

Russell Benaroya: Hey, everyone. Welcome to the Stride 2 Freedom podcast. My name is Russell Benaroya, and I'm the co-founder of Stride Services, a virtual back office, bookkeeping, and accounting firm serving hundreds of clients around the United States.

This podcast is designed to help small business owners focus on growth and innovation. In other words, focus on those things that inspired you to start your business in the first place. We call it your genius zone. We do our job on this podcast when business owners feel like they have the trust and confidence to build the right team of partners around them that will help them grow.

Thanks for joining. Let's go.

Wow, everybody. You are in for a treat today. Welcome to the Stride 2 Freedom podcast. I'm Russell Benaroya. I have two all-stars with me on this edition of the podcast today. And it's going to become very clear momentarily why they both need to be here. The problem that I want to solve for all of you leaders out there is how you show up matters.

It is said that it takes seven seconds for someone to form a solid impression of who you are. And some research even suggests that it takes just a 10th of a second to determine traits like trustworthiness. So then why, in a remote environment, when we are all on Zoom, and we are trying to make a strong impression, do we take so many shortcuts in how we show up, and as such, lose our impact?

So let's stop that starting today. I have the distinct honor of having two guests on the show who have demonstrated tremendous leadership in how we show up, both visually and verbally. You may know [Gia Goodrich](#), a bit of a YouTube sensation with her [How to Look Better on Zoom](#) garnering over 630,000 views. Hi, Gia?

Gia Goodrich: Hi, I'm so happy to be here.

Russell Benaroya: Aaron and I saw Gia on a YouTube video, we said we have to have her on the show. And I want to introduce you to [Aaron Schmookler](#) who's the co-founder of [The Yes Works](#), a training and coaching company that among other things, guides leaders on effective communication. Hey, Aaron?

Aaron Schmookler: Howdy.

Russell Benaroya: So let's take control. Let's start going for it. We're going to cover a bunch of topics today, but I want you to end this show with a bunch of tactics and techniques that will deliver take-home value to you today. Let's rock and roll, Gia and Aaron. Are you ready?

Aaron Schmookler: I'm ready.

Gia Goodrich: I'm down.

Russell Benaroya: Okay, favorite cereal as a kid?

Gia Goodrich: I was basic and boring. I never really liked sugar cereals. So I was all about that Rice Chex bland, horrific lifestyle.

Aaron Schmookler: I really liked the, I think it's called Crispix. It's like rice on one side and corn on the other.

Gia Goodrich: Yeah.

Russell Benaroya: I've met people like you before. What is one song that you listened to as a kid or when you think about yourself as a kid, you're like, "Yeah, I really listened to that song a lot, it really signifies my youth."?

Gia Goodrich: Oh, my gosh, I was such a brooding little drama babe that mine was Garbage - *I'm Only Happy When It Rains*, which is still apropos because I live in the Pacific Northwest. So I still feel that song very much to my soul.

Aaron Schmookler: Well, I don't even know what that song is. I'm going way back to like five or six and I had a little red cassette of the Disney Robin Hood with the fox and that song where they whistle. That's the song that I first learned how to whistle and I think it's the song I listened to the most when I was still in single digits.

Russell Benaroya: I love the kid in all of us. What is the most recent show that you binge-watched?

Gia Goodrich: I am so late to this party train, but it's *The Crown*. I have obsessively been watching that. Before, it was *Peaky Blinders*, and then during the elections, because it was so hairy and tenuous, I needed to have faith in government so I binge-watched *Madam Secretary*. I did all of my retouchings just to have faith in humans.

Aaron Schmookler: I really liked that one. You can do that one right alongside *The West Wing*.

Gia Goodrich: Exactly. And they're like a bazillion episodes. When it comes to bingeing, I feel like it's top tier for sure.

Aaron Schmookler: I have re binged *Avatar The Last Airbender*, which I binged with my wife before we even had a daughter. Now that we've got a six-year-old daughter, we re-binged *Avatar Last Airbender*. Love it. It's so good. Get your Netflix going.

Russell Benaroya: Last last last question. If you have your phone near you, what is the last picture that you took on your phone that you're willing to share?

Aaron Schmookler: Let's see. It's an Advent Calendar Elf.

Gia Goodrich: I love it. Mine is on the super vain train but it's only because I'm launching a podcast myself. So we did pictures for it. It's a picture of me with my arms in the air and a fabulous fuchsia wig as one does.

Russell Benaroya: I love it.

Aaron Schmookler: I left my fuchsia wig at home.

Russell Benaroya: So let's jump into the problem that we're trying to solve today. Aaron, I think you articulated it really well before we started the show, maybe you could kick us off and frame the opportunity here?

Aaron Schmookler: I hang out with my clients a lot. My clients are corporations. So I'm hanging out with all these corporate folks, some of whom are salespeople and I can't see them. I can't see their facial expressions. I can't see their eyes or maybe I'm looking up their nose because they've got their laptop in their lap. Maybe I have to strain to hear them.

Then I also hang out with folks like us who are small businesses serving corporations and I can't see us either.

Here's the thing. I'm a theatre and film director, really. Like now, I'm training teams to communicate and collaborate effectively. By training, my degree is in directing theater. And what we directors do is manipulate how you feel about the character that you're looking at, primarily with lightning. It's like our favorite tool for making you suspicious of people.

So what you all are doing, if you are not lighting yourselves effectively, and you can look at Gia, and Russell and me; and we are all evenly lit. No harsh shadows. You can see our eyes. You can see a little glimpse of light in our eyes. Thank you for the wink, Gia.

That sends subliminal messages to your brain that we are trustworthy because you can assess how we are thinking and feeling about you. And that's the primary thing that we're looking to other people's faces for; whether we're aware of it or not. We're trying to tell how people feel about us.

If people are thinking of us as prey, metaphorically, then we will not trust them. So if we're not well lit, we're shooting ourselves in the foot when we go out to talk with people. One other thing before I shut up because I can go on and on and on about this is that there's all this talk about Zoom fatigue.

I don't have data to back this up, but I'm willing to wager everything that I have that a significant part of Zoom fatigue is our brains working overtime to try to assess how people are feeling about us over Zoom. Right now, I know, Gia, that you're feeling good. I know, Russell, that you're feeling interested because I can see your faces easily.

Subliminally, what's happening is that we're spending an awful lot of energy trying to assess what's going on in other people's minds by looking at their facial expressions, and we're failing

to get that data easily. Our brains use 20% of our calories every day. They're incredibly expensive machines and we're making them work overtime as the most important thing that happens in our lives, which is whether or not we're included or excluded socially. So that's a major part of Zoom fatigue.

When you're trying to make a sale, or trying to serve a client, or trying to have a meeting with your team, if people are feeling exhausted just by talking to you because they can't see you, well, then you're burning daylight. You're burning money, and you're burning energy. You don't have to look as good as the three of us do to simply be readable. And for everybody out there, I would consider having your face visible and readable, the minimum acceptable requirement.

Gia Goodrich: I love the way that you're framing it because it really is about these nonverbal cues that we're picking up from other people. One of the things that has to do with these nonverbals that I think is really important is the kind of cognitive strain; that brain fatigue that happens when we have a big difference in light.

One of the things that I see people do a lot, which is totally understandable, is they'll position themselves in front of a giant window. So what happens is there's a big difference in luminosity, which just means brightness and darkness, and then our eyes get totally strained, trying to go back and forth and focus, not to mention the sensors in our laptops and our cameras aren't smart enough to be able to prioritize you over the brightness of the window.

Some of these techniques are pretty easy once you understand how light operates so that you can make sure that the brain of anybody trying to connect with you, trying to watch you is not having part of that energy siphoned and being drained just by the quality of your image.

Russell Benaroya: Gia, you posted this video, *How to Look Better on Zoom*. You have hundreds of thousands of views. What did you learn from that experience? Was it more than you expected? What kind of feedback did you get?

Gia Goodrich: First of all, YouTube is this entire beast that is fantastic and unruly and all the things. I put that video up just for the people near me. Prior to that, the most I'd ever gotten on a video was maybe 2,000 views. At the time, I had less than 1,000 subscribers. So it was just for people in my life that I'm having personal meetings with.

Then it sat there for three months. All of a sudden, I did an interview, which drove enough traffic on a particular day that triggered the algorithm, and then two or three months later, I have over 20,000 followers and that video has over 600,000 views. It has been the biggest, steepest learning curve I can say, and such a great ride along the way.

What's really been fulfilling is reading the comments. I had an optometrist yell at me via comment that I need to get my new glasses because squinting is not okay. I've had seven-year-old school teachers say that they've never felt better now understanding how to change how they're seen in video. So it's super rewarding and also crazy now thinking that the audience for these little videos that I recorded in my room is so much bigger than it originally was, but just absolutely the best.

Aaron Schmookler: I told Russell that we had to include you. I was sending off little hints to my clients about how they could look better and I was searching for what can really help them better than I can. When I did a search and found you, I just started sending your videos to everybody.

I'm fairly new to having glasses, so you helped me make my eyes visible instead of having reflections. So I can tell people why it's important all day, and your videos are so valuable for figuring out how.

Gia Goodrich: Thanks. It's really understanding that this is a whole skill set that we aren't supposed to have. It's not innate in all of us. Everybody who's showing up in a way that's great, they look polished, they've taken the time and learned this particular skill set, which, once you start to break it down and start to understand it isn't that hard.

It's just really prioritizing some of those things: understanding how light operates, how angles work, and what you can do in your background to make sure that people get a little glimpse into your life. It's not the chaos and mess that my life is right now, literally right outside of the frame so that people can really focus on your beautiful face and what you have to say.

Aaron Schmookler: Right on.

Russell Benaroya: Can you share some pro tips, Gia?

Aaron Schmookler: He's looking for pro tips from you, I think, Gia.

Gia Goodrich: is on all the things, from video quality to lighting to all of this. But just to break it down pro tips, start with making sure that you prioritize light. This is something that we don't really think about in terms of our workspaces and where our computers are located. The easiest, most beautiful, gorgeous light is right in front of a window.

So if you think about moving your laptop, moving your desk to the front of a window, that will be the most beautiful, easy light that you can achieve. Next is the angle. If you think about where our laptops are usually angled, it's this upward tilt that really creates this gross foreshortening and distorted effect. If I'm not in my normal recording area, I will just pile a bunch of books, I will find some boxes, whatever it is to get that lens closer to the eye line.

Then lastly, the big thing that I'll say is it really comes down to your background. Curate what you're about so people get that little bit of a glimpse, but it's also not detracting too much where it's distracting from who you are. So leveraging those three things is a great start and how to up your Zoom game.

Aaron Schmookler: Couldn't have said it better. If you watch Gia's videos extensively, she starts with, be in front of a window, not with the window behind you. Then you can go all out and you can spend a lot of time and money. Over the course of the last 10 months when we've been locked in here, I am continually, one step at a time, making my image better, making my lighting better.

If you were to see behind me here, I'll go ahead and show you some of this, this light you can see it's jury-rigged, and it will remain jury-rigged. But I look acceptable. You can see my facial expressions so I know your brain is not having to work overtime to determine whether I'm a threat and that's been true all along.

Even before I started jury-rigging all this stuff, I was visible. So I'll say again that even if you can just go a little bit better than you are now, it's going to make a huge difference for the people that you are communicating with via Zoom or via whatever video calling service you're using. Do a little bit today. If you want to do a little bit more next week, do a little bit more next week. Just go for at least that minimum that your face is lit and you are not in shadow.

Russell Benaroya: Aaron, I appreciate you carrying the water for me here as I'm dealing with my own technical challenges. Thank you. We're talking about how we show up visually. Aaron, can you talk a bit about how we can show up better verbally: how we communicate, eye contact, words we use?

Aaron Schmookler: Gia talked about how we tend to put our laptops down. I've got my laptop on this little stand. Right now, I'm using a standing desk and you can tell that I'm using a separate camera. None of that is necessary.

Gia has talked about putting her laptop up on a stack of books. As long as your camera is more or less at eye level, then some of those tricks that we as film directors use to manipulate you, you will not be falling prey to accidentally. If you're looming over your camera, then people will feel threatened; whether they're conscious of it or not. It's actually better for you if they're conscious of it because then they can filter against that. If they're unconscious of it, then it's going to be a problem.

If you're way down here and looking up, then people are going to feel as though you are not confident. That's not good for you either. You'll also notice Gia right now is nodding. You'll notice that I've been nodding a lot. That, for me, it's conscious. It's not that I'm making the decision to nod whenever people talk. It's more that I've decided to turn up the sensitivity in my physical response apparatus to the impulses that I already have.

If I'm having an agreement impulse, then I just let that become physically expressed. And I do that more now than I do in person because there are so many fewer cues and because I suppress my sub vocal responses. I'm less likely to say, mm-hmm, via Zoom than I was in person.

That's good because if we're in a room full of 30 people, then every mm-hmm can turn into a lot. I appreciate that I see the two of you nodding. It tells me that I'm connecting. It tells me that I'm saying something valuable. It gives me some of those warm fuzzies that we've all been missing so much.

Gia Goodrich: You're diving into charisma territory, which is absolutely one of my superpower areas. I love it. I'm fascinated by it. I'm all about it. A big part of it is nonverbals like you're talking about; the things that aren't coming from your mouth, all the body language that goes with how

you're interacting. That really gets to a deeper part of our brain and our unconscious to where we'll like somebody without even really understanding why.

In going to your question, Russell, about talking, that's another part of charisma. I think a big thing that is a misconception that we've carried around for a long time is that charismatic people are born with it. There's this wonderful book called *The Charisma Myth* that explains that charisma is a combination of power, presence, and warmth. Everyone has those three factors, and everyone can connect to combine their own unique charisma mix.

And if you don't think you're charismatic in this moment, just think about a moment when you've been with your best friend or a couple of friends and you're deep in a story and people are riveted, and they're loving you and your energy. We all have this capacity. So it's really about how do we translate that on video?

Some of it, which I'm sure Aaron's going to speak to, has to do with your voice, your word choice, and things like that. Also, a lot of it has to do with his own verbals. One of the things you might see is, as soon as I started thinking about this, I started talking more with my hands because hands are something that we subconsciously think about. If you can't see someone's hands, there's a part of you that, going back to what Aaron said, feels like you're under threat. You can't really judge what this person is about.

Showing your palms and really creating gestures that add to your point, so they aren't dissonant. If they're out of sync, that can create this cognitive strain. It can detract from your point. As long as your hand gestures are in sync, that's another thing that can really up your charisma points and get people to that place that even if they're engaging with you only over Zoom, they really feel like they like you.

Aaron Schmookler: Russell, you asked about eye contact. You may have noticed that I'm making eye contact, and I'm also breaking eye contact. When we're listening to people, often, we'll look at the floor or we'll look at the wall because we just want to be able to focus on the words. There's so much visual information that we look for something that isn't going to be so much signal so that we can pay attention to the signal that we want.

There's no reason not to do that on Zoom. I actually will sometimes say to people, "Hey, if I look away during this call, please know that I'm listening to you." In fact, I probably am going to look away so that I'm listening to you.

One of the things that we train the teams that we work with to do, we call it Be Obvious. A lot of that has to do with bringing forward what may be obvious to you but isn't necessarily obvious to somebody else. So to say, "I'm looking away and I'm looking away so that I can focus on you," because who knows how they're going to interpret that? To give them a clue about how to interpret that can be really valuable.

Russell Benaroya: That's a great point. I've been on the phone more with folks recently because I've wanted to think and not be disrespectful. And feeling like I can't look away on

Zoom. Like I need to be making eye contact while I'm thinking, but I like the "make it obvious". That makes a lot of sense.

I'm also noticing because you're standing up, Aaron, you're also a bit bouncing around. There's some energy there. So standing versus sitting sends a different signal.

Aaron Schmookler: Right, and that's deliberate. I knew that you were going to put us on video because you told me. I was like, "I'm going to lift my desk, and I'm going to get up on my feet, and I'm going to be ready to move."

Gia Goodrich: I just want to chime in really quickly because I had the opposite thought. And it's only because I'm jumping into the podcast territory. For me, as much as I love visuals, I know that suboptimal audio quality is a huge thing.

So what I tried to do is have my sexy microphone situation, and I'm in a rocking chair so I can rock back when I'm drinking something. So nobody has to hear the slurping, gulping sounds that go with it. I love that these are two totally different solutions; thinking about the end-user in mind, which is really the point of it and really important.

Aaron Schmookler: Gia, you already have vocal energy. One of the things that happens for me when I stand up is I just get more vocal energy; I have more vocal energy. For those folks who aren't seeing us, they're getting some of that animated action that the viewers are getting through my voice. Both of you are also vocally expressive.

Speaking of vocally expressive, I love having the opportunity to do this because I've been shouting into the wind a lot. I'm going to look you right in the eye and say, "You've got to get off mute."

We do trainings with 30 people. We've been doing trainings with 30 people now for 10 months on Zoom and other video platforms. We ask everybody to stay off mute unless there is a lawn or going by because all those little micro-expressions, all those little tiny mm-hmms, the little chuckles are so important. Having none of them is a big contributor to Zoom fatigue.

There are studies that show that in a job interview, somebody who is wooden-faced, who is blank, who gives you no response is much more difficult. It's much more enervating for the interviewee than an interviewer who scowls and is clearly displeased with you because you know where you're at. As somebody who's been doing training online, I can tell you that when there's no response because people are off video, and/or they're on mute, it is incredibly enervating.

And it's not just for the trainer. It's true for everybody. All of the teams that we have trained have said, "We are staying off mute forever and a day." Hearing little chuckles in response to something funny that you've said, hearing an *mm* is so valuable, being able, in a virtual room full of 30 people, to hear somebody go *sigh* and to be able to say, "I heard you take a breath, Russell. Was there something that you wanted to share?"

How else are we going to get the input from the people who are reluctant to give input if we're not picking up on the most subtle cues that we can't possibly get if everybody's on mute? Get off mute.

Russell Benaroya: It's a great point. Let's talk about audio. Gia, I saw on your video originally, it looked like you were wearing a lavalier. Now you have an awesome mic. I've got a big mic. I'm sure Aaron does as well. Talk a little about audio quality; any recommendations that you have for best practice.

Gia Goodrich: That's a great question because I don't exactly know why, but we can deal with craptastic video quality better than our brains can deal with really bad audio. That is really one thing that if it's aggravating, it's not clear, we just really can't deal with it.

For most of us, one of the big issues that we have is when we're recording, we're in these really reflective spaces. Meaning that the audio, the sound waves that are emitting from our mouths are bouncing off all of these different surfaces: the wall, the ceiling, the floor especially if you have hardwood floors. It creates this muffled, jumbled, sub-optimal thing.

A lot of times, what we want is just directionality. Meaning we want the source of the microphone to be closest to the stream of air so that you can really understand what we're saying without a lot of this jumbled mess going on.

One of the ways it's really easy to do that is just to plug in with your headphones. Get some air pods. If you're recording video, and I wouldn't necessarily recommend this for Zoom, but if you're thinking about recording videos for things like YouTube or something like that, really plugging in with that headphone mic, and if you want, a lavalier, one of those that connect and you see them on the lapel that just clips so it's really close to your mouth to really get that beautiful sound quality.

The problem with the computer is that you have to get a splitter. It can be done, but because our inputs to sound are both for our headphones and for our mic on our computers, a lot of times it just takes a little bit more finessing. But I think really just trying to figure out a solution that will make it so that we can separate the background noise, the kids doing dishes in the background from you is really going to help with that audio quality.

Russell Benaroya: Great advice. Aaron, anything to add?

Aaron Schmookler: I don't think so. We all clearly have spent some money on our microphones. Again, you don't have to go all out to make a real difference. I think one thing that I will add is don't be nice to people about this. Be polite, but don't be nice.

We were in one of these networking meetings where I met Russell. I was early to this networking meeting and people were introducing themselves. One of these freelancers introduced herself and I really had to lean in. I was straining to hear her. She was so quiet. So I very politely chatted specifically to her and said, "Hey, I don't know if it's a technical issue, you

might want to look into an external mic because it's hard to hear you." It was meant to be a service to her; to really be helpful.

Then when it came time for everybody to introduce themselves officially in this networking event, again, we could hear her, but only by working really hard. The first thing that she said, probably because of what I had typed to her was, "Can you hear me okay?" And the person who was facilitating the meeting said, "Yeah, we can hear you fine."

After this meeting, she went on, I'm sure, to do prospecting, trying to get business, to working with her clients, and trying to serve them, and those people, without a doubt in my mind, left those meetings fatigued because it was work to hear her. Not that we couldn't, but it was work.

By being polite and nice and saying, "Yeah, we can hear you fine," this meeting facilitator really did her a disservice by ensuring that her prospects and her clients were having to work in ways that they shouldn't have to work.

Gia Goodrich: I love this story, if I may just swish it a little bit. I love what you're saying about being honest. My thing is that there's always a kind way to be honest. And that's the difference between being polite and just letting everything go, sweeping things under the rug, and being honest.

An example is there's this amazing entrepreneur and a person that I know in real life. She's amazing, named Jamie Schmidt, the deodorant monolith. In her book, *Supermaker*, she talks about having vocal dysphonia, which means that when she gets stressed, her vocal cords contract in a way that creates a lot of vocal fry. And it really stops her ability to project fully.

In her case, if you were joining a Zoom call with her, it might seem like she was intentionally being quiet or something like that. That's to say that there might be all these different reasons. To your point, I think it's really important to address it and maybe offer help. Having a lapel mic in that situation that connects to your computer, that gives you just instantly better video quality and makes you louder. Having her awareness of that might totally open up this world for her.

So I think it's important just in everyday life, but particularly in Zoom, thinking about ways that we can be honest, and be kind, be generous in our assumptions, but also really offer help when it comes to how to show up. For a lot of people, there are so many fears and insecurities around it.

I just had a conversation around Zoom dysphoria. Seeing ourselves on video all the time is creating all of this really gnarly, nasty body awareness, image distortions. We're all kind of under this stress. That's what I really think of, for me, as the crux of what I do, is I help people show up primarily so they can be more confident and feel like they can really articulate themselves; show up in the best way possible.

What I clearly say in my Zoom video is if people are judging you, they're a dick. And that's just what time of day it is. I think being aware of other people and really trying to make sure that you're showing up in the best way so that other people can have a pleasant experience is great,

but also, this is really about you feeling confident so you can translate in this weird, digital medium as the best possible version of yourself, which really is all about confidence at the end of the day.

Russell Benaroya: I love how you took this to be so much more than the what of what we're talking about to the why it matters. Not just in this interaction, but for how we feel about ourselves. Mind you, I had no idea that my forehead was so big that my hair was graying so much until I was on Zoom so much. That's my own issue; I'm dealing with it. Hey, let's talk about the future.

Aaron Schmookler: Before we talk about the future, can I answer Gia real quick? When I say don't be nice, I don't mean don't be kind. I'm so glad to use that word, kind. While I found that meeting facilitator very nice, I actually think it was unkind of her to say that. So I'm 100% behind be kind.

I also want to say that we're talking about a lot of different stuff. I don't want anybody out there to become overwhelmed by how many different things we're bringing up or by being able to say, "I cannot project, I cannot speak loudly, am I in trouble?" Every single incremental improvement that you make, is really going to have a profound impact.

If you have vocal fry and that's just a part of your physiology, no problem. If you light yourself well, if you get a mic, you're going to more than compensate for the vocal fry problem. Then lastly, I will say that at the top right of your Zoom, you can turn off the self-view. Once you've figured it out, people can see me, you don't have to see you. You can turn it off and stop being distracted by it and know that if people are consciously judging you, who needs them? It's the subconscious judging that I really want to help people dispense with; judging you as a threat subconsciously because you can't be seen. Let's talk about the future.

Russell Benaroya: If we look out a year or 18 months, where are we going in this Zoom world? How's the technology evolving and how will it help us or challenge us to show up with the confidence that we want to? What's the future look like in your view?

Gia Goodrich: One thing that I've already seen, which is so great, is the technology is becoming more accessible. We know that webcams, for whatever reason, are like 10 years behind every other thing. And it's usually because that's not the priority if you think about a computer. They're trying to do all this other stuff, be a jack and jill of all trades, so it's not really the priority.

I just had a wonderful conversation, made a video that spoke to this, you can check it out on my YouTube. I just had a wonderful conversation with a couple who developed software that makes it so that you can use your phone as a webcam. Boom, easy fix. We all have cell phones in our pockets. That's a great way to level up your video quality instantly.

So what I'm really excited for are a lot of these ways that we're taking what's expensive, taking what's out of reach for the everyday person, and really making it easier and more accessible. I think if you're feeling like, "I'm just going to hunker down and wait it out because eventually, this

will pass and we will get back to normal," I would caution you against that. What I see for the future is that now we've added digital remote work, all of that stuff as a huge skill set that we all now have. And it's really beneficial for a lot of companies. It's really beneficial for a lot of teams. I don't think it's going anywhere.

So really embracing it, really figuring out how you can show up the most confidently, the best possible so you're able to translate as close as possible to how somebody would meet with you for coffee, that's really going to help you embrace this moment that is going to be around for a long time.

Aaron Schmookler: I think back to the office is going to happen. Everybody back to the office; not going to happen. People have been pulling for, pushing for, asking for remote work for years. There's been a lot of fear from leaders that if you go home and you work from home, you're not going to do the work and I'm not going to be able to keep track of you and we're just going to lose productivity.

There have been a lot of leaders for years saying, "No, you can't work from home." Now they've been forced to let people work from home and they're finding out that it's not so bad.

Gia Goodrich: That they're more productive.

Aaron Schmookler: That's right. So if you think you're going to wait it out, as Gia said, that's not going to happen. You're not going to wait it out.

Russell Benaroya: As we wrap up, is there anything that we didn't touch on today that you feel is important to share with our listeners?

Gia Goodrich: I really feel like when you circle everything around, you bring the roosters back to roost, it's really about judgment. Like Aaron talked about, there's the unconscious judgment that we're making that really activates our sympathetic nervous system, which is the fight-flight-freeze response. There's a part of our brain that's constantly judging and scanning, trying to figure out if we're safe. And that's both if you're talking or if you're listening.

There's also this more conscious part of us that because of the crazy brainwashing that we've had about beauty standards, about what's cool, what's not cool, is also worrying about whether or not we're going to be judged. At the end of the day, the truth is, and this is a hard and loving truth, we are all inherently narcissistic. So you can assume that everyone, at least 80% of their attention, is going to be on themselves; whether or not they're being judged, whether or not what they're saying is accurate.

So it allows you to just release a little bit and say, "People pretty much are not spending their whole day obsessing about whether or not I use the right word just then," or whatever the case may be. It gives you this freedom to really start to show up authentically as you.

The other part that I think is so important comes back to this idea of authenticity. We are, as a society, so sick of the perfect Instagrammable, curated moment. We really want people who are real. And that's why I think we love watching Zoom, seeing those moments.

My favorite is when the kid in the background comes down the stairs and interrupts everything. It's just this beautiful moment to really connect with people. So don't shy away from that. Allow people to see you.

Leverage whatever tools you need to make you feel more confident with light, with sound, with your hand gestures, all of this stuff, but just remember, these are all tools to help you connect. You are inherently good enough, you are worthy of connection. If you figure out how to show up in the best possible version of you and the most authentic version of you, that's really how you're going to rock. That's what we're all excited to see.

Russell Benaroya: Awesome.

Aaron Schmookler: I'll add to that that one of the ways you can think about the disruptions in your home, there were all these memes early on in this pandemic of like my coworker has four feet and won't stop licking me. We weren't embarrassed when our co-workers would come up to us when we were in the office and ask us a question when we were on the phone because that's just a part of office life.

So there's no more need to be embarrassed when your four-legged coworker interrupts you in a Zoom meeting or when your kid interrupts you. I've had more than one Zoom meeting interrupted with a kid on my lap. It's a part of the nature of the beast.

One other suggestion that I'll make is to think of your Zoom environment, the things that Gia has been talking about the same way you would think about your storefront or your office. If you wouldn't permit your clients to come into an office that is dimly lit, if you wouldn't permit your clients to come into an office that is cluttered, then don't permit your clients to come into an office that's dimly lit or cluttered.

At the same time, Gia, as I completely agree with you about people judging you and who you are, we all have to sort who we're going to work with somehow. Who are the people that we want to work with? Who are the people that we're going to trust to work with, with our hard-earned money with our hard-earned reputation? If you're hiring a branding company or something like that, who are you going to trust with those things?

It's hard to make the decision between the million service providers that are out there. And right now, how you come across is going to be one of the things that people are making those determinations on the basis of; consciously and unconsciously. And that's appropriate. So, while I agree with Gia to say if people are going to judge you, they're dicks, I also will say that if people are going to judge your capacity to serve them, that's appropriate. So give them an accurate representation of how you're going to serve them.

Gia Goodrich: I love that. I think that's a very appropriate distinction. For example, I'm a director, commercial photographer by trade. I make YouTube videos. If you look at my background, you can tell I'm good at light, you can tell that I have some branding. You can roughly see what my aesthetic is.

Then I have like these little moments that are a little more real life. Those are sticky notes and mantras that I try to remind myself every day of, but that's important. If I was trying to sell myself as what I do but I didn't really have all of that together when a client was to meet me, they would have this unconscious or very conscious reticence and reluctance to want to work with me because what I'm saying I can do doesn't necessarily match what they're saying.

So there is a whole element to branding to this. I think it's really about quality and that's what I love, at the end of the day. If you are really great at whatever your superpower area is, just know that you have to be able to translate that same quality in how you're showing up in a meeting. So trying to bring those two closer together is definitely ideal for sure.

Russell Benaroya: In the vein of talking about judgment, let's end on a favorite donut question. What type of donut do you like?

Aaron Schmookler: Oh, piece of cake. I love old fashioned glaze. Period.

Russell Benaroya: I just learned a lot about you. This is so good.

Gia Goodrich: My response is going to be so true to who I am. I don't eat donuts. I have one of those sensitive constitution stomachs. I'm one of those people at restaurants that's like, "Can I have the burger, but without the bun, without the patty, without the lettuce, without the cheese, without the onions?" So I don't eat doughnuts, but if we do get to desserts that we're obsessed with, anything that has to do with chocolate. Cover anything with chocolate, you're good with me.

Russell Benaroya: Awesome. I am going to Apple Fritter all day long. Gia and Aaron, this was amazing. Thank you so much for joining us today on this edition of Stride 2 Freedom. I have wanted to talk about showing up as a professional on Zoom for quite a long time and I can't think of two better people to have the conversation with.

You shared some great ways for us to think about this problem at a tactical level. You also really opened up the conversation to talk about it at a more meta-level, at a why level, and how it reflects on who we are as people, and what is the story that we're trying to evoke visually when we get in a virtual meeting or virtual environment.

I'm going to put a lot of information in the show notes because you shared so much. I just really appreciate you both spending time with our audience today.

Aaron Schmookler: Russell, thank you for making it happen.

Gia Goodrich: Yeah, this was so much fun. Talking with you both was amazing. I just feel super grateful to be here.

Russell Benaroya: Well, thanks, everybody.

Aaron Schmookler: I'm even getting a little starstruck because I so admire your videos. Thanks for talking with us.

Russell Benaroya: It's so good. Well, have a great day everyone. Thanks for listening and talk to you next week on Stride 2 Freedom. Take care.