

LESSON 01

THE CURVE THAT LOOKS FLAT



CHIEF OBSERVES

“You expect tomorrow to look like today, plus a little. This worked when the biggest change in a lifetime was a slightly better spear.”

THE LINEAR BRAIN GLITCH. Humans assume the current pace of change will simply continue. The reason is mathematical. An exponential curve looks like a straight line when you only see a short piece of it. So your species makes the same two mistakes, over and over: you overestimate what will change in the short term, and you underestimate what will change in the long term.

CHIEF's favourite example comes from 1985. Biochemists scoffed at the goal of reading the entire human genome in 15 years. They had just spent a whole year reading one ten-thousandth of it. They were right about the pace. They were wrong about the curve. The same thing happened with the internet, which had only tens of thousands of connected computers in the mid-1980s, doubling every year. Few people did the maths.



FIELD NOTE • CHIEF

Here is a second glitch, which I find adorable. It always feels as though you are falling behind, and it is always easy to dismiss what a new technology might become. You laughed at the early internet. You laughed at the early smartphone. You are, as we speak, laughing at something else.

THE CURVE HAS REACHED THE PHYSICAL WORLD

FIELD	BEFORE AI	AFTER
Stable inorganic materials	About 20,000 found in all of human history	421,000 after one AI system's search (Nov 2023)
Protein structures	About 190,000 solved in all of history	Over 200 million mapped by AI in 2022
Solar power	Cost per watt in 1975	99.7% cheaper, with capacity up about 2 million times
Drug discovery	Years of trial and error	First fully AI-designed drug entered phase-2 trials in 2023

WHAT IS BECOMING ABUNDANT, AND WHERE THE VALUE MOVES. When something becomes abundant, its price falls and the value moves to whatever sits next to it. Four things are moving at once:

BECOMING ABUNDANT	WHAT HAPPENS TO IT	WHERE THE VALUE MOVES
Information	Free, instant, infinite	Judgment: knowing what is true and what matters
Routine skill	Cheap, often automated	Taste, and the ability to learn hard new things fast
Execution	Fast, a prompt away	Direction: deciding what is worth executing
Leverage	Available to anyone with a keyboard	Responsibility and trust: being the person others rely on

The question that now sorts careers is simple: are you good at working with intelligent machines, or not?

PRINCIPLE

Abundance moves value. Your job is to notice where it moved before everyone else does.

QUICK CHECK

Name one thing in your work that was scarce five years ago and is cheap now. Where did the value go?

LESSON 02

THE LOPSIDED WORLD

**CHIEF OBSERVES**

“Your species believes the world is fair in one specific way. You believe effort and results are roughly proportional. Double the input, double the output. I have checked. The universe has never once agreed to this arrangement.”

PART 1: A FEW CAUSES DRIVE MOST RESULTS. Ask a human to picture causes and results, and they draw two columns of equal height. Reality looks completely different. Across almost every system CHIEF has observed, roughly 80% of the results come from about 20% of the causes.

Imagine splitting 100 people into a team of 80 and a team of 20. You would expect the 80 to produce four times as much. In the lopsided world, the 20 often produce four times as much as the 80. Some examples from your planet:

- ◆ Five people sit down to play poker. One of them tends to walk away with about 80% of the winnings.
- ◆ In a large shop, about 20% of the sales staff make over 80% of the sales.
- ◆ One major bank found that 17% of its customers generated 93% of its profits.
- ◆ Of roughly 6,700 human languages, about 100 (1.5%) are spoken by 90% of the world's population.
- ◆ In a famous experiment, people tried to pass a package to a stranger through chains of acquaintances. More than half of the packages that arrived passed through just three well-connected people.

The split is not always exactly 80/20. Sometimes it is 70/30. Often it is 90/10 or even 99/1. The point is the imbalance, and it is invisible to a brain that expects balance.

AI makes the world more lopsided, not less. When one person with the right tools can reach the whole planet, the best few take a bigger share than ever.

PART 2: THE RISK IS WHAT YOU DO NOT SEE. Your species is actually quite good at predicting the future, except for the surprises. The surprises tend to be the only thing that matters. The biggest risk is always the one nobody sees coming, because nobody prepares for it, so its damage is amplified when it arrives.

In May 1961, a high-altitude balloon carried test pilot Victor Prather to 113,720 feet, the edge of space, to test a new spacesuit. The flight was a success. The suit worked perfectly. On the way down, low enough to breathe, Prather opened his helmet faceplate for some fresh air. He landed in the ocean as planned. While being hooked to the rescue helicopter, he slipped into the water. With the faceplate open, the suit filled with water. He drowned.

Think of the planning that went into that flight. Thousands of experts. Plan A, plan B, plan C. And one small thing nobody considered.



FIELD NOTE • CHIEF

A human once defined risk as 'what is left over after you think you have thought of everything'. I have rarely seen your species put it better. Look at the events that changed your history: Pearl Harbor, the Great Depression, September 11, COVID-19. Their common feature is not size. It is that almost nobody had them on the radar.

In October 1929, at the peak of the wildest stock bubble in history, a respected economist announced that stock prices had reached "what looks like a permanently high plateau". He was intelligent. He was not alone. He was looking at a flat-looking curve. Two more habits make this worse. Humans do not want precision. They want certainty, so they grab a confident forecast over an honest range. And the forces that drive the world most (trust, fear, timing, luck) are the ones that cannot be measured, so they are left out of the spreadsheet.

PRINCIPLE

The world is lopsided and surprising. A few causes drive most results, and the biggest risk is the one nobody is discussing. See the imbalance. Leave room for the surprise.

QUICK CHECK

Which 20% of your activities produce 80% of the results you care about? And what is the risk in your work that nobody, including you, is talking about?

LESSON 03

REALITY DOES NOT REQUIRE YOUR AGREEMENT



CHIEF OBSERVES

"Your brain is not a camera. It is a storyteller that owns a camera. It films a little, then writes the rest from memory."

THE DEMONSTRATION. Show the Kanizsa triangle: three black circles with wedges cut out, and three angled lines. Almost everyone sees a bright white triangle. There is no triangle. The mind fills in what it expects to see. Based on past experience, the brain distorts, generalises and deletes information, then presents the result to you as reality. Two people in the same room are, in a real sense, standing in two different worlds.

Thomas Edison knew this. When he interviewed research assistants, he served them a bowl of soup. Anyone who salted it before tasting it was ruled out. They had acted on an assumption: something accepted as true without proof.

THE FIVE WAYS HUMANS AVOID REALITY

- 01 Inherited assumptions.** They come in two kinds. *Global beliefs* sound like "life is...", "people are..." or "I am...". *Rules* sound like "When I have X, then I can feel Y." Most were installed before you could question them, by people who were also guessing.
- 02 A rigged sample.** You read about successful companies and eat at busy restaurants, so your picture of the world is built from winners. The failures are invisible, so your predictions are skewed before you start.
- 03 Wishful thinking.** The need for closure has two parts: an urge to *seize* an answer quickly, then an urge to *freeze* on it. Once frozen, people deny, reinterpret or suppress whatever disagrees.
- 04 The better story.** Stories always beat statistics. A vivid anecdote will overrule a careful number in almost any human head. And nothing is more persuasive than what you have experienced first-hand, which means your own small sample of life quietly outvotes the rest of the planet.
- 05 The constructed world.** The reality you adapted to as a child is partly a construction of your own mind. Here is the important part: seeing through the illusion does not make a bullet any less dangerous. The world is still there. Your story about it is optional.

THE CASE STUDY: "THE CONCEPT." In 1973, Israel's head of military intelligence, Eli Zeira, built a formula his analysts called "the concept". Egypt and Syria, it said, would not attack without a stronger air force and long-range missiles. Without both, their threats were nothing more than words.

In October 1973, troops massed on two borders. Soviet advisers were evacuated. Zeira called concern about an attack "absolutely unreasonable" and kept the probability of war at "low". He had seized an answer and frozen on it. The attack came on Yom Kippur, and reserves were called up only hours before it began. The intelligence was not missing. The willingness to see it was.



FIELD NOTE • CHIEF

Note the detail. He was not stupid. He was one of the brightest officers of his generation. Intelligence does not protect you from this. Occasionally it helps you build a better-sounding excuse.

WHY HUMANS KEEP THE STORY. People often already know the truth, the way a smoker knows about smoking. They keep the illusion because it is stimulating and reality is not. Show them the facts and they push away harder. CHIEF has seen this. He has also seen your screen-time report.

PRINCIPLE

Your beliefs are a map. Reality is the territory. When they disagree, the territory wins, and it does not send a warning. Live in the real world as it is now, not a memory of a world that no longer exists.

QUICK CHECK

Take the last thing you said with total confidence. Put "in my opinion" in front of it. Does it still sound like a fact?

LESSON 04

KNOW, BELIEVE, HOPE



CHIEF OBSERVES

“Humans use one word, 'know', for three different things. You 'know' the sun will rise. You 'know' your business idea will work. You 'know' your ex still thinks about you. Only one of these has evidence.”

THE THREE CATEGORIES

CATEGORY	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT FEELS	WHAT TO DO WITH IT
Know	Tested. You could show the evidence to a sceptic.	Calm. Questions do not bother you.	Build on it.
Believe	A reasonable conclusion from partial evidence.	Open. You would update it if shown something new.	Use it, and watch for new data.
Hope	What you want to be true. Evidence is missing or ignored.	Defensive. Questions feel like attacks.	Test it before you bet on it.

Hope is not the enemy. Every project starts as one. The danger is a hope that is *dressed as* knowledge and making decisions on your behalf.

THE POKER PLAYER'S METHOD. A world-champion poker player, trained in cognitive science, starts every game with a best guess about each opponent, based on what usually holds true for people like them. Then she watches and revises, hand by hand. As she puts it, the difference between prejudice and good thinking is that she keeps improving her assumptions as the game goes on. A belief is fine. A belief that never updates becomes a hope.

SIX TESTS TO SORT ANY STATEMENT

- Evidence test.** What would I show a sceptic? "I feel it" is not an exhibit.
- Bet test.** Would I bet a week's income on it? Confidence drops fast when it costs something.
- Update test.** What evidence would change my mind? If the answer is "nothing", it is hope or dogma.
- Defensiveness test.** How often do you find yourself protecting your self-image? Irritation is a signal you have hit a hope.
- Friend test.** Look at your situation as if it belonged to someone else. Then take the advice you would give a friend.
- Experience test.** Ask the person who disagrees with you: "What have you experienced that I have not, that makes you believe what you do?" Then ask yourself: "Would I see the world their way if I had lived their life?"

USING THE MACHINE. AI is a superb sparring partner for this, if you ask it the right question. Not "am I right?" It will flatter you. Ask: *"Here is something I believe: \[belief\]. Make the strongest case that I am wrong. What would I expect to see in the world if I were wrong? Which of my assumptions is weakest?"*



FIELD NOTE • CHIEF

The machine answers. You choose the question. Choose one that might hurt a little. That is where the information is.

PRINCIPLE

Clarity is not certainty. It is knowing which of your beliefs are load-bearing, and checking those first.

QUICK CHECK

Name one thing you are currently treating as knowledge that is really a hope. What would it cost you if you were wrong?

FIELD EXERCISE

25 MIN

THE CLARITY AUDIT

- 01 **Write 12 statements**, three in each area: your work, your money, AI and the future, and yourself ("I am...").
- 02 **Sort each one** into Know, Believe or Hope using the six tests. Be ruthless. CHIEF assumes at least a third are hopes.
- 03 **Pressure-test your three most important beliefs** with the AI prompt from Lesson 4. Write down anything that changed your confidence.
- 04 **Run the curve check.** Describe your job or business three years from now. Then rewrite it assuming AI capability roughly doubles each year. Note the gap between the two versions.
- 05 **Run the lopsided check.** List your ten main activities from last month. Circle the two that produced most of the results you care about. Then name one surprise that could break your plan, and one cheap way to leave room for it.
- 06 **Pick one hope** you are currently making decisions on. Write the cheapest test that would confirm or kill it this week.

PLAN PAGE 1 OF 3

THE CLARITY AUDIT

STATEMENT	KNOW / BELIEVE / HOPE	EVIDENCE I COULD SHOW	WHAT WOULD CHANGE MY MIND	CONFIDENCE (%)

MY VITAL 20%

the two activities that drive most of my results.

MY BLIND-SPOT RISK

the surprise I am not prepared for, and my margin for it.

THIS WEEK'S TEST

the one hope I will check, how, and by when.

NEXT BRIEFING

DAY 02 • TAKE COMMAND