



GOING OFF SCRIPT

How To Get Out Of A 'Drama Triangle'

By Dr. Clare Beckett-McInroy and Caroline Beckett



Have you ever come across a team that seems to generate drama the second they enter the room? Often, individually, each team member seems to be able to separate from the drama and perform effectively, yet – together – there is no cohesion. Sick of the drama in your team? Read on to discover strategies for working through the victim-rescuer-persecutor cycle.

DEALING WITH THE VICTIM – RESCUER – PERSECUTOR WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION

Steven Karpman (1968) developed the concept of the 'drama triangle' which is a model for explaining specific co-dependent, destructive inter-action patterns, which negatively impact relationships, internal dynamics and team performance.

Karpman's Drama Triangle, based on Berne's Transactional Analysis model, is a powerful tool for analysing situations with an objectified perspective – from the outside in. The focus is on the connection between responsibility and power. It models how individual 'scripts' can be played out subconsciously. What actually needs to be examined, understood and changed, is the original 'script' belief and the decision. This is usually the source of the unconscious, often negative, behavioural pattern. The understanding of this is crucial if the leader is to be able to support their team to both understand and change their behavioural patterns.

Each position on this triangle has clear, readily identifiable characteristics. Whenever a person becomes entangled in any one of these positions, they literally keep spinning from one position to another, destroying the opportunity for healthy relationships and productive team dynamics. Positively, once a team becomes aware of these positions they can then choose to break this cycle; they can transcend the 'drama triangle'. Resolving these dysfunctional behaviours is essential for eliminating team tensions as well as creating healthy, productive personal and professional relationships.

THE VICTIM

As a victim I feel: oppressed, helpless, powerless, victimised, ignored, patronised, unimportant, insignificant. At the extreme, the victim's focus is on negativity and all that is wrong. They find themselves in a place where they feel powerless and, at times, insignificant often spending endless hours talking about their problems, their bad luck and how they have been hurt. They can be depressed and wallow in self-pity. Things are never right and there is never enough: time, money, support, opportunity, attention etc. You have a victim in your team if you feel: worn out, depleted, frustrated, lacking in energy and depressed from the negativity. Regardless of how much time, attention, information, energy or support is provided, the victim rarely changes or has the impetus to change.

As a leader, it is important to remember that people only change when they are ready to take full responsibility for all of their thoughts, words, actions and creations. Until then, there will be little positive momentum or energy.

THE RESCUER

As a rescuer I feel: positive, knowledgeable, caring, like I am making a difference, in control, like a hero.

If there is a rescuer in your team they may spend hours, days, weeks or even years attempting to change, control and to get respect from others. They frequently have a veneer of control, power and superiority, always appearing to be confident and in control. Rescuers tend to thrive on taking care of and attempting to direct the lives of other people.

While they may appear to influence, control and change others, the rescuer often attempts to gain attention and respect from the team members which helps them to carve an identity. They pretend to know more than other team members and frequently have an answer for everything, even though they have little, if any, actual knowledge or experience regarding the subject.

Consider: how can you make a rescuer look inwards and consider what they themselves need in order to progress?

THE PERSECUTOR

As a persecutor I feel: powerful, strong, dominant, confident, blameless, angry, controlling.

The bully in your team is the persecutor in this triangle. They blame others for their issues, short-falls and misunderstandings.

Interestingly, victims and rescuers can become persecutors, if they vent their frustration, anger and resentment at others, blaming others for their negative feelings. Rather than taking personal responsibility and walking away they can stay locked into the destructive patterns, antagonising and attacking what they perceive to be the source of their frustration.

What if the victim is angry with the rescuer, because they feel that have pushed too hard, demand too much?

What if the rescuer is angry with the victim for not appreciating and understanding then not making changes?

So, how do you handle a persecutor in order to stop them punishing others through destructive actions such as dominating, controlling, nagging, belittling, shaming, blaming and humiliating? Consider strategies a persecutor can develop in order to disengage with the role, to focus on taking care of themselves and to consider what is needed in order to get their own life in order.



“As a leader, it is important to remember that people only change when they are ready to take full responsibility for all of their thoughts, words, actions and creations.”

HOW DO WE DISCONNECT FROM THE 'DRAMA TRIANGLE'?

Leaders and team members need to focus on ways to break the cycle. How do you disconnect from the 'drama triangle'?

Step One

Become aware of the pattern and then work to educate your team. Once aware of the patterns and behaviours, team members are then empowered and can choose to change or break the triangle.

Step Two

Consider:

- > What is my motivation?
- > What makes me act this way?
- > What am I trying to control?
- > What am I ignoring?
- > What part am I playing?
- > What makes me play this part?
- > What is it that I really want, need or desire for myself and from others?

- > What part is the team playing in this situation?
- > What needs to change?
- > What can I do to change?
- > What if nothing changes?

Step Three

The victim needs to develop awareness of their patterns and to stop looking for someone or something outside them to fix them, to give them the answers or to give them the love and support they need. Whereas the rescuer needs to stop trying to change, control or get support from others. All corners of the triangle need to learn how to love, honour, respect and support themselves. Persecution and blaming others only creates further negativity and will never accomplish anything positive.

When the team moves away from feeling powerless and blaming others, to the place of focusing on what it is that it truly wants, it can take powerful positive steps and enable the potential of all team members. BIG

