

AI FOR REAL PEOPLE · A SHORT COURSE FROM PFI

Difficult Conversations

A short course on using AI to prepare for the hard conversations at work — asking for a raise, giving difficult feedback, saying no. Not a therapy tool. Not a substitute for the conversation itself.

About 30 minutes

Free

Five short lessons

No videos

No quiz you can fail

You will actually try things in this course — open an AI tool in another tab, draft a message, hear how it lands. The people who try get the most out of it.

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This course is not a therapy tool. If you are in crisis, put this down and call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or **911**. In Hawaii, **Hawai'i CARES** at **1-800-753-6879** connects you to local mental-health resources.

Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. PFI is a Hawaii-based nonprofit helping individuals, communities, and small businesses build the future-defining skills needed to thrive in a changing economy. This course is free, and it stays free.

Welcome

Some conversations are just hard. Asking for money. Telling someone their work is not what you needed. Saying no to a favor from a friend. Disagreeing with your boss.

The hardest part is usually not the conversation itself. It is the days you spend rehearsing it beforehand.

This course teaches you to have those rehearsals with a tool that can talk back. Then you can actually have the conversation with the person.

What this course is

A short walkthrough of one thing — using AI to prepare, draft, and rehearse the hard conversations most of us have at work (and one kind we have at home — telling someone no).

Five short lessons. About thirty minutes total. No videos.

What this course is NOT

This course is not a therapy tool. If you are in crisis, close this tab and call **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or **911**. In Hawaii, **Hawai'i CARES** at **1-800-753-6879** connects you to local mental-health resources. The full list of what this course is not for is at the end of Lesson 5.

This course does not teach ho'oponopono or any other Native Hawaiian reconciliation practice. Those belong to Hawaiian families and cultural practitioners. This course teaches a modern, secular use of AI — not a substitute for those traditions.

This course is also not a pitch for any particular AI tool, and not a test you can fail.

How this course works

You read. You try a few things in your own browser, in your own AI tab. You answer a couple of questions to yourself (not graded, not saved). You move to the next lesson when you are ready.

Think of it like an old-school text adventure. You are the person it is happening to. The lesson asks you to do something small, you do it, the next part shows you what to notice.

You can skip any of the questions. You can skip whole lessons. You can do this on the bus, on your lunch break, on the couch.

One thing to know before we start

There is a real difference between using AI to *rehearse* a hard conversation and using AI to *have* the hard conversation for you.

- **Rehearsal builds the muscle.** You practice out loud (or in text) with a tool that can talk back, and then you go have the real conversation as yourself. This is what this course teaches.
- **Delegation weakens it.** You have the AI write the message, you copy-paste it, you send it. Research and lots of real-world stories show that recipients can usually tell — and the fact that you delegated a personal message often lands worse than saying nothing at all.

The rule of thumb for this whole course: **AI helps you prepare. You have the conversation.**

A SHORT SELF-CHECK BEFORE WE BEGIN

Three quick scenarios. Ask yourself if any of them sound like you.

Scenario 1. There is a conversation you have been meaning to have with someone for weeks. You know what you want to say. You keep not saying it.

Scenario 2. You are about to send a message that you know is going to land wrong. You have re-written it three times. It still sounds off.

Scenario 3. Someone asked you to do something you cannot do (or do not want to do). You are drafting the "no" reply in your head and it keeps coming out either too harsh or too apologetic.

If any of those sound familiar, you are in the right course. Keep going.

A note about the live version

Everything in this course also runs as a free live 30-minute class on Zoom. Alex walks through the same workflow in real time, and — because rehearsal is much easier with a real person responding — the live version lands differently than reading alone. If any of the scenarios above feel urgent, sign up at lu.ma/pacforward. The next session is on the website.

If you would rather just read your way through this course, that works too. Keep going.

BEFORE LESSON 2 — SET UP AN AI TOOL

This course is tool-agnostic. It works with any popular AI chat tool. If you do not already use one, take 2 minutes to set up a free account with the AI tool of your choice — the free versions are enough for everything in this course.

"Help me say this differently"

The first move is small: type one thing you want to say. Ask AI for three versions. Pick the one closest to yours.

What you will do in this lesson

Type one thing you want to say in exactly one honest sentence. Ask the AI to give it back to you three ways. Notice which one sounds most like you.

TRY IT NOW

Think of one small, low-stakes thing you would like to say to someone this week. Something like:

- "I can't cover your shift Saturday."
- "I'd like to move our meeting to next week."
- "I need to leave the party a little early."
- "I'd prefer we not talk about work at dinner."

Do not pick anything big yet. Save the raise negotiation and the feedback conversation for later lessons. Open your AI tool in another tab. Type this exactly (replace the bracketed part with your own honest one-sentence thing):

COPY AND PASTE

I want to say the following to someone: "[the thing you want to say]". Give me three versions of this: one direct, one warm, and one brief. Do not add information I did not include. Keep the meaning the same.

Send it. Read the three versions.

Stop here. Actually do this before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

Three short versions of the same message, in three different registers. One is probably close to what you would have written. One is probably too soft. One is probably too clipped.

The interesting one is usually the one you did not think of yourself. Not because it is right — often it is not right for your relationship with this person — but because it shows you a possibility you would not have considered on your own.

The important thing to notice

Notice what the AI *did not* do. It did not decide what you should say. It gave you options. You still pick.

That is the pattern for this whole course. The AI is a source of drafts you would not have written on your own. You are the one who knows the person you are writing to.

A QUICK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved — just for you

Of the three versions the AI gave you, which one is closest to how *you* would actually say it? Not the "best" one. The most *you* one. That is the version you would edit and use — probably by making it a little more yours, not less.

TRY TO REMEMBER · TWO QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours. Your answers aren't saved.

1. Why ask for three versions instead of just one?

Our answer: Options help you notice choices you would not have considered on your own. You still pick — the AI just widens the menu.

2. Why start with a small, low-stakes thing before working up to a real difficult conversation?

Our answer: To learn the pattern (draft → three versions → pick and edit) in a place where nothing bad happens if the AI gets it wrong.

The free live class runs through this same pattern with a real message an attendee brings. If you want to practice with someone: lu.ma/pacforward.

The tone-check workflow

Now for a harder version of Lesson 2. You have a real message you need to send — to your boss, a coworker, a family member — and you are worried about how it will land.

The move is not to have the AI write the message. The move is to have the AI *read your draft the way someone in a bad mood might*.

The three-move tone-check workflow

Move 1. Write your draft.

In your own words. Rough is fine. If you have been drafting it in your head for days, get the actual words out — no matter how clunky.

Move 2. Read it through the AI. Copy your draft. Open your AI tool. Paste the draft. Type this:

COPY AND PASTE

Read this message and tell me: 1) How might someone in a bad mood have read it? 2) How might someone in a good mood have read it? 3) Point out any specific words or phrases that could go either way. 4) Suggest — do not rewrite — one change per problematic phrase.

Stop here. Actually try this on a real draft — one you have been sitting on — before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI probably found one or two phrases that could read as sharper than you meant. It probably also over-worried about one or two things — the AI does not know the person, so it will occasionally flag a phrase as risky that is actually completely fine between you and this specific recipient.

Read the AI's flags with your own judgment on top. For each flag, ask:

- Would *this specific person* read it the way the AI is worried about?
- If yes, what is the smallest change I could make?
- If no, leave it alone.

Move 3. Rewrite it in your own words.

This is the load-bearing move. **Do not paste the AI's suggested phrasing directly into your draft.** People — and increasingly, hiring managers, coworkers, and family members — can tell when a message was written by AI. The cadence is a little too balanced. The phrasing is a little too polished. Recipients feel it, even if they can't name it.

For each phrase the AI flagged, close the AI tab (or ignore it) and rewrite that part in your own words. It might come out slightly rougher than what the AI suggested. That is exactly what you want. Rougher-in-your-voice beats polished-not-in-your-voice, every time, for anything that matters to the person receiving it.

THE RULE YOU CANNOT BREAK

Never paste an AI-drafted message directly into an email, text, or letter to a real person. Use AI to hear how your draft might land. Then rewrite in your own words. If you cannot summon the words to rewrite it, that is important information — often it means the message is not ready yet, or you need to talk out loud with a real person before writing.

A QUICK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved

Was any of the AI's "how someone in a bad mood might read it" surprisingly accurate? For most people the answer is "yes — one specific phrase I hadn't noticed." That phrase is the one to change.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. Why is it better to ask "how would someone in a bad mood read this" than "how does this sound"?

Our answer: Because "how does this sound" is vague; the mood-frame forces the AI to imagine a specific reader, which surfaces specific problems.

2. What is the one rule you cannot break in this workflow?

Our answer: Never paste an AI-drafted message directly into a real message. Use the AI to hear how it might land, then rewrite in your own words.

3. What does it usually mean if you cannot bring yourself to rewrite a section in your own words?

Our answer: That the message is not ready yet — you may need to talk out loud with a real person before writing.

The live class demonstrates the tone-check on a real message an attendee brings — and Alex plays the recipient. If you want that: lu.ma/pacforward.

Rehearsing the conversation

Sometimes the hard part is not the words. It is what happens next — what the other person says back. You do not know how they will respond, and that uncertainty is the reason you have been putting the conversation off.

This is where AI can genuinely help. Not by having the conversation for you. By letting you rehearse it once first.

The rehearsal workflow

Move 1. Describe the person, honestly. Open your AI tool. Type this:

COPY AND PASTE

I need to have a difficult conversation with [person's role, not name — for example, "my manager" or "my sister"]. Here is how they typically respond to hard conversations: [describe their pattern honestly — for example, "they tend to shut down and go quiet" or "they get defensive first and then more reasonable after a few minutes"]. I am going to say something to them; play them back to me. Be realistic, not nice. Do not make them easier than they actually are.

Send it. The AI will acknowledge the setup.

Move 2. Say your opening line. Type what you actually plan to open with. Not a summary. The exact words. The AI will respond as the person you described. Read the response.

Move 3. Reply back. Whatever the AI says back, respond to it in the words you would actually use. Notice what happens in your head — where do you get stuck? Where do you feel yourself wanting to apologize before you have made your point?

Move 4. Run the exchange for 3-4 rounds. That is usually enough to see the pattern. When you feel you have run out of new things to try, stop.

Stop here. Actually try this on a real conversation you have been avoiding.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

Three or four exchanges deep, one of two things usually happens:

- You said something that surprised the AI-as-the-person, and their reply gave you a real new angle to think about.
- You said something that got the AI-as-the-person exactly where you were afraid they would go — the shutdown, the deflection, the counter-attack.

Either one is useful. The first shows you a way in you had not seen. The second shows you the exact moment you need to be prepared for in the real conversation — so it does not surprise you when it happens.

THE IMPORTANT WARNING

The AI is not that person. It is *your best guess* at that person, filtered through what you told it. So:

- **Do not treat the AI's responses as prediction.** The real person may respond very differently.
- **Do not treat the AI's suggestions as coaching.** If you ask the AI "what should I say next?" it will give you an answer, but that answer is based on nothing about your actual relationship history.
- **Do not use this during an active argument.** This is preparation *before* the conversation, not something to run *during* it. If you are in a live conflict with someone you care about, close the tab and give the conversation your full attention.

The AI is a rehearsal partner, not a coach and not a counselor.

A QUICK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved

What was the one moment in the rehearsal where you felt yourself wanting to back down or apologize? That is the moment to be ready for in the real conversation.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. Why do you describe the person's *typical response pattern* in the setup, not just their name or role?

Our answer: Because the AI needs some texture to play them realistically. "My manager who tends to go quiet when things get hard" gives the AI something to work with; "my manager" gives it a stereotype.

2. What is the difference between using AI to *rehearse* and using AI to *coach* you through a difficult conversation?

Our answer: Rehearsal is playing the other side so you can practice your own responses. Coaching would be asking the AI to tell you what to say — which relies on nothing the AI actually knows about your relationship.

3. When should you NOT run this workflow?

Our answer: During an active argument. This is preparation before a conversation, not something to run mid-conflict.

The live class runs this workflow with real conversations from attendees — and Alex plays the counterpart in ways the AI can't quite match. If a hard conversation is coming up this week, join us at lu.ma/pacforward.

What you did, what's next

You came in with at least one conversation you have been avoiding. You leave with three moves — say-it-differently, tone-check, rehearse — and a clear rule for when AI is not the right tool at all.

Your checklist — what you can do now

Tick each one you have actually done.

- ☐ I have signed in to an AI tool at least once.
- ☐ I know the "three versions — direct, warm, brief" move for hard-to-word messages.
- ☐ I know the "how would someone in a bad mood read this" tone-check.
- ☐ I know the one rule I cannot break: never paste AI-drafted messages directly to real people.
- ☐ I know how to use AI to rehearse a conversation before I have it — and when not to.

What to do this week

Pick one small conversation you have been avoiding. Not the biggest. A small one. Run the say-it-differently move from Lesson 2. Send the version most in your voice.

If it goes better than expected, try the tone-check on a bigger message next week. If it goes badly, you now know something about your relationship with that person you did not know before — that is also useful.

A QUESTION, IF YOU WANT TO ANSWER IT · optional, not saved

What was the moment in this course where something surprised you, or something clicked, or you thought "wait, I could try this on..."?

If you want to tell us, email hello@pacforward.org — Alex reads every reply.

Two things that go further than this course

The Field Guide to AI — a free downloadable PDF that covers everything in this course plus chapters on inbox, paperwork, and the honest limits of AI. pacforward.org/repository.

The free live class — 30 minutes on Zoom with Alex. Rehearsing with a real person lands differently, and the live class is where you can do that in a low-stakes way with someone else in the same shoes as you. Highly recommended if this is a topic that matters. lu.ma/pacforward.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PAGE IN THIS PACKET

When to close the tab and talk to a real person

This course cannot help with:

A mental-health crisis. If you or someone you love is in immediate danger, call **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or **911**.

Grief, ongoing addiction, or ongoing abuse. Talk to a therapist or a counselor. If you do not have one, your primary care doctor can refer you. In Hawaii, the **Hawai'i CARES** line at **988** or **1-800-753-6879** connects you to local mental-health resources.

A live argument. If you are mid-conflict with someone you care about, close this tab. Give the conversation your full attention.

A decision about leaving a job, a marriage, a friendship, or a family relationship. These are your calls to make. AI does not know your life.

Anything involving medical, legal, immigration, or financial decisions that affect you. Use AI to understand terminology if you want. Then talk to a doctor, lawyer, or financial advisor.

Native Hawaiian reconciliation practices (such as ho'oponopono). These belong to Hawaiian families and cultural practitioners. This course teaches a modern, secular use of AI — not a substitute for or version of those traditions.

You are always in charge of your own conversations. AI is a rehearsal partner. You are the one who has the conversation.

KEEP THIS PAGE

The prompts, in one place

Five prompts from the course you can copy when you need them — plus three more to grow into. Open this page when you have a hard conversation coming up. Replace the bracketed parts with your actual situation.

1 • Three versions of one message — from Lesson 2

I want to say the following to someone: "[the thing you want to say]". Give me three versions of this: one direct, one warm, and one brief. Do not add information I did not include. Keep the meaning the same.

2 • Tone-check a draft — from Lesson 3

Read this message and tell me: 1) How might someone in a bad mood have read it? 2) How might someone in a good mood have read it? 3) Point out any specific words or phrases that could go either way. 4) Suggest — do not rewrite — one change per problematic phrase.

3 • Rehearse a conversation — from Lesson 4

I need to have a difficult conversation with [person's role]. Here is how they typically respond to hard conversations: [pattern description]. I am going to say something to them; play them back to me. Be realistic, not nice. Do not make them easier than they actually are.

4 • Ask what they might have meant — companion to Lesson 3

Here is what [person] said to me: "[paste]". Give me three different things they might have meant by this. Don't tell me what I should say back — I'll decide that.

5 • Prepare a specific ask — companion to Lesson 4

I need to ask [person's role] for [specific thing]. Help me think through: What is the strongest reason for them to say yes? What is the most likely reason they would say no? What is one thing I could offer that would make it easier for them to say yes?

THREE MORE TO TRY — THESE BUILD ON THE FIVE ABOVE

6 • Write a polite "no"

I need to say no to [request]. Help me write a short reply that says no without burning the relationship. Show me two options — one warmer, one firmer. Do not apologize excessively.

7 • Structure hard feedback

I need to give someone hard feedback about [specific behavior]. Help me structure the conversation using: (1) the specific behavior I observed, (2) the specific impact it had, (3) what I would prefer going forward. Give me three sentences per part. I will edit and personalize.

8 • Prepare for a raise conversation

I am going to ask for a raise. Here is what I want to lead with: [your one sentence]. Help me think through: What is one specific accomplishment from the last year that supports this? What is the most likely counter my boss will give? What is a reasonable response to that counter?

‘A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi

"All knowledge is not learned in one school."

Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our courses are free for everyone — if this one gave you time back, you can help keep it that way at pacforward.org/donate.

FORWARD TOGETHER