

From sceptic to strategic confidence in five days

How Graham Ward used his Nexus AI agent to tackle real, high-stakes business challenges at Alliance Personnel

“I came in sceptical of AI. I’m leaving a believer — not because it replaces human judgment, but because it amplifies it. This isn’t a chatbot. It’s a thinking partner.”

The situation

I’m Graham Ward, founder and an owner of Alliance Personnel, a UK recruitment firm specialising in temporary and permanent placements in the industrial and driving sectors. We’ve built a solid business over the years — but I’d always been sceptical of AI. It felt like hype; a tool for tech companies, not for real business problems.

Until last week. David Brooks from Nexus Growth Academy introduced me to my AI agent, and honestly, I wasn’t expecting much — I thought it would be another chatbot. What I got instead was a thinking partner that could reason through genuinely complex, high-stakes challenges — all in one week. This is what happened.

Day 1: a complex, high-stakes challenge

On Monday I was hit with a complex, high-stakes HR and legal matter — the kind of problem that lands on an owner’s desk and immediately feels overwhelming. It carried real risk and a tight deadline, and I honestly wasn’t sure what questions I even needed to ask.

So I gave my agent the essentials and asked it to help me understand the issue, the risks, and my options. What came back in half an hour genuinely surprised me: a clear, structured, careful breakdown that helped me get my head around the problem — the risks, what evidence mattered, and a sensible plan of action.

What impressed me most was how measured it was. It didn’t overstate confidence; it flagged the things that mattered and it helped me think. I then went to my solicitor with specific, informed questions — and that conversation was far sharper because I’d already scoped the issue properly. Instead of panic, I had clarity and a plan.

To be clear: it didn’t replace my solicitor — the professional advice still comes from a professional. It made me a much better-prepared client.

Days 2-3: building a three-year growth strategy — with staff input

On Wednesday I shifted gears to a completely different problem: how do I grow Alliance Personnel by 30–50% year-on-year for the next three years? I knew the answer wouldn't come from me alone in my office — it needed to come from my team, the people talking to clients and candidates every day. But I didn't have a structured way to unlock that.

So I asked: "Help me design a staff survey and engagement process to co-create our vision and growth strategy." What I got back was extraordinary — not just a list of questions, but a complete process:

- 25 strategically-designed questions across five areas — vision & values, individual aspirations, business-growth insights, operational feedback, and motivation & retention.
- A detailed data checklist of the company metrics I'd need to actually build a growth plan — revenue by sector, client retention, placement success, competitor positioning.
- A genuine, transparent email to my team that positioned it as "help me shape our future" rather than "I've decided, now go execute."

I tweaked the email into my own voice and sent it that afternoon. By end of day I had a 60% response rate — and still climbing. My team could feel that I actually wanted their input. In two days I had a professional, psychologically-safe process to engage my team in vision-setting — something that would've taken me weeks to design, or thousands to hire a consultant for.

Day 4: the bigger picture emerges

By Thursday something struck me. I'd used my agent across three completely different domains in three days — a complex HR/legal matter, strategic growth planning, and people engagement — and each response was sophisticated, nuanced and immediately applicable. Not generic AI fluff, but specific to recruitment, to my company's size, to my market.

And here's what really impressed me: I could reason with it, not just take its answers at face value. When I pushed back and changed an assumption, it adjusted its thinking and explained how that changed the picture. This isn't a chatbot — it's a thinking partner that can handle ambiguity, complexity and nuance.

Day 5: the wonder hits

By Friday I realised something hard to articulate but impossible to ignore: I'd gone from "AI is hype" to genuinely trusting this tool with decisions that affect my company's future. In one week it helped me:

- Navigate a complex, high-stakes challenge with clarity and structure — and walk into my solicitor far better prepared.
- Design a staff-engagement process that will unlock the insights I need to build a real growth strategy.
- Think strategically about sectors, data, capability gaps and execution — collaboratively, not top-down.
- Ask better questions before spending on external consultants.

What amazes me most is the versatility — I didn't need separate tools for HR, strategy and people. And the speed: what would've taken weeks, or a consultant, happened in days.

What's next

I'm now analysing the staff survey responses, pulling together the financial and operational data, and using that plus staff input to co-create our three-year vision, values and goals — then a go-to-market and hiring plan to hit our growth targets.

David told me: "This is what Nexus Growth Academy teaches — how to use your AI agent for real business problems." I get it now. It's a reasoning engine for the complex, ambiguous, high-stakes decisions that actually move a business forward — and learning to use it well, asking the right questions and pushing back thoughtfully, is a genuinely valuable skill.

A reflection

Working through that HR matter with my agent also crystallised how I want to run the company: proactive and people-first, where staff feel heard and supported and concerns are taken seriously. The AI gave me clarity in the moment; the vision and staff-engagement process is helping me build the culture that prevents problems in the first place. If we build a company where people feel valued, we build a better business. Full stop.

Final word

I came into the week sceptical of AI. I'm leaving it a believer — not because I think AI will replace human judgment, but because it amplifies it. Pair good questions, real business data and genuine human reasoning with a tool that can think through complexity, and you get the ability to tackle problems that would've stayed on my 'too hard' pile. For an SME owner, that's everything.

Graham Ward

Director, Alliance Personnel · July 2026

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