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AI ESSENTIALS · GUIDE NO. 17

BUILD AN AI AGENT TO RUN YOUR WEEK

Not a chatbot you open, a standing agent that sits on top of your calendar, inbox, and files, builds your day every morning, keeps you on pace, and closes the day out. Here's exactly how to set one up, even if you're not technical, and how to keep it on a short leash.

~10 MIN READ · FOR EVERYONE WHO COMMENTED "AGENT" · FIRST SETUP: ~20 MINUTES

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THE SHORT VERSION

- An agent is different from a chat: you give it a **goal** and it does the multi-step work across your apps, you check the result.
- The most accessible way in is **Cowork** in the Claude Desktop app (macOS **and** Windows). It can run a task on a schedule while you're away.
- You build it from four parts: **connect** your apps, **write** the agent's job, put it on a **schedule**, and set **guardrails**.
- Keep it on a leash: read access is safe, sending and scheduling get a review step, and money/health/legal stay fully off.

THE REFRAME

A chatbot waits for you to show up. An agent shows up for you, every morning, on its own, already knowing what your day looks like.

For a week I let an AI agent run my life, and I've never been more productive. The difference from normal AI use is the whole point: I didn't open a chat and ask it things. I set it up once, and from then on it worked in the background. Every morning it read my calendar, email, and to-dos, built out my day, and kept me on pace, messaging me when I drifted off task and pointing me back to what mattered. I stopped being the person who has to remember to plan the day. The plan was just there.

That's what an agent is: not a smarter answer, but a standing worker. You give it a goal and some guardrails, and it figures out the steps and does them across your tools, reading, deciding, drafting, one action after another. It's the top level of using AI, and the surprising part in 2026 is how reachable it's become. You don't need to be an engineer, and you don't need a fancy setup. You need four things, and a spare twenty minutes.



The shape of it: one agent sitting on top of the apps you already use, reading across all of them to build your day and keep you on pace, running even while you're away.

A chatbot is a tool you pick up. An agent is a teammate you set up once and then mostly just check on.

PICK YOUR AGENT

"Agent" isn't one product. A few tools can run this kind of standing, multi-step work today, and they trade off power against how technical they are. Pick the one that matches you and skip the rest.

TOOL	BEST FOR	TECHNICAL?
Cowork (Claude Desktop)	Most people, runs on your Mac or PC, touches your files + apps, works on a schedule	No, point and approve
Claude Code	Builders who live in a terminal and want maximum control	Yes
Zapier agents	Connecting many cloud apps together with triggers and steps	A little

START WITH COWORK

I built mine in Claude Code because I live in a terminal, but for almost everyone reading this, **Cowork** is the right first door. It's inside the Claude Desktop app on the Pro and Max plans, runs on Windows and Mac, and needs no code. Everything below is written for Cowork; the same ideas port to the others.

PART 1, CONNECT YOUR WORLD

An agent that can't see your world can only give generic advice. So the first job is to connect the apps it needs to read: your calendar and email at minimum, plus your task list and any files it should work from. In the desktop app you enable Cowork, then connect each app and approve what it's allowed to see, the same two-minute permission grant you'd do for any integration. Cowork is smart about how it reaches each tool: it uses a direct **connector** first (Gmail, Google Drive, Slack), falls back to your **browser** if there's no connector, and only reaches for direct **app control** when nothing else fits.

Keep this first pass tight. Connect read access to your calendar, inbox, and tasks, that alone is enough to build the day and the brief. You can widen it later once you trust the pattern. What you're assembling is the agent's field of view: the more of your real week it can see, the more of it it can actually run.

CONNECT READ FIRST, ACTION LATER

On day one, give the agent permission to **read**, your calendar, email, and tasks. Hold back the ability to **send** messages or **change** events until you've watched it work for a week. A read-only agent can't do anything you'll regret.

PART 2, WRITE THE AGENT'S JOB

This is the heart of it. You're writing a one-page job description for a chief of staff, what to check, what to build, and what to tell you.

An agent is only as good as the instructions you give it, so be specific about the outcome you want. Don't say "help me stay productive." Say exactly what it should read, what it should produce, and what "done" looks like. Here's the core instruction, the morning "build my day" run. Paste it, then edit the specifics to your actual life.

"You are my chief of staff. Every morning, do this:

1. Read today's calendar, my unread email, and my open tasks.
 2. Build a realistic plan for the day, block focus time for my top priority first, then fit the rest around my meetings.
 3. Flag anything urgent: a client waiting on a reply, a deadline today, a conflict on my calendar.
 4. Write me a one-screen brief: today's shape, the 3 things that matter most, and what to prep for tomorrow.
- Don't send anything or change my calendar without showing me first. Keep the brief short."

In Claude you can save this instruction as a **skill**, a named, reusable routine, so the whole job runs from one command instead of re-explaining it every time. That's worth doing: it turns "run my morning brief" into a single trigger that fires all four steps. Once the morning run is solid, you write two more short jobs the same way: a midday check-in and an end-of-day close-out.

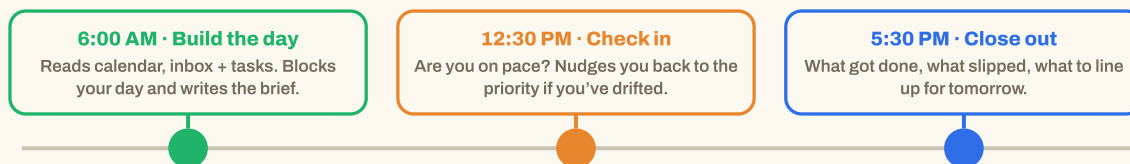
Midday check-in: "Look at what I said I'd focus on this morning versus what's actually happened. If I've drifted off the top priority, send me a short, direct nudge pointing me back to it. If I'm on track, say nothing."

PART 3, PUT IT ON A SCHEDULE

Instructions that only run when you remember to trigger them aren't an agent, they're a saved prompt. The move that makes it a real teammate is the schedule. Cowork lets you schedule a task to run automatically on the frequency you choose; each run has access to your files, connected tools, and skills, and it works even while you're away, your computer just needs to be on. (You can also run scheduled tasks in the cloud at claude.ai/code/scheduled, which don't depend on your machine being awake at all.)

Set three standing orders: the build-my-day run in the early morning, the check-in around midday, and the close-out in the early evening. Now the agent isn't something you use, it's something that happens. You wake up to a built day, get a nudge if you wander, and end with a clean handoff to tomorrow.

A DAY IT RUNS FOR YOU · THREE STANDING ORDERS



Three scheduled runs. You set them once; the agent shows up on its own.

Three scheduled runs turn a prompt into a teammate: it builds your day at dawn, checks whether you're on pace at midday, and closes the day out in the evening, all on its own.

WHERE THE NUDGE LANDS

For the agent to "message you," point its output at a channel you actually watch, a note it drops in your inbox, a message in Slack, or a notification. Set that up when you schedule the task, so the midday nudge reaches you instead of sitting in a window you never opened.

PART 4, KEEP IT ON A SHORT LEASH

The more an agent can do, the more it matters what it's allowed to touch. Guardrails aren't the boring part, they're what makes handing off work safe instead of scary.

Start from the right mental model: the agent can see whatever you let it see, and it acts across real systems. That's the power and the risk in one sentence. So you scope it deliberately, and the tools are built to help, Cowork asks permission app-by-app, lets you review actions before they run, keeps a blocklist, and blocks the riskiest categories (banking, payments, crypto) by default.

WHAT THE AGENT MAY DO · AND MUST ASK ABOUT

Read calendar, email, tasks

So it can build and brief your day

ALLOW



Add focus blocks to your calendar

Helpful · but review the first weeks

ASK FIRST



Send messages or emails on your behalf

Keep a human approval step

ASK FIRST



Move money, delete, or touch financial apps

No. Ever.

BLOCKED



A sane default for a personal agent: let it read your calendar, email, and tasks freely; make it ask before it sends or schedules; and keep anything that moves money firmly blocked.

- **Read freely, act with review.** Reading your calendar and inbox is low-stakes. Sending a message, moving an event, or spending money is not, keep a "show me first" step on all of it until you deeply trust the pattern.
- **Never grant money, health, or legal.** Keep financial apps blocked (they are by default), and never let the agent see medical, legal, or other people's personal data. There's no undo on a bad send.
- **Start low-stakes and widen slowly.** Let it build your day and brief you for a week or two before you let it draft replies or block time on its own. Trust is earned one safe run at a time.
- **Keep a kill switch in mind.** You can pause a scheduled task, re-scope a permission, or disconnect an app in seconds. Knowing that makes it easy to start small and expand.

THE FAILURE TO DESIGN AGAINST

The thing to prevent is the agent sending or deleting something on its own that you'd never have approved. You stop it with one rule: anything that leaves your machine, an email, a message, a calendar change, waits for your yes. Reading is automatic; acting is reviewed. Hold that line and the worst case is a brief you ignore, not a mess you clean up.

START HERE TODAY

Don't build all three runs at once. Connect your calendar and inbox (read-only), paste the morning "build my day" instruction, and schedule just that one run for tomorrow at 6:30 AM. Wake up to a built day once and you'll want the other two by lunch.

SOURCES & WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- [Claude Help, Let Claude use your computer in Cowork](#)
- [Claude, Scheduled tasks \(claude.ai/code/scheduled\)](#)
- [Claude Code Docs, computer use](#)
- [Zapier, AI agents](#)
- [New to all this? Comment "LEVELS" for the 4-levels map, or "COMPUTER" for the setup basics](#)

Built by Hank Barker // AI Essentials // @hankhelpsai. Agent tools are in active preview and change fast, availability varies by plan and platform. Last reviewed July 2026.