

Girls' Leadership Guide:
Offloading Is Not Surrendering: Using AI Well

Ivy Walker
Serial Entrepreneur, Author & Risk Management Expert
Treasurer, S.H.A.U.N. Foundation for Girls

Using AI well starts with a distinction most people miss: handing off a task is not the same as handing off your thinking.

Cognitive offloading is something we have always done with tools. We write things down, so we don't have to use mental resources to remember them. We use a calculator instead of doing the math in our head. That's offloading. The key feature is that you remain in charge. The calculator is a tool, and you could do the task yourself if you had to. Offloading frees your attention for more complex work.

Cognitive surrender is different. It happens when you stop evaluating what the tool gives you and start treating its output as the answer. The grant narrative drafted by ChatGPT that goes out unread. The program evaluation you asked Claude to put together that gets forwarded to the funder because it sounded good. The tell is not how much you used AI. It is whether you could defend the result if a board member or funder pushed back on it. If you cannot explain why a conclusion is right, you didn't offload anything. You surrendered the task. You gave up the judgment, but the accountability still belongs to you.

For girls-centered organizations, this matters a lot. Your expertise is not generic. You know what a safe program space feels like, how girls talk about their lives, and which communities have reasons to distrust institutions. AI models draw on broad patterns, and those patterns can flatten girls into stereotypes or miss the context that makes your work effective. A tool can write a polished impact story that is subtly wrong about the girls it describes. Only someone who knows them will notice.

There are a few ways you can guard against drifting from offloading to surrendering. First, decide what a good answer looks like before you prompt a chatbot. If you form your own view first, you can compare it to the tool's rather than being anchored by it. Second, treat output as a draft from a capable colleague who holds no accountability. Check any claims made, especially numbers, citations, and anything with your organization's name on it. Third, keep the hard parts for yourself. Offload the formatting, the first-pass summary, the tedious reconciliation. Keep the framing of the problem, the tradeoffs, and the final call.

A useful test is to ask what you would do if the tool disappeared tomorrow. If the answer is "struggle through, but I could," you are offloading. If it is "I would not know where to start," you are surrendering.

Leaders also set the norm. If you accept AI output without scrutiny, your staff will do the same. If you show you're checking and you reward people for catching errors, they learn that the tool serves the mission rather than replacing the people who carry it.

Responsible AI use means ensuring that you are applying your knowledge and judgment to any AI output, not simply accepting what it gives you as the finished product.