An AI chief of staff, *with nothing switched off*

What my set-up does, what it relies on, what it costs, and what it would take to build your own. A companion file holds the prompts to give your Claude.

What it does: my inbox, my diary, my pipeline and my follow-ups, handled while I work and while I sleep

INBOX

Triage around the clock

A session checks my inbox every 15 minutes, sorts what needs me, and drafts replies in my voice for me to send.

EMAIL TO ME

One clean report, not a trickle

Every piece of work ends with a summary email to me, deliverables attached, saying whether I must act.

PIPELINE

The board kept current

When work changes a lead or proposal, it notes the card and refreshes next steps on the cards I lead.

OVERNIGHT

Scheduled work on a second machine

[About fifty] scheduled tasks: briefings, my diary, audio summaries, Saturday email preparation, checks that the other jobs worked.

MEETINGS

Transcripts that become memory

Meeting transcripts are pulled in, names corrected at source, and decisions filed into the right project.

BUILDING

It makes the tools it needs

Websites, client portals, small apps and data pipelines, published by it, reviewed by a second model before I see them.

What it relies on: eight things most firms switch off, and you are free to switch on

1 · MONEY

A card it can pay with

It signs up for a service, buys credits or a domain, and carries on.

Start: a card with a low limit.

2 · KEYS

Direct access to the web's tools

Its own keys for Cloudflare, Vercel, GitHub and data services such as Apify.

Start: one key, kept in a password store.

3 · PERMISSION

It acts without asking first

Bypass permissions mode: no click per step, so a run with nobody there finishes.

Start: only once item 4 is in place.

4 · GUARDRAILS

Rules written as code

Checks on every action block what must never happen: email to others is only ever a draft; nothing is deleted.

Start: the two rules on page 4.

5 · ALWAYS ON

A computer that never sleeps

A spare laptop runs the scheduled work through the night and while I travel.

Start: scheduled tasks on your own laptop first.

6 · MAIL

An inbox it can work in

It drafts, labels and archives, and emails me from its own mailbox.

Start: drafts only.

7 · ITS OWN TOOLS

It installs what it needs

Software, connectors, small websites and background jobs.

Start: let it install, and ask it to log what it did.

8 · SCOPE

One memory for all your work

Every client, project and person in one place, so it joins dots across them.

Start: one instruction file about you.

What keeps it safe: a few hard rules, enforced by code, so freedom never becomes a sent email or a lost file

RULE 1

Drafts, never sends, to anyone else

Email to a third party is always a draft. I send. A check blocks any attempt, whatever the instruction says.

RULE 2

Nothing is deleted

Old files move to an archive folder; deletion goes to the bin. Permanent deletion needs my word on the exact file.

RULE 3

Save before you overwrite

A dated copy of any document or data file is kept before it changes.

RULE 4

Never fill a gap

A missing fact is left out or marked in square brackets, never made up.

RULE 5

Never interrupt me unasked

No messages or notifications I have not asked for. Reports come by email, in one place.

RULE 6

A second model checks the work

Anything for a client is reviewed by a model from another company before it reaches me.

Rules 1 and 2 are the ones to build first. Every rule exists because something went wrong once. **Check, Edit, Own** still applies: it drafts, I own what goes out.

How it is built: six layers, each added when the last one showed what was missing

LAYER	WHAT IT IS	SCALE TODAY
Standing instructions	Files it reads at the start of every session: who I am, how I write, how to work, what never to do.	[About 140,000 characters]
Memory	One small file per lesson or fact, with an index it reads every time.	[260 or more files]
Guardrails	Small scripts that check every action before it runs, and block or warn.	[About 45 checks]
Skills	Packaged routines: branded documents, decks, email, calendar, closing a session.	[About 100]
Scheduled work	Tasks on an always-on second laptop, each on the cheapest model that does the job well.	[About fifty tasks]
Second opinions	A model from another company takes the heavy reading and reviews anything that matters.	On a separate subscription

Figures in brackets are counts from my own notes between September and November 2026, not a fresh audit.

The cost: two £200-a-month Ultra plans, because I run it flat out; yours can cost far less

WHAT I SPEND

£400 a month on Claude, at full stretch

Two Ultra plans at £200 a month each. I run both to their limits: the strongest models, sessions all day, scheduled work all night.

The second-opinion model runs on a separate subscription, not counted here.

HOW TO THROTTLE IT

Four dials, each easy to turn

How often: daily instead of every 15 minutes.
Which model: the mid-tier or cheapest model for routine runs; the strongest only for judgement and writing.
How many tasks: three good ones beat fifty.
How many machines: one laptop and one plan to start.

Start on one plan. Add a second only when you hit its limits every week and the work is worth it.

The honest warning: this is not a product. Hundreds of small settings got me here, and you will have work to do

WHY

It grew, it was not designed

Each fix was made the day something broke. The result works for me, on my two laptops, with my accounts.

EXAMPLES

The small things that matter

Which program may read which folder; passwords a background job can reach; email aliases; a browser logged into each site; a schedule file where one bad entry silently stops every task.

SO

Copy the ideas, not the files

Ask your Claude to build each piece for your own machine and accounts, test it, and write down what it did. Expect an afternoon per piece, and some days when it fights you.

The companion file, **prompts for your Claude**, has a prompt for each step. Paste them in order. They were written for this guide and have not been tested on anyone else's set-up.

Where to start: eight steps, one at a time, each running for a week before the next

1. **Tell it who you are.** An instruction file: your work, your clients, how you write, what never to do. (Prompt 1)
2. **Give it a memory.** One file per lesson, plus an index. (Prompt 2)
3. **Build the two hard rules.** Drafts only to others; nothing deleted. (Prompt 3)
4. **Connect your email, drafts only.** Then ask it to draft replies to today's mail. (Prompt 4)
5. **Schedule a morning brief.** Once a day, on your laptop. (Prompt 5)
6. **A closing email for every piece of work.** What was done, and what waits on you. (Prompt 6)
7. **Switch on bypass permissions.** Only after steps 3 and 6 have run cleanly for a week. (Prompt 7)
8. **Add keys, a card and a second opinion.** One at a time, low limits first. (Prompt 8)

What stays yours: the judgement, and every word that leaves under your name

CHECK

Read what it drafted

It is fast and usually right. Usually is the problem. Every draft gets read before it goes.

EDIT

Make it yours

The draft is the start. Your edit is where the judgement and the relationship live.

OWN

Send it yourself

Sending stays with you. That rule is what makes all the other freedom safe.

The point is not a busier assistant. It is time back for clients, people and thinking, kept for those, not absorbed into more of the same.