

The 3 TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic) Roles: Their Core Beliefs and Aspirations

By David Emerald and Donna Zajonc

This article explains the TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic) roles of Creator, Challenger and Coach, which are the positive alternatives to the Drama Triangle roles of Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer. First described by Dr. Stephen Karpman in the late 1960's, the Drama Triangle roles (which we call the Dreaded Drama Triangle, or DDT, because of their toxic nature) are common strategies human beings use to manage fear and anxiety.

The journey from Victim consciousness to Creator consciousness is not always easy, nor does it travel along a straight line. We prefer to think of it as a continuum, with your center of gravity gradually moving from the DDT to the TED* empowering roles.

The DDT roles feel very familiar to most people. The TED* roles are much less so and, like learning any new skill or practice, it takes time to experiment and apply these ways of relating to others, life experiences and oneself. We hope these brief explorations will support you in updating your human operating system with the more empowering TED* roles and can help you escape the DDT and take control of your life---creating more freedom, innovation, resilience and joy.

The Creator's Choice

As you make the shift from the DDT to TED* roles, you are upgrading your "internal operating system" by adopting a Creator Orientation. Therefore, the central role in TED* is that of Creator, which is the antidote to the Victim role.

In the Victim role, there is a "deficiency story," of feeling not enough or insufficient. When living as a Creator, you upgrade your deficiency story to a Creator story. This upgrade is not a small shift. In fact, it may be the most profound shift you make in your life because it will alter your relationship with yourself, loved ones, co-workers and all of life.

David was once asked what the central principle of being a Creator is, to which he replied, "Creators choose choice." So how does one shift from reacting to choosing; from deficiency to sufficiency?

You begin by affirming your true essence as a resourceful, creative and whole human being. You also uphold and see these same qualities in all others, viewing them as the Co-Creators they are.

We see three primary beliefs that are foundational for the Creator to choose choice.

Choice #1: I am sufficient, whole and complete.

We encourage you to take a moment and rewrite your deficiency story into your Creator story. We learned the following process from Fr. Richard Rohr that can help you begin this transition:

Think of a negative phrase you have said aloud or thought to yourself that comes from a sense of shame rather than your inherent dignity. Turn it upside down and say, in first person, present tense, an affirmation of your (Creator) value. For instance:

“I am unlovable”..... “I am infinitely loved.”

Or, “I am a problem in the world.....” “I am a gift and solution in the world.”

The Creator “knows” deeply their true essence as love and wholeness for themselves and other Creators.

Choice #2: I am responsible for choosing my response to life.

If you believe you are whole and complete it stands to reason that you no longer view yourself as at the mercy of life’s events. You can now choose your response.

Viktor Frankl, who survived three Nazi concentration camps writes in his amazing book, *A Man’s Search for Meaning*:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

As a Creator, you can learn to pause and be aware of the space that exists between the incoming stimulus and your response. This awareness builds your capacity to be at choice, rather than simply react to the drama of the moment.

Choice #3: Even with set-backs and struggles, I focus on continuous learning.

When you take responsibility for your response to life's events, you spend less energy trying to change situations that you can't control. Once you accept you don't know how things are going to turn out, there's new energy for learning and growth rather than resisting "what is."

Now, as a Creator, you can focus on what you desire in life—what rocks your world and what you are truly grateful for. With this new orientation to life, set-backs and struggles become learning opportunities – what we call Challengers – and you are no longer a Victim to life's challenges.

When in the Victim role, we humans run on an egoic-operating system where everything is about "me" and the win-lose paradigm. Once you begin to recognize that this is a false image of life that divides reality into "us vs them" and a "right or wrong" paradigm, you yearn for a more satisfying way of living.

You can choose to relate to others, yourself, and life with a whole new operating system based upon your ideal—or Creator self.

The Challenger's Learning Intent

Of the three TED* roles of Creator, Challenger and Coach, we receive the most questions about the Challenger.

Readers tell us they resist embracing the Challenger role because they view it as risky or scary. Others say if they are a Challenger, they won't be liked by their co-workers or those they lead. We also hear that sometimes there is confusion with the Coach role, which we will explain in a moment. We are pleased to clarify this powerful role that we have grown to deeply appreciate.

Challengers are catalysts for learning and are willing to stand for the vision, even when it may be unpopular. Challengers have a knack for letting go of the details and staying focused on the desired outcomes. They sometimes shake things up and are often called the "truth-tellers." Challengers go to the heart of the matter and frequently deliver the hard facts, while inspiring others and themselves to reach for the highest good.

You have had Challengers in your life—we are sure of it. Your Challenger may have been your toughest teacher, the demanding sports coach or a wise uncle or aunt. You know they

loved and cared for you because their intent was to challenge you to learn and grow and be your best. At the time, you may have resisted their high expectations.

Without Challengers, under pressure we humans might wither, and compromise the vision we so desire. There are at least three primary beliefs that are foundational to the Challenger role:

Belief #1: Life is about learning and growth – even in the face of “not knowing.”

Challengers frequently ask of others and themselves: “Given the situation, what is here to learn or gain?” They may say to themselves or others: “Let’s trust the process and keep moving forward.” They take a stand for learning and growth by evoking/inspiring and, at times, provoking/nudging others to take action and continue to stretch and hone their Creator capabilities. While Persecutors want to control chaos and uncertainty, the Challenger “knows what they know and don’t know” and is comfortable with the “not knowing” that often occurs in the learning process.

Belief #2: Given life is ever-changing and uncertain, I rest in the confidence and conviction of my values.

This belief is the foundation of the “truth-teller.” By clarifying and aligning themselves with their values, keeping their word and living in integrity is a high priority for a Challenger. They do not acquiesce to the drama of the moment. Instead Challengers focus on taking a stand for what they believe in, even in the middle of chaos and change. They also challenge others to live in integrity with their values.

Belief #3. I tell the truth about current reality, without blame or judgment.

Challengers see reality for what it is and neither minimize nor catastrophize “what is” to gain position or be “one up.” A Challenger speaks the unspeakable, that no one else in the room is willing to say. While there is a strength and sturdiness to the Challenger, there is also a willingness to be vulnerable and open, because there is nothing to hide or defend. A Challenger has compassion for themselves and others, knowing that life and the creating process can be very hard sometimes.

They learn to be comfortable, even curious, about things they don't know or understand, and grow beyond the Persecutor's craving to be in control. Rather than be fooled by the illusion that they can control their environment, the present moment becomes an adventure as they and others learn in and through the process of creating.

Transforming Workplace Drama with the **Power of TED***

Learning “to let go or be dragged” by the need to control can be one of the most difficult human qualities to change. Here are a few suggestions of where to begin to cultivate the Challenger role:

1. **View others as Creators.** Prior to challenging others, first reflect upon your intentions. Ask yourself: “What is my intention—to put down, look good or be right or, to build up and support the other?” Challengers challenge from a learning intention.
2. **Be open to new ideas and experiences.** Challenge your own learning by picking one small thing to begin; something you are unfamiliar with and then follow your curiosity and explore the topic. This loosens your grip on the need to know.
3. **Develop self-awareness** in the moment by learning to pause and listen to your internal talk. You may notice the ego’s need that whispers (sometimes shouts!) at you to stay in control and be right. When you hear that Persecutor voice, learn to pause and, again, ask “what is there to learn here?”

The Challenger’s intention is to spark learning, growth and development—both within yourself and in support of others—as a vital aspect of creating and co-creating outcomes and choosing empowered responses to life experiences.

The Coach’s Curiosity

Last, but not least, we have the Coach role, which is the positive alternative to the Rescuer.

Together, the three TED* roles represent the best of who we are as human beings. A Creator says: “I take responsibility for my life and what I want to create.” The Challenger focuses on continuous learning and telling the truth about current reality.

The Coach completes the triad by asking: “How are you/we going to create what you/we want?” Coaches become curious and listen deeply as they become supportive partners in the discovery process. (And you do not need to be a professional coach to embrace this role.)

What is curiosity? Curiosity means investigation, exploration and simply, “wanting to find out.” If you want to “find out,” it implies that you don’t know or are open to

possibilities. Therefore, curiosity necessitates that you embrace “not knowing.” This is the opposite of the Rescuer, who thinks they know best and intervenes, even when not asked.

If you have a sense of “knowing” and want to ask a question from the place of “I know this or that,” you are leaving the space of curiosity. Your question will be directed to a specific outcome and will manipulate the conversation toward that path.

Just the opposite, a Coach asks powerful and probing questions to clarify outcomes, discern current reality and assumptions, and partner with others to determine and commit to incremental Baby Steps.

Three beliefs are foundational to the Coach role. They are:

Belief #1: I have faith in the wisdom that lies within.

When in the Coach role, there is a spaciousness that arises from the faith that answers and insights exist within the other. With this faith, a Coach allows time for the individual’s unique learning process to unfold, while holding them as ultimately whole and complete. Above all, a Coach sees those they support as Creators who can make their own choices.

Belief #2: I trust the discovery process.

Believing in the Creator essence within themselves and others, a Coach trusts the process of allowing and emerging, rather than pushing, pulling or grasping. They stay attuned to emotions and celebrate movement and progress. A Coach uses their intuition to sense obstacles or barriers, as well as when ease and flow are present. The discovery process begins with curiosity, recognizing and observing something that is not yet clear or understood. This lack of understanding is not resignation or ignorance, but an openness to find out what is really going on and, when clarity emerges, discerning the way forward.

Belief #3: I believe in leaving the power with others as they clarify what they want.

A Coach understands that, during the discovery process, a deeper clarity arises that generates energy for action. When people are fulfilled and are discovering their own path, they are more creative and innovative. The “aha” moments that come from deep inquiry clears away a person’s confusion, opens into clarity and understanding, which creates passion and desire for action.

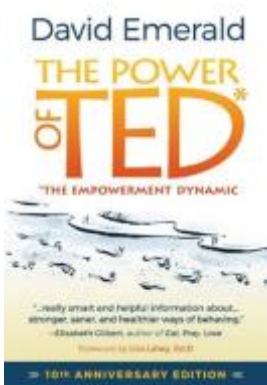
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For managers in organizations, learning the art of inquiry and the skill of curiosity will help you relax as a Coach so you can partner with those you supervise and lead in a powerful and fulfilling new way. As you see the other as a Creator, whether they act like it or whether they know it, you can now partner with them in an exciting journey of discovery.

Inquiry with curiosity requires that you challenge yourself toward what you know and don't know. In the work environment, your prior experience with projects, co-workers and bosses can affect your sense of knowing. You may think you "know" others and their response to situations or questions. The bias of "knowing" is that you can't begin to investigate a situation if you think you know all there is to know about it.

If you are not free from "knowing" you will not ask powerful questions. At best, they will be leading with closed-ended questions and you will rob the other person of their reflective process that helps them arrive at what is true for them. At worst, you will tell others what to do, which disempowers them from engaging and investigating their own creativity.

Whether in your personal or professional life, embrace the Coach role as a way to support others to clarify what they most desire and want in life. And as a Creator, open yourself to being a Coach—and to being coached!



David Emerald is the author of **The Power of TED***, an executive coach, and uplifting keynote speaker who lives in the Pacific Northwest with his wife and business partner, Donna Zajonc. David has over thirty years of experience of leadership development that has led to developing his simple, yet profound, TED* framework. **Donna Zajonc MCC**, Director of Coaching and Practitioner Services for the Power of TED*. Donna has over fifteen years of experience as a leadership coach, keynote speaker, facilitator and trainer. She is passionate about building individual and collective capacity to help shift from reactive conversations to more creative and empowering dialogue.