



## Dialog 6: Amit and Viktoriya

### Friend Helps Friend / Complaint

Amit is struggling with office politics at the Fortune 50 company where he's a technology lead. He's just met up for lunch with an old friend, Viktoriya, who's not part of his organization. In this conversation, she will help him change.

## Step 1: Permission

**Viktoriya:** Hey Amit, how are things going?

**Amit:** OK. (But not meaning it)

**Viktoriya:** What's going on?

**Amit:** Oh, you know, drama at work.

**Viktoriya:** Looks like it's weighing heavily on you.

**Amit:** Yeah, it is. But I don't know that there's anything I can do about it. Do you want to get drinks, or go straight to the lunch menu?

**Viktoriya:** I've got time, but I'm not having anything stronger than kombucha these days. So what's going on? I'm a good listener. And maybe we can figure something out together. Would that be helpful?

**Amit:** Yeah, actually. I've been spinning it around in my head, and I don't like to talk to Manjul about it because she gets angry on my behalf. I appreciate her loyalty, but it doesn't help.

*Leading with a complaint (chapter 10).*

*Getting permission before jumping in with advice or questions (chapter 10).*

## Step 2: Outcome

**Viktoriya:** So tell me a little about the situation.

**Amit:** Well, as you know, I work for a Fortune 50 organization. I developed this new tech platform, and my boss Marta and I were getting the business units to use it. We were doing great — getting positive feedback, and visibility at the C level. Then one of Marta's peers was promoted over her, and is now her boss — that's Shiann. Shiann has taken control over all these business relationships, and so now Marta and I are back to just supporting the technology. We don't have any meaningful contact with the business units anymore. We've lost all visibility and traction, because Shiann doesn't want Marta to contract with them directly. I was really looking forward to growing my skills and influence in the business, and now I'm basically stuck managing a mature technology platform that doesn't need a whole lot of managing. It feels like a dead end.

**Viktoriya:** That sounds really frustrating.

*Even though we say to start with the outcome rather than dive into the problem, in some cases it would be weird to know literally nothing about the underlying situation. So before going for outcome, Viktoriya asks for "a little" background, which establishes both a shared frame of reference and rapport.*

*Leading with empathy (chapter 10).*

**Amit:** Yeah. I'm wondering what I'm even doing there. What will I be contributing? How would I grow?

**Viktoriya:** So let me ask you: What's the outcome you'd like to see?

*Probing for an energizing outcome (chapter 14).*

**Amit:** I'd like to figure out how to get Shiann to trust Marta enough to give us more real opportunities within the business.

**Viktoriya:** What might that look like?

*Going for clarity (chapter 16).*

**Amit:** Marta and I would regain our visibility with the business units. Since I'm the tech specialist, there's a lot of benefit to me working directly with our end users. That way, I would probably see and hear things that would allow me to create more technological solutions that help those units succeed. That's how I see my future at the company, ideally.

**Viktoriya:** And what would that do for you?

*Going for meaningful (chapter 17).*

**Amit:** That way I could continue to challenge myself, and to grow.

*That's the opportunity.*

### Step 3: Opportunity

#### *What's Happening Now?*

**Viktoriya:** Great. So help me understand a little bit what's going on in the relationship between Shiann and Marta so we can figure out together what's the potential for improving it. What do you know about where their relationship fell apart? Did they ever have a good one? Bring me there so I'm sitting in the organization with you a little bit, and I can get a feel for what's going on.

*What's happening now (chapter 19).*

**Amit:** Okay, so Shiann and Marta are very different. Marta is very fair minded, and driven by what is needed for the organization. Shiann, on the other hand, is a bit of a narcissist. She's very motivated by her own personal self-image. If you go into her office, you'll see that three of the walls are covered with giant photographs of her and the things she's done. Everything she does and says is to raise her own stature.

*This is all generalizations and interpretations - doesn't Viktoriya need to dive deeper?*

**Viktoriya:** Raise her own stature?

**Amit:** When they were peers, Marta became aware that what Shiann was doing wasn't what the enterprise

needed. So there was always this kind of tussle between them, where Marta was advocating for the organization, and Shiann was doing whatever she needed to do to be personally successful. And when something didn't go well, Marta would try to fix it, and Shiann would try to cover it up to protect her image. Marta ended up doing a lot of work to save Shiann from her own messes, but Shiann doesn't trust her. And she hasn't returned the favor, that's for sure.

**Viktoriya:** Can you give me a recent or memorable example? If I were a fly on the wall when Shiann was acting to raise her stature, what would I see and hear?

**Amit:** About three months ago, Marta alerted Shiann to a potential security risk in a new version of the software. And recommended that we halt the rollout until we had eliminated it. But Shiann had already given a big presentation announcing the new rollout, along with the exciting new features, and refused to delay the rollout.

**Viktoriya:** Were you in the room when this happened?

**Amit:** No, Marta told me about the meeting later that day. She said that Shiann dismissed her concerns, and said that any bugs could be fixed on the fly, and the tiny risk of a security issue was nothing compared to the productivity benefits of the new version.

### ***What Have You Tried?***

**Viktoriya:** You mentioned that you were trying to build a more trusting relationship between them, so you and Marta could regain that direct line to the business units. What have you tried?

**Amit:** I've tried to be as helpful as possible to Shiann. To provide the technical support that she ends up giving to the business units. It's tough, though, because I don't want to be disloyal to Marta.

**Viktoriya:** And what else?

**Amit:** Not much. I mean, I've obviously had a lot of conversations with Marta about what to do, but honestly, we know what we'd have to do to get on Shiann's good side, and neither of us is willing to do it.

**Viktoriya:** What would that be?

**Amit:** Put her interests above the enterprise.



*What have you tried? (chapter 20).*

## ***Find the opportunity in the problem***

**Viktoriya:** Okay, so I want to ask you a question, and I want you to answer immediately, without thinking, the first thing that comes into your head. Do you want to play?

**Amit:** Sure.

**Viktoriya:** First thing that comes into your head: What do you think about Shiann?

**Amit:** I think she's quite autocratic, narcissistic, and difficult to work with.

**Viktoriya:** And what do you think about Marta?

**Amit:** I think that Marta is a very fair person who is easy to work with, and who is always trying to do the right thing for the organization.

**Viktoriya:** Okay. I want to ask you one other question. Have you ever had a successful working relationship with someone whom you didn't really like or respect?

**Amit:** Well, sort of. I was able to work with them to produce outcomes. But we never got along, or were particularly friendly to one another.

**Viktoriya:** I have a thought here. I want to reflect an observation, and have you kind of sit with it for a second. It may lead us to thinking about a few options, so it could be useful.

**Amit:** Sure, all ears.

**Viktoriya:** When you tell me that you want opportunities, and you want to grow — and one of the ways you're trying to do that is to build this relationship between Marta and Shiann, and also possibly between you and Shiann.

**Amit:** Right...

**Viktoriya:** So you described Shiann in a way where she's not particularly likable. I'm gonna paint this super black and white, not that you did. Marta's a good person, and Shiann is kind of a jerk.

**Amit:** That's very succinct. Marta's a good person and Shiann is a jerk, at least in my opinion.

**Viktoriya:** So there's something else I'm hearing from you. What you want most for yourself is growth and new opportunities and new challenges. And Shiann is

*Asking for a quick response to uncover Amit's assumptions. Working to separate data from interpretation (chapter 19).*

*Finding the opportunity in the problem (chapter 21). In this case, it's looking for "what's good about the problem." Viktoriya reflects back to Amit that Shiann has, to some extent, the outcomes and qualities that Amit wants.*

someone who's really good at that, right? Like, there's something about her that you admire. You haven't said it in terms of admiring. But Shiann is putting herself out there, and she's meeting people in the business, and she's looking for opportunities, and she's growing, and she's challenging herself.

**Amit:** That's true.

**Viktoriya:** And Marta, who's a friendly nice person whom you have a good relationship with, is sort of stuck in a place that you don't want to be stuck in. So I'm curious about your reaction to that, and what it might mean in terms of what your next moves are for your own growth and development.

**Amit:** That's really interesting. And I'll tell you why. When Marta and I were working together last year, before Shiann took over, I was the Shiann. I spent last year in New York, reaching out to all these business units and explaining the opportunity to them. Making roadshows and presentations.

I appreciate Shiann's ability to go boldly out and seek opportunities. But the disconnect is with our values systems. Shiann cuts corners, which doesn't serve the enterprise in the long run. She moves fast, and has visibility and a strong career platform, but at the expense of mitigating risk. My values are much more aligned with Marta, who puts the enterprise above her own career goals. If it weren't for that, I could quickly align with Shiann. She's told me that she'd like to work with me directly, but I've been holding myself back because we don't share the same values.

**Viktoriya:** Shiann has reached out to you and said, "Let's work on this stuff"?

**Amit:** Yes. Not in a way that would give me visibility or put me in direct contact with business units. She recognizes the work I've done, but wants to use me as the specialist who gives her the information that she uses to talk to the business units. She hasn't tried to put me in a strategic position.

**Viktoriya:** This is a slightly separate question, but what's the next stage of growth for you? Either here or somewhere else — when you think of the next stage of growth that will make you a stronger leader in the world, that will make you more capable of achieving the things you want to achieve — what is that for you?

*Looking to connect the problem to broader outcome: Amit's career goals (chapter 21).*

**Amit:** So two things come to mind. One is to have a dedicated team to lead. The second is something for this team to deliver or create, that we have ownership over. Whether it's a strategy, or a more tangible outcome needed for an enterprise.

**Viktoriya:** Are there some ways Shiann can help you achieve those things?

**Amit:** Shiann could definitely help me achieve that. She has a lot of work on her plate, and could definitely create a room where I could be that leader with that team delivering that particular solution. As I said, it's just me holding myself back because I don't want to be disloyal to Marta, and I don't want to compromise on things that are important to me.

**Viktoriya:** What's the compromise?

**Amit:** Well, it's Shiann's style of working. There's a lot of diligence that we'll do in terms of security of information before we put a solution out there. We don't want to be in the news as the next giant data breach. And Shiann's approach is, let's just put it out there and hope nothing happens. Let's just go do it. And that's a very risky proposition for the brand of this enterprise. Doing the diligence slows down the solution, but cutting corners and putting it out there quickly wins points with the business. If I were working with Shiann, reporting to her in that particular position, she would want me to cut corners, which would put me in a very difficult position.

**Viktoriya:** So it's great to be aware of that risk. Let's put it in the parking lot for now, and return to it after we know what the plan is, and assess the plan with that risk in mind. How does that sound?

**Amit:** That sounds fine.

## Step 4: Plan

### *Identify Options*

**Viktoriya:** Great. What I'm hearing you say is, you want to grow your career and get more opportunities and responsibilities from Shiann, without compromising your own values and standards.

**Amit:** Yes, that's exactly it.

*Explicitly asking if there's an opportunity in the problem.*

*Working with Shiann can help me grow my career.*

*Compromise values - too early to deal with it*

*Parking lot that- make a plan and then see if it's relevant - cross that bridge when we get to it*

**Viktoriya:** Great. So let's come up with some options for action. What are some things you might try?

**Amit:** Well, I could try to impact Shiann's perspective on that issue.

**Viktoriya:** What might that look like?

**Amit:** I can keep trying to convince her to see the risk that we're taking by moving so quickly. I've had these discussions with her before, and she says she agrees, but still wants to move ahead.

**Viktoriya:** So what else might you try? One option is to help her see the risk. That doesn't seem to work so well. What are some other ways you might be able to influence this particular way of operating which you feel is dangerous for the enterprise? And is getting in the way of your willingness to connect and work productively with Shiann?

**Amit:** Right. The other option is just keeping track of what is being asked for, and then being willing to take some calculated risk. If there are certain failures that we experience, use them as a case study.

**Viktoriya:** How would that play out?

**Amit:** It depends on what the case study ends up being. If it's just a project that didn't go as well as expected, that's one scenario. If there's a security breach, then that becomes much more serious.

**Viktoriya:** You're saying, follow Shiann's mode of operation, and then track and measure it? Am I understanding that correctly?

**Amit:** Yes.

**Viktoriya:** Right. OK. And what else can you do? What are some other ways you can address this?

**Amit:** One other way could be to have Marta try to influence Shiann to do more to anticipate and manage risk. If Shiann doesn't want to do it herself, that might give Marta an expanded area of opportunity.

**Viktoriya:** Why is any of this in Shiann's best interest?

**Amit:** Well, it improves the longevity of her enterprises. She's gained a lot of success in the last couple of years, but it's not a sustainable path in my opinion.

**Viktoriya:** How is this going to give her more of something

*On second thought, the goal isn't necessarily to change Shiann's cavalier attitude toward risk. It's to remove what's getting in the way of Amit's willingness to work with her. Changing Shiann turns out to be just one option to achieve that. (chapter 24).*

*Viktoriya asks this question not to stress-test an option, but to generate new ones. Articulating what Shiann wants may spark new ideas to achieve those outcomes (chapter 24).*



she wants? Let's just say for the sake of argument, she thinks everything she's doing is perfectly sustainable. Let's role-play this — I'll be Shiann. "You know, you're pointing out these risks, and I understand them. I do. But so far, in my experience, none of those risks have panned out. We've had a very successful run, and it looks like we'll continue to."

**Amit:** (Continuing in role play) "You're right, Shiann, We have had a pretty good run so far, and these are still risks. Our past track record doesn't guarantee no problems in the future. And mitigating them comes with no downside - it doesn't have to slow us down - and a lot of potential upside. Including increased exposure with the business units, since we now get to be central to company-wide conversations about risk."

**Viktoriya:** That's good. It sounds like you're addressing Shiann's concern, and also advocating for risk mitigation not just for its own sake, but because it helps her get what she wants most: increased exposure and business opportunities. And - to speak to your goal - it sounds like it would also keep you connected to the business.

**Amit:** Correct. And it would help me build a relationship with Shiann, in a way that would be advantageous to her, and could build trust between us.

**Viktoriya:** This is going to seem like an out-there question. But I'm wondering if you do follow through with this, it has the potential of getting you to like Shiann more. What do you think?

**Amit:** It's definitely possible, because my opinion of her is based on what I've seen. If I work within closer quarters, maybe I will see a different person, because as I said, I do appreciate that it takes courage to take on risk. And for someone like her, who is so vested in her self-image, to take on a risk that could wipe out all her influence in a single day — there's definitely something to be said for courage like that.

**Viktoriya:** That's interesting. It aligns with what you've said about the outcome you want, which is to put yourself in positions where you're going to grow and take certain risks. It might feel risky just to connect with Shiann in this way.

**Amit:** It does. Partly because I see the potential that connecting with Shiann will be a betrayal of Marta.

*Exploring the opportunity even if Shiann doesn't act out of positive intent (chapter 21).*

**Viktoriya:** I wonder about that. And I kind of come back to what you said originally, which is one of your wins would be to help improve their relationship. Like, can you become close to someone who someone else you're close to doesn't like, and not feel like you're betraying the person you're close to. I know that came out confusing — are you following?

**Amit:** Yes, completely. It will be uncomfortable, that's for sure.

**Viktoriya:** Yes. You might have to be willing to have independent relationships with each of them not trusting the other, and that would be difficult. Or you could try to help them get along better, which would also be challenging.

**Amit:** Yes, that's a great point. That actually plays into one of my strengths, which is that I can be on friendly terms with a wide, diverse set of people. No matter how they feel towards each other, I can still maintain my trust and integrity in the relationships.

### **Choose**

**Viktoriya:** That's great. OK, so what do you want to do? Let's get concrete here. What can you begin to do to move in this direction? The next week, let's say, that will begin to open up some of these possibilities?

*Asking for a decision (chapter 25).*

**Amit:** Well, I'm going to reach out to some of the business partners and set up meetings for next week. I'll ask where they are with our technology and find out the details: what help they need, how they're engaging with the platform, are they working with Shiann? Are they aware of the work we've done so far? And talk about how we can help them. And I'll collate that information and share it with both Marta and Shiann: this is what's happening and here's their feedback in terms of engaging us. I'll also schedule time with Shiann, to get her individual input on the information that we receive from these teams, and what is her take on how best to leverage the opportunities.

**Viktoriya:** That sounds like a great plan. Is there a risk that Shiann might feel you're going around her? Or is it clear that you'll be supportive of her?

*Exploring pros and cons, risks and benefits (chapter 25).*

**Amit:** She won't mind as long as I'm going to those businesses as a way of getting information. I'll keep them exploratory, and won't provide actual direction.

**Viktoriya:** What's the one thing you feel you know about Shiann? That you've talked about?

**Amit:** She likes visibility and approval from the business side, in terms of —

**Viktoriya:** Is there a way that as you're exploring this with the business, you can help position her in a certain way that she's going to end up feeling good about, without being manipulated?

**Amit:** Yes. If I see an opportunity where our team could actually step in, I can put Shiann's name in there. "I'll talk to Shiann and then get back to you on how we can take this forward and help you achieve success." And then I'll talk to Shiann.

**Viktoriya:** What do you need to do to make sure you're comfortable with Marta? That you're taking care of that relationship as well.

**Amit:** Right. My plan will be to be completely transparent. "This is the approach I'm taking. This will hopefully get us insight and a seat at the table with the business and get Shiann's approval in our approach as well."

**Viktoriya:** What about your approach with Shiann? Would transparency be appropriate there as well?

**Amit:** Yes, I believe so. She'll respect that.

**Viktoriya:** Great. Anything you think might get in the way? Any contingency plans you need to develop?

**Amit:** Well, Shiann might take the information I give her and move on it by herself and not take me along on the journey. If that happens, then I'll put more effort into creating a more positive working relationship with her. If it continues, let's say by June of next year, then I think I will have to look for other opportunities.

### **Commit**

**Viktoriya:** OK, great. So what are the next steps, specifically?

**Amit:** The first thing I'm going to do is come up with the list of all the people I want to connect with on the business side. The second thing is to set up meetings with these folks in the next two weeks, no later than that. I will also have a discussion with Marta and appraise her of what I'm planning to do and how I'm planning to go about it.

I'm quite confident she'll be OK with that. Then once I've had those meetings, I'll have a discussion with Shiann: this is where we are, and this is what I've uncovered. And this is how it can help her gain more traction with these businesses by addressing these opportunities.

**Viktoriya:** Fantastic. That's great.

**Amit:** Thank you, Viktoriya. This has been very helpful.

**Viktoriya:** My pleasure. Now, ready to order? I hear the barbecued jackfruit at this place is amazing.