

CHAPTER 8

The Empowerment Dynamic

The day was vibrant and the sounds of life reverberated everywhere. Gulls circled above the surf, getting into spats over which spoils belonged in whose beak. Families and couples took their places all along the beach, while a few people walked solo and were, like me, absorbed in their thoughts.

I couldn't stop thinking about this new life orientation, how I was acquiring the tools to create a more fulfilling life. I wondered what all of it might mean in the future. Whatever change lay ahead, I felt ready.

At that moment I felt someone nearby and looked over my shoulder. Ted had stood up from his perch on the rock and motioned ahead of us. "Let's walk back toward the shoreline," he said. "There's something else I want to draw in the sand for you."

The three of us strolled along the shore, Ted and me on either side of Sophia, who linked her arms in ours. It felt as though we were three old friends, surprisingly natural. In a few moments we stopped. The area seemed relatively free of sunbathers. Ted drew another triangle with the tip of his walking stick.

"The Creator Orientation challenges every assumption and attitude that the Victim Orientation holds to be true," said Ted. "A Creator puts problems in their rightful place, causing fear to fade and loosen its grip. In its place, passion, desire, even love, become your primary motivation. Though fear still comes up from time to time, the Creator stance increases your capacity to deal with anxiety in ways that actually enhance your creativity. Rather than constantly reacting to your circumstances (the Victim's way) you begin creating your experience—which means, of course, that you create a new set of relationships as well.

"These new relationships are the powerful antidote to the Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer roles of the Dreaded Drama Triangle. By assuming the Creator Orientation, you enter a whole new set of

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dynamics that support rather than sabotage your happiness. It's called The Empowerment Dynamic. My nickname, Ted, comes from The Empowerment Dynamic."

"So Ted's not your real name?" I asked.

"It's my real name now!" Ted chuckled. "I don't mind sharing initials with The Empowerment Dynamic."

Sophia touched Ted's arm. "David," she turned to me, "before Ted describes this new triangle of relationships, I want to be sure of something. Do you know what an antidote is?"

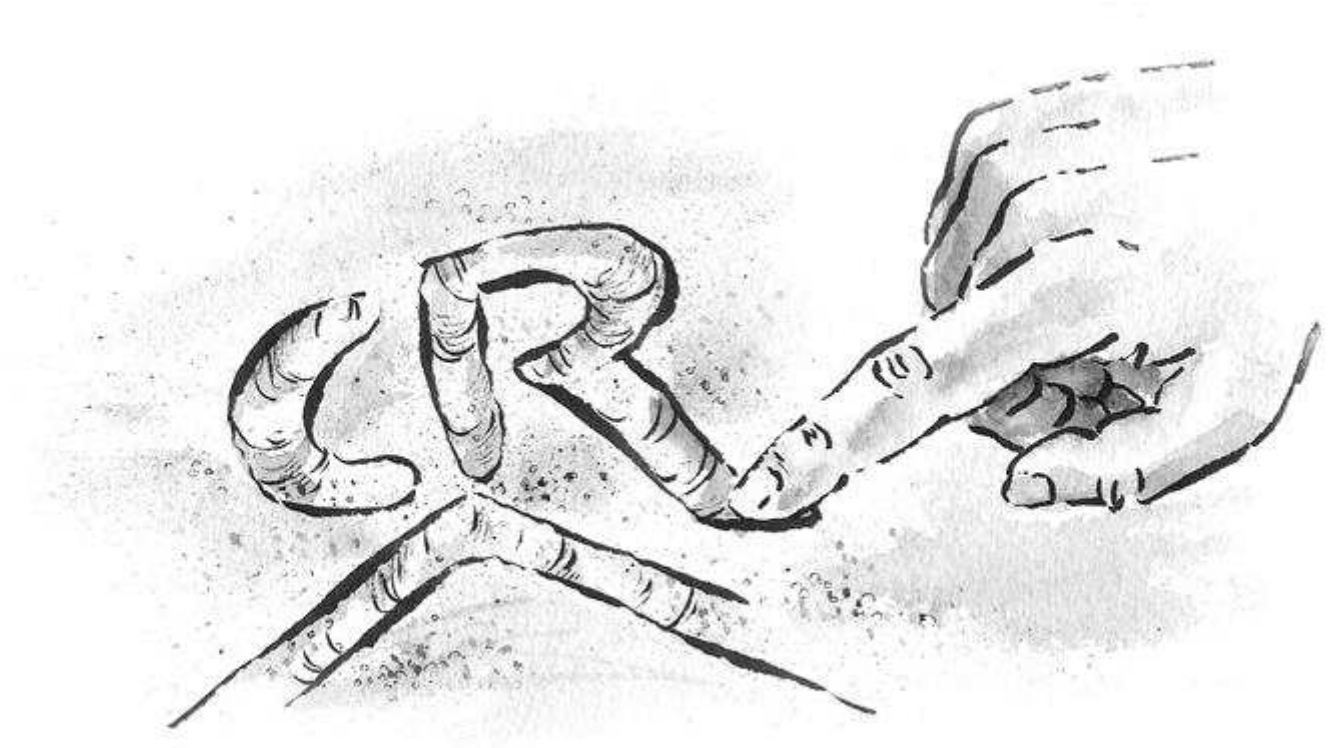
"Isn't it the cure for a disease or an illness, something like that?"

"Close," Sophia smiled. "It's a remedy that counteracts the effects of a poison. TED*—The Empowerment Dynamic—counteracts the poison of DDT, the Dreaded Drama Triangle. TED* is the antidote for DDT."

Ted explained, "Each of the roles in TED* is also an antidote for its counterpart in the DDT. **Creator** is the antidote for the Victim role. The antidote for the **Persecutor** role is **Challenger** (I'll say more about that in a minute). And in The Empowerment Dynamic, support comes not from a Rescuer but from a Coach."

Ted knelt down and with his finger wrote the letters Cr at the top of the new triangle.

The Creator Role



“The central role in The Empowerment Dynamic is Creator,” explained Ted. “Actually, all three roles share Creator characteristics, just as all three roles in the DDT are Victim oriented.

“You could think of Creator as the light and Victim as shadow. While the Victim is powerless, a Creator claims and taps into his or her personal power in order to choose a response to life circumstances. Therein lies a Creator’s power to manifest a desired outcome.

“A Creator is vision-focused and passion-motivated. To really live into your Creator self, you’ll have to do the inner work necessary to find your own sense of purpose and passion—whatever touches your heart and holds meaning for you.”

“Adopting a Creator stance begins simply by making a choice. You decide and declare that in your heart, mind, and soul, you really are a Creator, not a Victim,” Sophia said. “As I said before, I spent the first few months after I met Ted just making that choice every day, sensing more and more what it meant to live as a Creator. It took me some time to clarify what I wanted to create in my life. At first, all I knew was that I couldn’t live as a Victim anymore. It took a while for me to learn exactly how I could step out of the Victim stance and into the Creator Orientation.”

Out on the water, a surfer caught a wave and rode along as the wave crested and gradually subsided.

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“It sounds almost too good to be true,” I said. “I mean, living my life from a Creator Orientation is bound to be a wonderful change compared to what I’ve grown used to.”

Sophia smiled and pointed out toward the surfer. “Living your life from a Creator perspective is kind of like what that guy’s doing, like riding a wave. There will still be waves of change in your life and you will have to learn to ride them. Some of the changes will arise from your own choices and others from circumstances beyond your control. Sometimes the waves will throw you for a loop and other times you’ll surf them with skill, ease, and grace. Even when the waves throw you, you will learn from the experience and continue growing. Like a surfer whose close attention and focus can make his ride on a wave into a powerful experience of beauty and grace, by living into the Creator Orientation and The Empowerment Dynamic, in time you’ll learn to navigate through life so adeptly that sometimes you’ll amaze even yourself.”

I watched the surfer ride the wave all the way in to the shore. He shouted with glee, shoving his fist in the air “*Yes!*” and headed back into the waves.

“You’ll learn to love—or at least learn to ride—the variety of waves that life serves up,” Sophia added. “You’ll find yourself actually moving toward each new challenge with growing enthusiasm. Greeting your experiences as a Creator is a powerful way to live.”

“A Creator has a special relationship with power,” said Ted. “The kind of power that a Creator cultivates is not power over others—that is the power of the Persecutor. Instead, a Creator harnesses the power to create. Power to and power with are the dynamic duo of the Creator Orientation.

“Creators share power with others, first and foremost because they see others as Creators in their own right. Truly speaking, a Creator is actually a Co-Creator, as he or she gives in service to others while at the same time receiving support from them. Creators also receive support in ways that might seem mysterious, from unseen forces which appear to be spiritual in nature. The experiences of serendipity and synchronicity that Sophia referred to are manifestations of the unseen, but very present, Co-Creator in action.

“As a Creator enters into relationship with other Creators, together they support other people by playing the two additional roles that complete The Empowerment Dynamic: Challenger and Coach.”

The Challenger Role

“The Challenger has many faces,” Ted continued. The most common is the one who provokes others to take action. The Challenger may be compassionate or confrontational, or both. A Challenger calls forth a Creator’s will to create, often spurring him or her to learn new skills, make difficult decisions, or do whatever is necessary to manifest a dream or desire. The Challenger is a kind of teacher who points toward life’s lessons, toward opportunities for growth embedded in the living of life.

“Like the relationship of Persecutor to Victim, the Challenger to a Creator is usually a person, but it may also be a condition or circumstance. All of life’s experiences are teachers in some sense, challenging us to grow and evolve. Although the Persecutor certainly provokes a reaction, the Challenger elicits a response by encouraging a Creator to acquire new knowledge, skill, or insight. Both roles initiate change, but in different ways.”

Ted bent over and scratched *Ch* in the sand at one corner of the triangle.

Sophia said, “I once worked for a manager who was one of the most difficult people I ever knew. She pushed all my emotional buttons. But as I look back on the experience of working with her, I realize how much I learned. I learned how not to treat others, for one thing. Being in that situation also forced me to clarify the work I really wanted to do, and to learn to stay centered in the face of what I could have easily called one tough Persecutor.”

Ted smiled. “I remember, Sophia, how you were struggling with your manager at that time. The Challengers who come into your life, David, may be either constructive or deconstructive in nature. Constructive Challengers spark improvement or development of some kind. They coax, cajole, and entice you to move in the directions of your heart’s desires. This kind of Challenger is a teacher who challenges your pet notions, your view of the status quo. Most of the time, constructive Challengers are aware of what they are doing when they challenge you. They see you as a Creator, and they encourage your learning, growth, and development.

“Deconstructive Challengers, on the other hand, cause you to take apart your experience in order to learn from it. These teachers may be unwelcome people, conditions, or circumstances, such as a relationship that teaches you to face something difficult in yourself, especially something that is inhibiting your capacity to create. Sophia’s manager was one of these for her. A deconstructive Challenger might be an event that wakes you up to possibilities or to problems for which you can discover a creative solution.

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“Even this kind of Challenger bestows a great gift, although it rarely feels that way. The gift is usually one of clarity—showing you what you want or don’t want, what you need to leave behind, or what you must learn so that you don’t repeat a painful experience.”

Sophia turned to me with compassion in her eyes, and I felt the question coming. “Who or what have been your Challengers, David?”

I sifted through my woes for a moment. My dad’s death, my infertility, and my ex-wife’s emotional withdrawal—all were Challengers, without a doubt.

“When my dad passed away, it challenged me to develop my sense of myself as an adult.” I was thinking out loud. “He used to challenge me to consider the impact I was making. He taught me to always ask myself whether I was leaving other people or situations better off than I found them. That was his personal measure of success, and when he died I adopted that measure within myself more completely. I can see the example he set for me and how his death was a constructive Challenger in my life.

“My infertility is a little trickier, though. It certainly has been a deconstructive Challenger. It made me take stock of a lot of things, especially how I see my contribution in the world. Not being able to father my own children is a deep loss, but I also know there are plenty of opportunities to father children in the role of stepfather or adoptive parent, or to volunteer with a community service organization as a mentor to young people. Lately, I’ve also realized that my larger contribution may have more to do with what I offer through my work.

“My ex-wife was also a deconstructive Challenger. Her withdrawal from our marriage, which I can now see with a bit more compassion, made me think about what I really wanted in a relationship. I know that I want a healthy relationship, but I’m not entirely sure what that looks like. I have so much to learn and explore before I’m ready to open up to a new intimate relationship.”

Sophia smiled kindly. “David, you’re already doing the work of a Creator. To be able to look on those experiences in which you’ve seen yourself as a Victim, to see them now as Challengers that have taught you something—that’s one giant step! It’s one of the major shifts in awareness that TED* brings. Already you’re transforming your relationship to your life experiences.”

“Seeing that you have much to learn and to explore brings us to the third role in The Empowerment Dynamic: the Coach,” remarked Ted.

The Coach Role

As he wrote *Co* in the lower right corner of his sand drawing, Ted asked, “What comes to mind when you think about a coach, David?”

“I think of sports . . . maybe a football coach or a basketball coach,” I said.

“The role of Coach in The Empowerment Dynamic is a bit different. In the sports world, a coach doesn’t actively engage in the field of play. The coach is on the sidelines, strategizing and helping to coordinate the individual efforts of the team members, with the goal of winning the game. A good sports coach helps his or her players believe they can win—or at least play their best—by guiding them to develop the skills and attitudes that lead to success.

“A Coach in The Empowerment Dynamic shares that characteristic of encouragement with a sports coach. But there is at least one key difference between a typical sports coach and a Coach in The Empowerment Dynamic.

“A TED* Coach is fully engaged in the field of play—the Creator Orientation—in his or her own life. First and foremost, a Coach knows he or she is a Creator, and sees other people as Creators as well.

“The Coach is the antidote to the Victim’s Rescuer in the DDT. While both Coach and Rescuer seek to support the other person (the Victim or Creator), the Rescuer actually draws power away from the Victim and reinforces his or her powerlessness. A Coach leaves the power with the Creator and seeks only to help facilitate her personal progress. A Coach is the embodiment of a Creator’s desire to share power with another.”

Sophia looked at Ted and playfully signaled *time out*. “Hang on, Coach! David, let me share some of my experience in working with several different types of Coaches. I’ve been blessed to have a number of great Coaches, including this guy here.”

Sophia and Ted caught each others’ eyes and chuckled. Their lightness lifted my spirits.

“When Dan and I were first breaking up, I worked with a dynamite therapist and licensed social worker. She asked a lot of good questions that helped me probe into my past so I could begin to understand the sources of some of the patterns of behavior that had contributed to our relationship’s breakdown. Then she helped me begin to release them and replace the old behaviors with more functional ways of being in relationship.

“I was working with her when I first met Ted. Just as he is sharing with you, he helped me open to a whole different way of thinking and to see that I could create a future that was not bound by my past. As a result of my conversations with Ted, I decided to begin working with a certified coach, who helped me

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clarify what I wanted and to develop strategies for creating outcomes. All three—the therapist, Ted, and the certified coach—acted as Coaches for me because they supported my own exploration.”

Ted added, “A Coach in The Empowerment Dynamic doesn’t necessarily need to be professionally trained, such as the therapist and professional coach Sophia worked with. A Coach can simply be a trusted friend, which I know I have been for Sophia. It is true, however, that there are times when it may be important to work with a professional.

“A Coach supports, assists, and facilitates a Creator in manifesting a desired outcome. A Coach holds others to be whole, resourceful, and creative. Coaches don’t regard those who turn to them for support as somehow broken or in need of fixing, which is the Rescuer’s viewpoint. Instead, a Coach helps others see new possibilities, helps them to dare to dream.”

“That’s right,” Sophia chimed in. “A Coach is a source of knowledge, but he doesn’t tell a Creator what she should or shouldn’t do. Instead, he asks a lot of good questions and listens deeply to what a Creator is saying as she thinks, probes, and explores. A Coach is constantly alert to possibility. My Coaches are able to see possibilities that may be invisible to me; they help ignite my inspiration, and they’re committed to my success as I forge my own way in life. They say, ‘I’m going to stand beside you, no matter what,’ and they mean it. What they don’t say, though, is ‘Here, let me fix it for you,’ or—even more importantly—‘Let me fix YOU!’ which is the approach of the Rescuer.

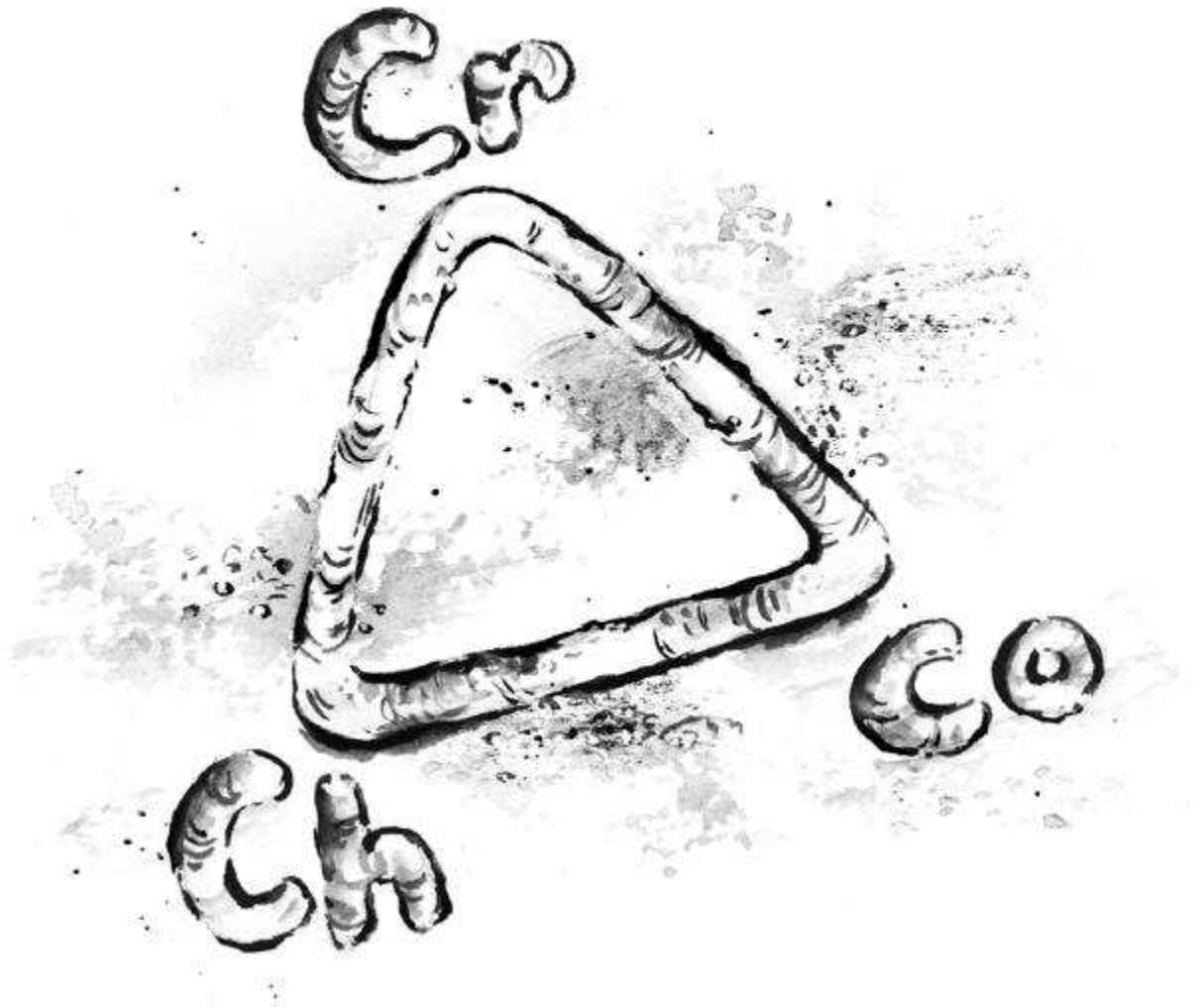
“When I began working with a professional coach, he shared the definition of a coach from the International Coach Federation.” Sophia opened her journal again, found the page she was looking for, and handed it to me. I read the definition she had written:

Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives. Coaches are trained to listen, to observe, and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach’s job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

“Having that kind of support must be awesome,” I said. “I’ve worked with a therapist before—that’s how I found out about Karpman’s Drama Triangle. And I can see how she acted as a Coach, of sorts, in the way she helped me explore. But if you are not professionally trained, how does a Coach go about working with a Creator?”

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Sophia reached over and pulled the exercise band out of Ted’s pocket. She stretched it between her two hands the way I had done earlier. “One really effective way is to use Dynamic Tension. You can be a Coach for others by asking them questions that help them gain clarity about what they want to create in life. Help them assess their current reality—both what is helpful in creating their vision and what is inhibiting and getting in the way. Then explore with them possible Baby Steps they can commit to. That will begin to bring their heart’s desires into reality. The main thing is to remember to see the other as a Creator, to be curious and ask good questions to help them clarify, to listen and support them in their own self-discovery process.”



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“A Coach cultivates empowerment and hope in the heart of a Creator,” Ted pointed out. “For the most part, a Coach is forward and future focused, supporting a Creator to learn from the past and from current realities. From time to time, a good Coach will consciously assume the role of constructive Challenger. Ultimately, a Coach helps a Creator take ownership and assume personal power, so he or she can respond consciously and purposefully to life’s circumstances. With the help of a Coach, a Creator can stay centered in the Creator Orientation. Staying centered allows you to become much more effective in the outer world, since you can focus on your envisioned outcomes and choose your response to whatever comes up—whether it is easy or challenging.”

“It really sounds too good to be true,” I said.

“As we’ve said,” Sophia responded, “TED* isn’t all sweetness and light. Even in this way of being, we can feel the weight of circumstances and lose sight of what’s most important to us. Those are the times when we most need a Coach. We all face problems and challenges that test our strength, but as we face and find our way through them, we grow in fortitude, wisdom, and compassion—and these gifts we can share with others. Tough times are the fire in which our Creator character is made strong and whole.”

I looked at Sophia, then over at Ted, then at Ted’s triangle in the sand. I felt almost light-headed as I considered the possibility of actually living this way. What would my life look like, centered in a position of empowerment, with the support of great Coaches to help me understand and respond creatively to my Challengers?

I looked out at the sea, and then up the shore toward the bench where Ted and I had met. Far out on the water the little sailboat had made its way up the coast. The seagulls, the surfers, and the sunbathers continued up and down the beach, while the crashing of the waves surrounded us.

“I sure would prefer to live my life as a Creator. I’m tired of wallowing in the DDT. It looks so easy on paper—or on the sand. But I have so many years of practice and habit living out the Dreaded Drama Triangle. I know all three of those roles forward and backward. How do I make the shift from DDT to TED*?”

“Aahhh,” said Ted, “that’s an important question, David. Let’s explore how Shift Happens!”