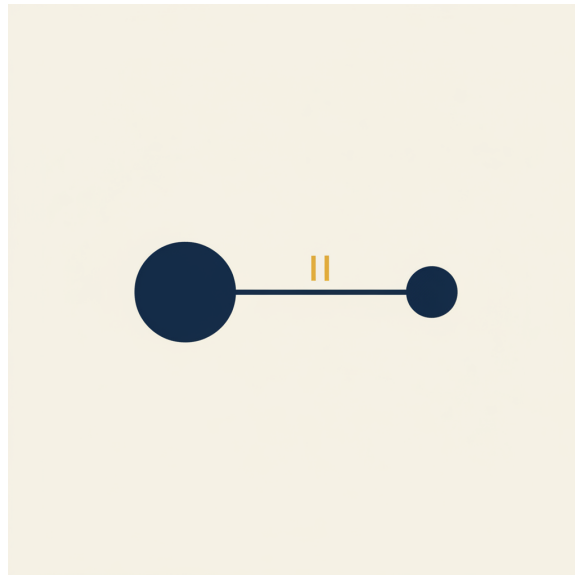




TIER 2 - WORK APPLICATION * V1.0 -- MAY 2026

FOR DIFFICULT FEEDBACK AND REVIEW

AI for prep before the conversation, structuring before the meeting, and processing after. The hard rule: AI cannot replace the actual conversation. It can only make you walk in less scared.



BY

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Anyone who has to give performance reviews, deliver hard feedback to a struggling employee, ask for feedback themselves, or run a 360-style review -- and wants to walk in prepared instead of winging it

15-20 minutes

Free. Forever.

EDITION

AUDIENCE

READ TIME

COST

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Two more modules in Tier 2:

SECTION 1

The conversation you're avoiding

Most managers under-give hard feedback

The pattern is consistent across small businesses and big ones: a manager knows someone on their team is struggling, knows the right move is a hard conversation, and puts it off for weeks or months. The reasons are real -- fear of breaking the relationship, lack of preparation, no clear framework for the conversation -- and the cost is real. The struggling employee doesn't get the chance to improve. The team carries the slack. By the time the conversation finally happens (or doesn't), it's at the firing stage.

AI doesn't replace the conversation. The conversation has to happen, with you, in person, in your voice. But AI does help with the part most managers fail at: PREPARING for the conversation. The structure, the specific language, the failure modes to avoid. Done well, the prep gives you enough confidence to actually have the meeting on Monday -- not push it another two weeks.

What you'll have by page 12

By the end of this primer:

- **The prep workflow** for giving hard feedback.
- **The structure** of a performance conversation that actually moves something.
- **The "asking for feedback yourself" workflow** -- getting useful input without performative theater.
- **The processing-after workflow** -- capturing what happened in the meeting so you can follow through.
- **The honest limit** -- AI cannot have the conversation for you.

The hard feedback conversation you've been putting off isn't a writing problem -- it's a courage problem. AI doesn't solve courage. It solves the "I don't know what to say" excuse so the courage problem is the only one left.

SECTION 2

The prep workflow

Before any hard-feedback meeting

The hard-feedback prep prompt:

"I have to give hard feedback to [employee name + role]. The specific issue: [in plain words -- what's wrong, with examples from the last 30-60 days, not vague characterizations]. My goal in the conversation: [what I want them to do differently / what change I need to see]. My honest assessment: [what I think is going to happen -- best case, worst case, most likely]. Walk me through:

- 1. The 3-4 things I should say at the start to set the tone -- not soft enough that the seriousness is lost, not harsh enough that they shut down.*
- 2. The specific examples I should reference -- and how to frame them as observations, not character attacks.*
- 3. The questions I should ask them to understand their side before I assume.*
- 4. The clear change-of-behavior ask, stated as specifically as possible.*
- 5. The 2-3 follow-up steps that demonstrate this is a real conversation, not a documented warning.*
- 6. The failure modes -- moments in the conversation where I'm likely to drift into ineffective patterns (over-apologizing, escalating, deflecting). Flag them."*

Output: a real prep doc. 15 minutes to read through and internalize. You walk into the meeting knowing what you're going to say, what you're going to listen for, and the failure modes you're most likely to hit.

What this prep avoids

- **Vague feedback that doesn't actually communicate the issue.** "I need you to step up" instead of "I need you to respond to client emails within 24 hours instead of letting them sit for 4-5 days, which has happened on the X and Y projects."

- **Character attacks instead of behavior observations.** "You're disorganized" instead of "I've noticed three projects this quarter where the schedule slipped because checklist items weren't tracked."
- **The conversation that ends without a clear change ask.** The employee leaves the meeting not really knowing what to do differently.
- **Documented warnings disguised as conversations.** When the goal is firing, just fire; the "hard conversation" theater wastes everyone's time.

SECTION 3

The structure of a performance conversation

A reliable 4-part frame

The 4-part conversation:

- 1. State the observation, not the verdict.** "Over the last 6 weeks, I've noticed three projects where the schedule slipped." Specific. Verifiable. Not yet a conclusion.
- 2. Name the impact.** "The slip on the X project meant the team had to scramble in week 7. The slip on Y put pressure on the front-end of Z." Connects the behavior to consequences. Not personal -- operational.
- 3. Ask for their read.** "How do you see this? Is there context I'm missing?" Real listening. They may have a legitimate reason. They may not. Either way, you've heard them before you've sentenced them.
- 4. State the clear change ask.** "Going forward, I need you to flag schedule risk by week 3 of any project that's looking tight. If a project does slip, I need to know about it within 48 hours of you knowing about it, not at the end." Specific. Measurable. Time-bound.

That's the whole frame. Maybe 20-30 minutes of conversation. The AI prep gives you the structure; you bring the actual exchange.

What the conversation isn't

It isn't a one-way lecture. It isn't a documented warning being read aloud. It isn't a list of complaints. It is a real exchange between two professionals about a specific behavior that needs to change.

If you can't have it that way -- if the employee is already too far gone, or you're already too angry -- the conversation isn't the right move. Document the pattern, talk to HR if you have one, plan the next step (formal warning, PIP, termination). The "hard conversation" pretending to be a real exchange when it's really a documented warning is the worst version of this work.

SECTION 4

The "asking for feedback yourself" workflow

Why "any feedback?" produces nothing

You ask your team or your peers for feedback. Half don't respond. The half that do say "you're doing great" or hedge into uselessness. You're left thinking "either I'm great or they're scared to tell me the truth."

The fix is structured questions. AI helps you write them.

The feedback-request workflow:

"I want to ask [team / peers / boss] for feedback on my work. I'm specifically trying to figure out: [what you actually want to know -- e.g., 'whether my communication style is landing,' 'what I should be doing differently in meetings,' 'what's frustrating to work with me on']. Draft a short message asking for feedback that:

- 1. States WHY I'm asking (genuine improvement, not theater).*
- 2. Asks 2-3 SPECIFIC questions, not 'any feedback'.*
- 3. Removes the 'I might get in trouble for being honest' fear.*
- 4. Gives them a clear way to respond -- anonymous form, a private call, in-person.*

My voice. Short."

The output gets you real responses. The trade-off: the more specific the question, the more vulnerable you have to be -- and that's often what makes the feedback flow.

Common specific feedback questions that work

- "What's one thing about how I run meetings that you'd change if you could?"
- "When I gave you that update on [project], what would have been more useful?"
- "Is there a pattern in my communication that's frustrating that you've never told me about?"
- "What do I think I'm good at that I'm actually mediocre at?"

These get real answers because they're specific enough that the person can give a real answer. "Any feedback?" gets nothing.

SECTION 5

The processing-after workflow

Capturing what happened so you actually follow through

After a hard conversation, your memory of what was said and agreed will fade within 48 hours. AI helps you capture it while it's fresh.

"I just finished a hard feedback conversation with [employee]. Walk me through: 1. What I observed in the conversation -- their reaction, their counter-points, the moments they pushed back vs accepted. 2. What we agreed on as the change-of-behavior ask and the timeline. 3. The follow-up checkpoints I should schedule. 4. What I should put in writing in a brief follow-up email to them. [Dictate or type rough notes from the conversation]"

Output: a clean record + a follow-up email draft. You send the email within 24 hours. The agreement is documented. The follow-up checkpoints go on your calendar.

Without this step, hard conversations are common to "vanish" -- both sides act like it happened but neither follows through. Documentation closes the loop.

SECTION 6

The honest limit

The non-negotiable rule of this whole module:

The non-negotiable:

AI prepares you for the conversation. AI does NOT replace the conversation.

The actual exchange has to happen in person (or at minimum on video -- never text or email for hard feedback). It has to be in your voice. The employee has to feel heard, even when they're hearing something hard. AI's role ends when the meeting starts.

Three things AI cannot do here:

- **Read the room.** The employee's tone, the pause before they answer, the moment they shut down vs the moment they engage -- those are signals you read with attention. AI doesn't see them.
- **Adjust in real-time.** A hard conversation that's going badly often needs a re-frame mid-flight. You have to do that on the fly, in your voice, with your judgment.
- **Take responsibility for what's said.** What gets communicated in the meeting is on you. Not AI. If you used AI prep and then read the AI script verbatim, it's still your conversation when it goes well or badly.

Within those limits, AI for hard-feedback prep is one of the most-undervalued workplace applications. The "I keep putting off this conversation" problem dissolves once you have a real prep doc. The conversation gets harder to avoid when you're 20 minutes from being ready.

SECTION 7

When NOT to use AI at all

- **The conversation is actually a firing.** Don't dress it up as a "feedback meeting." If you've decided to fire someone, that's a different conversation. AI prep for that has its own shape; don't mix it with the developmental version.
- **Legally sensitive situations.** Active discrimination claims, harassment complaints, ADA-protected situations. Talk to HR or an employment attorney, NOT AI.
- **Highly personal context.** Performance issues that are connected to a death, an illness, a family crisis in the employee's life. Those conversations need the human, full stop. AI prep flattens the unique-to-this-person context that should be at the center.

SECTION 8

Where to go from here

Two more modules in Tier 2:

- **AI for upward communication** -- status to leadership, asking for raises, pushing back on direction.

Get the next module the day it drops: theaiguywi.com/training

If you want this prep-discipline installed across a management team -- every hard conversation actually getting prepared for, every follow-up documented -- that's the consulting offer.

Reach out: alexanderjahn79@icloud.com

Closing -- the lock-in line

The hard conversation you've been avoiding isn't a writing problem. AI doesn't solve the courage problem. It does remove the "I don't know what to say" excuse -- so the only obstacle left is the courage one. And that's the one you can actually face once you have a prep doc and a clear structure.

20

Twenty minutes of prep

vs three weeks of putting it off. The prep doesn't make the conversation easy; it makes the conversation possible. Then you have it. The struggling employee gets a real chance. The team stops carrying slack. The "we should have talked to them months ago" hindsight stops happening.

-- Alex

Agent Logic --

Lac, WI. This is module 16 of 18 in Tier 2 (Professional).

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