

BEYOND AUTOMATION: HOW AI ELEVATES CREATIVITY AND STRATEGY



FEATURING

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L E A R N I N G O B J E C T I V E S :

- Routine freight tasks such as load entry and invoicing are increasingly automated, freeing transportation professionals to focus on exceptions, growth and customer relationships.
- PCS Software executives Mark Hill and Danielle Villegas stress that AI is changing the nature of work, not eliminating jobs — highlighting creativity, judgment and interpersonal skills as rising in value.
- From AI assistants to autonomous agents, new tools are reshaping operations, and leaders say experimentation, training and a culture of openness will determine how well teams adapt.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing daily operations in freight transportation, shifting the focus from repetitive tasks to exception management and higher-value work. [More than 60% of logistics businesses now use some form of AI](#), according to recent industry surveys, and adoption is accelerating as companies push for efficiency and competitiveness.

Routine load entry and invoice processing, once the backbone of back-office work, are increasingly automated. With the basics handled by machines, transportation professionals are being asked to step up in new ways—solving problems, strengthening customer relationships, and driving business growth.

This shift is more than technical; it's changing the skills transportation leaders must prioritize. For fleets and logistics managers, the urgent questions are clear: How do teams adapt to these new demands? What strategies will define success as AI becomes a daily presence on the job? The answers will shape the future of work across the industry.

From repetitive tasks to high-value contributions

[Manual work](#) has long filled the days of transportation professionals, from building loads in a transportation management system to sending invoices for completed shipments. [Danielle Villegas](#), chief product officer at [PCS Software](#), noted that these tasks are now handled by AI: “We don’t manually create loads inside of our [TMS application](#). We don’t manually create invoices inside of the application anymore.”

By automating repetitive steps, AI frees up time and energy for teams to focus on higher-level work such as customer growth, freight optimization or continuity planning. For example, instead of spending hours on data entry, a dispatcher might focus on improving backhaul opportunities or strengthening customer relationships. As more routine work disappears, companies are reinvesting saved hours into areas that drive revenue and improve service quality.

This shift sets the stage for a new operational model, one in which humans step in only when judgment, creativity or relationship-building is needed. That’s where **exception management** is becoming the new standard.

Exception management is the leadership model

Exception management — stepping in only when routine processes encounter a problem — has become central to freight operations. Instead of entering data or processing paperwork, freight managers now focus on issues that require human judgment: a delayed load at a warehouse, a billing mismatch on an invoice or a last-minute route change due to weather.

[Mark Hill](#), CEO at PCS Software, explained, “Our systems will be very much exception-based because AI is going to get better and better at handling each of the steps in the process and making decisions that are more in line with how people have done it in the past.” As AI systems reliably cover most everyday tasks, people shift their attention to these rare but critical situations. When a shipment is flagged for missing paperwork or a rate discrepancy appears, that’s when human expertise takes over.

The industry is moving toward a model in which technology manages the routine, and professionals step in only for exceptions that directly affect customer satisfaction and business results.

This shift matters for every fleet, broker and logistics team. **Instead of getting buried in paperwork, workers have the chance to apply their experience and insight where it counts — leading to more growth, stronger customer ties and measurable business results.**

AI assistants and agents: New partners in daily operations

As AI takes over routine processes, new categories of tools are emerging: [assistants](#) and agents. AI assistants are already part of daily life for many transportation teams. These digital copilots help with tasks such as scheduling, load tracking and answering routine questions. Their value lies in how they support decision-making, flag problems and reduce the need for constant manual checking. For many, assistants free up time to focus on challenges that truly need human attention.

As companies adopt more advanced systems, AI agents are starting to play a larger role. [Agents](#) reason, act across multiple platforms and handle issues from start to finish. “Assistants evolve into wanting to do more interaction with the outside world, with other systems, with other capabilities. And that’s where agents come in,” Hill explained. Unlike assistants, agents can resolve exceptions, make choices and move work forward with less waiting for human input. Still, they require oversight to ensure decisions align with company goals and customer expectations.

The line between assistants and agents is not fixed. As tools learn and improve, many evolve from simple support roles into more independent ones. This progression reflects a larger change in how transportation companies approach daily operations. Adopting assistants and agents helps fleets expand coverage while resolving problems faster.

With both in the mix, companies can provide better service, [spot disruptions early](#) and keep operations moving even when challenges arise. These tools allow teams to focus on strategy, customer relationships and growth, rather than only managing routine problems. For leaders, the question is not whether to choose between people and machines, but how to combine both for the best result.

Human strengths: Creativity, growth and connection

AI now handles many of the tasks that once filled the day in transportation offices. This shift puts a new spotlight on what only humans can do. "AI just changes the nature of the work that the individual is doing", Villegas said. "I don't think it necessarily [takes jobs away](#), but it changes how they spend their day-to-day when, what tasks they're doing." Workers who once built their schedules around data entry or routine calls now have the chance to focus on solving problems and spotting opportunities that drive the business forward.

When AI takes care of repetitive work, it gives transportation teams more freedom to think strategically. Professionals can spend their time finding better backhauls, exploring new freight markets or identifying ways to improve margins — actions that require judgment and experience. Each exception or challenge that AI cannot solve calls for a person who can weigh options and choose the best course. Human insight in these moments becomes a clear competitive advantage.

As routine tasks fade, skills such as communication and teamwork grow in importance. Hill said, "The ability to interact with people has become more desired and more valued." Freight professionals now spend more time working directly with customers and colleagues, building trust and leading teams through change. These skills help companies adapt and grow, especially as technology continues to reshape operations.

AI isn't reducing the role of people in freight — it's raising the value of **creativity, leadership and connection**. In an industry where customer trust and reliable service are everything, these human strengths are the difference between simply keeping pace and staying ahead.

Overcoming fear: Fostering a culture of experimentation

Many workers in transportation feel uncertainty as AI takes on bigger roles in daily operations. The concern often centers on job security, but the real shift is about how work gets done. Hill urged teams to move past worry: "Don't be scared, nobody's gonna steal your soul." He explained, "Jobs are gonna change. That's all a normal part of evolution."

Trying new tools is the surest way to build confidence. Workers who use AI in their own tasks quickly learn its limits and strengths, and mistakes become part of the learning curve. Teams that test, adjust and share what works gain skills faster. **Leadership must reinforce this culture by showing curiosity, encouraging trial and error, and supporting hands-on training.**

Managers and executives play a central role in reducing fear. When leaders use AI tools daily, they signal that learning is for everyone. Teams follow their example. A culture that rewards curiosity and experimentation keeps workers engaged as technology advances.

Fear can hold companies back. The most successful organizations encourage openness to change and treat missteps as learning opportunities, a mindset that will determine how well fleets adapt as AI becomes part of everyday work.

Looking ahead: Leading the AI shift

Adopting AI in freight doesn't require an overhaul overnight. Hill advises leaders to begin with a single, measurable project: "Let's do some small projects inside. Let's learn how this thing works. Let's learn how the [car drives](#), and then magic happens and it expands throughout the organization". Small wins build confidence, while missteps provide lessons that shape stronger strategies.

The bigger test is cultural. Teams need encouragement to experiment, share what works and see AI as a tool that supports — not replaces — them. Leaders who model curiosity and openness will find their people more willing to adapt.

The future of transportation will be defined by those who combine [AI's efficiency with human creativity](#), judgment and connection. Companies that move now, with purpose and pragmatism, will set the standard for the industry's next chapter.

This article is based on an episode of Roadsigns, a podcast exploring the trends and technologies that are shaping the future of trucking. [Check out the website to catch past and future episodes.](#)