

THE DREADED DRAMA TRIANGLE

story by **DIANE GASAL** | illustration by **MATT MASTRUD**

For six years he toggled between sympathy for his office manager and walking on eggshells. He hired her through a friend of a friend. At the time, she just needed to “catch a break”, and he is someone who likes to help. In hindsight, he realizes the clues began at her first interview when her car wouldn’t start, and he agreed to pick her up. They were then caught – caught in the Dreaded Drama Triangle.

The Drama Triangle was created by Stephen Karpman, MD. It includes the roles of Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer. It is easy to fall into one of these roles. Sometimes we fast cycle between them.

Let’s say the finance manager, Isabelle, is upset with Greg because he keeps withholding data she needs. Isabelle asks her boss to intervene. Isabelle is the victim, she sees Greg as the persecutor, and the boss becomes the rescuer. The boss calls Greg into his office and reprimands him. Greg then sees himself as a victim, thinks of the boss as the persecutor, and may tell Isabelle she needs to rescue him. Around and around it goes.

The roles don’t always have to be people. With our first story, the office manager was the victim, the broken car was the persecutor, and the boss was the rescuer.

Anytime you feel anxious about something, think about how the Drama Triangle may be at play. For example, when I feel anxiety about writing articles, I can see myself as a victim, the deadline as the persecutor, and junk food as the rescuer... Just a second, let me get these crumbs off my keyboard.

Very informative session and the audience participation was excellent. We had a real life situation to illustrate from drama to empowerment.



WHAT IS BEHIND EACH OF THESE ROLES?

- » Victims play the starring role. They see themselves as powerless. Their dream has been denied. They believe, “poor me”.
- » The rescuers see themselves as pain relievers; they believe, “poor you”. They fear not being needed. Hence they unknowingly keep the victim as a victim.
- » The persecutors dominate. They blame and tear down, acting this way because they fear becoming victims themselves.

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE IS AGONIZING. IF YOU ARE IN IT, HOW CAN YOU GET OUT?

David Emerald created an antidote called The Power of TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic). In the TED* Triangle, each role flips to an opposite.

- » Victim becomes creator.
- » Persecutor becomes challenger.
- » Rescuer becomes coach.

How can you move from the Drama Triangle to The Empowerment Dynamic?

START BY NOTICING WHERE YOU FOCUS.

In the Drama Triangle the focus is on problems. When you think about problems, the inner state it creates is anxiety. To relieve the anxiety you react.

Focus on Problems – Create Anxiety – React

Let’s say you are afraid to discuss an important issue with a volatile coworker. As you think about the problem your anxiety increases. You can react with fight, flight, or freeze. You unconsciously choose flight and keep avoiding the coworker. That temporarily relieves the anxiety; however, it doesn’t really change anything, so the problem will continue to recur.

In The Empowerment Dynamic, the focus is on vision (what do

you want?). As you imagine the vision, the inner state it creates is passion. From that passion you can choose baby steps to take.

Focus on Vision – Create Passion – Take Baby Steps

Going back to our example, what if you envision a successful conversation with your coworker? In your imagination you see yourself being exactly the person you want to be, kind, direct, and clear. You see yourself grounded and seeking to understand. You imagine the other person softening and starting to cooperate with you. As you keep that in your imagination, you start to see what questions you want to ask or things you want to say. What else can you do to facilitate a shift from Drama to Empowerment?

WHEN YOU ARE IN THESE ROLES, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

- » Victim – What is my dream denied? What do I really want?
- » Rescuer – How do I see the victim – as a problem to fix or as capable and resourceful?
- » Persecutor – What is my intention? Am I focusing on looking good and trying to be right? Do I want to put down or build up?

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DRAMA AND EMPOWERMENT.

Our opening story was real. The owner of that company had an epiphany after learning about the Dreaded Drama Triangle. He saw how he was hooked, mainly as a rescuer. And it wasn’t just with the office manager; it was in many areas of his life. He decided to focus on what he wanted for his company rather than focusing on problems. He took baby steps (and I’d say some very large steps) to make that vision happen.

You can, too. 🌀

If you’d like to talk more about this subject, contact Diane at Diane@dianegasal.com. If you’d like to learn more about The Power of TED (*The Empowerment Dynamic) visit www.powerofted.com.*

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