

Navigating a Support Career in an AI-Powered World

Mathew Patterson • January 5, 2025



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You work in customer support.

Some people think that means you work a checkout or blast perfume at passing shoppers in a department store, but it's not that kind of customer service.

Your work happens online, over chat or email, sometimes on the phone. You handle everything from "I forgot how to log in again!!!" to complex investigations of weird bugs specific to the web browser embedded in fridge doors.

Maybe you started out in this career, or maybe you followed a winding path here via a psych degree you never really used (but are still paying for) and a brief period where you thought you might become a sculptor for an off-brand wax museum.

Whatever your path, whatever your story, you find yourself here, now, right at this moment — this moment when all anybody wants to talk about is AI and how soon it will replace your job. Even though it's already obvious that AI will shake up all sorts of industries, it sure feels like a lot of businesses will start with customer support. New AI-powered apps daily promise to "drive down your customer service costs," and consultants seduce CEOs with the dream of a human-free team.

No surprise then that the people who are most single-mindedly bullish about an AI-centric future are the people most insulated from the economic effect (or who at least believe themselves to be.) They can't know how it will all shake out in 10 or 15 years, and neither can we.

We don't live in the future; we have to deal with the present. We're all going to need to figure out our own paths from right here to ... somewhere out there. You might be excited about working with AI tools or anxious about how they will be used (or most likely somewhere in between). However you are feeling, you are not alone.

So this is not an article about how AI will change the world over the next decade. It's about how AI might change *your* working life *this year* — or next year — and what you can do about it.

The 4 paths for support professionals

Where will your support career go next? Standing still is not an option, because AI is going to shift the ground beneath you. You'll choose a direction to travel, or a choice will be made for you by the forces of either market or manager.

Feeling like you have no agency in your career, or even in your life, is a recipe for despair. The truth is you *do* have options, and you can steer yourself, at least a little.

We see four distinct directions you might head in. Think of these as compass points. You don't have to head due north, but it's good to know where it is and which way you're facing.

1. Move UP into a management role

Follow the classic career growth model by becoming a people manager and taking on higher levels of responsibility. You might become a team leader, a support lead, or a director of service. Perhaps you'll be in a support operations role, figuring out systems and processes more suited to a working world which includes generative AI.

Management roles will also be shaped and augmented by AI, but the day-to-day work is less likely to be drastically changed. We've got plenty of resources to help new and aspiring support leaders and more to come.

2. Move IN and become an AI specialist

Consider embracing the change and leading your colleagues by digging deep into the potential and practicalities of AI and an AI-augmented future of service. Every team will need someone with a broader understanding of the AI tools who can advise the team on how to get the most from them. If you enjoy following the technology, bringing your support perspective to bear on it could be really valuable.

Keep an eye out for our upcoming guide on the best places and techniques for developing into an internal AI expert for your customer support organization.

3. Move AHEAD as an individual contributor

AI will almost certainly lead to the loss of some roles and the reorganizing of teams, but there will be plenty of people using AI tools to deliver human-powered service more effectively, more quickly, and at greater scale.

To succeed as an individual contributor in the future will mean embracing the best of AI augmentation and using it to improve your personal productivity while maintaining a high standard of service quality.

If you are interested in this path, it will help to have a clear understanding of where you spend your time and energy today. Which tasks that you do could be replaced or shortened by better tools? Where might you most valuably spend any time you can free up?

Stay tuned for more from Help Scout on practical tips for using AI to make your working life easier and more impactful.

4. Move OUT of customer support

Perhaps you will decide to take your customer service skills and apply them to other roles where a decent human touch is highly valued. You could become a customer success manager or account manager and get more hands-on to help your customers reach their goals. Or you could apply your customer-centric mindset to a product management role or a training and onboarding position.

Four primary directions, each of them branching out and twisting back onto the others in a tangle of entwined opportunities.

Check your gut reaction right now: Which path appeals to you most? Why? Make a note of it, and then tomorrow or next week, ask yourself again.

In practice, your career opportunities probably won't arrive so clearly labeled. The value of having this framework in mind is in helping you spot the moments that could lead toward something you are most interested in.

Like all good scouts, it helps to be prepared.

Chart your own path

The combination of your life and work situation, career goals, and set of skills are unique to you. Nobody can tell you the best thing to do. At most, they can offer you options and their best advice.

The first step in taking some control over your own working future is to know yourself better. What are you good at, what matters to you, and what might you need to learn? We've put together [some support career planning questions](#) to help you think it through.

Spend some time thinking about what you want and where your skills lie. The answers you end up with are important, but the process of figuring them out is what counts most.

Deepening your understanding of your own strengths and interests helps you develop a lens through which you can view this world and your working life as it changes. You'll be better positioned to advocate for yourself when the right moment arrives.

Enjoying the journey

We don't know yet how long it will take to move from "AI is going to change everything" to "Of course you use AI at work, everyone does." So rather than waiting to find out, we should find ways to use the time.

Today the map of our future work with AI is vague and covered with the "here be dragons" warnings map makers used to cover their ignorance. As we learn more about the capabilities, costs, and challenges of AI tools, we will be able to see all our opportunities more clearly.

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