

# MIT Shadow Magicians: What's at Risk

**What's at Risk** comes into play when there is somewhere in my life that I am stuck. I may know the way I need to think or the action I need to take, but for some reason I still don't do it.

What explains this? The theory we work with is that I choose all of my actions (consciously or unconsciously), and I have a *good reason* for every choice I make. **Golden** choices support my authentic self and the healthy, fulfilling life I aspire to lead. By contrast, "**shadow**" choices keep me safe, but sabotage my gold in the process.

Shadow has three parts:

- a WOUND (an event or relational dynamic that occurs in childhood)
- a SHADOW BELIEF I take on about myself or how I must behave in response to the wound, and
- a SHADOW BEHAVIOR that I perform based on that belief.

Shadow by definition is unconscious, although I may be aware of my shadow behavior to some degree. The belief and the wound are buried, which is why I keep playing out the behavior even though I want to do something else.

**What's at Risk** helps me to uncover the buried SHADOW BELIEF so I can discover the truth about how it got buried (the WOUND) and who I really am underneath (my GOLD).

To perform What's at Risk, I start with the behavior I want to change (the observable part of my shadow) and ask "what's at risk?" if I stop behaving that way. I then keep asking that question until I get to the catastrophic punchline I internalized as a child in response to my WOUND. Ex:

*Shadow Behavior: I avoid conflict.*

*Golden Behavior I want to exhibit instead: engage in constructive conflict.*

*What's at risk if I engage in constructive conflict? I will hurt someone's feelings.*

*What's at risk I hurt someone's feelings? I will be a bad person.*

*What's at risk if I am a bad person? I will be rejected and alone.*

*What's at risk if I am rejected and alone? I will be in enormous pain. Life won't be worth living.*

No wonder I keep avoiding conflict -- I believe that if I don't, I will be in enormous pain and life won't be worth living. This is my SHADOW BELIEF. If this is true, then I am attempting to take care of myself by avoiding conflict because -- as far as I can see -- that is my best (and only) option. My shadow therefore isn't bad or shameful even though its impact is destructive -- it is trying to keep me safe and, like my gold, has my interests at heart. I developed my shadow as a

child to stay safe and get the love I needed. I deserve honor, not contempt, for caring for myself in this way.

And... my SHADOW BELIEF isn't actually true. I can and do observe that other people engage in constructive conflict without getting the catastrophic outcome I fear. In all likelihood, that would be true for me too if I did the same. So how did I come by such a belief? I must have taken it on in a situation in which that outcome actually was threatened: my childhood WOUND. (Finding this wound is the paydirt we are seeking with this process.)

#### Advanced "What's at Risk" Options:

##### **1. Question the Status Quo**

In any What's at Risk dynamic there is a dilemma: either I DO the thing I am afraid of doing, or I keep performing my Shadow Behavior (the status quo). Sometimes, it's fruitful to ask the question "what's at risk" about the latter. Ex:

*What's at risk if I continue avoiding conflict? My boundaries will be run over.*

*What's at risk if my boundaries are run over? I won't get what I want.*

*What's at risk if I don't get what I want? I will be miserable.*

Note the similar catastrophic outcome to the one I feared on the other side. In especially poetic situations the person will use exactly the same language for the catastrophic punchline on each side, which often leads to a big emotional hit. However, even if the outcomes aren't exactly the same or equally horrible, they *are* both pretty negative, and the take-away is that -- due to my shadow belief -- I have set myself up to be "screwed" either way. This realization can be a powerful motivator to explore my shadow deeper, as it drives home the COST to me of keeping things the way they are.

##### **2. The Positive Spin**

We can also attack both sides of the dilemma from a POSITIVE perspective. To see how my shadow and gold each SERVE my interests, we can ask "What's the WIN?" First, I ask it about my shadow behavior (the default situation) -- this will show how I am keeping myself safe:

*What's the WIN if I keep avoiding conflict? People will be happy with me.*

*What's the WIN if people are happy with me? I will be accepted and loved.*

*What's the WIN if I am accepted and loved? I will be safe.*

And we can ask it about the GOLDEN behavior I want to adopt but am afraid of:

*What's the WIN if I engage in constructive conflict? I will get what I want.*

*What's the WIN if I get what I want? I will be happy and at peace.*