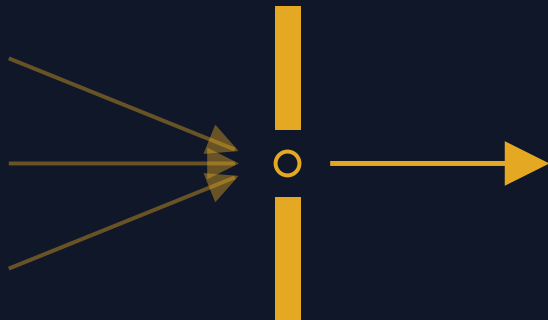




A FREE WORKING TEMPLATE

The AI Governance Policy Template

For owner-led companies. Write down what may be built, what data may enter a model, and who approves it, before anything gets built.



W. Ed Becker, CCSM

Founder, Growth Right Solutions, LLC

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GrowthRight.Solutions · +1 (307) 288-6880

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About Growth Right Solutions.

Growth Right Solutions places a Chief AI Officer inside owner-led companies that cannot justify hiring one full time.

The work is done with a client's leadership team rather than handed to them. Strategy, governance, and building sit in one accountable seat, instead of a strategist, a builder, and a vendor who each answer for a different part of the result.

Who we work with

Owner-led and family-owned companies, including partnerships, between \$20M and \$40M in revenue with 40 to 250 employees. No private equity, no venture investors, and no outside board. The people in the room can decide.

Specialty contracting, large home services, roll-ups and holding companies, and emerging franchisors.

How the work runs

Governance comes first. Nothing is built until there is a written policy covering what may be built, what data may enter a model, and who approves it. This template is the shape of that policy.

The starting point gets recorded. Measures are agreed and written down before anything is created, so that in ninety days the change can be shown rather than argued about.

One system at a time. Each one runs live for three full months, measured and tuned, before the next one begins.

Who wrote this

W. Ed Becker spent twenty six years running a managed IT services company, where the average client stayed 17.5 years against an industry norm of three to five. Before that, seventeen years in government technology as Director of the Eastern Zone for the General Services Administration, covering the eastern United States, the Caribbean, and Western Europe.

Why this template is free

A policy is the first work of any engagement, and it is work a leadership team can do for itself in an afternoon. Publishing it costs nothing and it is more useful in your hands than in a proposal.

Why this document exists.

Somewhere in your company right now, someone is using an AI tool you did not approve. They are not being reckless. They are trying to get their work done faster, and the tool was free and took two minutes to sign up for.

That is not the problem. The problem is that nobody has written down what they are allowed to put into it.

Most companies write their first AI policy after something has already gone into a tool that should not have. A customer list. A contract. A spreadsheet with salaries in it. By then the conversation is about damage rather than about rules, and it is a considerably harder conversation to have.

This template exists so that you can have the easier conversation first. It is free, it requires no email address, and you may distribute it freely with attribution.

Who this is for

Owner-led and family-owned companies that have started using AI, or are about to, and have no written rule governing it. If you already have a general counsel and a chief information security officer, they have this covered. If you do not, this is a place to begin.

What a company looks like once this exists

A written policy is what lets a company move quickly rather than carefully. That sounds backwards and it is the most useful thing on this page.

Without a rule, every decision is a one-off. Somebody wonders whether they can use a tool for something, and either they ask and wait, or they guess. Multiply that across forty people and the company moves at the speed of whoever is available to answer.

With a rule, people act. The question has already been answered, once, by the people who should have answered it. The team stops asking permission for the ordinary and starts bringing you the genuinely unusual, which is the only thing you wanted to see anyway.

What it will and will not do

It will get a policy onto paper, and a policy on paper is a great deal better than an understanding in somebody's head. It will not tell you what your particular business should allow, because that depends on facts this document cannot know. Page 21 sets out those limits plainly.

One rule before you start

Nothing in this document is a decision your technology vendor should make. Every blank here belongs to the leadership team. A vendor can advise on what is possible. Only the leadership team can decide what risk the company is willing to carry.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to work through it.

Sections one through eleven are the policy itself. Each one opens with a short note on why it matters, then gives you the blanks to fill in, and closes with a description of what a good answer looks like.

Do it in one sitting, with the leadership team

It takes about ninety minutes, and the conversation it starts is worth more than the document it produces. Doing it alone and circulating a draft afterwards produces a document nobody argues with and nobody follows.

Fill in what you can and leave the rest

Some blanks will have obvious answers. Some will start a discussion. Some nobody in the room will be able to answer at all.

The blanks are the point. When you reach page 16, count them. That number will tell you more about where your company stands than anything you managed to fill in.

Write it so a new hire would understand it

The test for every answer in this document is whether someone who started last Monday could read it and know what to do. Language that only makes sense to the person who wrote it is language that will be interpreted differently by everybody else.

Then put a date on it and a review in the calendar

A policy with no review date becomes wrong quietly, and nobody notices until it matters. Section eleven handles this.

What this document is for

This is an operating policy. Its job is to tell your people what to do, in language they will follow on a Tuesday.

Where something needs to satisfy a regulator, a contract, or an insurer, that version goes to your attorney. This one is the version your team actually uses.

SECTION ONE

Scope and ownership.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Two things have to be true before any rule in this document works. Everyone has to know it applies to them, and one named person has to own it.

Ownership is the part companies skip. A policy owned by a committee is a policy owned by nobody, because a committee cannot be asked a question on a Tuesday afternoon.

This policy applies to

Employees, contractors, temporary staff, vendors with system access, and anyone else who touches company data.

The person accountable for this policy is

Their authority includes

Approving new tools, revoking access, and stopping a project already under way.

This policy was approved on

What a good answer looks like

A named individual rather than a role or a department. Someone senior enough to say no to a purchase and be heard. Someone reachable within a day. If the only person who fits that description is the owner, write the owner, and then decide whether that is where you want it to stay.

What data may never enter an AI tool.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Start here rather than with what is allowed. The prohibited list is shorter, it is clearer, and once it exists everything outside it becomes easier to say yes to.

The reason it needs to be written down is that information does not come back. Once something has been pasted into a system you do not control, you cannot retrieve it, and you often cannot prove what happened to it.

Cross out anything that does not apply to your business. Add what is missing.

- ☐ Customer or client lists, in whole or in part
- ☐ Anything covered by a signed confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement
- ☐ Employee records, salaries, reviews, or medical information
- ☐ Financial statements not already public
- ☐ Bank, payment card, or account numbers
- ☐ Social Security numbers or government identification numbers
- ☐ Pricing, margins, or bid information
- ☐ Legal correspondence or anything involving counsel
- ☐ Proprietary drawings, formulas, code, or specifications
- ☐
- ☐

What a good answer looks like

Specific enough that a new hire would know what you meant. "Confidential information" is not specific. "Anything from the pricing folder on the shared drive" is. Where a rule points at a real place or a real document, people follow it.

SECTION THREE

What may enter with approval, and whose.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most business information is neither secret nor freely shareable. It sits in the middle, and the middle is where a policy either works or falls apart.

If approval takes a week, people will stop asking. The approval route has to be fast enough that using it is easier than going around it.

Name the person who can approve each category. A role is acceptable. A department is not, because departments do not make decisions.

INFORMATION	APPROVER
Customer names without contact detail	
Internal process documentation	
Draft proposals and quotes	
Vendor and supplier information	
Operational data without names attached	

The test that settles most arguments

If this appeared in a competitor's inbox tomorrow, would it matter? If yes, it needs approval. If no, it probably does not.

What a good answer looks like

An approver who can answer within a day, and a written record of the answer so the same question does not get asked four times. A short list of standing approvals for things that come up weekly saves everyone considerable time.

SECTION FOUR

Which tools are approved.

WHY THIS MATTERS

An unwritten list is not a list. Until the tools are recorded in one place, nobody can answer a simple question such as where a particular piece of information ended up.

Record every tool in use, including the ones nobody approved. Those are already carrying your data, and leaving them off the list does not change that.

TOOL	USED FOR	OWNER	APPROVED

How to get a complete list quickly

Ask what people are using to get their work done faster, in a room where the purpose is clearly to write things down rather than to take anything away. Say that out loud before you ask.

The answers come quickly on those terms, and the people who speak up first are usually the ones worth listening to about what to build next.

What a good answer looks like

A list that is longer than leadership expected. Most companies find between three and eight tools in use, and typically only one or two of them were ever formally chosen.

What to ask before approving a new tool.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Every question below is easier to ask before you sign than after. Vendors answer them readily at the point of sale and considerably less readily once you are a customer.

- ☐ Does the vendor train its models on the data we put in? Can we turn that off?
- ☐ Where is our data stored, and under whose law?
- ☐ Can we export our data, and in what format?
- ☐ Can we delete our data and receive confirmation that it is gone?
- ☐ Who at our company owns the account and pays for it?
- ☐ Who else at our company has access, and how do we remove someone?
- ☐ What happens to our data if we stop paying?
- ☐ Does the vendor carry recognized security certification, and will they show it?
- ☐ How will the vendor tell us if they have a breach, and how quickly?
- ☐

Who is responsible for asking these questions

What a good answer looks like

Written answers rather than remembered ones, kept somewhere you can find them in a year. A vendor who will not answer these in writing has given you useful information about how they work.

SECTION SIX

Where a person must stay in the loop.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Some decisions should not be made by a system alone, however good the system is. Naming them now, while nothing is at stake, is far easier than naming them during an incident.

This list also protects the people doing the work. A team that knows exactly where its judgment is required stops second-guessing everywhere else.

A person reviews and approves before any of the following goes out or takes effect.

- ☐ Anything sent to a customer under our name
- ☐ Pricing, quotes, or contract terms
- ☐ Hiring, firing, or performance decisions
- ☐ Anything with legal or financial consequence
- ☐ Public statements, marketing, or social media
- ☐ Decisions affecting an employee's pay or standing
- ☐

One category worth its own conversation

If an automated process screens job applicants, schedules shifts, or scores employees in any way, several states now regulate that specifically. That is a question for your attorney rather than for this template, and it is worth asking before you build rather than after.

What a good answer looks like

A short list. If everything requires human review, the list will be ignored within a month. Choose the decisions where being wrong would be expensive or hard to undo, and leave the rest to run.

SECTION SEVEN

How output gets checked before it is relied on.

WHY THIS MATTERS

An AI system produces work that reads as confident whether or not it is correct. Confidence and accuracy are different things, and deciding in advance how you tell them apart is what lets a team rely on the output.

The answer is not to check everything, which nobody sustains. The answer is to decide in advance which outputs get checked, by whom, and against what.

OUTPUT	CHECKED BY	CHECKED AGAINST

For output that is not checked every time, we spot-check

How often, how many, and who does it.

When a mistake is found, we record it here

What a good answer looks like

A source of truth named in the third column rather than a person's judgment. Checking a figure against the accounting system is verification. Checking it against whether it looks about right is not.

The whole thing on one page.

Every day, someone in the company reaches this decision. This is the path they should follow once the sections above are filled in.



SECTION EIGHT

How a mistake gets handled.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Something will. The difference between a problem and a crisis is whether anyone knew what to do in the first hour.

The most valuable thing this section does is make reporting easy and fast. Nearly every incident has a simple fix available in the first hour, and a clear route to report it is what keeps that hour available.

If confidential information is put into an AI tool by mistake, the person who did it must

They should report it to

Within

Same day is a common answer, and one hour is a better one.

Reporting a mistake promptly is what we ask for, and the company will treat it that way. Where a mistake is concealed, the company may take further action.

Keep these sentences or write your own, but decide the question now. People report problems early when they know how the report will be received.

What a good answer looks like

A first step someone can take without permission, such as stopping use of the tool immediately, followed by a single named person to tell. Two steps, no forms, no committee.

SECTION NINE

Who owns each system once it runs.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A named owner is what keeps a system current. Without one, a system drifts quietly out of step with the business it was built for.

The owner is not the person who built it. The owner is the person who will notice when it stops matching how the work is actually done.

SYSTEM OR PROCESS	OWNER	REVIEWED	DOCUMENTED WHERE

The fourth column is the one that pays for itself

A system that works and is written down is an asset the company owns, and it stays an asset when people change jobs, take holidays, or move on.

That is also the column a buyer looks at first, because written-down process is the part of a company that transfers.

What a good answer looks like

A real location in the fourth column, such as a named document or folder that somebody could open today. If the honest answer is that it is not written down anywhere, write that. It is useful to know.

SECTION TEN

What happens when you leave a vendor.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Every tool you adopt, you will eventually leave. Vendors are acquired, prices change, and better options appear. The time to decide how you get your data out is before you put any in.

This section takes ten minutes and it is the one most often skipped, because the day you sign up is the day leaving feels least relevant.

For each approved tool, we know

- ☐ Which named person holds the account and the billing
- ☐ How to export our data, and in what format
- ☐ How long the vendor keeps our data after we cancel
- ☐ What we would lose that cannot be exported
- ☐ Whether any client data of ours sits inside their system

If we leave a vendor, the person responsible for the exit is

Before we cancel any tool, we will

Export, verify the export opens, and confirm deletion in writing.

What a good answer looks like

An account held in a company address rather than one person's personal email. That single detail causes more difficulty at exit than any other, and it is the easiest one to fix while nothing is wrong.

When this policy gets revisited.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A policy written once and filed creates the belief that the question has been settled. The technology changes, the regulations change, and the way your company works changes, usually faster than any of you expect.

This policy is reviewed

At minimum every six months, and always when any of the following happens.

- ☐ A new AI tool is introduced
- ☐ A new automated process goes live
- ☐ A law or regulation changes in a state where we operate
- ☐ An incident occurs, whether or not it caused harm
- ☐ A vendor changes its own terms
- ☐ Someone who owned a system in section nine leaves the company

The person who owns the review is

Next review date

Where the current version of this policy lives

Somewhere every person it applies to can find it without asking.

What a good answer looks like

A date in a calendar with an invitation already sent, rather than an intention. Reviews that depend on somebody remembering do not happen.

NOW COUNT

The blanks are the finding.

Go back through what you filled in and count two things.

How many blanks are still empty. Not because you ran out of time, but because nobody in the room knew the answer.

How many answers came from one person's memory rather than from something already written down.

What those two numbers give you

Every empty blank is a decision waiting to be made once, by the people who should make it, instead of several times a day by whoever happens to be doing the work. Each one you fill in is a question your team never has to ask again.

Every answer that came from memory is a candidate for writing down. Written down, it keeps working when that person is on holiday, on a different job, or simply busy on the day it matters.

Write the two numbers down

Blanks nobody could fill in

Answers that came only from memory

Date we did this

Keep this page. When you review the policy in six months, count again. The direction those two numbers move is the clearest measure you will have of whether any of this took hold.

SIX QUESTIONS

Before you close the folder.

Answer these honestly, on your own. Nobody else needs to see them.

If someone on your team pasted a customer list into an AI tool this afternoon, is there a written rule that says whether they were allowed to?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

Can you name every AI tool currently in use anywhere in the company?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

Is there one person who can stop an AI project, and does the company know who that is?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

Before your last technology project began, did anyone write down where things stood so the change could be measured afterwards?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

If a system you rely on produced a wrong answer today, how would anyone find out?

☐ WE WOULD KNOW ☐ WE WOULD NOT ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

Which processes in your company exist only in one person's head?

☐ WE KNOW ☐ WE DO NOT ☐ I DO NOT KNOW

What this policy buys you.

An afternoon of work produces four things, and only the first one is what people expect.

Speed

A company with a written rule moves faster than a company without one, because the ordinary questions have already been answered. Your team stops waiting for permission on things that were always going to be fine, and starts bringing you only the genuinely unusual, which is the only thing you wanted to see.

The confidence to actually use this

Owners who have no rule tend to do one of two things. They forbid AI outright, which their people quietly route around, or they allow everything and hope. A written policy is what makes the middle position available, and the middle position is where all the value is.

A company that can be handed to someone

Decisions living in one person's judgment are decisions that leave when that person does. Written down, they become part of how the company works. A buyer, a partner, a successor, or a new manager can pick them up and carry on, and every process in that condition is worth more than the same process held in someone's head.

And the part that matters most

Every decision that has been made once and written down is a decision that stops arriving in your evening. The question at seven on a Friday about whether somebody can use a tool for something. The call from a manager who could have acted if only he had known the answer.

Dan Sullivan names four freedoms, and a written policy pays two of them almost immediately.

Freedom of time arrives first. The questions that used to route to you now answer themselves. Nobody waits for you to be free before they can get on with something ordinary.

Freedom of relationship follows close behind. A team that can act without checking is a team that stays, and the conversations you do have with them stop being about permission and start being about the work.

Freedom of money and freedom of purpose come later, through what gets built on top of this. They are the subject of the two companion guides.

The quiet one nobody mentions

Most owners who have not written this down are carrying a low, constant awareness that something is happening with AI in their company that they do not fully know about.

An afternoon with a pen ends that. Not because the risk was large, but because a question that has been answered stops taking up room.

What a template cannot do for you.

This document will get a policy onto paper, and a policy on paper is a great deal better than nothing. It will not do three things, and you should know which three.

It does not know your business

The prohibited list in section two is generic. Yours is not. A specialty contractor, a franchisor, and a holding company each hold information that would be serious in the wrong hands and unremarkable in anyone else's. Finding yours takes someone sitting with your leadership team and walking through how work actually moves from first contact to getting paid.

It cannot set your risk tolerance

Every blank in this template is a judgment about how much risk the company is willing to carry in exchange for how much speed. That is an owner's decision, and it belongs to the leadership team rather than to anyone outside the room.

It cannot make anyone follow it

This is the one that decides whether the policy matters. A rule the team did not help write is a rule the team works around. Adoption is not a document problem, and it is where most of this work is won or lost.

If you want the rest of it

Growth Right Solutions works with owner-led companies to turn a policy like this into something the team actually follows, and then to build the systems that run underneath it.

The place to start is The Check. Twelve questions, about two minutes, and a reading on screen at the end. No email is required and the reading is yours whether or not we ever speak.

GrowthRight.Solutions/check

TWO COMPANION GUIDES

The Baseline covers how to record where things stand before you build, so that in ninety days you can show what changed.

The Owner Dependency Discount covers why documented, transferable process is worth money at exit. Both are free at GrowthRight.Solutions.

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About the author

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Growth Right Solutions, LLC · Sheridan, Wyoming

GrowthRight.Solutions · +1 (307) 288-6880 · ed@growthright.solutions