

INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

PURPOSE- DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

How to Inspire
and Build
High-Performance
Teams

Executive Presence

*The Art of Being
Seen, Heard, and
Respected*

BREAKING CYCLES, BUILDING CHANGE

**Strategies for
Transforming
Challenges into
Progress**

Exclusive Interview

Suzie Orman
**on Standing in Her Truth
and the Power of Women
in Wealth Building**





At *Influential Women* our mission has always been simple. We shine a light on the voices, stories, and achievements of women who are redefining leadership in every field. This magazine is more than a collection of articles and features. It is a celebration of resilience, innovation, and the power of women supporting women.

Within these pages you will find stories that inspire, insights that challenge, and voices that remind us that influence is not measured only in titles but in the impact we make on others and the legacy we leave behind.

We are proud to share the journeys of those who dared to push boundaries, embrace change, and lead with both courage and compassion. Our hope is that their words and work ignite something in you. That spark of possibility that says you belong here too.

Thank you for being part of this community. Together we continue to raise the bar, open doors, and create a world where women's influence is seen, heard, and celebrated.

With gratitude,

The Influential Women Team



9 MORNING ROUTINES OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN LEADERS

Morning routines set the tone for the day. We asked nine successful women leaders what helps them stay focused, energized, and ready to lead.

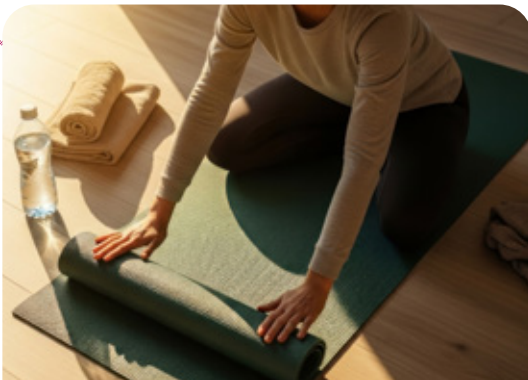


1. WAKE UP EARLY – BEFORE THE WORLD CALLS

5:30 a.m. is the sweet spot for creativity. Many leaders use this quiet time for journaling, meditation, or simply sitting in silence before emails and calls begin.

2. HYDRATE FIRST, COFFEE SECOND

The majority of women leaders start their day with water or herbal tea before caffeine. It's about clarity, not just energy.

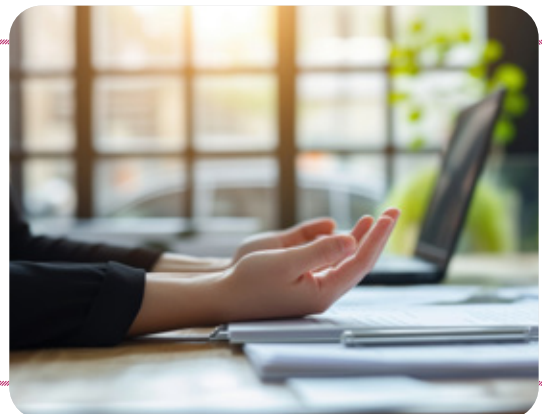


3. MOVE THE BODY

From yoga flows to quick HIIT sessions, movement is non-negotiable. Exercise fuels both confidence and focus.

4. MINDFUL MOMENTS

Five to ten minutes of meditation, prayer, or deep breathing is a cornerstone. Successful women know calm is a competitive edge.





5. FUEL WITH INTENTION

Breakfast is about brain power — think oats, smoothies, or protein-packed plates. Quick, nourishing, and never skipped..

6. SET PRIORITIES, NOT TO-DO LISTS

Leaders don't just list tasks — they set three non-negotiable priorities for the day. Less overwhelm, more impact.



7. DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

No scrolling in bed. Emails and social apps wait until after morning rituals are complete. Protecting headspace is power.

8. FAMILY & CONNECTION

For many women, mornings are sacred family time — making breakfast with kids, checking in with a partner, or quick calls to loved ones.



9. DRESS WITH INTENTION

Whether it's bold lipstick, a tailored blazer, or sneakers for comfort, getting dressed isn't just about appearance — it's about stepping into the role with confidence.

“HOW YOU *start your morning*
IS HOW YOU *own your day.*”



By The Numbers: **WOMEN AT WORK**

Progress, power, and the road ahead

29%

of national parliament seats worldwide are held by women



32%

of chief executive officers are women



15 million

businesses in the U.S. are owned by women



28%

of the STEM workforce is female



80%

the healthcare workforce is female

53%

of U.S. medical school students are women



AI AT WORK:

Opportunities for Women Leaders

Harnessing innovation, shaping the future

Artificial intelligence isn't replacing leadership — it's reshaping it. For women leaders, AI isn't just a tool, it's an opportunity to amplify influence, accelerate innovation, and break barriers across industries.

01 SMARTER DECISIONS, FASTER

AI takes the heavy lift out of data. From analyzing market trends to predicting customer behavior, women leaders can focus on strategy — not spreadsheets.



02

02 AUTOMATING THE EVERYDAY

Repetitive tasks like scheduling, reporting, and inbox triage no longer steal valuable hours. Automation creates space for creativity and high-level leadership.



01



03 UNLOCKING NEW MARKETS

AI tools can uncover hidden customer needs and untapped audiences, giving women-led companies a competitive edge in growth and innovation.

04 BREAKING BIAS WITH BETTER DATA

Used wisely, AI can help surface fairer hiring practices, equitable pay models, and inclusive product design — issues women leaders are uniquely positioned to champion.

03



04



05

05 FUTURE-PROOF LEADERSHIP

AI isn't the future — it's the present. Women leaders who adopt and adapt now will shape tomorrow's boardrooms, governments, and startups.

"AI won't replace leaders. But leaders who use AI will replace those who don't."

How Women Learned to **SPEAK UP** WHEN NO ONE WAS LISTENING

How she spoke up, stood tall, and claimed her place at the table — turning moments of doubt into defining moments of strength and leadership.

“

I found my courage by reminding myself that my voice and perspective have value, even when others don't immediately recognize it.”

**ANN EHLER,
SPECIALTY ACCOUNT
MANAGER, AXSOME
THERAPEUTICS, INC.**

“WHEN I FEEL UNDERMINED OR IGNORED, I RETURN TO THOSE VALUES AND LET THEM GUIDE MY NEXT STEPS. IF STAYING TRUE TO THEM COSTS ME A JOB, THAT SAYS MORE ABOUT THE EMPLOYER THAN ME.”

**DAYNA GALGANSKI,
SALESFORCE
IMPLEMENTATION/IT
PROJECT MANAGER,
UF LASTINGER CENTER
FOR LEARNING**

“I realized that doubt and fear are not stop signs, but signals that my voice is needed. Speaking up is how we shift the conversation and open the door for others.”

**ANNALEAH MORROW,
VICE PRESIDENT
INDUSTRY STRATEGY
& INNOVATION;
HIGHER EDUCATION &
WORKDAY, AVAAP**

“Despite facing unconscious bias, I found strength in my students' words, who recognized my dedication, reminding me of my value. This inspires me to speak up and display my true worth.”

**LESLIE DECRAENE,
FOUNDER,
PRECISE MED
PROSE, PRECISE
MED PROSE**

“KNOW, THE RISK YOU TAKE IN NOT SPEAKING UP IS FAR GREATER THAN WHAT YOU RISK WHEN YOU DO!”

**NIKKI COLEMAN,
DISTRICT MANAGER,
STARBUCKS COFFEE
COMPANY**

“In the moments I felt unseen and unheard, I reminded myself that my voice carried the insight others were searching for. I stopped waiting for permission and chose to speak.”

**AMANDA DEEN,
ENVIRONMENT,
HEALTH, AND SAFETY
MANAGER/DIRECTOR,
SSA MARINE**

“In college, I was the only woman, and the only Black person in my gaming club. Everyone doubted me, but I turned that doubt into fuel.”

**SARAHROSE
ANDERSON,
ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR,
OPULENT
SOLUTIONS GROUP**

“When I feel uncomfortable or challenged, I lean on two lessons from mentors: when you are satisfied, improvement has stopped, and what one person can do, so can another.”

**LARA DIXON, DIRECTOR
OF EDUCATOR
PREPARATION &
ACCREDITATION/
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
K-12 ADMIN, MICHIGAN
STATE UNIVERSITY**

"I advocated within the State of Florida to prevent systems from collapsing, but no one listened. I've learned it doesn't matter if they listen or not: speak and live your truth."

VICKI LEI, CHRISTIAN SPEAKER/MUSICAL CREATOR/ DOCUMENTARY WRITER

"THE DAY I STOPPED WAITING FOR PERMISSION TO CONTRIBUTE, AND STARTED TREATING EVERY BOARDROOM LIKE A MISSION BRIEFING WHERE LIVES DEPENDED ON CLARITY, MY VOICE BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE."

JULIE MUSTER BRYSON, VETERAN ADVOCATE, AUTHOR, BUSINESS OWNER, FOUNDER & CEO, BOOTS 2 BENEFITS LLC

“

I found courage when I realized that staying quiet meant agreeing. In a major meeting, I spoke up about how a decision would hurt patient retention."

ALEJANDRINA ESTEVEZ, AD ACCELERANDO PROGRAM MANAGEMENT LEADER, JOHNSON & JOHNSON INNOVATIVE MEDICINE

“ In a room full of surgeons and executives, I didn't wait for permission to speak. I spoke up not for recognition, but because advocating for operational excellence means advocating for better care.

JANETTE SINGLETARY, MANAGER, PERIOPERATIVE SCHEDULING, TAMPA GENERAL HOSPITAL

"My courage came from preparation and knowledge. When you truly understand your subject matter, you can stand in your confidence and speak with authority, even in spaces where it wasn't always easy to be heard."

TRACEY JACKSON, FOUNDER, PRINCIPAL, & CFO, TAJ STRATEGIC CONSULTING SERVICES

"I found my courage by reminding myself that my voice carries solutions and perspectives that deserve to be heard. Once I chose to speak with confidence, I claimed my seat."

LADWINA FLEGEANCE, AUTHOR, EDUCATOR & FOUNDER OF FRUITS OF HER LABOR, THE FRUITS OF HER LABOR TEXAS

“ I USED TO FEEL OUT OF PLACE IN CERTAIN ROOMS, HESITANT TO SPEAK FOR FEAR OF BEING JUDGED. OVER TIME, I LEARNED THE POWER OF STEPPING OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE AND EMBRACING MY UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE.

SELMA HODZIC, MANAGER, TRAVELERS

"I've been in rooms where I felt invisible, where my ideas went unheard. But I remembered who I was raised to be. I spoke with clarity and purpose, and slowly the room began to shift."

BRANDY L. MCAULEY, AUTHOR, PAGE PUBLISHING

“ Having found a way to let my voice be heard has resulted in observing others do the same. My advice: it doesn't matter who wants to hear it or gets upset, let your voice be heard.

ARELIS CALKINS, LIFE COACH, REIKI PRACTITIONER, & AUTHOR, ARELIS CALKINS

"When you truly care about the outcome of a discussion, the courage to speak and contribute becomes imperative. Being heard is a matter of persistence."

ANNE MARIE HICKS, SENIOR MANAGER, CAPITAL EDGE CONSULTING

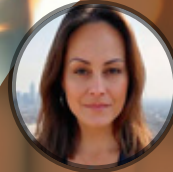
How She Created Opportunity When None Existed

STORIES OF WOMEN WHO REFUSED TO WAIT FOR DOORS TO OPEN — AND BUILT THEIR OWN PATHS INSTEAD.



“When I saw the gap in how companies scaled Customer Success without adding overhead, I built Key Focus Group to deliver global excellence with agility.”

**KEYONNA TAYLOR,
CEO | VCSO,
KEY FOCUS GROUP LLC**



“When no clear path existed, I didn’t wait for doors to open— I built them. I leaned into my strengths to create opportunities that didn’t yet exist.”

**ERICA MALDONADO,
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
TO SENIOR VICE
PRESIDENT OF SUPPLY
CHAIN & BUSINESS
INTELLIGENCE, ASHLEY
FURNITURE INDUSTRIES**



“As women we face struggles in male-dominated workforces. When struggle comes you become strategic. I get ahead of problems by stepping in them, find alternative ways to connect and build a team.”

**CORTNIE “CJ” LOMAX,
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE II,
US SELLER SUCCESS &
RECRUITMENT- BEAUTY
DIVISION, AMAZON**

“They said I couldn’t withstand the storm, but in the Army, I built solutions where no path existed. By leading with respect and kindness, I proved I am the storm.”

**LEANN DALEY,
PROGRAM
ANALYST, CALIBRE
SYSTEMS**



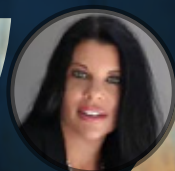
“When the path didn’t exist, I built one for my students—and it became the foundation for my own growth as a leader.”

**ELIZA MARIA
RIOS GUISAO,
LEAD SPECIAL
EDUCATION
TEACHER, UPLIFT
EDUCATION**



“We all fall and face obstacles, but having a clear vision of your goals and a mindset that refuses to accept failure keeps you moving forward.”

**TAMARA WEBB,
SPECIALTY
ACCOUNT
MANAGER, AXSOME
THERAPEUTICS, INC.**



“Dreams do not work unless you do!”

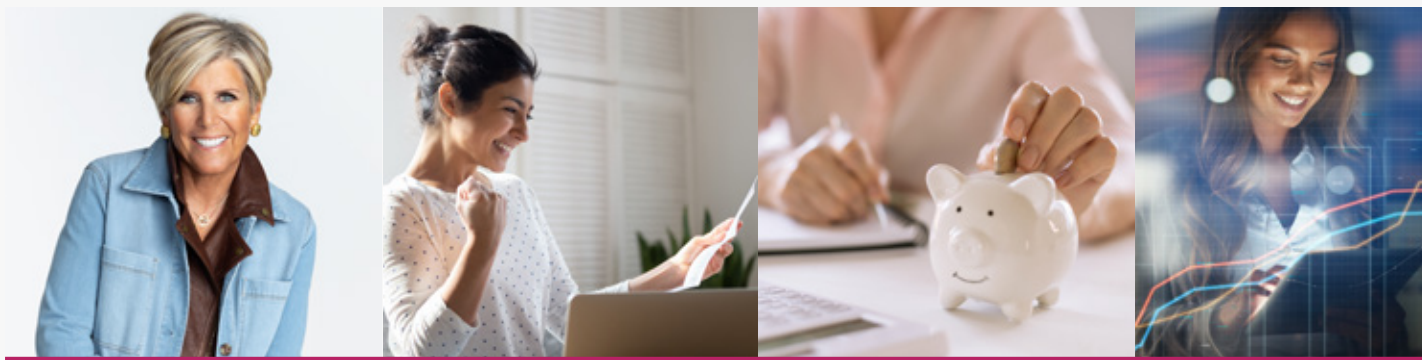
**MIRANDA
ROBERTS,
TERRITORY
SALES
MANAGER,
GULF COAST
SUPPLY**



Always Standing in Our Truth

An Interview with

SUZE ORMAN



Author, podcast host, and personal finance expert **Suze Orman** is a ten-times #1 *New York Times* bestselling author on Personal Finance, with over 25 million books in circulation, available in twelve languages worldwide. She is also a two-time Emmy Award-winning television host and one of the top motivational speakers in the world today. She has received an unprecedented eight Gracie Awards, which recognize the nation's best radio, television, and cable programming by, for, and about women was twice named to the *Time* 100, ranked among the World's 100 Most Powerful Women by *Forbes*, and named one of the 100 Most Influential Women in U.S. Finance by *Barron's*.

Orman was the host of *The Suze Orman Show* on CNBC for thirteen years, a contributing editor for *O: The Oprah Magazine* for sixteen years, and a contributing editor for *The Costco Connection* for nineteen years. She is currently the host of the popular *Suze Orman's Women & Money* podcast.

Influential Women was honored to do an interview with this powerful, wise, and inspiring woman as the cover for our inaugural issue. As we have come to love and expect from Ms. Orman, she brought her keen intelligence, no-nonsense wisdom, and warm humor to our conversation.

“ Those struggles taught me this truth: money isn’t just about wealth. It’s about dignity. It’s about independence. It’s about security. It’s about having the power to protect yourself and those you love. And the only way to build that power is to stand in your truth—no excuses, no denial. ”



••• EARLY INFLUENCES & JOURNEY •••

IW: Suze, you've inspired millions with your straightforward financial wisdom. What experiences in your early life shaped your views on money and success?

I grew up on the South Side of Chicago, where money was always tight and survival was the goal. My father ran a tiny chicken shack, my mother was a secretary, and every single dollar mattered.

One day, when I was still a child, I watched my father run into that shack as it burned to the ground. Flames roared, but he risked his life to save the cash register—because every cent he had was in that box. He came out with third-degree burns covering his arms and chest, clutching that register like it was oxygen. That moment seared into me—literally and figuratively—that in our world, **money meant survival**.

But survival wasn't the end of it. My father later developed emphysema, and my parents struggled with both money and health. By thirteen, I was working every day in his deli, helping to pay the bills. I never expected my parents to provide for me—they could barely provide for themselves.

Those struggles taught me this truth: money isn't just about wealth. It's about *dignity*. It's about independence. It's about security. It's about having the power to protect yourself and those you love. And the only way to build that power is to stand in your truth—no excuses, no denial.

••••• BREAKING BARRIERS •••••

IW: You entered an industry that hasn't always been easy for women to dominate. What challenges did you face in building your credibility? And how did you overcome skeptics in the early stages of your career?

In 1980, when I was twenty-nine years old, I walked onto Wall Street. For seven years before that, I had been waiting tables, bringing home \$400 a month. The only reason I was there was because I owed \$50,000 to friends who had loaned me money to open a restaurant. I had invested it at Merrill Lynch—and a crooked broker lost every dime. As a waitress, I knew I could never pay them back. So, I thought: *If they can make me broke, maybe I should become a broker.*

When I went into that interview, the manager looked me in the eye and said, “Women belong barefoot and pregnant. We'll hire you, but don't worry—we'll fire you in six months.”

They only wanted me to fill a quota. I was a woman in a man's world—and I was openly gay in a world that didn't accept that as of yet.

But here's the truth: you don't silence skeptics with words. You silence them with results. I studied harder. I worked longer. I refused to quit. You don't ask for permission to succeed—you show up, you stand in your truth, and you make them take notice.

And no, they never fired me. What I learned is simple: **Always stand in your truth.**

That's how you turn “barefoot and pregnant” into unstoppable and undeniable.

••••• HER CAREER & INFLUENCE •••••

IW: You've written bestselling books like Women & Money and The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom that have helped millions. Which of your principles do you feel has created the biggest transformation for women? And on The Suze Orman Show, you often gave tough love. Why is direct, no-nonsense advice so important when helping people with money, and in particular, women?

Listen to me: the one thing I want etched in your head forever is this: **You must always stand in your truth.**

Why? Because you and your money are one. Your money is a direct reflection of you. If your money is a chaotic mess, it's because you are a chaotic mess. If your money is out of control, it's because you are out of control. Money doesn't lie. It tells the story of your life.

Your self-worth equals your net worth. When you undervalue yourself, the world undervalues you right back. And here's the kicker: you can never solve a financial problem with money. You solve it by facing the truth about *why* you're overspending, *why* you're in debt, and *why* you keep making the same mistakes. Until you face that truth, you will stay in bondage.

Debt isn't just numbers on a statement—it's a **warning siren**. It's proof that you've traded your power for denial. And the longer you ignore it, the louder it gets.

The way out isn't more income. The way out isn't luck. The way out is *courage*. The second you decide to stand in your truth—about who you are, what you value, and why you've been hiding—that's the second your money shifts. That's when you move from chaos to clarity, from bondage to freedom.

Because here's the bottom line: when you clean up your truth, your money will clean up with it.

••• WOMEN & WEALTH BUILDING •••

IW: How do women's emotional relationships with money differ from men's, and how can we turn those differences into strengths? Can you describe the most empowering financial move a woman can make in her twenties? Her forties? Her sixties? And what myths about women and money do you wish would disappear forever?

One of your most famous lessons is to build an eight-month emergency fund. Why do you think this piece of advice, along with standing in your truth, has been so empowering for women in particular?

Women have a different relationship with money than men. Men often see it as a scoreboard. Women see it as security, freedom, and love. That is not weakness—it is strength, because money tied to values is money with power.

Here's what I tell women at every stage:

- **IN YOUR TWENTIES:** Open a Roth IRA. Pay yourself first. That's how you stand in your truth about your future.
- **IN YOUR FORTIES:** Protect yourself—insurance, a will, and a strong emergency fund. That's how you stand in your truth about responsibility.
- **IN YOUR SIXTIES:** Delay Social Security if you can. That one decision can mean thousands more every year for life. That's how you stand in your truth about longevity.

The myth I want to bury forever? That women "aren't good with money."

Wrong. When women take control, they're often better investors than men, because they're not gambling—they're steady.

I started *Women & Money* because women had been shut out of the financial conversation for too long. To stand in your truth means you stop hiding from your debt, your mistakes, and your dreams. You face them, you own them, and you change them.

And yes—the eight-month emergency fund is non-negotiable. It's not just about money. It's about dignity. It's about knowing that when life knocks you down, you won't lose your home, your independence, or your peace of mind. That's what standing in your truth looks like.

••••• WOMEN & MONEY LEGACY •••••


IW: After decades of helping women step into financial power, what changes have you actually seen in women's confidence and decision-making with money? How do they create real-life security and happiness? And how do you want to be remembered by the women whose lives you've touched?

Over the decades, I've watched women go from saying, "I can't" to declaring, "I can, and I did!"

I've seen women walk out of abusive relationships because they had money of their own. I've seen them go from sleeping in cars to becoming millionaires. I've seen them retire on their own terms after being left penniless by their husbands. That is the power of standing in your truth.

"People first, then money, then things" has been my mantra. And when women honor themselves first, they make financial decisions that bring both security and joy.

How do I want to be remembered? As the woman who helped millions find the courage to stand in their truth. Not just with money—but with life itself.

Because here's the bottom line: when you stand in your truth, you don't just change your money. **You change your destiny.** 

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Photos by Marc Royce

WHO PUT THE “AGENT” IN AGENTIC?

Clarifying the Confusion Behind Modern AI Models

**FROM CHATBOTS TO AI AGENTS:
DEMYSTIFYING THE EVOLUTION
OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

Ava Jones, *founder, Simplanica*

I recently attended a tech conference and realized something: the most whispered question in the room wasn't “what's next?” or “who's launching when?” It was, “Wait... What actually is an agent?” And, fair. It's a mess.

If you're a Silicon Valley native, your internal definitions might be just as fuzzy as a Midwest fifth grader's. Learning how to use this tech is already a lift. Trying to walk your mom through why her prompting sucks when she's trying to tweak her peach cobbler recipe? Another level. So, let's walk it back... All the way back to the 1950s.

In 1955, computer scientist John McCarthy proposed something wild: that machines might someday replicate the way humans learn and reason. This was the birthplace of both the term *artificial intelligence* and the first recorded use of the word *agent* in a tech context.

We're starting there.

Let's unpack this in order of easiest to explain to most eye-crossing.

Chatbots: The ones we all know. Talk, respond. Talk, respond. They simulate conversation, usually over the Internet. The first of their kind? ELIZA in 1966, which mimicked a Rogerian therapist—and, weirdly, kind of fooled people.

LLMs (Large Language Models):

These are trained on absurd amounts of text data (like, billions of terabytes) to produce human-like language. Think of them as ultra-advanced parrots: they mimic language, answer questions, and do it convincingly, but they're not "thinking" in a traditional sense. They're just very, very good at text.

Generative AI: Now we get spicy.

Gen AI goes beyond repeating. It creates. Text, audio, video, images—it's all fair game. It pulls from massive data sets and generates something new that feels like the source material but isn't a copy. You may have heard this term in 2022 or 2023, but it traces back to 2014, with Ian Goodfellow's framework for Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs).

Here's how I like to explain GANs: Imagine you're playing Monopoly. Every time you pass GO, the banker hands you fake money. But each time, the fake money looks more and more like real US\$. Eventually, you can't tell the difference between the game cash and what's in your wallet.

That's GAN. One side generates fake data, the other side tries to detect it. The whole system keeps getting better at both until it's nearly indistinguishable.

That subtle mimicry? That's the artistry behind Gen AI.

Agentic AI: Think of this as your chatbot going off to college. It can take initiative. It can critique, plan, and act (sometimes without you even asking). It emerged around 2023, offering a new level of independence from models before it.

Here's a quick rule of thumb:

- If I want to write a screenplay with no rules, just vibes? I want Gen AI.
- If I want to write that same screenplay but also want an AI that flags overused tropes (e.g., "The last twelve teacher/barista romcoms flopped. Want to rethink that premise?") and swaps out every overused "like" with smarter word choices? That's Agentic AI.

Of course, Agentic AI is rooted in McCarthy's original "agent" idea. This idea, though, has evolved significantly, leading us to today's more dynamic "Agent"ic AI. So, let's hit the apex of this whole rabbit hole:

What even is an AI Agent?

Do we know?



Right now, it's a crowded floor, but no one wants to be the first to dance.

An AI Agent can create data or solutions in contexts where it hasn't been explicitly trained. It solves tasks through inference rather than replication. It acts on its own volition without prior examples (within reason; it's not off researching breakdancing). It tries to solve your problems for you, sometimes even after you've closed the app. You don't need to babysit it.

Now, historically, we've had a few different takes on what an "agent" could be. Simple Reflex, Model-based, Goal-based, Utility-based, and Learning Agents—and based on McCarthy's original definition—an agent is a system that can perceive its environment, make decisions, and act accordingly. We could argue those five still count as the OG agents.

*Simple Reflex,
Model-based, Goal-based,
Utility-based, and Learning
Agents—and based
on McCarthy's original
definition—an agent is
a system that can
perceive its environment,
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and act accordingly.*

