

Victimization and the Human Experience

By David Emerald

“Think of a time in which you felt you were being victimized.” I often find that participants in my seminars struggle to think of a time when they were (or are) in the victim role. Perhaps this should come as no surprise, because none of us want to see ourselves as a powerless victim. Despite our desire to deny that we may be a victim at times, I have come to regard victimization as an inescapable part of the human experience.

How we respond to victimization, however, has everything to do with whether we live primarily from a victim or a creator orientation. The victim orientation, or mindset, is embodied in the problem-focused actions of the victim, persecutor and rescuer roles. Dr. Steven Karpman was the first to identify these key roles in what he referred to as the Drama Triangle.

A creator orientation, or mindset, is embodied in the outcome-guided actions of a creator, challenger or coach. This is what I define as The Empowerment Dynamic (TED*), an alternative mindset and escape from the roles of the drama triangle. Empowerment emerges in how we deal with victimization when it occurs.

The Power of TED (*The Empowerment Dynamic)* explores a distinction between victimization and victimhood. Victimization is any situation in which a “dream or desire” is denied or thwarted – any situation. Victimization can be caused by people, by conditions (such as a health condition), or circumstances (such as a natural disaster). Victimhood, on the other hand, is a self-identity and a way of being in the living of one’s life. TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic) serves as a challenger to victimhood, while acknowledging the reality of victimization as part of the human condition.

There is a very wide range of victimization that occurs in the world and in our lives. Think of this range along a scale of 1 to 10, which I call the Victim Rating Scale. At the high end of the range (9-10) is extreme victimization. Those who are victimized by war or oppression or by natural disasters certainly experience the high end of the scale. There are many whose daily lives are bound up in such extreme conditions.

At the other end of the scale (1-2) are experiences of “mundane victimization.” A driver cuts in front of you on the road; you come down with a nasty cold; a storm ruins your plans for a family outing; a co-worker is late in getting information to you for a report you are writing – all are examples.

A few months ago, I had such an experience. I had traveled from my home in the U.S. Pacific Northwest to the East Coast, and its time-zone difference of three hours. The next morning I was scheduled to give an important presentation and I knew I needed a good night’s sleep to be at my best. In an attempt to adjust to the time difference, I went to bed about 10:00 PM (while my body was asking: “Why are you trying to go to sleep? It’s only 7:00 o’clock!”).

After hours of tossing and turning, I finally fell asleep about 1:00 AM. At fifteen minutes later I was awakened by a couple of obviously intoxicated men coming into the room next door who were talking loudly – and then one of them tried to open the door that connected our two rooms. I was now wide awake, again, and I certainly felt victimized!

In the “scheme of the Universe,” my victimization was of the mundane sort. But I was frustrated and angry that my “dream/desire” of a good’s night sleep was being thwarted. In the darkness of my room, I realized I faced a choice: to react out of the victim orientation or to focus on how to respond appropriately to my victimization from a creator orientation. I must admit that I fantasized about reacting by banging on the door between the rooms, or shouting, or knocking on their door and reading them the riot act. I also realized that any such persecuting reactions had a high probability of engaging the Dreaded Drama Triangle and escalating the situation.

Instead, I chose to focus on the outcome that I wanted, which was quiet and the chance of falling back asleep. I set an intention of giving the guys next door 15 minutes before taking the action of calling the front desk and asking them to handle the disturbance. As it turned out, about 10 minutes later they left and, as far as I know, never returned.

I had been a victim of their disturbance. Most of us do not want to think of ourselves as victims. We believe the label “victim” is only reserved for those circumstances that hit 9-10 on the Victim Rating Scale. However, we may

consciously or unconsciously go through our day as a victim on the 1-3 end of the scale, not realizing the toll it is taking on our energy and life perspective as we react to what is going on around us or happening to us.

As a creator, when we experience victimization we remember that we have the capacity to choose our response – even in the event of extreme victimization. In the story in *The Power of TED**, the character Sophia recounts Victor Frankl’s revelation, during his internment in Nazi concentration camps, that “everything can be taken from a (person) but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” This is truly the statement of a creator in the face of the most extreme of circumstances. While the range of choices available to him were slim, indeed, he realized he was still “at choice” on how to respond to his harsh human experience.

As human beings we will always have experiences of victimization. For some in our world, the cases may be of the extreme variety, which call for our compassion and active support whenever we can. However, for most of us – most of the time – it will be the everyday, mundane victimization (a 1-3 on the Victim Rating Scale) that happens at work, at home, in our communities.

Any time you experience anger, frustration, sadness or any other emotion that is reactive in nature, the changes are great that you are experiencing victimization. The following process is designed to help respond to the situation as a creator and to increase your capacity for being “at choice” when victimization occurs. (You might bring to your mind right now an experience of victimization to use in reading through the process.)

First, describe the experience of victimization. Who or what is the persecutor in the situation (remember, it can be a person, condition, or circumstance)?

Next, rate your experience of victimization on the Victim Rating Scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being more mundane/everyday and 10 the most extreme. An important note: If your safety or security is threatened (i.e. a 9 or 10 on the Victim Rating Scale), it may be vital to do what you must to reach a safe place or state of being in the situation before using with this process.

Next, identify the “dream or desire” that is being denied or thwarted. What is it that you want that the current situation is – or seems to be – standing in the way of or preventing?

With that outcome (dream/desire) in mind, and while acknowledging the current reality you are experiencing, what choice(s) might you have for taking a baby step in the direction of the outcome?

And finally, commit to – and take – the first baby step!

Victimization is an inevitable part of the human experience. When victimization occurs, remember that you can always be “at choice” in how you respond in the long run. The choice is between focusing on avoiding a problem or creating an outcome. To do so, it is important to discern the “dream or desire” that is being denied or thwarted and to focus on identifying the choice(s) available to move toward that which you want to create. To the creator in you!