

A TOOLKIT FOR PEOPLE LEADERS

The Buy It Toolkit

When to buy, when to build, and the questions to ask before you sign. A decision guide, a ten-question vendor scorecard, and a one-page worksheet you can take into your next vendor meeting.

- 01** The short version: buy, build, or wait
- 02** The HR AI landscape
- 03** Vendor scorecard: ten questions
- 04** The decision on one page

Buy, build, or wait?

The hard part isn't finding options. It's knowing which problems deserve a purchase, which deserve a build, and which deserve to wait.

Situation	Usually the right move
The problem is common to every company (screening, scheduling, help desk, document search) and the stakes of a wrong answer are moderate	Buy , probably from a vendor you already use
The problem is specific to your organization (your competency model, your policies, your process) and a good answer depends on your context	Build , usually on a platform you already have
The problem touches decisions about people (hiring, pay, performance, discipline)	Slow down. Buy or build only with a clear human decision point and a review from Legal
Nobody on the team has tried to solve it with the tools you already have	Wait , and run a two-week experiment first

Signs you should buy

- **Someone has done this a thousand times.** Resume parsing, scheduling, benefits questions, knowledge search.
- **It lives inside a system of record.** The vendor who owns the data usually wins on integration.
- **The risk is in the plumbing, not the judgment.** Security, access control, audit logs, uptime.
- **You need it everywhere at once.** Support, documentation, someone to call.

Signs you should build

- **The answer depends on documents only you have.** A policy assistant is only as good as the handbook behind it.
- **The workflow is yours.** Your onboarding, your calibration process, your case notes.
- **It's small.** One workflow, for one team, done well.
- **You already have the platform.** The assistant and agent features inside the tools you pay for today.

When to wait. Before any purchase, run a two-week experiment: can one capable person, with the tools you already have, get 70 percent of the way there? If yes, you have learned what you actually need. If no, the reason becomes your requirements list.

Five kinds of tool you will meet.

Categories matter more than names; the names change monthly.

Category	Strength	Watch for
AI inside your core systems HRIS, ATS, LMS, engagement platform	Already integrated with your data and already approved.	Features that are a demo rather than a product, and pricing that moves them into a new tier.
General assistants and platforms Copilot, Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude	The most capable models, the broadest use, and the place your team can build its own assistants without code.	Uneven adoption. Without fluency, most licenses go unused or produce slop.
HR point solutions screening, interview intelligence, skills, survey analysis, help desks	Depth in one problem.	Anything that makes or shapes a decision about a person. Ask how it is audited and where the human decision point is.
Builder and automation platforms agent builders, low-code automation	Where HR teams become builders.	Security defaults, access to people data, and who maintains what gets built.
Learning and enablement platforms fluency courses, practice tools, coaching assistants	The fastest way to raise the floor across a workforce.	Generic content that never mentions your tools or your work. Fluency sticks when it is personalized.

Before you take a meeting

- ☐ We have written the problem in one sentence with a number attached.
- ☐ Someone has tried the simple version with the tools we already have.
- ☐ We know which category this tool belongs to, and which of our existing vendors could do it instead.
- ☐ We know whether the tool will touch decisions about people.

Ten questions to ask any vendor.

Score each answer from 1 (vague or missing) to 5 (specific, shown in the product, and verifiable).

Question	Score	Notes
1. Which model powers this, and what happens when it changes?	1 2 3 4 5	
2. Where does our data go, who can see it, and is it used for training?	1 2 3 4 5	
3. What is the human decision point? Show me, in the product.	1 2 3 4 5	
4. How do you test for bias and adverse impact, and can we see the results?	1 2 3 4 5	
5. What does an audit log look like for a decision this tool influenced?	1 2 3 4 5	
6. What does the product do when it does not know?	1 2 3 4 5	
7. Which features are live today versus on the roadmap?	1 2 3 4 5	
8. What does it integrate with, and what does that integration actually sync?	1 2 3 4 5	
9. What happens to our data and configurations if we leave?	1 2 3 4 5	
10. Can we talk to a customer who has used it for more than a year?	1 2 3 4 5	

A total under 30 is a tool to keep watching, not buy. Any question scored 1 on data, bias, or the human decision point is a stop, whatever the total.

Before you sign or build, write it down.

If you cannot fill this in, you are not ready to buy or build. You are ready to learn, and that is a fine place to start.

The problem, in one sentence, with a number attached (hours, days, cases, dollars)

The two-week experiment we ran with what we already have, and what we learned

The human decision point, and who owns it

The data the tool will touch, and who approved that

What "working" looks like in 90 days, and how we will know

Decision

- ☐ Buy
- ☐ Build
- ☐ Wait and run the experiment

Owner and review date

Want a second opinion? We read every message and reply with an honest take on whether to build it, buy it, or wait. Request more information at humanready.team.