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### Introduction

I'm Gilda Bonanno, Executive Presentation Sales Coach and Professional Speaker. Welcome to 7 Steps to Confident Public Speaking. In this Special Report, I will cover the seven steps you can take to be a more confident public speaker, whether you're speaking at conferences, in the community, on behalf of your company or at professional events.

Public speaking is always about communicating a message to your audience in a coherent, clear and timely manner. The foundation of all good public speaking is confidence. You have to believe that you have something worth communicating and then be able to demonstrate that to your audience.

I'm assuming that you already know your content. Now you need the confidence to deliver that content to your audience.

You've seen speakers who are confident and know their material. They're engaged. You connect to them. You listen to them. You remember what they say. That's your goal, to be one of those confident public speakers that people listen to, so they remember you and your message long after the presentation is finished.

Follow these seven steps to become a more confident public speaker.

## **Step One: Get Into Your Head**

Before you open your mouth to speak, what is the voice in your head telling you?

Before you stand up to walk to the front of the room, to pick up the slide remote and face the audience, what is the voice in your head telling you? Now, if you're like a lot of my clients, that voice in your head is very negative. It's telling you that you can't do this.

It's telling you something like, "Ugh, you're going to be boring," or, "You're not as interesting as the last speaker," or, "You're so nervous, I hope they don't notice that you're sweating," right? That voice for many of you is incredibly negative.

I've actually named that voice the "Joy Sucker" voice because it sucks the joy out of your presentation and out of your life. If you allow that voice to be dominant in your thoughts as you're presenting, you undermine your own ability to do a good job.

If something goes wrong, that voice is just going to get louder and say, "See? I told you, you couldn't follow the slides properly, you messed up your introduction, you didn't say the right thing here. It's going to be a disaster. You're boring, no one is listening to you, they're all looking at their phones," and you just go into this tailspin.

So getting into your head before you present is crucial because in my experience, I've found that what you tell yourself about how you present is just as important -- if not more so -- than how you actually present.

Let me repeat that because it's surprising yet I've found it to be true.

What you tell yourself about how you present is more important than how you actually present because the film that you're running in your head of yourself presenting will color how you come across to the audience. If you tell yourself all these negative things, if you become very focused on what you're doing wrong and on mistakes you're making, that will affect how you actually present.

The nuts and bolts of your content become almost irrelevant because everything is undermined by this negative mindset you're taking into the presentation with you.

To fix this issue, first you have to recognize the negative mindset. What is that negative voice saying to you? Be honest with yourself. Think about it the next time you're in a situation where you might have to present or when you might have to speak at a meeting. What's really going through your head?

What are you really telling yourself? For many of you, it's probably quite negative. That voice might have come from an unhelpful boss or coworker. It might stem from your childhood. It might just be a creation of your own imagination and your own negative view of how you present your information.

# **Step Two: Replace That Negative Voice**

Once you are conscious of that negative voice, you have to replace it with something more positive.

It could be something as simple as, "You can do it," or "I'm ready and I'm prepared," that will uplift your energy and your self-belief right before you present.

In those crucial few seconds right before you open your mouth, you need to tell yourself something positive that you can believe. You might not say, "I'm the best speaker in the entire world," because maybe that does not feel true to you, but you can believe, "I've prepared and I have something interesting to share with this audience."

Frame the presentation to yourself as your sharing of what you know as opposed to egotistically (and nervously) being the center of attention. Shift the focus a little bit to, "I have something to share, I'm prepared, I know my topic, I've done this before, I'm ready, I'm excited, I'm eager."

I like to call this positive phrase a mantra. (A mantra is just a term we borrow from Eastern philosophy and from yoga). It's an empowering phrase that you can repeat to yourself and believe.

It could be a line from a song or a poem, or something that speaks to you. Each of us has unique tastes and interests so what works for you may not work for someone else.

Think of it as your pre-game preparation. Before you walk in the conference room and as you're walking up to the front of the room, have this mantra running over and over in

your head. As you face the audience, if something goes wrong, like the bulb blows on the projector or you lose your place or you get interrupted, instead of saying to yourself, "See, I know this proves I can't do this. I'm bad at this," instead, go to your mantra, "I can do this, I'm ready, I'm prepared, I have something interesting worth sharing with this audience."

Now the mantra has to be something powerful because it has to drown out your negative joy-sucker voice which has had a lot of time to implant itself in your mind because you've been using it for years.

Be patient with yourself as you develop and try out mantras until you find one (or many) that work for you. Take a moment right now and think of something meaningful that you could use to help empower you - jot it down if you can. Then try it out live in an actual presentation setting or when you have to speak up at a meeting and see how it impacts both what you tell yourself about how you present and how you actually present.

And if you're having difficulty coming up with something that resonates with you, think about what you would tell a friend or a child who was nervous about giving a presentation. You would never say, "You're going to do a terrible job, you always do. You're really bad at presenting." So stop using that negative language on yourself.

Using a mantra is not just wishful thinking. It does really help to frame how you deal with the situation, particularly if something goes wrong. It allows you to have a positive foundation and stay grounded so you can rely on your experience, knowledge, preparation and practice as opposed to letting a small mistake turn into a full disaster.

# **Step Three: Understand Your Fears**

Once you've gotten into your head and begun to replace the negative voice with a positive mantra, the next step is to understand your fears. If you're nervous about speaking, you're not alone. Most people are nervous ranging from an uneasy feeling in the pit of your stomach to full blown anxiety. When I teach public speaking in classes or work one-on-one with executive coaching clients, I often ask, "What are you afraid of?"

Very often the response is something like, "Well, I don't want to mess up this presentation because my boss will be in the room."

Then I say, "Let's dig a little deeper. So your boss in the room when you give a 'bad' presentation, so what happens next?"

They say, "Well, my boss is going to be upset."

"Okay, then what will happen?"

"Well, he or she is probably going to have one of those critical conversations with me about my performance."

"Okay, then what will happen?"

"Well, then it's going to negatively impact my performance review."

"Then what will happen?"

"Then I'm not going to get a raise. Then I'm probably going to get fired."

We continue down this path of, "And then what will happen?" and take their fears to their illogical conclusion. It usually ends up with something really disastrous. People are afraid they're going to lose their jobs, which means they won't be able to pay the mortgage so they lose their homes and end up on the street, their spouse will leave them and the dog will die.

This fear of a major disaster being kicked off by this one small presentation is very real. Fear is very powerful as an emotion. It's very strong and it usually does not follow a logical path.

It makes sense in the world of fear to go from, "I stumbled on this presentation. I got my slides out of order and I was a little boring," to, "I'm on the street alone, the family is gone and the dog is dead."

So you need to understand your fears and take them to their illogical conclusion. What are you afraid of? What's the worst that can happen because of this presentation?

Since fear likes to lurk in dark corners of our minds and hearts, it is our job to shine the light of day and logic onto these fears.

How likely is one mistake in a presentation going to lead to you being homeless and alone on the street?

For most of you, one presentation that goes slightly off the rails is not going to cost you your job, your home and your family.

No, it really is not likely.

And if something did go wrong with your presentation and your boss was in the room, and he or she did get upset and even yelled at you, would you be able to deal with it?

Would you live through that? Would you be all right?

Yes, you would. Sure, you would be embarrassed and you might feel bad for awhile, but you would survive.

The fear is groundless because your worst case scenario is not going to happen. Even if something did go wrong with the presentation, you could still deal with it. Even if it was uncomfortable, you would be okay.

Once you realize that and understand your fears, it helps to take their power away. They become toothless, powerless, impotent fears that no longer get inside your brain and impact you when you're trying to do your best.

Don't skip this step because it's important. Ask yourself, "What am I afraid of? And then what's going to happen? How likely is it that my worst case scenario is going to happen? And, if something did go wrong with my presentation, would I be all right and be able to survive, despite the embarrassment, and perhaps the negative dip in my career for that week, or month? Would I be okay?"

Yes, you would. Therefore, there's nothing to fear.

## **Step Four: Prepare Early**

Now that you've got the mental game set, which is crucial to your success and confidence, we need to get into the hard reality of creating this presentation.

Prepare early. Unless somebody walks into your office and says, "You have to present tomorrow morning at eight o'clock," there is no excuse for you to wait until the last minute to prepare.

Yes, I know you're busy and you have many number one priorities, but waiting until the night before does not work. Maybe there are a few people who can give a great presentation when they just prepare the night before, or the morning of, but for the great majority of us, myself included, preparation takes more than a few minutes.

If you want to be a more confident public speaker, you need to prepare early. The night before doesn't count. Two days before doesn't count. And even a week before may not be enough time.

You need to prepare as early as possible, understanding the reality of your schedule and when you're told that you're expected to present.

# What's Your Message?

What are you doing when you're preparing? You're preparing your content. Most importantly, you need to figure out your message. Whether your presentation is one minute, ten minutes or sixty minutes, you should think of it as having one theme, one message, one point and one purpose that you can sum up in a sentence or two.

This message is the overarching theme or point of the entire presentation, specific to the audience and the time limit. If I interviewed everyone in the audience after you finished speaking, they should all share some variation of that message when asked, "What was the point of that presentation?"

Sometimes the message is clear to you when you sit down to prepare this presentation. It's as clear as, "Here are the three reasons why we recommend that the merger go forward."

Other times, maybe if you're presenting an overview, a summary or an update, it might not be as clear what your message is until you dig into your content more and look at your background material. Whether it's flipping through your email, looking through spreadsheets, rereading your notes from meetings, thinking about it, drawing it out -- however you work – you may need to comb through that material to find your message.

What you want to avoid is just throwing all that material on a slide or in a bunch of documents and tossing it at the audience and saying, "You figure it out, you figure out what my message is."

I've seen people do that and so have you. In that kind of presentation, however long it lasts, the audiences comes out of it confused. They think, "What was the point of that? What was the message? There was a lot of stuff, a lot of noise, a lot of detail but I have no idea what the point was."

Don't leave it to your audience to dig for your message because they won't bother and you'll have lost them. It's your job; you dig through the material and you come up with the message.

Then once you have that message, make sure everything you prepare to include -- whether it's a story, an example, an image, a chart or a graph -- connects to that message. If it doesn't, then why are you wasting time including it?

Now that doesn't mean you can't have extra material with you or supplemental material ready to answer questions or to provide in a different way before or after the presentation. That's fine, but don't clutter your presentation with extraneous information that's going to confuse the audience about what your true point or your true message is.

# First Your Message, Then Your Slides

Only after you have your message should you create your slides. I know this goes against the grain of common practice – that many people sit at a screen with blank slides and then sort of pour information there, and from that fashion a presentation.

I recommend that you try it the other way around.

Get a blank piece of paper or a blank document (whether it's on your computer or tablet or an actual piece of paper) and sketch out your message in words or images. Think about that one or two-sentence message and try out different variations. If you think about the message before you actually construct the slides, you're less likely to have extra slides and extra material that's irrelevant.

Once you have a message or a draft message, then storyboard the presentation and create slides if needed. Choose an organizing principle that will make sense to the audience, such as a chronological ordering, showing pros and cons or using numbers. I'm a big fan of using numbers, just like *Seven Steps to Confident Public Speaking*, because it helps me stay organized and it helps the audience follow my presentation. At

any given point, they can follow the road signs and know where you are in the presentation. What came before and what's coming ahead are all logically connected.

Preparing early allows you to mold and develop your content in a way that makes sense and is likely to connect the audience as opposed to confuse and overwhelm them with too much extra information.

## Step Five: Be Aware of Your Non-Verbals and Body Language

Now that you have your content, you're ready to start practicing the actual delivery of your presentation.

You need to be aware of your non-verbals and body language when you speak. Elements include voice, eye contact, gestures, posture, facial expression and movement -- all the signals that your body gives to the audience.

Why are they important? Imagine a speaker shuffling to the front of the room, pushing the paper around on the podium, looking down at the paper, not making eye contact with the audience, clearing their throat repeatedly and speaking in a monotone. If you're sitting in the audience, you've already made the decision to tune this person out because no matter if their next words are, "I'm really happy to be here with you today," you don't believe it and you're not interested.

Why? Because the body language, the lack of eye contact, the monotone, weak voice, the shuffling of the notes, the clearing of the throat in that way -- all of those signals tell you this person is not worth listening to, not confident and not interested in the presentation.

When there is a mismatch between what you say and how you say it, the audience gets confused and they just might believe your body language instead of your actual words.

You have to make sure that your non-verbals communicate the same message that your words do. They should all tell a story of you being a confident (not cocky) public speaker who is engaging, interesting and worth paying attention to. So what does that look and sound like, specifically?

#### Voice

First, there is your voice. The human voice is wonderful because it can communicate so much meaning and emotion just by its variety, just by changing its pacing, volume and speed. Most people, however, don't use that range. Most people speak in one tone, without a lot of variety, which is going to put your audience to sleep. You need variety in your voice to indicate that certain words are more important than others; for example, they're louder or have a quick pause before or after them.

You also need to enunciate your words, particularly if you have an audience that is not native in the language you're speaking in. Even if you're presenting to native speakers, enunciation is still important. If you're presenting in a large room without a microphone,

for example, it's harder for people to understand you which makes it harder for them to pay attention. You want to make sure the beginnings and the endings of your words are actually there, that you don't mumble through them and that you don't eat those words or chew on those letters.

Speak loudly enough and slowly enough that you can be understood. How loud? How slow? It depends. How big is the room? How is the sound system? Is there a lot of ambient noise? Is it new information? Is it complex data? What are you trying to communicate?

As you're preparing and practicing, remember that you need to speak loudly, slowly and clearly enough that you can be heard easily and understood.

#### **Eye Contact**

Another element of non-verbal communication is your eye contact. Making eye contact with people in the room shows you're confident. It shows that you know your material and don't have to bury your head in your notes or your slides.

It also demonstrates that you're interested in connecting with your audience. You're not just presenting information. You're actually trying to share it with each person and make them feel like they're the only person in the room.

## **Facial Expression**

Your facial expression is also important. Most people have to smile more. Especially if you're feeling nervous, you might forget to smile.

Or you might think you're smiling but when you watch it on video, you realize you're not actually smiling or it's just a half smile as opposed to a smile that lights up your entire face, including your eyes.

Smiling is important because first of all, it relaxes you. The brain interprets it and relaxes you. It also relaxes the audience because no audience wants to see a speaker be uncomfortable. If you smile, the audience thinks, "Oh, she's okay. I feel good about this."

Obviously if you're delivering bad news or announcing layoffs, you're not going to be smiling. But for most people in most other presentation situations, smiling more is required.

#### **Hands and Gestures**

What do you do with your hands when presenting? I've written a lot of articles and recorded a lot of videos on this topic because this can be a real challenge for many people. When you're not using your hands for gestures, they should be relaxed down at your side, hands unclenched, not jammed in your pockets or folded across your chest.

That's a neutral, energized position. From there, use your hands naturally for gestures to illustrate what you're talking about. Think about gestures as providing imagery to connect to your words.

Start by becoming aware of how you use your gestures naturally in casual conversation. Then try to bring them into your presentation to help illustrate what you're saying. It could be something as simple as opening your arms to welcome people or showing size or geographic distance using your hands. If this is something you're not comfortable with, then you have to practice.

Also be aware of what you're doing if you have something in your hands like a PowerPoint remote or notes. Don't telegraph your nerves and your anxiety by folding the notes into little pieces or playing with the remote, or tossing it between one hand and the other, or any of the other nervous actions that people do with their hands.

I once had a client who would roll his sleeves up and down when giving a presentation. Without realizing it, he would roll one sleeve up, and then roll it down, roll the other sleeve up, and then roll it down. When he finished his presentation during our practice session, I said to him, "Look at your sleeves," and sure enough, one was rolled up and one was rolled down.

He said, "Did I do that?" because he was totally unaware what he was doing with his hands.

#### **Movement and Posture**

Also become aware of how you stand and move. Don't nervously pace the floor. Stand and deliver. Stay in one spot if possible. Have your feet hip width apart with your energy focused and your knees slightly bent. You're not standing stiffly at attention, but your weight is evenly distributed on both feet so you're energized as opposed to sagging or slouching to one side.

Stand or sit up straight with your head up and your shoulders back, ready to make eye contact. You are confident so you're not afraid to take your space up in the room or at the table and you want people to listen to you.

Start working on your non-verbals and body language at meetings or in conversations at work. Your goal is to make sure they, along with your words, communicate confidence and competence – that you know your content and are excited and eager to share it with the audience.

# **Step Six: Practice**

The sixth step to confident public speaking is practice. Practice allows you to put together the two elements of content (prepared early) and delivery (including your non-verbal communication).

This step could also be called "practice early" because just as you don't want to be pulling your message and slides together at the last minute, you certainly don't want to be practicing the night before or the morning of the presentation. You need to practice long before then to come across as a more confident, engaging speaker.

Your practice consists of a few different elements. First of all, practice your content so that it's fluent but not memorized. You want to make sure that you can get from one word to the next and one sentence to the next with ease. If you're just learning a new language, you stop and start a lot. You don't know all the vocabulary, you're not confident in your grammar, so you're not quite fluent. You speak at a slower pace and it's not quite even.

Fluency in your presentation, just like with a new language, comes with practice. Fluency will help you avoid filler words like, "Um, uh, you know, so." You know what comes next and you are able to get to that point without the filler words.

Why not memorize? The problem with memorization is that if you forget where you are and what comes next, you will be lost. I've seen it happen and I'm sure you have as well, when a speaker memorizes a presentation and then forgets what comes next; they cannot go forward and they cannot go back. And if you memorize every word, you're going to be stuck in your head trying to remember what comes next instead of engaged in the moment with your audience.

Practice so that you internalize your message and material and you can communicate it a couple of different ways but have the same meaning. It doesn't have to be the exact words but it should convey the same meaning.

Another element to practice is how to use notes. While it's fine to use notes in most presentations, it's near impossible to use them for the first time during your live presentation.

Instead, practice with your notes. I recommend that you put them on one sheet of paper. Get them to fit on one side preferably, two if you have to, and put them on heavy cardstock paper. That will allow you to hold them with one hand and easily turn to the other side if you need to with one hand, so you have a hand free to gesture or to use a PowerPoint remote, or whatever else. Using heavy cardstock is also helpful if you put the notes on a table or a lectern so they don't blow away.

Also practice your beginning, your ending and your transitions. These are the spots where you might get tripped up during a presentation and lose your confidence.

How do you get from your opening to your first point? How do you get from your first to your second point, from the second to the third, from the third to the end? How do you end?

It could be something as simple as, "The second reason we should invest in this company is..." It doesn't have to be fancy or sophisticated. Just a simple line such as, "One other element that's important to consider is..." Use these lines to help your

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audience see your message and the logical organization of your material that you created when you prepared it early. It's built into your material; you just have to be able to verbalize it.

#### Do a Dress Rehearsal

Practice does not mean that you sit at your desk and silently flip through your slides. That's not going to help you be more confident when you actually give the presentation.

I recommend that after you do several practices of your content and delivery, you do a dress rehearsal. When performers do a dress rehearsal for a play or a musical, they actually get in costume, on stage, with the lights and the music. Everything that will be there in the actual performance is present during the rehearsal, so the performers become comfortable in the environment with all of its details and logistics.

When you practice, get into as close to the real environment as possible. If you can get into the actual room to practice, it will help you pull all the elements together - the message, the time limit, the transitions, the slides, the notes.

Even if you can't get into the space itself, you can simulate the situation. If you will deliver the presentation standing, then stand up while you practice. Wear similar clothes; for example, if you normally don't wear a suit but you suddenly have to wear a suit for this presentation, practice in the suit so you know what that feels like. Get used to it if the jacket feels a little tight across the shoulders or the high heels feel a little uncomfortable.

You want to deal with anything that could get in your way on the actual presentation day. Do you know what the room looks like? Can someone send you a picture if it's in a different location? Will you need a microphone – do you know how to use it?

Take control of this practice. I've asked hotel managers to take a picture of the room and send it to me. I've had the cleaning staff let me into the conference room the night before so I can run my slides one more time. I've attended a session or meeting in the room I'll be presenting in, just to get a sense of what the room feels like, what the temperature is, what the ambient noise is like.

Do your best to do a final dress rehearsal to the extent possible. This kind of practice will give you confidence and help you be grounded, especially if you momentarily get distracted.

Practice is required to be a confident, engaging speaker, but most people skip this step. They think because they know the material and they're a subject matter expert, practice is not required. The bottom line is if you don't practice a lot, it will be very difficult for you to be confident and successful.

Yes, practice takes time. But it's time spent up front investing in a successful, confident presentation as opposed to spending time afterwards doing damage control. The practice will pay off. You will see the difference.

And don't be envious of colleagues who look like they never have to prepare and practice. For most of them, that's not true. They do prepare and practice, but you just don't see it. They may not tell you about it. They don't advertise that fact. They may look like spontaneously brilliant presenters, but most of them have worked long and hard to have it look that way.

## Step Seven: Repeat

Many years ago, there was a shampoo commercial on television that reminded consumers to follow the instructions on the bottle: lather, rinse, repeat.

Repeat is exactly what you have to do. Repeat all these steps. This can't just be a oneoff, something that you do for one presentation once in a year and then forget about it and expect the skills to magically stay in your mind.

Repeat the process of these seven steps for every presentation. If you usually don't give a lot of presentations, find excuses to give them, instead of making excuses not to give presentations.

Start small, perhaps with a community organization you're involved with, a civic cause or some other kind of activity outside of work that captures your interest and enthusiasm. Offer to give a presentation for them or speak a few words at a meeting so you get practice in small, friendly environments.

Create these opportunities for yourself if they don't occur naturally. The goal is for you to experience success in small steps rather than waiting until the biggest presentation of the year at the annual conference with all the clients and senior partners in the audience.

As you give these presentations, be sure to track your progress, whether online or on paper. After you finish a presentation, note how you prepared, what your experience was, what your anxiety was like, what kind of feedback you received, etc. Review any video or audio you recorded. Get feedback from people in the room whose opinion you respect or from a coach like me. That feedback loop is important to your ongoing progress toward becoming a more confident speaker.

#### Conclusion

The good news is that presentation skills are just *skills*. They are not something you have to be born with. They're not some kind of secret magic or mojo. They're just skills, meaning that they can be practiced and improved. I've worked with a lot of people in my career and I've never met one who could not improve their public speaking skills, provided they put the time, energy, and effort in and practiced things in the right way.

Follow these seven steps and know that it is possible to become a more confident, effective presenter. If you're not one of the lucky few who happened to be born as a naturally gifted, confident speaker -- and those people are few and far between – you

can still improve your skills by investing the time, energy, effort, and resources into following these seven steps.

Stop waiting until the night before to slap together a couple of slides and call it a presentation and then expect to be confident and to come across as engaging, smart and knowledgeable about your subject. That's not going to happen. Instead, I want you to be able to rely on your practice and your preparation because that will allow you to be confident.

Imagine what it will feel like when you stand in front of an audience and know you're ready. You are prepared. You know you can handle the situation. You know you can keep the audience's attention, that they're going to be interested in what you have to say, that you'll be able to respond to their questions with ease and that you'll feel comfortable with yourself.

Imagine what that's going to feel like – and know that it's within your reach.

The seven steps to confident public speaking are all about you taking control of your skill development and beginning to believe in yourself and your own ability to develop into a more confident, engaging, powerful presenter.

I know you are well on your way to becoming more confident as a presenter. Now it's time for you to believe it, too.

Please feel free to reach out to me if I can help you in any way. If you'd like to learn more about my individual coaching, I'd be happy to talk with you and discuss how we could work together to improve your skills.

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#### **About the Author**

Gilda Bonanno is a speaker, trainer and coach who helps people improve their presentation and communication skills so they can be more successful. She achieves these results by combining her extensive business experience with a background in improvisational performance and a conviction that with the right training and practice, everyone can become a more effective communicator and leader. She has worked with clients throughout North America and in South America, Europe, China, India and Thailand.

She speaks about communication, networking, leadership, motivation and humor to groups ranging from entrepreneurs to engineers to healthcare professionals. In addition to facilitating high-energy, client-focused programs, she also coaches individuals to overcome their fear of public speaking and eliminate the barriers to letting their voice be heard.

Gilda is a certified Project Management Practitioner (PMP), has a certificate in Process Reengineering and holds an Advanced Business Certificate in Management from the University of Connecticut School of Business. Her expertise in process improvement and project management allows her to help clients use their communication and presentation skills to solve business problems.

She is Past President of the CT chapter of the National Speakers Association and the Southern CT chapter of the American Society for Talent Development (formerly ASTD).

Please feel free to reach out to me if I can help you in any way. If you'd like to learn more about my individual coaching, I'd be happy to talk with you and discuss how we could work together to improve your skills.

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