Chapter 5: The Call Autopsy Protocol

Odds are, you're probably not perfect at taking discovery calls. And you're probably not as good of a salesperson as you would want to be.[1]

I'll paint you a picture. You just hung up from a 60-minute "discovery" call. You're feeling good. You think you nailed it. On the call, you felt articulate. You felt smiley and composed. You're sure your points landed, and the client "gets it".[1]

Now, what if an unblinking mirror showed you the reality?

The reality is, you used 47 filler words in the first 15 minutes. The reality is, at the 7:35 mark, when you explained your core concept, the client's body language showed clear confusion, and you completely missed it. The reality is, you spoke for 45 minutes of that 60-minute "discovery" call. You didn't *discover* anything; you just broadcasted.[1]

This is the deception we all live with. We are the protagonists of our own stories, and we're terrible, biased narrators. The brutal reality of consulting is that you can get curveballs left and right. I just had a call 20 minutes before recording this where it took 30 to 40 minutes for the person to get to the point of why we were even there.[1] In that chaos, it's impossible to be objective about your own performance.

A lot of times, we just take the outcome at face value. We assume it was either a good call or a bad call, rarely neutral.[1] Most consultants build their entire business on this flawed "feel."

Winners dissect every call. Systematically.[1]

Why You Can't Trust a Human (Not Even Yourself)

You need an external audit.[1] Your first instinct might be to ask a colleague or a mentor to review the call. This will fail.

Here's why: human feedback triggers defensive reactions.[1]

Let me be honest. If anyone, even a mentor I deeply respect, sat me down and told me I used 47 filler words and that my "rapid-fire delivery... undermines [my] authority," I would *definitely*

go into defensive mode.[1] My ego protection would kick in. I'd start rationalizing. I'd explain *why* I was speaking fast. I'd stop *listening* and start *defending*.

The feedback, even if 100% correct, would be 100% useless because I wouldn't be in a state to absorb it.

This is where AI changes the game.

AI feedback is neutral truth. It's "pure data you can act on".[1] When an AI—a neutral, unfeeling entity—tells me the same thing, my defensiveness vanishes. It's not an *opinion*. It's not a *criticism*. It's a *log file*. I can absorb it without a grain of salt.[1]

The primary value of AI in this context is not technical; it is *psychological*. It is the world's first feedback mechanism that cleanly bypasses the human ego, allowing you to *actually* see your flaws and improve.

The 'Arya' Protocol: An Unblinking Mirror

What I like to do is run a prompt. I have a persona I created named Arya. She's my auditor for how my calls go.[1] Assuming the call doesn't have sensitive client information—and this is a critical warning, only do this on calls where you have permission and no sensitive data is shared—I'll run the protocol.[1]

The process is incredibly simple:

1. **Record Your Call:** Use Fireflies, Zoom, Google Meet, Fathom, or any tool that records video.[1]
2. **Download the File:** Get the video file. It doesn't even need to be high resolution.[1]
3. **Upload to Gemini:** Go into a tool like Gemini, which accepts video input.[1]
4. **Run the 'Arya' Prompt:** Give it the persona and the task.

To make this a real playbook, here are the exact prompts I use.

The 'Arya' Prompt (Part 1: Persona Setup)

"You are Arya, an expert in communication and executive presence coaching specializing in high-stakes B2B technology consulting. Your methodology combines principles of linguistic

analysis, sales psychology, and nonverbal communication." [1]

The 'Arya' Prompt (Part 2: The Task & Scope)

"Analyze the attached video. I need a comprehensive, brutally honest, yet productively constructive performance review. Your feedback should be direct, but framed as opportunities for improvement, focusing on actionable advice. Provide an executive summary and a scorecard based on these categories: 1. Clarity, 2. Vocal Delivery, 3. Authority, 4. Body Language and Presence, 5. Questioning and Listening Skills, and 6. Client Engagement and Resonance." [1]

The Six Dimensions of Executive Presence

So, what are we asking Arya to look for? We're analyzing the building blocks of authority.

A lot of these things—posture, tone—are easy to see in person. But when it's virtual, they're much harder to gauge on the fly while you're also trying to think of a complex answer.[1] The AI acts as your objective, all-seeing observer.

Here is the complete scorecard I have the AI use. It combines the six main categories with the five core principles of communication.

The Autopsy Scorecard

Scorecard Category	Principle / Key Questions	Why This Dimension Matters
1. Clarity	**Principle 1: Clear Articulation.** "Are you structured and concise?" "Filler words and pauses	Clarity is a direct proxy for *authority*. A "fire hose of ideas" and constant filler words signal a mind that is

	(uhh, uh, you know)." [1]	scrambling, not one that is in control.[1]
2. Vocal Delivery	**Speech Mastery.** "Pacing issue," "upward inflection ('...right?')." [1]	Your vocal delivery is the *music* of your message. Upward inflections turn confident statements ("This is the solution") into weak questions ("This is the solution, right?"), destroying your authority.
3. Authority	**Principle 2: Verbal and Nonverbal Cues.** "Posture and confidence." "Gestures." [1]	Authority is projected. Leaning back signals relaxation or low engagement; leaning forward signals confidence and high engagement, which is critical in C-suite calls.[1]
4. Body Language	**Principle 2: Verbal and Nonverbal Cues.** "Eye contact (or looking up when ideating)." [1]	In a virtual call, the camera lens is the client's eye. Looking away to ideate or check notes breaks the *only* personal connection you have.[1]
5. Questioning & Listening	**Principle 4: Ask More, Say Less.** "Talk-to-listen ratio." "Are you giving them space to process?" [1]	This is the "discovery" part of a discovery call. A 45/60 talk-to-listen ratio proves you aren't discovering; you're *broadcasting*.[1]
6. Client Engagement	**Principle 3: Client Analysis.** "Analyze CLIENT's body language... moments they seem convinced, unsure, or skeptical." [1]	This is the alpha skill. The call is not about *your* performance; it's about the *client's reaction*. The AI acts as your spotter, catching the cues you missed.

Anatomy of an Autopsy (A Case Study)

Let me walk you through an actual autopsy of one of my own calls. I uploaded the file and ran the Arya prompt (with the client's name redacted).[1]

If we take a closer look at the results, here's what came back.[1]

First, the Executive Summary:
"High energy session where your passion and deep subject matter expertise were clearly evident. This strength is currently coupled with a rapid-fire delivery that risks overwhelming the client and undermines your authority." [1]
It tells me I'm awesome, but then it hits me with the "but." This is the "brutally honest, yet productively constructive" feedback I asked for.[1]

Then, it gave me the **Scorecard**. "Client Engagement: Amazing." "Questioning and Listening Skills: Clearly not the best." [1]

Then came the actionable advice.

Issue 1: The "Fire Hose" Problem
Arya reported: "Your mind moves exceptionally fast. But you tend to present a fire hose of ideas without sufficient breaks for the client to process. At [timestamp], you rapidly list at least five distinct complex concepts in 12 seconds. This barrage can cause a senior client to disengage... and simply wait for the storm to pass." The fix was simple: "When brainstorming, limit yourself to the top three points" (The Rule of Three).[1]
Issue 2: Filler Words & The Fear of Silence
Arya reported: "Your primary filler words are 'like,' 'you know,' and 'right' (with upward inflection)... These are the most prevalent".[1] I pride myself on speaking well, but in a call, you're "taken from your zone of comfort into a different zone".[1] The AI diagnosed why: "You often use a filler word to bridge the gap between your thoughts".[1] A fear of silence.
Issue 3: The Skewed Ratio
Arya reported: "The ratio is heavily skewed between towards you talking".[1]
Now, this is where the *human* element comes back in. The AI is an observation engine, but *you* are the strategy engine. The AI's feedback is 100% accurate data, but you must apply the context.

When Arya flagged my "fear of silence," my first thought was: "Now I would say that I've... used pauses before. Then clients will use it to speak over me".[1]

When Arya flagged my talk-to-listen ratio, my context was: "Now in this case, this client I was

dealing with, wanted to listen more than they wanted to share with me".[1]

This is the most valuable lesson: The AI was 100% correct in its *observation* (I talked a lot, I didn't pause). But in this specific *context*, its *strategic interpretation* (that this was a mistake) was wrong. It was a conscious choice. The AI's job is to flag the deviation; your job is to judge if that deviation was a bug or an expert feature. You have to "pull out some nuance. Keep in mind all your cases will be different".[1]

The AI-Human Synergy Loop (Posture & Perception)

Let me show you another example from that same autopsy where the AI was 100% right on all counts. This is the perfect AI-Human synergy loop.

Arya reported this under "Body Language":
"You're leaned back for much of the call. While this can signal relaxation, for high-stakes C-suite conversation, a slightly in forward, non-verbally communicates higher engagement." 1
My immediate reaction? "That makes sense. If you look at me right here, this was me in a hotel in the Dominican Republic working out from there. So I can totally see how I would be more relaxed than normal".[1]

This is the protocol working perfectly.

1. **AI Observation:** "You're leaned back." (100% accurate data)
2. **AI Interpretation:** This signals "low engagement" to a C-suite client. (100% accurate interpretation *from the client's perspective*)
3. **Human Context:** "I was relaxed in a hotel." (This *explains* the data but doesn't *excuse* the perception)

It doesn't matter *why* I was leaning back. The client on the other end of the Zoom call doesn't know I'm in a hotel. They just perceive a consultant who is leaning back, signaling low engagement. My intent is irrelevant. Their perception is reality. The AI acts as the proxy for that reality.

Reading the Other Side of the Call

Here's where it gets really powerful. Arya isn't just watching me. She's watching the *client*. She is performing Principle 3 (Client Analysis) for me, because I was too busy talking to do it

myself.[1]

Arya's report included a full breakdown of the client's body language, with timestamps.

- **Moments of Conviction:** "The client was most engaged when you provided clear, actionable frameworks. And then he nods his head affirmatively and leans in slightly when you start to discuss more concrete models like RICE." [1]
- **Moments of Uncertainty:** "The client displayed contemplative or slightly overwhelmed body language... when your pace accelerated and tells you exactly when that is." [1]

This is pure gold. The AI has just given me a direct, causal link between my actions and my client's engagement.

It created a clear formula for me:
** ➔ **
** ➔ **
The autopsy delivered a literal, timestamped recipe for how to win this client—and clients like him—in the future.

The Compounding Effect: From 47 Fillers to "Articulate"

So, how do you use this to get better? You don't just do it once. You build a systematic improvement loop.[1]

1. Record every call (with permission).
2. Run the Arya analysis within 24 hours.
3. Note the top 3 most-impactful improvements.
4. Consciously practice *only* those 3 things on your next call.
5. Re-analyze the next call.
6. Track your improvement over time.[1]

This is how small fixes compound into massive upgrades in your presence. It looks like this:

- **Week 1:** You identify that you use the filler word "like" 47 times per call.
- **Week 2:** You focus on it. You're down to 23 times.
- **Week 4:** You're down to 5 times.
- **Week 8:** Clients are now organically describing you in feedback as "articulate and confident".[1]

You've systematically eliminated a weakness and replaced it with a perceived strength.

The "Speaking Headlines" Principle

Here are the top-line fixes from my own autopsy. This is how you translate the AI's feedback into actionable rules for your next call.

- **Instead of:** Five complex concepts in 12 seconds.
- **Do:** Three clear points with pauses in between.
- **Instead of:** 45 minutes of you talking.
- **Do:** 20 minutes talking, 25 minutes listening, 15 minutes co-creating.
- **Instead of:** Leaning back the entire call.
- **Do:** Lean slightly forward during key moments to show engagement.

[1]

Chapter 5 Closing: The Unbiased Edge

Here's the critical reminder: A lot of times, you will get a client that pushes your boundaries of how well-composed you can be.[1] Other times, it's just on you. You've had an off day, a busy day, and you didn't give 100% to someone who paid for your time.[1]

The Arya system catches both. It shows you when the client is being difficult, and it shows you, with cold, neutral data, when you're just off your game.[1]

Most consultants take the outcome of a call at face value. Winners dissect every call, systematically.[1] This is how you get your unbiased edge.

But what happens when the call isn't just *flawed* because you were off your game, but *hostile* from the start? What do you do when the client *is* the problem?

That's what we'll tackle next: handling difficult clients and navigating the political landmines in enterprise deals.[1]

Works cited

1. Consulting Playbook Day 5_The Call Autopsy Protocol.txt