share your best social platform for people to stay connected?

**Brian:** Yes, well, thank you for the opportunity. I always enjoy just listening to you and speaking with you, and it's been a privilege. I'm basically @Brian Solis on every platform. Your platform of choice. Briansolis.com. My email address is brian.solis@servicenow.com.

**Beena:** Awesome. Brian, thank you so much for joining us. This was a great conversation. I really learned a lot as well. So thank you so much for joining us. And thanks to our audience for tuning in to AI Ignition. To be sure to stay connected with the Deloitte AI Institute for more AI research and insights.

Visit the AI Ignition Podcast Episode Library  
[Deloitte.com/us/ai-ignition](https://deloitte.com/us/ai-ignition)

#### About Deloitte

---

As used in this podcast, "Deloitte" means Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see [www.deloitte.com/us/about](https://www.deloitte.com/us/about) for a detailed description of our legal structure. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting. Please see [www.deloitte.com/about](https://www.deloitte.com/about) to learn more about our global network of member firms.

Copyright © 2025 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.