

ASCENDION

# Building an AI-Powered Company

A CEO's perspective on Ascendion's agentic-era  
operating model

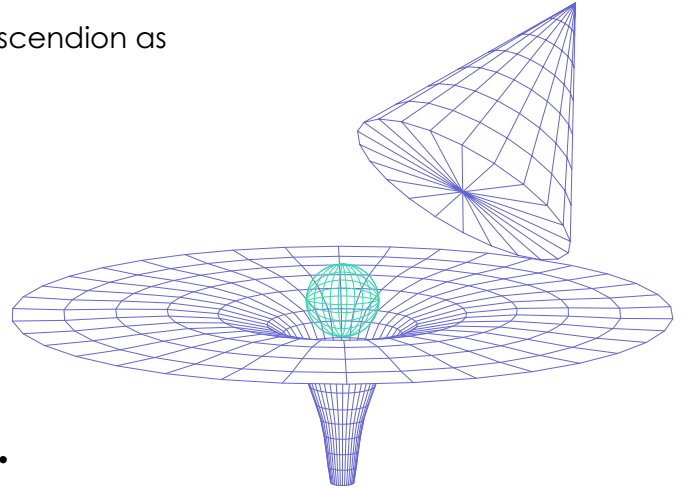
Most companies talk about becoming “AI-first.”

As CEO, I made a harder call: we would rebuild Ascendion as an AI-powered enterprise from the inside out.

Not as a branding exercise.

Not as a tool rollout.

As an operating-model decision.

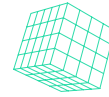


And I'm going to be dead honest about the moment we're in: **the ostrich strategy doesn't work**. The idea that we can wait this out, let the hype cycle pass, and keep doing business the same way is a comfortable self-deception.

For anyone making decisions in a company today, we have a responsibility to help ourselves and our teams face what's real: **AI is changing the economics of work, and the people and companies that don't adapt will be left behind.**

## 2025 Was Our Pivot Year

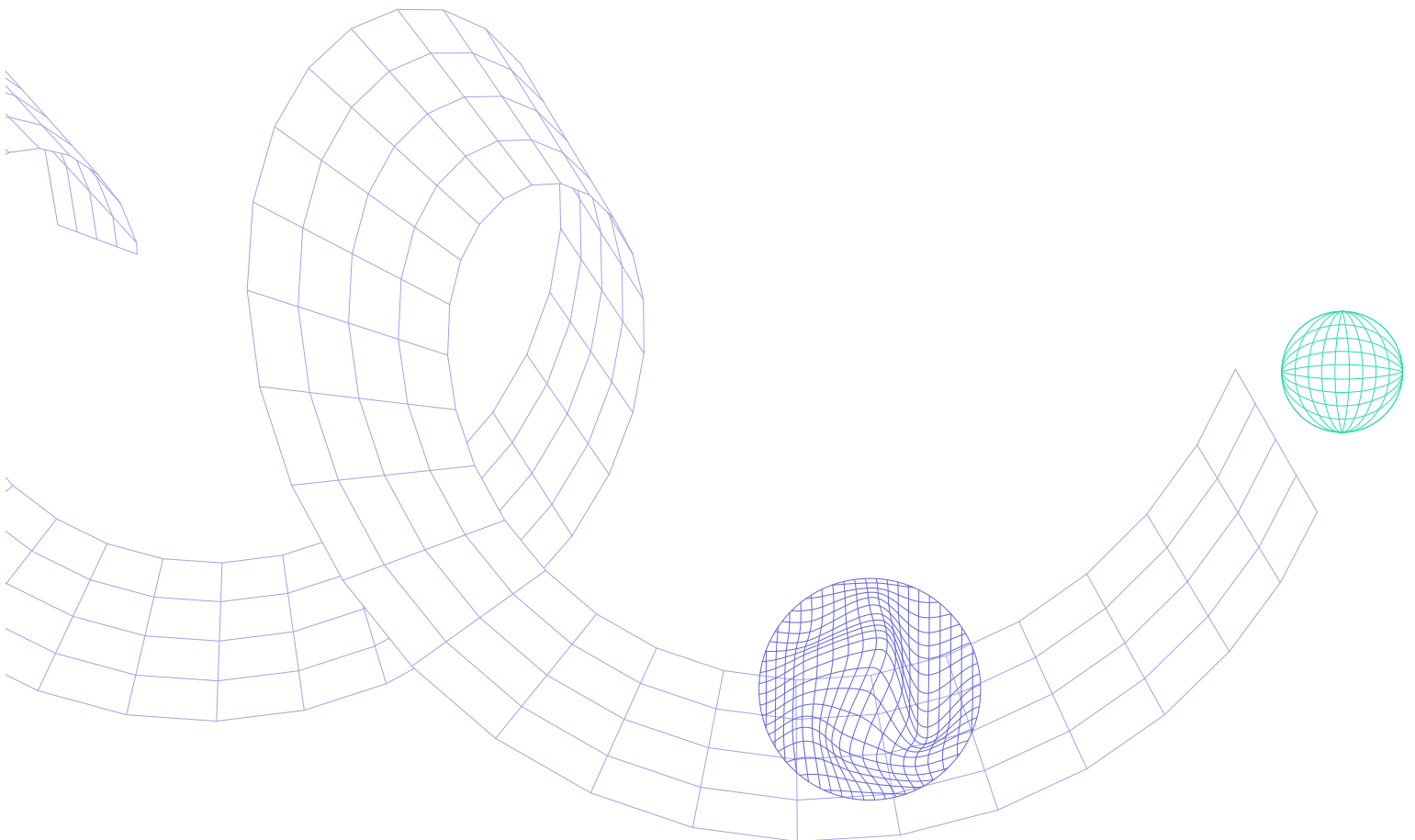
From my seat, 2025 is when the “**green shoots**” of agentic AI started showing up in a real way. If 2024 was the year of experimentation (AI for fun, a cool new toy) then 2025 was the year of proving that AI works **at work**.



That doesn't mean the debate is over, or that we've solved every problem or answered every question. But the direction is clear: **enterprises are moving from copilots toward agent-enhanced workflows.**

We've become much more clear-headed about the defining question of this business era: how do we put AI to work at scale without breaking trust, increasing risk, or creating chaos?

We're still in the early days of the true AI revolution. The playbook for answering that question is still being written. That's why we set out to change our own company first, so we could then help clients bring the power of AI into theirs.



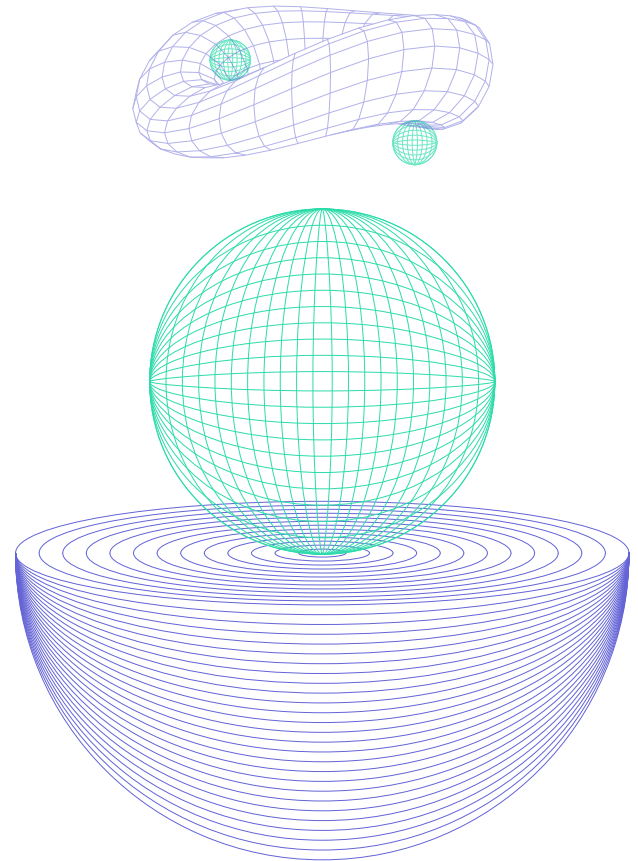
## We Had to Stop Blaming the Technology

Some people may not want to hear it, but we've reached a point where the technology is no longer the real bottleneck preventing value from AI.

In the recent past, when automation initiatives often fell short, it was fair for leaders to blame the technology: it wasn't mature, scalable, or easy enough to use. That excuse is gone. The world's largest technology companies are making massive bets here. Capital is flowing into AI infrastructure. Tools are improving weekly.

If a company isn't moving to capture value from AI, it's rarely because the technology isn't ready. More often, and this is the hard part, it's because of culture, leadership, and outcomes discipline.

AI transformations fail when companies fetishize the shiny stuff (models, demos, slideware) and avoid the brutal work of leadership: redesigning processes, breaking silos, changing incentives, and building trust.



## We Keep Closing the Adoption Gap

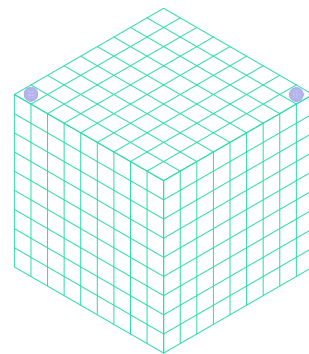
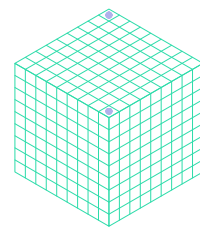
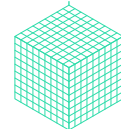
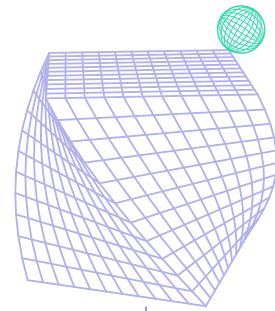
On the personal side, people are using AI constantly. We're experimenting. We're connecting tools. We're improving how we work.

Then too many of us walk (or Zoom) into work and end up either creating AI workslop, getting stuck with legacy systems, or inadvertently violating policies from HR, IT, finance, legal, or a random someone who simply says, "No."

That's why I treat AI as a leadership issue, not just an IT issue. If we, as leaders, don't actively close that gap, the transformation required to scale AI won't happen at the speed the market demands.

# We View AI as an Operating-Model Decision

We mapped AI across every corporate function, including talent, engineering, marketing, finance, HR, IT, and operations, to identify where agents and intelligent systems could materially improve productivity and outcomes.





This required two parallel efforts:

1

Reimagining workflows with AI  
(rather than just adding new tools)

2

Upskilling the workforce so AI becomes  
daily practice, not a special project

**It Worked.**

We pushed hard to become a "learn-it-all" company around AI.

Today:

52%

of our own production code is generated by AI.

4,500+

Ascenders are trained on AI skills.

There is a

~2x improvement

in the impact of our marketing program budget across velocity, scale, and quality, by using AI.

Every Ascender shares a **company-wide AI growth KPI** to drive accountability and adoption.

**Every corporate function** is embedding AI into daily work to increase velocity and quality without driving up costs.

Microsoft recognizes Ascendion as a **Frontier Firm**, which they define as human-led and agent-operated, that excels at unlocking innovation.

We learned this the hard way: AI is not magic. Agents and systems do not automatically create impact.

**Re-architecting work does.**

8,000+

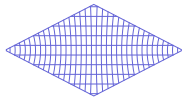
AI agents now operate across recruitment, onboarding, finance, HR, and engineering delivery to improve speed and impact.



# Platform + Process + People = Impact

For leaders working to build an AI-powered enterprise, we've found that having a method matters. It keeps us from depending on a handful of heroes, or a lot of luck.

## Ours is built on three elements:

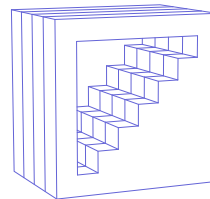


### **PLATFORM**

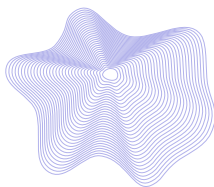
The systems that orchestrate and automate work (including external AI systems and our internal AAVA™ agentic platform)

The operating discipline: how work flows, how risk is managed, how quality is assured, and how humans stay in control

### **PROCESS**



### **PEOPLE**



Humans continue to bring curiosity, creativity, empathy, and ethics to work; bots are powerful, but they are not, and will not be, human; leaders and teams must be trained to run human + machine workflows responsibly

We still have more to do. Our playbook is still being written. But we've learned that, while tools are necessary, they are not sufficient. A scalable method is what turns human and machine capabilities into business outcomes.

# Our New Leadership Profile: Hands-on with Agents

This is the part I believe most strongly: **leaders must lead from the front.**

Leaders need to be personally comfortable using AI systems, and even building agents, to demonstrate modern operating competence.

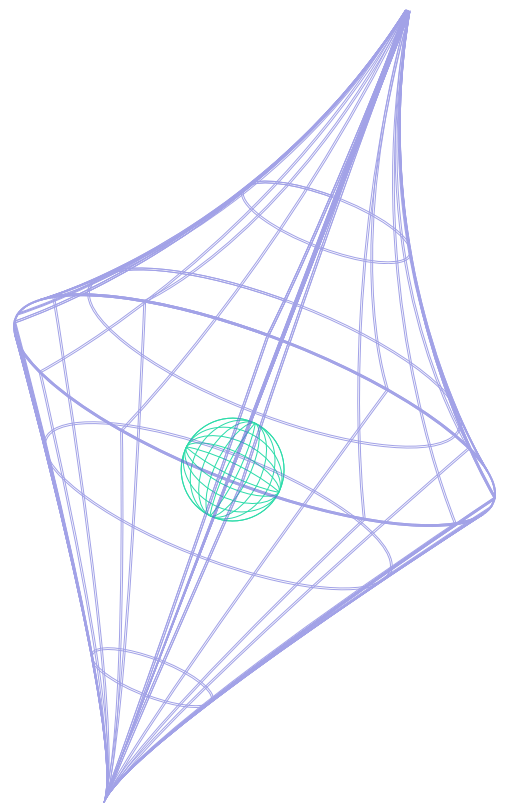
Said more bluntly: if you can't get your hands dirty with the tools shaping your business, your people won't believe you enough to evolve.

The next era will reward companies that run people and agents as integrated teams delivering trusted impact.

**That's the journey we've been on at Ascension.**

We did it internally first, because credibility demands proof. Now we bring the same method—platform, process, people—to enterprises working to become AI-powered themselves.

(For more information about how we apply our ideas for clients, please visit [here.](#))



## About the Author



**Karthik Krishnamurthy (KK)** is the founder and CEO of Ascension, a breakout leader in AI-powered software engineering. He's shaping how the next economy is built through platform, process, and people. A member of the **Wall Street Journal CEO Council** and the **Forbes Technology Council**, KK is helping define Engineering to the Power of AI.

## About Ascension

Ascension is a leader in AI-powered software engineering, helping businesses innovate faster, smarter, and with greater impact. We partner with Global 2000 clients across North America, APAC, and Europe to solve complex challenges in data, experience design, software product engineering, and workforce transformation. Powered by expert engineers, thousands of AI agents, and our Engineering to the Power of AI™ (Engineering<sup>AI</sup>) method, we deliver measurable outcomes that build trust, unlock value, and accelerate growth. Learn more at [ascension.com](https://ascension.com).

