The Ladder: how I hand real work to AI across four companies

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RUNG 1	RUNG 2	RUNG 3	RUNG 4
In my head	**Written down**	**Handed off**	**Runs itself**
The task only exists as something I know. Nobody else can do it, human or AI.	What done looks like, and everything you need to know to get there, is on paper.	Somebody else, a person or an AI agent, picks it up and finishes it without asking me anything.	It happens on its own, gets checked, and I only hear about it when a decision needs me.

Every task in my business climbs the same ladder. Most of my work used to stall on the first rung. The whole game is getting it to the last one.

Why AI can't finish the job

This is the part I got from Ari Meisel. Say you ask a VA to log in to a site and update something, but you never gave them the password. They're not going to finish. So that's a bad delegation.

AI is the same. Before it can finish anything it needs 2 things:

1. **Definition.** Does it know exactly what done looks like, and everything it needs to know to get there?
2. **Tools.** Does it actually have access? The logins, the APIs, the data, the permissions.

Miss either one and you just get a really fast guesser.

How I go from idea to done

- **Goals.** The big thing, per project. What done looks like for that business.
- **Targets.** A goal broken into the next few concrete objectives that actually move it.
- **Passes.** Each target broken into chunks of work defined well enough that AI can pick one up cold and finish it. (You could call them tasks.)

A pass is closer to a work order than a to-do: what to do, what done looks like in a way you could actually check, where the stuff lives, what it's allowed to touch, and what it has to stop and ask a human about.

Moving a task up one rung

- **1 to 2:** write down what done looks like, in a way somebody could check. If you can't, that's the first thing to fix.
- **2 to 3:** give it the tools. Anything that can't be defined yet doesn't get guessed at. It turns into a question for the one person who can answer it. Answer it, and the work runs.
- **3 to 4:** something grabs the work that's ready on its own, and a different agent checks it before anything gets called done.

The bonus for the technical half: the starter kit that goes with this (the pass template, the end-of-session checklist and 3 more files I actually use) is at marketermatt.com/ladder. I'm writing about building this every day on the blog.