Buy vs Build vs Hire Framework

Decision Matrix for Choosing Your Automation Approach

From: *Hire AI, Not People* by Shawn Kercher | Chapter 5

The Three Paths

Path	What It Means	Best For
BUY	Use existing software built for your use case	Simple workflows, getting started fast
BUILD	Create custom automation with flexible platforms	Specific requirements, technical comfort
HIRE	Work with a specialist/agency	Complex needs, time > money

Quick Decision Guide

Answer these questions honestly:

1. How complex is your workflow?

☐
    Simple — Standard process, few exceptions → Lean toward BUY

☐
    Moderate — Some custom requirements → Consider BUILD

☐
    Complex — Many edge cases, integrations needed → Consider HIRE

2. What's your technical comfort level?

☐
    Low — I avoid anything technical → BUY or HIRE

☐

Medium — I can figure things out with tutorials → BUILD possible

☐

High — I'm comfortable with software/automation → BUILD

3. How much time can you invest?

☐

Minimal — I need this working ASAP → BUY or HIRE

☐

Some — I can dedicate 5-10 hours/week for a month → BUILD

☐

Significant — This is a priority project → BUILD

4. What's your budget situation?

☐

Tight — Need lowest cost option → BUILD (long-term) or BUY (short-term)

☐

Moderate — Can invest in the right solution → Any path works

☐

Flexible — Time matters more than money → HIRE

5. How unique are your requirements?

☐

Standard — Other businesses do exactly this → BUY

☐

Somewhat unique — Need customization → BUILD

☐

Very unique — Nothing off-the-shelf fits → BUILD or HIRE

Scoring Matrix

Give each path 0-3 points based on how well it fits your situation:

Criteria	BUY	BUILD	HIRE
Matches my workflow complexity	/3	/3	/3
Fits my technical skills	/3	/3	/3
Fits my time availability	/3	/3	/3
Fits my budget	/3	/3	/3
Handles my unique requirements	/3	/3	/3
TOTAL	/15	/15	/15

Highest score = Your recommended path

Path Details

If You Choose: BUY

Pros: - Fastest to get started - No technical skills required - Someone else handles maintenance - Usually affordable for basic needs

Cons: - Limited customization - May not fit your workflow exactly - Often doesn't integrate with other systems - Dependent on vendor's roadmap - Can get expensive at scale

Good BUY options by AI Employee type:

AI Employee	Tools to Consider
Front Desk/Scheduling	Calendly, Cal.com, Acuity
Sales/Follow-up	HubSpot, ActiveCampaign, Close
Support	Intercom, Zendesk, Freshdesk
Voice	Vapi.ai, Bland.ai

Next step: Sign up for 2-3 free trials. Test with your actual use case.

If You Choose: BUILD

Pros: - Highly customizable - Matches your exact blueprint - Often more affordable at scale - You own and control the system

Cons: - Learning curve - Takes more time upfront - You're responsible for fixing problems - Can get complex quickly

Recommended BUILD stack:

Layer	Tool
Brain	OpenAI GPT-4 or Claude
Automation	Make.com or n8n
CRM	HubSpot (free tier) or Airtable
Channels	Twilio (SMS), Vapi (voice), Crisp (chat)

Next step: Complete the Workflow Blueprint (Chapter 4), then start with Make.com tutorials.

If You Choose: HIRE

Pros: - Expertise from day one - Faster implementation than learning yourself - They've solved your problems before - Ongoing support available

Cons: - Costs more upfront - Dependent on someone else - Quality varies widely - Need to find the right fit

How to evaluate an AI agency/consultant:

☐

Do they have case studies in your industry?

☐

Can they explain their approach in plain language?

☐

Do they offer ongoing optimization, not just setup?

☐

Is pricing transparent?

☐

Will you own the system they build?

Red flags: - Promises that sound too good - No clear process or timeline - Can't explain what happens after launch - Lock-in contracts

Next step: Book calls with 2-3 agencies. Ask about their process, timeline, and what happens when something breaks.

Hybrid Approaches

You don't have to pick just one:

BUY + BUILD: Start with an off-the-shelf tool, then add custom automations around it with Make.com or Zapier.

BUILD + HIRE: Build the simple parts yourself, hire help for complex integrations.

BUY now, BUILD later: Get something working fast with a BUY solution, then migrate to custom when you outgrow it.

My Recommendation for First-Timers

Start with BUY unless you have specific requirements that off-the-shelf tools can't handle.

Why? You'll learn what you actually need from real usage. Then you can make an informed decision about BUILD or HIRE for version 2.

The goal isn't the perfect system. It's a working system that you improve over time.

Your Decision

Path chosen: _____

Primary reason: _____

First action: _____

Timeline: _____

From Hire AI, Not People by Shawn Kercher

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