



Ashley Kate  
HR & Finance

# HR Director Boardroom Summary

November 2025



Chaired by

EVERSHEDS  
SUTHERLAND

# Speakers:




**Hannah Mahon**  
Partner  
Eversheds Sutherland



**Steph Evans-Hill**  
HR Director

**Discussing the topic:**  
*'Why Authentic Intelligence is the  
Leadership Skill AI Can't Replace'*



The latest HR Directors Boardroom event brought together senior leaders from across the region for an engaging and timely exploration of how organisations can balance the rapid rise of artificial intelligence with the enduring need for human connection.

The session was opened by Steph Evans-Hill, who immediately set the tone by inviting the room to reflect on the realities of leading people in a world that is becoming faster, louder and more technologically driven. Steph introduced the central theme of “Authentic Intelligence” - the idea that the leaders who will thrive in the future are those who double down on the human qualities that AI cannot replicate: empathy, curiosity, humility and ethical judgement. She described how these behaviours are becoming more valuable, not less, as AI reshapes how we communicate, how we recruit and how we lead.

Supporting the discussion throughout was Hannah Mahon, Partner at Eversheds Sutherland, who was on hand to provide legal insight as the conversation progressed. Hannah contributed perspectives at key points in the session, grounding the discussion in the realities of an evolving legal landscape. She highlighted how new technologies are outpacing traditional frameworks, and emphasised the importance of clarity, fairness and accountability in people decisions - especially as AI becomes more deeply embedded in everyday HR practice.

### **Authentic Intelligence: The Human Advantage**


Steph began by reflecting on the modern workplace and the pressures facing leaders today. Hybrid working, dispersed teams and a multigenerational workforce have reshaped the expectations placed on managers, many of whom feel stretched thin, constantly “on” and caught between the demands of operational delivery and genuine people leadership. Against this backdrop, she argued, the traits employees crave most from their leaders, **empathy, curiosity, integrity, humility and deep listening**, are the very things that technology cannot imitate.

This idea of “authentic intelligence” became the golden thread of the session: in a world driven by data, speed and automation, it is the leaders who remain grounded, human and present who will truly stand out.

### **AI in the Workplace: A New Set of Realities**

As the discussion developed, the room acknowledged just how embedded AI has already become across the employment lifecycle. Employees are using AI tools to draft grievances, prepare DSARs, write emails, generate CVs and even rehearse interview answers. On the employer side, HR systems increasingly provide automated scoring and recommendations on candidates.

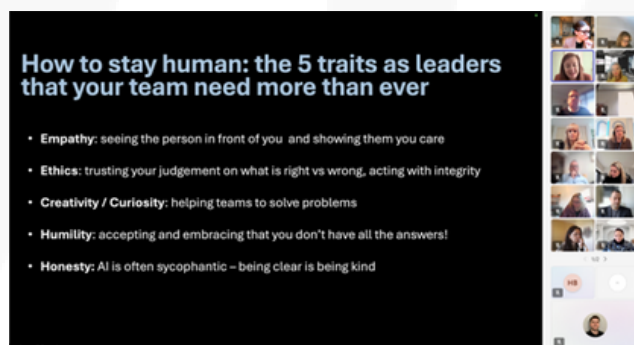
Here, Hannah offered important legal perspective. She emphasised that while these tools can be valuable, they must be used with care, transparency and clear human oversight. If a manager cannot explain or justify a decision produced with the support of AI, the organisation could face legal challenge. This grounded the room in a key principle: AI can support decisions, but it should not make them.



Steph built on this by exploring the practical implications. If candidates are increasingly presenting AI-polished versions of themselves, recruiters may find a growing mismatch between the quality of the written application and the individual who appears at interview. This isn't a sign of dishonesty, she argued, but a sign of the times, and it requires organisations to rethink what they value and how they assess it.

## Recruitment and the Search for Authenticity

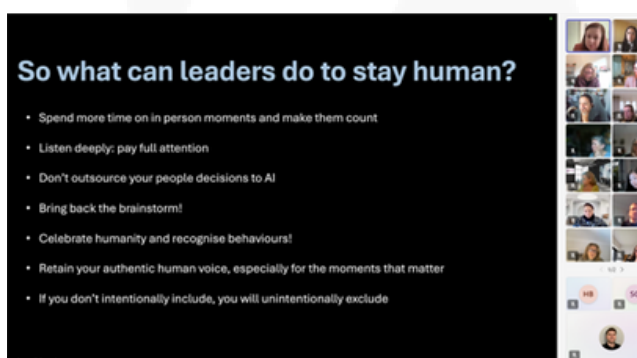
The conversation moved into the changing nature of recruitment. Hannah noted that because AI can now produce highly polished applications, employers should shift their focus away from perfection on paper and towards authenticity in person. She encouraged organisations to openly acknowledge the presence of AI, rather than attempt to police it, and instead design processes that reveal how candidates think, respond, adapt and relate.



Scenario-based questions, live problem-solving, conversational interviews and assessments centred on soft skills were positioned as ways to uncover a candidate's true qualities. The goal is not to eliminate AI from recruitment but to ensure that leaders meet the real person - not just the version enhanced by technology.

## Communication, Culture and the Cost of Speed

Throughout the session, Steph returned to the theme of communication and how dramatically it has shifted in just a generation. What once moved slowly, telephone switchboards, fax machines and paper memos, has been replaced with emails, instant messaging, Teams chats and now AI-generated text. While productivity has improved, the human elements of communication have sometimes suffered. Tone is misread, messages are sent hastily, and the pace leaves little room for nuance or care.



Steph noted particular challenges for younger generations entering the workforce, who often have less experience reading non-verbal cues or navigating complex conversations face-to-face. Surveys showing that a significant proportion of Gen Z would rather consult AI than speak to their manager about a problem highlight both the comfort with technology and the discomfort with emotional vulnerability.

The consequence, Steph suggested, is a workplace where speed has overtaken depth, and where leaders must work intentionally to restore the human connection that strengthens trust and engagement.


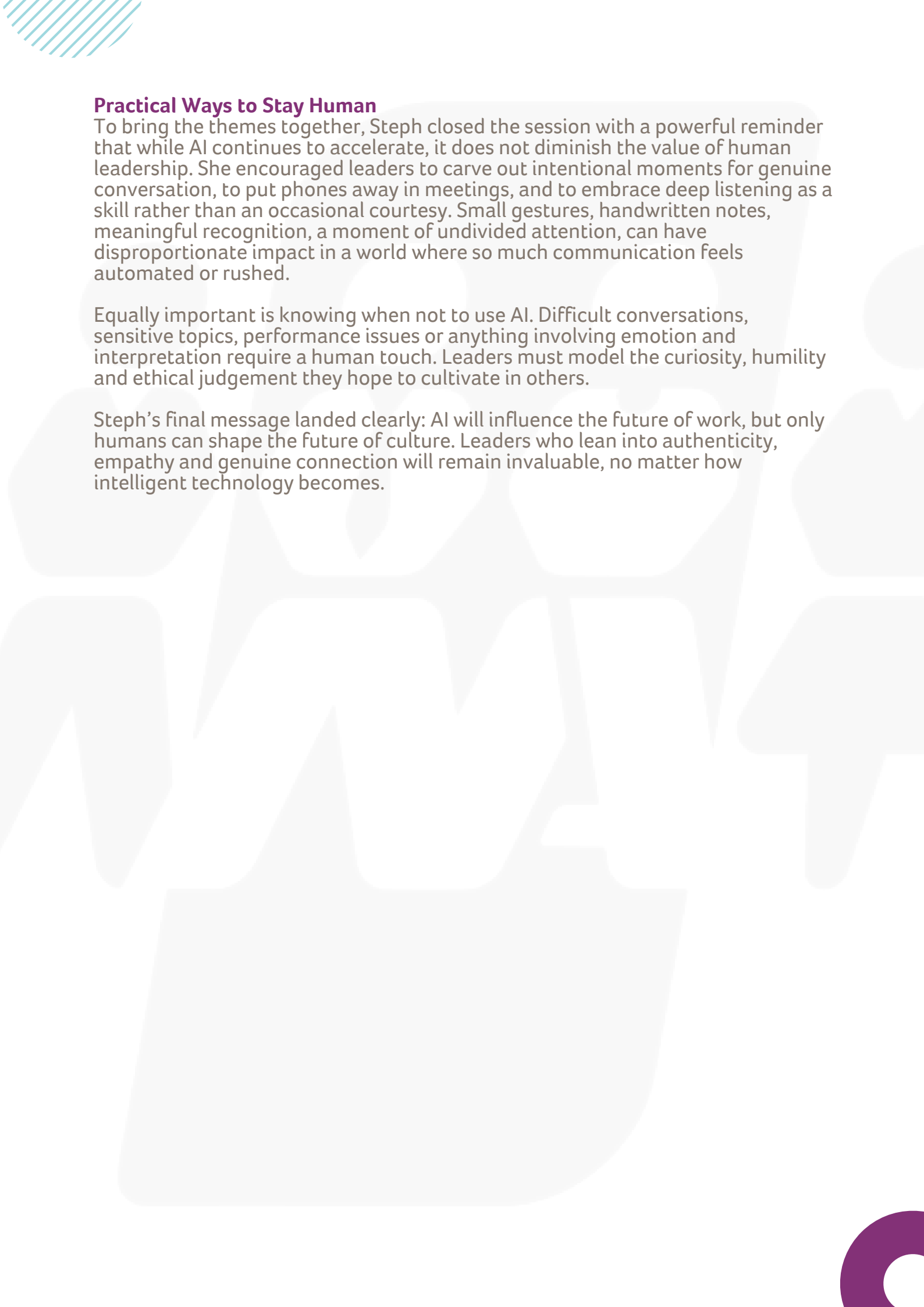


## Practical Ways to Stay Human

To bring the themes together, Steph closed the session with a powerful reminder that while AI continues to accelerate, it does not diminish the value of human leadership. She encouraged leaders to carve out intentional moments for genuine conversation, to put phones away in meetings, and to embrace deep listening as a skill rather than an occasional courtesy. Small gestures, handwritten notes, meaningful recognition, a moment of undivided attention, can have disproportionate impact in a world where so much communication feels automated or rushed.

Equally important is knowing when not to use AI. Difficult conversations, sensitive topics, performance issues or anything involving emotion and interpretation require a human touch. Leaders must model the curiosity, humility and ethical judgement they hope to cultivate in others.

Steph's final message landed clearly: AI will influence the future of work, but only humans can shape the future of culture. Leaders who lean into authenticity, empathy and genuine connection will remain invaluable, no matter how intelligent technology becomes.





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