

I built a task list that refuses to overwhelm me. I run five businesses through it.

"It's half an hour before dinner, I'm tired, give me an easy win." I say that to my task system and it gives me one — not forty lines to scan, but a single thing I can close in the time I have, picked for the moment I'm in. When I ask what actually needs me, it briefs me the way a good chief of staff briefs a principal walking into the office: "three things need you before end of day, here they are." Grouped by urgency, time-sensitive first, two or three lines of prose. It holds the rest back until the front is dealt with. Same data any other tool would lay out in full — completely different relationship to it.

That's the centre of it. A few other things make it disappear into how I already work:

I speak a sentence and the structure appears underneath it. I don't fill in a form. Mid-conversation I say "I told the client I'd have the bond schedule by Friday" and it's captured, correctly typed, stakeholder attached, deadline flagged as real rather than soft — without breaking my train of thought. The capture cost rounds to zero.

Delegation ends the chasing. When I hand a task off, it stays *mine* until the other person consciously accepts it. The moment they accept, ownership genuinely moves — and the duty to keep me updated moves with it. From that point it's on them to report, not on me to chase. If they never accept, it comes back to me visibly rather than sitting in a silent assigned-and-forgotten state. Running this many parallel commitments through other people, that single rule deletes most of the low-grade chasing that usually comes with the territory.

The discipline lives in the system, not my willpower. My own conventions — never invent a label when one exists, a blank field beats a guessed one, anything tied to travel is protect-this — get applied for free, every time, even when I'm tired or moving fast. The system holds my standards so I don't have to remember to.

I built this. I'm a fractional CFO — I run a coatings distribution business, a consulting practice, a property portfolio across three companies, and a navigation-device distributorship, plus a major engineering and construction client, most of them inside the same eight hours. I'm a finance person, not an engineer, and the build was lean: a conversational assistant over a structured store, no team. That's the point I want to make to anyone hiring for AI work — the leverage was never in the technology.

The design was the work

Everything above came from a few decisions that have nothing to do with code.

Capture the *shape* of a commitment, not just its text. A deadline someone imposed on me is a different object from a thing I delegated and am watching. A standing rhythm that should never be marked "done" is different from a one-off. A glass-ball commitment where a slip is a material breach is different from a nice-to-have. Most tools hold all of that as one kind of checkbox. Mine captures the difference, because the difference is the whole point.

Brief, don't dump. AI is exceptional at triage and synthesis. The highest-leverage thing it does for me isn't storing faster — it's turning volume into the two or three things that need a decision now. That decision, to triage-then-brief rather than list, is the single most valuable design choice in the system, and it isn't technical at all. It's a decision about what a human can actually act on.

Keep a human gate on what goes in. The obvious move is to wire the task list to my inbox and auto-generate tasks from email. I deliberately didn't. The value of the system is that a task being *in* it means something — so the gate is me. A commitment becomes a task because I said it out loud and meant it, not because an algorithm scraped it off a subject line. Accurate-and-extractable beats easy-to-fill-in every time; the only reliable way to keep the data trustworthy is friction on the way in.

Make the machine adapt to the human at the edges, keep the rigour in the middle. Underneath, the storage is properly structured — normalised, typed, clean at scale. I never see that layer or speak its language. I talk in outcomes and people and deadlines; the assistant translates in both directions. Loose and conversational on the outside, strict structure underneath. That separation is the pattern I now reach for on every internal tool I build.

What I actually bring

The tool is a task list. That's not the interesting part. The interesting part is a way of working with AI I've carried into everything else:

1. Put the discipline in the assistant's standing instructions, not your own willpower.
2. Make the machine adapt to the human at the edges; keep the rigour in the middle.
3. Keep a human gate on what goes in — the data has to stay trustworthy.
4. Brief, don't dump — use AI to turn volume into the decision in front of you.

None of these are technically hard. What made it work was treating the design as the work: deciding what a commitment actually *is*, what a human can act on, and where the friction needs to live. That's the capability I bring to executive AI work — not "I can wire up a tool," plenty of people can do that. It's knowing where the leverage sits, which is almost never in the technology and almost always in how a busy human and a capable machine divide the labour between them.