

NPA Mediation Pre-Caucus



Véronique is a young Frenchwoman who works as a designer for the fashion industry in New York City. She was particularly sought after because of her ranking in her *école des beaux-arts*, an impeccable eye for design, and her multi-language skills. She is fluent in English, Greek, and her native French. Véronique speaks with a pleasant accent. Ysabelle is her direct supervisor, with whom she is in conflict.

This Negotiated Performance Appraisal (NPA) is almost entirely focused on empathic listening. Only after Véronique has been listened to extensively does the mediator turn to the lists.

Chapter 2 covered empathic listening at length. Remember that as long as we can remain in Phase I (*listening*—as compared to *diagnosing* or *prescribing*), individuals who are venting can progress through several stages: Stage I (*sharing*), Stage II (*exploring*), and Stage III (*discovering*). As parties move through these stages they tend to speak slower, pause more often, become

increasingly analytical, consider other narratives, explore possible solutions, and begin to discover ideas they might not have considered before—or share thoughts they might have been reticent to share with others, or with themselves.

As you read this transcript of Véronique’s first pre-caucus, consider the following questions. What are the indicators that Véronique is progressing from Stage I to Stage II to Stage III? Can you identify these stages in Véronique’s pre-caucus?

Which of Véronique’s narratives seem to transform over time? What might be behind these changes? What are some of Véronique’s self-justifying stories?

Does Véronique permit herself to see Ysabelle in human terms? How is emotional leakage manifested when Véronique attempts to speak positively about Ysabelle? How would you interpret Véronique’s comment that the suggestions that she has for Ysabelle are not meant to improve just her own interaction with her, but rather, for the good of the whole shop?

What seeds may have been planted in the way of small challenges to promote positive fermentation? Does empathic listening promote exploration of other possible narratives?

What role do you think repetition plays in venting? If you were the mediator, would you have listened more, or less, before moving on to filling out lists?

In your opinion, is Véronique ready for a joint session? If not, is there room for more empathic listening during the next pre-caucus?

Can you visualize Véronique and Ysabelle not only working well together but actually becoming good friends? At one point Véronique feels the impact of an “aha moment,” as to the reasons why Ysabelle might not have wanted her to take her leave. What happens to this self-narrative over the remainder of the pre-caucus?

In the previous chapters I have removed much of the repetitive comments and have greatly shortened the narratives—as in the case of Nora and Rebecca. Not here. Many will find this chapter painful to read because of its repetitive nature—despite the fact that I cut substantial portions. What follows is much more true to

the type of empathic listening that requires the mediator to be truly engaged in the narrative. Here is where the gift of being listened to permits a person who is venting to see matters more clearly.

EMPATHIC LISTENING

MEDIATOR: Good morning, Véronique. So . . . tell me . . . what's going on with . . . Ysabelle?

VÉRONIQUE: [Laughs, then speaks with a smile.] Well, it's kind of weird, because I explained to her for about a year that I would be needing time for a semi-elective eye surgery. I told her back when I applied for the job that I would be doing this.

MEDIATOR: Ok.

VÉRONIQUE: So, I have tried to time my leave as well I could, knowing that I would have to wait forever if I wanted to wait for the perfect time. It turned out not to be the best of times, as one of the other designers was in Europe at a special show. But Ysabelle knew this was coming up.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: The doctor told me that I could return to work, if there were no complications, no later than two weeks. So I explained that to my boss. She said, "Sure. No problem." So, I had the surgery . . . and there *was* a complication.

MEDIATOR: Oh!

VÉRONIQUE: [Explains the complications from the surgery in some detail.] And I kept hoping I could go back to work soon, but I was in a lot of pain and discomfort. I thought, "This is going to be really difficult—going to work not feeling a hundred percent." So I called my surgeon and asked, "Do you mind if I could extend my leave a little bit more?" She told me not to return until she had had the follow-up with me, which was scheduled for

the next week. She preferred to be cautious, especially after the complications related to the procedure.

MEDIATOR: Right.

VÉRONIQUE: So I called my manager and said, “I had a surgery complication.” [She brings her hand close to her face and moves it and smiles even more.] And I don’t get even that much out when my boss responds [Using a gloating voice.] “I knew it! I knew you would pull this!” “Ysabelle, I’m not pulling anything. I’m just letting you know that because I had a complication they are not clearing me to go back to work yet . . . not until I see the doctor again.” So . . . she wouldn’t even listen to me . . . She wouldn’t even let me tell her why. She never even asked me if I was OK. Instead, she interrupted me and said: “Fine. You do whatever you have to do, I have to go,” after which she hung up on me! So I really didn’t get to explain what I wanted to say. So, I called my HR department and was instructed to honor the doctor’s recommendations. I still have not gone back to work. My doctor has not cleared me yet.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: In the meantime, Ysabelle was a Facebook friend along with several of my co-workers. So I’m on Facebook updating my family in France and my friends, on my surgery, and I noticed that—it’s called a wall—you can see, if you have two mutual friends, if they talk to each other.

MEDIATOR: I see.

VÉRONIQUE: So I noticed Ysabelle was talking to another one of my co-workers and explained that her own workload had now increased. “We will have to discuss our little *issue* and I spoke to the *issue* on Friday and she is giving me some big story.” [Véronique doesn’t smile when speaking for



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What role do you think repetition plays in venting?

Ysabelle but her smile returns when speaking for herself.] And basically, I'm the *issue*. As opposed to "It sure is inconvenient but I hope she is OK." I'm not referred to as a *she* or a person. I'm an *issue*. Like a pair of scissors, a sewing machine . . . excess thread!

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: It really made me feel dismissed. My first instinct on anything, as opposed to getting defensive, is to assume it's my fault. I was thinking: "I don't know how to fix this . . . She is mad at me . . . I don't like people being mad at me. And my doctor won't let me go back. I'll see if my doctor will let me go back sooner . . ."

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: So I went to the doctor's appointment . . . Actually I had to go sooner because I was experiencing a lot of pain. [Smiles broadly.] "No, you can't go back yet! Absolutely not!"

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: So I'm looking for another job, meanwhile. I'm quite concerned with possible retaliation. I spoke to HR. I was in tears and they wanted to know what was wrong. I told them about the Facebook thing and explained how Ysabelle was making me feel as if I had done something wrong. All of a sudden, two days later, Ysabelle is completely off Facebook. At first I thought she would have deleted me as a friend, which I thought would have been nice . . . which leads me to believe that she had been talked to.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: She may have removed her page but I'm worried about retaliation. She may cut my trips to Paris—my mom lives in Fontainebleau, which is relatively close to our shop there, and I have been participating in a special cross-country skiing event

in Auvergne every year for the last four years—and she can otherwise make my job miserable. I’ve seen her do this to somebody else.

Véronique, no longer smiling, goes into detail on how Ysabelle made another of the designers despondent and defensive.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: I’m trying to figure out how to be a big girl and handle all of that. Not to worry so much if things like that happen so I can function in my job . . . but be aware if it’s happening . . . Do you know what I mean? That sort of fine line . . . so . . . I know she has done this to other people and she keeps getting away with it . . . [She smiles and laughs again as she completes the sentence.] . . . and I don’t want to be one of her victims because I had the audacity of having surgery complications.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: She felt that I should have waited for the perfect time, which is what precipitated the whole thing. I asked Ysabelle why she couldn’t support me in this. [Véronique mimics a whiny voice] “Oh, I am, but you have to realize that I’m running a business.” [She smiles again.] Well, I’m trying to run my life! And so, when I said I couldn’t return as originally planned, it just turned into “Oh, well, Véronique is just trying to get away with something.” I’m not feeling so much discriminated against as harassed. She is sort of a bully. I think she is waiting for me to mess up so she can pounce on me. [Smiles openly.] She wasn’t happy I was there in the first place . . .

MEDIATOR: Hmm.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . but her boss forced her to hire me. [Pauses.] I kind of poked the tiger in the cage or something.

[Pauses and then smiles widely.] My last little—I tend to be a little passive aggressive, so my last little “stick it to the man”—I’m now cleared to go back to work this coming Monday but, as it happens, I’m scheduled for my three weeks of vacation starting next Monday. I plan to take these and have already purchased my plane tickets to return to France. Ha, ha. It’s kind of my sticking my tongue out at her.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: I happen to know she is one of those people who completely closes herself off and tends to say, “Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh,” but doesn’t listen to anything that you’re saying. It’s like she has already made up her mind, so why discuss something with her when you don’t think you’re being heard . . . You don’t feel you’re being listened to. She sits there smiling and nodding her head . . . “I know you’re going through the motion of pretending that you understand what I’m saying but you’re not really hearing what I’m saying.” And it’s not so much that she isn’t agreeing with me . . . I don’t think that I’m being heard just because someone is agreeing with me, because they are taking my side or changing their mind . . . but any sort of acknowledgement as far as . . . understanding . . . or something. “Even if you don’t agree with me, give me some indication that you understand what I’m saying. Or give me the opposite point of view. If I’m telling you the sky is purple, you heard me say that the sky is purple even when you know it’s a different color. You may ask, ‘So, why do you think the sky is purple?’ Something . . . some response so I know you have heard me tell you that the sky is purple . . . As opposed to ‘M-hm, m-hm, m-hm . . . [Laughs.] It’s blue.’” Maybe in the evening it was purple. Maybe

I had a valid reason. I feel she is just nodding her head but telling me I'm wrong . . . And it's really interesting that it's like that, because our enterprise spends a lot of money teaching managers how to listen. [Véronique goes into further detail here.]

MEDIATOR: Yes.

VÉRONIQUE: I think what I'm really hoping for, as far as a general outcome, is to show up for work when I return from France . . . and everything is fine. That I have worked it up more in my head than in actuality. That would be perfect. I don't think that will necessarily be it . . . I think it will be rather uncomfortable. If I pretend it's not uncomfortable . . . maybe everybody else . . . I know that her frustrations have been fed to some of the other designers—I'm sure not to everybody, but some of them. So they might be uncomfortable as to how to react toward me because they have been fed all of this from her . . .

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . so maybe if I act normal . . . maybe they will respond the same way. I do know, with the other designer that she bullied out—his reaction was to shut down and become very defensive. You could not crack a smile from him. He was rude to the clients . . . not really rude, but very abrupt . . . [With a very serious face she speaks.] It was, "What can I help you with?" Maybe if I go there and be pleasant and take their discomfort away, then they will be more apt to say, "I don't understand where the problem is," as opposed to "Ysabelle was right!" She is almost hoping that I come back ready to do battle or react in defensive ways. If I go in acting as if nothing is wrong, that will take the wind out of her sails.

MEDIATOR: Wind out of . . .

VÉRONIQUE: Yeah, I have . . . I have a tendency . . . I've noticed . . . to build things up in my head. I think a lot of people do that . . . They tend to build things up in their heads and then they get defensive about things and about what everyone around them is saying. You almost have a whole argument by yourself and stress yourself to a level that nobody else was at.

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: [Speaks slower, without smiling.] Yeah . . . and it's interesting because . . . I'm not sure where, exactly, I need to go . . . in terms of getting her to understand where I'm coming from. I . . . I get the impression that she—and I understand that she is running a business . . .

MEDIATOR: I understand . . .

VÉRONIQUE: . . . I understand . . . it's a business. It's not her business. She didn't create the business, but she is responsible for the New York operation. But . . . and you know . . . I have a tendency to build things way more than they need to be, in my head. If I purchase a hundred-dollar blouse I will sit most of the way, in the subway on the way home, having an argument in my head—"How will I present this to my husband?"—so that when I get home I'm, like, ready. [Laughing.] And his reaction was, "So you bought a hundred-dollar blouse." Then, I'm almost mad that he didn't care and I spent all that time getting ready to explain myself. [Laughing.] "What do you mean, I could go out and buy a hundred-dollar blouse?" [Véronique repeats herself and then in a more serious tone explains that she hopes she is blowing this whole issue out of proportion. She puts much emphasis on each of the following words.] I am so stressed out about going back to work. It's not to the point that I'm scared to go back. I'm afraid that



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“And basically, I’m an issue. Like a pair of scissors, a sewing machine . . . excess thread!”

they are going to be really negative toward me. Because my colleagues perceptions of me as “the issue” will have been affected by Ysabelle.

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: It’s really a difficult thing to build up the courage to pretend that it was nothing. [Very seriously.] I think that when I do return to work, something that I’m going to focus on, is to just try and be me. That is, to try and do what I do best, which is be a fantastic designer and interact positively with my clients and interact positively with my co-workers and . . . [Smiles and laughs.] . . . maybe especially with those with whom I feel safer. [Serious again, speaking very slowly.] I’m concerned . . . that I’m . . . going to let it . . . almost overtake me. I’m worried about what she might have said about me, but it’s possible that she didn’t say anything about me. My having built up this argument in my head will literally mean I have built a wall . . . that’s almost impossible to kind of break down. I’m concerned that a lot of this tension could be something that I have just created myself. “Am I creating this myself or does this actually exist?” . . . I’m . . . I’m . . . I’m just trying to . . . to figure out . . . within myself if this is an intrapersonal conflict or if it is as big a conflict as I think it is . . . before I go back to HR, before I go back to work. I think if I go back to HR before I go back to work I might look foolish . . .

MEDIATOR: Hmm.

VÉRONIQUE: What if I go to work . . . and it turns out to be bigger than what I think it is? And I should have gone to HR first and expressed those concerns? So that’s like the little dance I have going on in my head. [She repeats this concern again to herself and then pauses.] It’s kind of a strange little conflict.

Véronique starts to speak very, very slowly with some pauses, but doesn't say anything. After this false start she continues slowly, with fewer smiles and a little less eye contact.

VÉRONIQUE: One of the things I really think about is that Ysabelle never really wanted me to work for her. And we did get to a good place in our relationship, for a good period of time, for a good four or five months. We were friendly and chatty, and I allowed her to become a Facebook friend. You know, I didn't initially allow her there. [Smiles, then speaks normally.] I didn't understand why she wanted to be friends on Facebook when I didn't consider us friends. [Slowly.] I . . . when . . . when I was first moving out to New York, before I left France, she interviewed me over the phone and said, "Well, I don't think you're going to work out here in New York. I'm planning on promoting Heidi," and then gave me the name and contact information of another design firm. That person hired me, sight unseen, four months pregnant with my first child, knowing I was going to go on maternity leave. She still hired me, and she's still one of my closest friends. [Speaks slowly with a smile.] I absolutely adore her and I consider her like a mentor.

Véronique goes on to speak about the strong work ethic and other positive traits of this friend and former employer.

VÉRONIQUE: To this day I'm grateful she was willing to take a chance on me, four months pregnant, sight unseen, from France, recently out of the academy. The problem was the long commute to her shop. So time had gone by and I got another interview with Ysabelle. [Smiles again.] This time, I have a proven work record as a top performer . . . I have

won countless awards . . . I do my job very, very well, OK? Zero reason she shouldn't have hired me [Stops smiling.] but she had made up her mind—from our brief meetings at some of the big events since I had moved to New York four years before—that she didn't like me very much.

[Véronique describes some of her personal qualities that might have turned Ysabelle off.] So right before she interviewed me, she changed the position description to include fluency in German . . . and I don't—I speak French, Greek and English, and a tiny bit of Russian and Italian. [Smiling.] So how can I argue with that? I didn't get that position even though I was extremely qualified for it. [Véronique goes on to explain how Ysabelle's boss in France reversed Ysabelle's decision and hired Véronique.]

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: It was my intent to be an overachiever, but Ysabelle felt I was being a showoff—trying to make the other designers, or even Ysabelle, look bad. She should have thought: “My success is your success!” [Speaks slowly.] It kind of . . . gets to the point where . . . you don't know how to speak . . . to someone who thinks like that. [Now smiling.] Who doesn't want you to succeed? [Stops smiling.] I don't know if it's a jealousy thing . . . I don't know if . . . it's a sabotage thing . . . I don't know if it's a . . . I just don't know. Is it a personal thing? Where she personally doesn't want me to succeed? But, why? I feel like I just now went on a strange tangent from “We were never friends,” but we did get to a point . . . where we had kind of an understanding . . . despite the fact that she was nitpicking almost everything I was doing when I got there. I decided I wouldn't lower my performance level. At some point she seems to

have come to respect that. Yet at a later point that all changed again, but I'm not sure why.

[Véronique tries to analyze this matter.] Actually, I do know where it came from, I think that the turning point came mostly from . . . when I decided to seek a promotion in her department. She wanted me to take the position that that associate designer I mentioned to you before, Heidi . . .

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . so she told me in my review that she was going to do whatever it took so I could reach that position. [Speaking slowly.] So I said OK . . . maybe she's seeing what I'm capable of . . . It was around that time when our friendship . . . not friendship, but personal understanding with each other . . . started improving. I thought she had my best interest in mind and I was going to hold her best interest in mind. [Speaking even slower.] So I started training for that position . . . on my own. I started reading, shadowing others, and paying a lot of attention . . . asking questions . . . Ysabelle knew because I told her, "I'm going to do everything possible to make this as easy as possible for this transition to occur." But part of our corporate culture is that I had to apply for the position . . . and permit others to apply for the position. That was part of the requirement . . . [Smiles.] But I was told it was mine. I put in my application and knew another person who put in his application, someone who was not as qualified as I was. But I also found out someone else was also putting in her application. It wouldn't be a promotion for her, but actually a demotion, but it would put her in a different career track.

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: I had already been training for the job, so I didn't consider her much of a threat. [Smiles.] Remember

I told you that Ysabelle wouldn't originally hire me because she decided to promote Heidi? Well, that's who was also applying . . . and she got the job.

MEDIATOR: Oh!

VÉRONIQUE: [Seriously.] I'm sitting there, trying to figure this out, because in my head . . . I had been training for several months for a position that I wouldn't hold. And Heidi had not been doing any of that training. And Ysabelle used the excuse: "Well, you're both equally qualified! But she also speaks German." [Véronique speaks at length about her frustration with this sudden change of circumstances. Furthermore, she was asked to train Heidi. The individual Véronique had shadowed for four months had recently taken maternity leave and Véronique was left as the expert. Véronique speaks with frustration.] Well, that sucks! And to be honest, when she's asking me to schedule my surgery at a better time, I thought, "Why in the world would I do that!" . . . Why would I sit there and take the shop's consideration before mine when the shop would not take my consideration at all? Three times she has passed me over now! Three times I have been dismissed by her! Why should I change everything so it's more convenient for her? [She waves her hand as if to interrupt herself.] I'm not used to that sort of selfish thinking—but that goes into the fact that I almost feel guilty about the fact that I had to take a medical leave, about the fact that I had a complication . . . It's because I know that the reason I chose that date was because it was more convenient for me . . . not because it was more convenient for them. And it's very hard to do things for me first . . . so . . . that's where that kind of comes from. [Véronique puts her hand close to



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“If I have done something incorrectly, and one of my subordinates brings it up, I have a tendency to try and defend it. As opposed to listening to what they are saying . . . But if I get less defensive, and listen better, I will understand it the first time that they say it.”

her face and pauses. She continues seriously.] I'm wondering . . . if . . . hmm . . . if . . . hmm . . . I've done something wrong . . . you know . . . I'm just not sure . . . if . . . if I had handled it differently, and had had the surgery after my vacation.

[Pauses, then laughs.] She wanted me to have the surgery *during* my vacation. She even told me, "Why can't you take vacation time!" Why would I take my vacation time instead of sick leave time? But it was more convenient for her, and I did something for me instead. And because I have such a hard time with that . . . it's hard for me to move past the guilt that I feel for not thinking of somebody else first . . . for, instead, thinking of myself first. So [Long pause, after which she rehashes much of what she has said.] I don't know if Ysabelle's frustrations are surface frustrations or if her frustrations go as deeply as mine toward her. [She again repeats some of what she has said earlier, then laughs as she speaks.] Because that is how my frustration is for her—it's soil deep.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: [She again repeats much of what has been said and continues speaking seriously and slowly.] I think I'm going to take the right approach, though, to go in there and be as positive as I can and just work for myself and do what I know is right and keep my own integrity, so I think I am approaching that correctly. [Smiles and laughs as she speaks.] It's just very frustrating, thinking that somebody is mad at me . . . [Now seriously.] . . . or that I may have done something wrong . . . because I don't do well with that. I'm too much of a people pleaser. [Véronique pauses for a long time before resuming with a large smile, laughing as she speaks.] Something that's kind of funny is that I thought of getting a different position so I would never have

to face her. Just go in to work and turn in my keys and return some of my tools and that would be it.

Véronique speaks at length about actually starting to apply for another job for which she was tested. Two very qualified individuals also applied for the position, so in the end Véronique was not interviewed.

VÉRONIQUE: So, I'm wondering if somehow Ysabelle started chirping into his ear. Everyone knows everyone in this industry; nothing seems to be private. Since then, I have seen this designer twice and he wouldn't even look at me, wouldn't even come out and greet me. He normally used to come out and give me a hug and say, "Hi, how are you doing?" [Smiles.] Nothing. Now my brain is thinking, she started chirping in his ear. She knew exactly what I was applying to, and what I was doing, so my stress level of returning is that much more. It could very well be that she didn't even know I was applying for that position, but the fact of the matter is that she very well could have known and decided to sabotage that a little bit. But if she did not like me—I like to weight both sides of things—then . . . why . . . why would she try to keep me there if she didn't like me? [She repeats herself and then becomes more serious.] That was really disappointing. I really thought I was a shoe-in for that position.

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: The letdown was so hard! It's so hard to have that expectation and to see it in your mind as a fact, and then it is not there. That's frustrating . . . and . . . and it can get very easy to think that . . . ah . . . they are either out to get you or doing it on purpose . . . [Takes a deep breath.] . . . or there is someone who is trying to sabotage you. It really . . . gosh, it really . . .

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . starts to grate on you . . . to have that sort of disappointment. You know, time after time after time, when all I do is show up for work and try and do a good job . . . [Véronique raises her left hand above her head and moves it back and forth.] . . . to put the very best effort all the time, to excel all the time. Every day my goal is higher than most of my co-workers. In our group meetings, when I talk about my goals, my boss rolls her eyes as if to say that my goal is ridiculously high. But that's a realistic goal for me. [Véronique talks at length about her goal-setting and then pauses, makes a face, and shakes her head.] It tends to be frustrating to work so hard and to try to have the work ethic all the time . . . [She closes her eyes for a moment as she begins to speak.] It is so much easier to follow the pack. I'm listening to myself and I almost sound like a . . . martyr or something. [Véronique begins to wonder why Ysabelle is not more supportive of her excellent performance.] Maybe she likes to have everyone at the same level of performance so she can justify the general performance . . . or left without an excuse because you have . . . [Raises her left hand.] . . . this person up here—showing that more can be accomplished.

Véronique goes on to explain that the manager should encourage even a little more effort and that, without punishing people for not reaching higher goals, could at least foment higher productivity. Instead, she explains, Ysabelle seems content with minimal performance and not rocking the boat. Véronique then repeats that she is leaving Ysabelle without excuses.]

VÉRONIQUE: Maybe she feels threatened by my performance and would rather I performed at the same level as the others, you know. But when I'm not there . . .

[She suddenly seems enlightened and jerks her head as if startled.] Which could be it . . . When I'm not there . . . the total performance is much lower because I'm beefing up the curve. [She rejoices in this discovery for some time before continuing.] But why does she . . .

MEDIATOR: Mmm.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . have to be mean to me about it? [Breaks into laughter and rejoicing.]

MEDIATOR: [Laughs.]

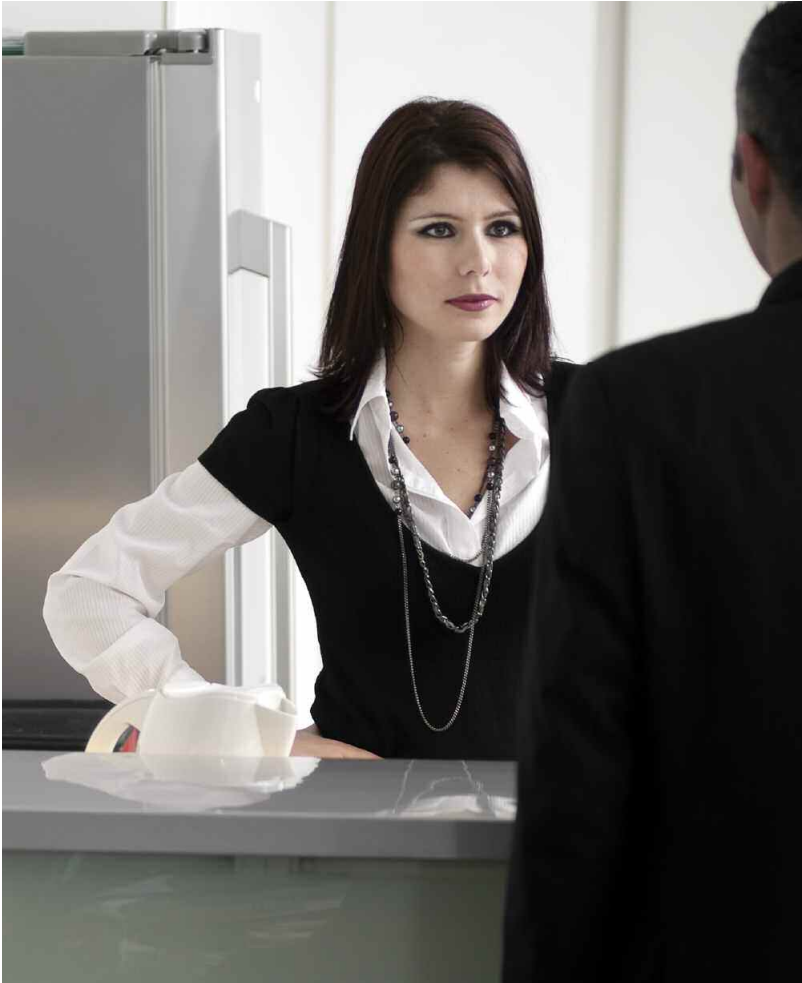
VÉRONIQUE: [Begins with a laugh but becomes serious towards the end of the sentence.] Why does she have to be so mean to me? I've seen them not promote someone before because they were doing too good of a job in their present position. [Smiling and laughing.] So what does that mean? I have to reduce my efforts if I want a promotion? [Laughing.] Well, now I am just frustrated. Now I do not know where to go. I had a realization moment that is so frustrating. That makes total sense! [She continues to relish this discovery for some time.] She just misses me. *Ooooh*, I think Ysabelle needs a *hug*! [Laughs enthusiastically.]

MEDIATOR: [Laughs.]

VÉRONIQUE: [Now more seriously, continues to explore where she is at, and that her present situation is not sustainable.] I feel she has cut off the top of my ladder.

Véronique speaks at length about her options and finding a place where she can be better appreciated. She repeats much of what she has said so far. She then talks about major life events that took her from just *existing* to *truly living*. That was when Véronique started putting more energy into a childhood interest, cross-country skiing.

VÉRONIQUE: If you get a bad haircut, your hair will grow back, but if I make a bad career move . . . I won't have



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“Even if they are yelling at me, I have gotten really, really good at . . . I call it ‘talking them off the ledge.’”

money to feed my kids. Even overachievers, like me, have lost their jobs for doing stupid things. Ysabelle is constantly bringing this up, not to me, but to the whole team. Everyone is so afraid of losing their jobs. A lot of my co-workers are single. I have two children . . . [Laughs as she finishes the sentence.] . . . and my husband's job is not that well paying. And it's not cheap living in Manhattan. "How dare you hold me back"—thinking back to my aha moment—"so I won't be able to advance for my kids!" [She moves both hands from one side of her body to the other as she continues in a serious tone.] I'm very actively trying to move my whole life from *existing* to *living*. Everything about my life, and even way deeper than what we are discussing at this level . . . everything about my life. I'm completely changing everything about myself. [Véronique mentions the risks of moving to a different firm, with the economy as it is, where she would have no seniority and no protection.]

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: It's very frustrating. Sometimes it's hard to be brave. [Takes a deep breath.]

MEDIATOR: M-hm.

VÉRONIQUE: Sometimes it's scary to be brave—not just hard, but scary.

MEDIATOR: Right.

About ninety minutes have elapsed. Véronique is serious, speaking with somewhat diminished eye contact and more pauses. She seems to be walking this path on her own—it seems she is in a very lonely place. It is difficult to observe her pain and watch her struggle. She ceases to make eye contact and pauses frequently and at length. She speaks slowly, with little animation, and seems depressed.

VÉRONIQUE: I don't do scary very well. I tend to be very analytical with almost everything . . . So I am glad I was able to have that realization, which I will have to ponder more about later . . . But it is so frustrating . . . It was a very frustrating "aha moment." [She repeats herself and explains that it is her nature to want everyone to succeed.] I can't fathom somebody being so . . . I don't want to say evil, but so greedy, so self-centered, and so . . . [Véronique seems to silently debate with herself. She attempts to speak but has several false starts.] I know she thinks she is a good person . . . and I know there are parts of her that make her a good person. I believe she has justified, in her own head, her reasoning as to why she thinks she is right. [Pauses and makes a face while briefly glancing toward the ceiling.] I don't know if that makes sense but I really believe that she thinks in some way . . . [Véronique seems to move away from the simplistic "aha moment," listing it as only one possibility of many before continuing.] This whole project of mine—of going from existing to living—is very exhausting . . . but very important to me. [Long pause.] I almost wonder if it's even worth it. I don't know if people expect it of me, and it's not a diminished self-esteem thing. "Véronique has not done much in the sports world before, so why would she be able to participate in a two-day cross-country skiing event!" [Laughing.] And when I do these things, "Oh, wow, Véronique participated in a two-day cross-country skiing event!" [Now more present.] This year I'm going to be involved in a harder event. I plan to increase the length of the trail at Auvergne—it's about four hours from Paris—by a number of kilometers. The reason why I decided to do so, not because I have always wanted to, is because I have skied the

easier paths before. I know I can do it. Although I am not sure . . . and I'm scared . . . But there is only one way to find out . . . The bottom line is that I have an issue as far as fear is concerned. I have a fear of disappointing people. I have a fear of making people upset with me, I have a fear of failing—I have a big fear of failing. [Shakes her head.] Ugh! And that probably has a lot to do with the fact that I'm afraid of people being disappointed in me. My biggest problem with this issue is in the workplace. I have a really hard time with conflict . . . which is odd, because at work I regularly deal with clients and their issues. It's easier for me to deal with complaints when it's not something that I have done. When I tell someone I will do something, I make every effort to do so and even document the steps I've taken. "This is what was wrong. This is what we have tried. This is what we want to do for you." Everyone leaves happy.

Without warning Véronique switches back to speak about Ysabelle.

VÉRONIQUE: Wow! It feels like a parent. I'm constantly trying to please this person and I'm never able to do it. I mean, it's like a daddy complex or something. I'm constantly trying to please this manager and there is nothing I can do to make her happy. [Smiling for a moment, Véronique explains how none of the different approaches to make Ysabelle happy have worked.] And now that I've stopped trying to make her happy . . . now that I've decided, "Forget it, I'm going to try to make me happy!" [Reiterates about scheduling her surgery before her trip to Paris and the impossibility of making her supervisor happy.] I need to stop trying to please

her. [Sighs and quickly glances toward the ceiling.] It's hard, but I understand that . . . But how do I show her the respect that she deserves and still function in my job and not want to run away . . .

MEDIATOR:

Run away.

VÉRONIQUE:

. . . from the job itself . . . [Nods her head.] . . . right, and not want to find another position? I don't know why I'm still there if it's not appreciated despite all the effort and everything I do to accommodate her. [Now smiling.] Well, I'm still there because I'm afraid to go anywhere else. If I go somewhere else I may not be as successful, or I may still have problems . . . and what if the problem is me, yeah? It's really tiring to be so frustrated all the time. I don't want to disappoint . . . [Véronique lists many people she does not want to disappoint.] . . . and even myself, I don't want to disappoint myself, either. [Haltingly, she explains what disappointing herself would mean in terms of not being able to support her family. Another longer pause and then speaks very softly.] So where do you go from there? [Very long pause.] Maybe I have been going through the motions and not really facing the really scary issues and really standing up for myself. [Long pause.] You know . . . [Long pause. Véronique describes a friend who is very tall, very smart, very funny, and very vibrant. She has landed a job that pays six figures, and is phenomenally successful yet has very low self-esteem in her personal life. Véronique imagines how nice it would be to blend with her and smiles for a second.] "Then I could model." [Becoming more serious, she reemphasizes her distress about her relationship with her supervisor. After the longest pause yet, she attempts to start speaking but hesitates again.] I think that . . . when I go back to work . . . after this trip . . . [Speaking

very slowly.] that I have a good idea . . . of where my head . . .

MEDIATOR: My head.

VÉRONIQUE: . . . needs to be. When I'm on my cross-country trail . . . for example, this last year I knew there was a hill that I couldn't finish . . . It was three-quarters of the way into the second day . . . and I was the most out of shape that I'd ever been . . . so everyone was ahead of me and I was about to start this hill that had defeated me twice before . . . and one of the things that I had decided as my game plan was . . . Now—let me back up a little bit—the first year I didn't know what to expect . . . It was not a race, that was my mantra . . . “Have fun, and do as much as you can.” The first day, one hour into the day, I started crying and didn't think I could finish, but didn't give up and kept going. When I got to that tough hill I told you about, I sat on the side of the trail, on a fallen tree, until a snowmobile picked me up—they had them going through the whole day, carrying supplies or helping people with their equipment and carrying food as well—and I was taken to the last rest stop. Then I skied the last hour to the finish line . . . So the second year my game plan was just, “Have fun. It's not a race, and when you get to that hill, do your best. If you can't make it, you know the snowmobile will be there.” I had given myself permission that, if I needed help, the snowmobile could take me to the rest stop. And they did, because I couldn't make it . . . So, the third year—this last year—my game plan was different. [Smiles.] Because the other two had not gotten me up the hill. So, my game plan was, “You know what you can control . . . You can't control the elements. You can't control how steep the hill is.” I was in better shape. I did a lot of jogging in



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“When I got to that tough hill I told you about, I sat on the side of the trail, on a fallen tree, until a snowmobile picked me up, and I was taken to the last rest stop.”

Central Park, but that's still very different than cross-country skiing up and down hills. "I can control that I keep moving my legs. I can control my breathing. I can control my focus and where I keep my focus. I can control how I approach the hill. I can control whether or not I stop for rests." I ended up taking more breaks on the hill than I wanted and got rid of my pack when the snowmobile went by, but I got to the top of the hill. [Smiling.] And skiing down the other side was freaking fun, because it was a steep hill. [Becomes animated with joy.] I just shot down that hill right into that rest stop that two years before I had been given a lift into. And I was, "Ok, I was not able to do it with my pack, but I did do it!" I finished the trail without any help from anybody, other than having them take my pack. I finished the cross-country trail on my own legs. And I didn't finish it last. For an hour there were people coming in behind me. [Beams happily.] So this year, well, I'm ready to add a few kilometers. [Becomes serious.] The way I approached that hill, and the way I approached the cross-country skiing, it's how I think I need to approach work. I can't control whether or not Ysabelle likes me . . . I don't even really care if Ysabelle likes me. Because I'm pretty sure I don't like her very much. I know I don't like her very much. But I can control what I do every day and the job performance that I give every day. And I didn't get the job that was promised to me. [Smiling and laughing.] But that's probably good, because I don't like Ysabelle. And I didn't get that other job, but there probably was a good reason why I didn't get that job, too . . . So two years I didn't get up the hill. Two jobs I didn't get. So I still have to try and get up the hill with my pack . . . and I still have to try and get that promotion

that I'm trying to get. I think I need to look at it differently . . . I think I'm still trying to ski with my pack on when I just needed to let the snowmobile take it. And I think that when I return to work after my vacation, I need to take that approach—that is, that I need to control what I can control—and I need a different outlook so I can get up the hill . . . And I think that that will make a lot of difference. At least, it will be interesting to try. It's a lot less scary than saying, "Who cares? I'm just going to go someplace else." . . . Because I know a lot of the elements there. It's kind of like . . . [Takes deep breath.] . . . going to the desert and you don't know . . . [Laughs and smiles as she finished the sentence.] . . . if it's the hot season or the rainy season. [Laughing.] At least if you know how to dress . . . [Becomes serious.] . . . you can have more success in getting through it all. Yeah, I think if I take that approach it will be a lot more successful. [Very long pause.]

Two hours have expired. Véronique makes a few concluding comments, after which the mediator transitions into asking some questions.

ANYTHING POSITIVE ABOUT YSABELLE?

MEDIATOR: Is there anything positive about Ysabelle you can think of?

VÉRONIQUE: [Pauses and makes a face, then speaks seriously.] Well sure . . . I know that she . . . she . . . holds a lot of value in her Christian beliefs . . . and I have a lot of respect for that. And I have a lot of respect for the fact that she doesn't cuss . . . [Quickly glances toward the ceiling.] And I cuss like a sailor. I've actually had to show . . . [Laughs.] . . . a lot of restraint. [Continues on a more serious note.] I value the fact that she doesn't drink at all.

[Nods her head affirmatively.] She holds her beliefs and her values very highly and I have a lot of respect for that . . . I do . . . have a lot of respect for the regard she holds her friendships, because I know that she has some very close friendships that she holds above everything else. [Véronique speaks about some of the difficult challenges that Ysabelle has had to face in her life.] She has been married to the same man for decades . . . [Shakes her head right and left.] . . . and has lived in different places supporting his career. For years she took lesser jobs within the fashion industry to permit her husband to be able to concentrate on his career. So I have a lot of respect for that . . . [Smiles.] I'm not going to say any *buts* and then go into something negative . . . [Laughing.] . . . so I will just leave it at that.

MEDIATOR: Is there anything you admire in her within the fashion industry world?

VÉRONIQUE: I do admire the fact that she is driven to succeed. I'm not fond of her methods. Or the way she relates to clients. [Speaks more rapidly.] But she does have the desire to achieve goals, and she'll have an expectation and see it through. She is persistent and she gets a certain mindset and it's very hard to change her mind. Which could be very positive . . . could be very negative . . . but it could be very, very positive, too. I like the fact that she has a good working relationship with others in the fashion industry . . . with whom she can work collegially . . . and she is not afraid to make referrals when someone else can do a better job in a specific area . . . [Makes a face, then laughs.] That is about it regarding her work ethic and her work . . . that I like. It was hard even coming up with that.

THE NEGOTIATED PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL LISTS

MEDIATOR: What are some of the things you do really well at work? What are the best things you bring to the job? That is, List I.

VÉRONIQUE: [Takes a deep breath.] The thing I take the most pride in are my clients—clients who still follow me even when I was just getting started in France. Celebrity clients who will only call me if they have a problem with something, even if they are not coming in person, they are still calling me to ask questions. And I have a lot of pride that they respect my opinion and appreciate my job performance enough that they know they can still come to me . . . so that is what I think I bring to the table more than anything else, not just the ethic, but the ability to relate to my clients. [Véronique goes into more detail.]

MEDIATOR: Anything else?

VÉRONIQUE: In terms of the positives? I try and bring enthusiasm. I try to bring a positive outlook. I try to . . . [Takes a deep breath.] . . . be a cheerleader for my neighbor. I don't like to only coach negative, I like to coach positive. So, if I have somebody who could have done something better, I tell them about that, but I also tell them what they absolutely did right . . . I really think I bring a good, positive outlook. And I try and keep a positive energy around me. [Makes a face.] As far as my other co-workers are concerned.

MEDIATOR: I'm going to skip to the other lists and then come back for more positives later on.

VÉRONIQUE: Ok.

MEDIATOR: What would be something you've improved in in the last six to eight months? List II.

VÉRONIQUE: At work?

MEDIATOR: [Silently indicates an affirmative answer.]

VÉRONIQUE: [Laughs and then speaks with some irony.] Hmm. Dealing with disappointment . . . [Continues more seriously.] Well, that's sort of hard to say because . . . for several of those months I was training for a position. I think, in terms of dealing with Ysabelle is concerned . . . I have improved as far as . . . expressing myself and learned how to . . . get my point across without maybe being received as hostile. I mean, it used to be received with a lot of hostility and I've learned to project my opinion without getting that hostile reception . . . as much. [Laughs.] I'm not cured. [After a false start, she explains.] I have developed more of a crust as far as taking things personally is concerned . . . with my clients. People would come in screaming "You gave me a . . ." and my initial response . . . [Laughing.] "I didn't give you a . . ." I have really learned not to take that *you* as personally as they are saying it. What they mean is you, your fashion industry shop. "What are you, as a shop, going to do about my complaint?" Not, you as Véronique. They are frustrated with the shop, not with Véronique. I have really learned to . . . Even if they are yelling at me . . . I have gotten really, really good at . . . I call it "talking them off the ledge," . . . when someone comes in threatening to move to one of our competitors and are beside themselves. There was a man just screaming at Ysabelle, and I mean *screaming*. Ysabelle was ready to call the police. At that time we did not have a guard. He was going completely insane because . . . [Gives the reason.] Well, I'd go insane, too. Ysabelle kept saying, "We can't do anything about it, sir. We can't do anything about it, sir." She's actually on the phone, ready to call the police. And I overheard this whole thing, because I was going by, and softly approached this man and

very softly said, “May I make a suggestion to you?” He looked at me and I said, “This is not a matter of ‘We don’t want to help you.’ This is a matter of ‘We can’t help you until [Explains why.]’ My manager is on the phone calling the police because you’re hostile. But we want to help you. Do me a favor, take my card and come in tomorrow and talk to me and we’ll get it sorted out.” And he did. He took my card, came back early the next day, and we got it sorted out. I took him to a private office, because Ysabelle didn’t even want him on the exhibition floor and we fixed the error, and it was fixed . . . [Laughs briefly.] . . . and he was happy. And he wrote a letter. So I pride myself on the fact that I can talk people off that ledge. And I’ve learned to get very good at it. In summary, I’ve gotten very good at taking that personal assault—really, they are assaulting the shop—and instead of taking that personally, I’m trying to understand where they are coming from, and saying, “Let’s fix it.”

MEDIATOR: Let me ask you another question, skipping to List III. We’ll come back to this one in a moment. What are some things you could improve in your job? What are things you could do better?

VÉRONIQUE: I still think I could become more skillful at not taking things so personally. I’ve gotten very good at it but—going back to the question—I can still be better at it. And I think that has to do with my everyday relationships with my co-workers more than my clients. But while I have gotten very good at dealing with my clients . . . I have to interact closely with many of my co-workers daily. We have a number of team projects. It’s harder to maintain—to keep up—that thick skin. I need to really learn how to not be so defensive. And I actually think it would make me a better listener,

and I don't mean Ysabelle so much, it actually has to do with people who are below me. If I have done something incorrectly, and one of my subordinates brings it up, I have a tendency to try and defend it . . . as opposed to listening to what they are saying. On the flip side of that—that sounds like the type of thing that Ysabelle tends to

“I can control that I keep moving my legs, I can control my breathing, I can control my focus, and where I keep my focus, I can control how I approach the hill, I can control whether or not I stop for rests . . . The way I approached that hill, and the way I approached the cross-country skiing, it's how I think I need to approach work.”



do—there have been a lot of times when I have gone back and said, “I was thinking of what you said.” [Laughing] Because I think about it. [Smiling and pointing with her right index finger as if pressing a button on the right side of her face.] And it’s like I replay it . . . “I was thinking about what you were saying and you’re absolutely right.” Even if they are partially right, I find it important to recognize that, and point that out. But if I get less defensive, and listen better, I will understand it the first time that they say it. I could really benefit from not getting so defensive. [Laughing.] I get that sort of French temper thing going on, where I just want to . . . “Go away. OK, OK, I understand . . . go away.”

MEDIATOR: Is there anything else that you can improve in your job?

VÉRONIQUE: [Makes a face followed by a long pause.] Well, that’s the biggest thing. [Laughing.] I’m sure there are lots of things people could list for me.

MEDIATOR: What would . . . some of those be?

VÉRONIQUE: I don’t know. That would be their own opinion. But I think most of the things I can improve on stem on my getting defensive about things. [Speaking slowly.] Otherwise . . . I would say . . . *focus*. Sometimes I lose focus. [Explains about dealing with some of the repetitive tasks.] I stop paying attention to some of the things that are going on around me. And then I’ll make stupid mistakes. Really stupid mistakes. [Makes a face.] And I tend to be a little late. [Smiling.] At least a couple of minutes. Like meeting with you.

MEDIATOR: Let’s go to List IV, and we will come back to List III later on. Because we also might want to consider some of the things that Ysabelle might say, what she might want you to improve. But before we do that . . .

VÉRONIQUE: [Takes a deep breath.]

MEDIATOR: . . . how would you respond to the following question, from Ysabelle: “Véronique, what changes could I, Ysabelle, make, so you could excel in this job?”

VÉRONIQUE: Well, hands down, “Just listen better.” Hands down, because . . . [Moves her face with a great deal of expression.] . . . I will talk *to* her, and I feel I am talking *at* her. [Véronique bobs her head up and down.] I get that bobblehead thing, “Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.” [Nods her head and puts on a fake smile.] And she usually does it with a fake smile, “Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.” And a lot of blinking, as if she was processing her own thoughts . . . as opposed to processing mine. [She continues more gravely.] So I really think I could go to the bathroom and have a better conversation with the toilet paper . . . [Smiling.] . . . than talking to her. Because she is just . . . a blank face, and I really think that if she just listened and . . . and heard . . . what was being said, she would be better all around. [Moves her head in a little circle.] As a manager, for associate designers, for me, for . . . just all the way around. Because I truly, genuinely don’t think . . . [Smiles briefly.] . . . that she has heard even a quarter of the things that I have ever said in the little over a year that I have worked there. I think that she tunes it out so that she can think about her own thoughts. [Enthusiastically, she emphasizes her point.] That is the number one thing. [More calmly she repeats herself.] That is the number one thing that she could do better.

Véronique asks, regarding the question she has been answering, if she should answer in general—or as it relates to herself.

MEDIATOR: What changes could Ysabelle make so you can thrive in your job?

VÉRONIQUE: Yes, listen better . . . Follow through . . . would be a very close second. Because, when . . . when . . . [Briefly laughs.] . . . when you promise something . . . it's not even a "We'll try to make this happen," or "We'll make an attempt to see if this can happen," it's [Speaks firmly and assuredly.] "That is your job! That will be your job! I am going to move heaven and earth to make that become your job." [Now laughing.] And then to find out that her friend is applying, too. [Smiling.] Forget Véronique. And even if you can't follow through with it for some reason—things do happen, and we do get a lot of clients from Germany . . . so the language thing could have been a valid reason . . . Still . . . she made a promise, and if you can't uphold a promise . . . I still think I should have had the opportunity to sit down with her and readjust how we were going to move forward . . . readjust what she was trying to do in terms of helping me reach my goals . . . because I just felt abandoned . . . and I didn't know where to go. Because I had focused so much to prepare for this new position that I knew was mine that now . . . what do I do? I mean, I really, literally felt that I had no place to go. So, follow-through is a very, very close second.

MEDIATOR: Could we say, "Keep your word?"

VÉRONIQUE: And it's not even that she needed to "keep her word." I really understand if it was that she couldn't give me the position . . . If she felt that Heidi was more qualified, that's fine. But talk to me about it . . . This is the direction . . . Communicate—that's it, communicate with me! "I'm sorry we could not give you this position." [She gestures with her palms up, a foot apart, as though weighing things on a scale.] I didn't expect

Heidi to apply for it. She is more qualified because she has the design background that I was looking for . . . and she speaks German.” [Brings both hands down.] “Fine . . . now, this is what I think we need to focus on to help you! Because we weren’t able to go this direction, we need to find a new path.” [Gesticulates and speaks with animation, bringing her hands close to each other, with the tips of her fingers closer than the palms, pointing a direction.] Instead of, “You’re on a dead-end road. Let’s just leave you here at the dead-end road. [Moves her left hand away and then brings both hands back together.] “We couldn’t take you down this road because Heidi took it.” [Moves the right hand away.] But instead of finding me a new path . . . she just abandoned me! I just felt completely abandoned. And, and . . . dismissed. That feeling, more than anything, made me close off . . . from her. And after that, it suddenly turned into a . . . I now needed to train Heidi. Grrr. I needed to train the woman who got my job! [Smiling.] That does *not* make me happy! [Laughing.] And when I didn’t want to train her, I was getting into trouble because I didn’t want to train her! “*I know how to do it. You should have hired me!*” [Continues speaking in a more somber tone.] Yeah, that’s the biggest thing, the communication . . . as far as where we need to go from here. Follow-through is good, too, but it should have been worded as communication.

MEDIATOR: Hmm. Anything else she could change that would permit you to excel?

VÉRONIQUE: [Makes a face.] Well . . . [Laughs.] . . . without doing a complete personality transplant! Not really. Maybe a little more *empathy*. She doesn’t seem to be a very empathetic person . . . [After a false start, she continues.] It seems a little self-centered

talking just about how I could excel because I really think these things would help the entire Manhattan shop excel. It would help other colleagues, not just me, but yeah, I think she really needs to show a little more empathy towards people. We don't wake up every day to a bed of honey and roses . . . sometimes bad things happen.

She begins to list incidents that some of her co-workers have recently faced in their personal lives, including the death of a spouse. Ysabelle expected the employee to return to work in a week and to act as if nothing had happened.

VÉRONIQUE: She could benefit from a good dose of empathy all the way around. [Smiling]. Then she would be perfect!

MEDIATOR: [Laughs.]

CONCLUSION OF THE PRE-CAUCUS

The mediator extensively thanks Véronique for what has been an intense two-and-a-half-hour pre-caucus. Véronique expresses gratitude for being heard.