

# RESOLVING CONFLICT WITH THE DRAMA & EMPOWERMENT TRIANGLES

## KEY LEARNING

- Experiences of being 'in Drama'
- Working to flip the narrative in different parts of our lives
- Playing in The Empowerment Triangle

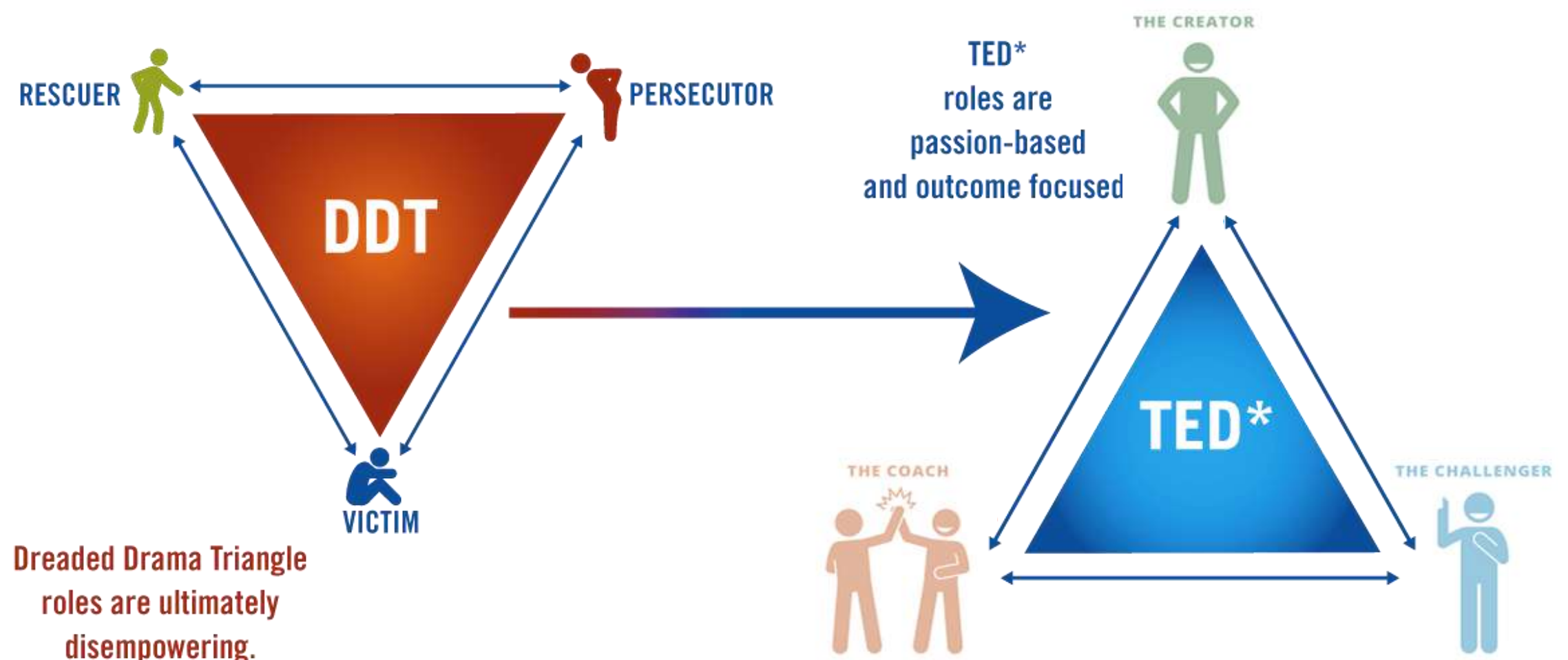
## Understanding & Reframing Our Roles To Move Forward

We all have a default way of looking at problems and our role in them. Whether it's a minor issue or a full-blown crisis, there is a narrative that automatically plays out in our heads, colouring our perception of solutions. Sometimes, this perception is correct; other times, it's counterproductive. However, understanding how we approach conflict - and positively reframing our role - can make real solutions possible.

This is where the Drama Triangle and the Empowerment Triangle come in. Let's explore these tools and how they help us overcome issues both in family life and in organizational settings.

### The Drama Triangle: A Breakthrough Model Of Human Conflict

Psychiatrist Stephen B. Karpman first proposed the Drama Triangle, a "...social model of human interaction..." in the 1960s. It describes the counterproductive ways many people relate to each other and problems when conflict arises. Essentially, everyone tends to assume one of three roles that suit their interests and personality. These roles can shift quickly if doing so provides power, rationalizes issues, or simply makes us feel better about ourselves.



## Three Faces of Drama

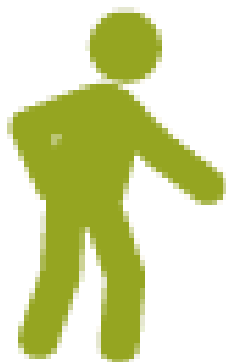
*These three “faces of drama” are placed on each point of an upside-down triangle:*



**The Persecutor (Villain):** This person is very critical, finding fault with others and blaming them for the problem. They feel the need to step in and dominate to set things right. In a family setting, this might be the parent who constantly criticizes their child for not meeting expectations. At work, it could be a manager who micromanages and blames employees for any shortcomings.



**The Victim:** This person sees themselves as powerless and hopeless, oppressed by the Villain. They often complain without taking productive action. In a family, this might be the child who feels they can never do anything right and gives up trying. In the workplace, it could be an employee who feels overwhelmed by tasks and constantly seeks help without attempting to solve problems independently.



**The Rescuer (Hero/Pacifier):** This person has a default orientation of “let me help.” They step in to save Victims, often enabling victimhood and failing to solve the long-term problem. At home, this could be a family member who constantly solves others’ problems, preventing them from learning how to handle issues themselves. In organizations, it might be a colleague who always steps in to help others, to the detriment of their own work and growth.

*The Drama Triangle illustrates how these roles perpetuate conflict rather than resolve it. Understanding the roles we play helps us break free from them and their short-term emotional rewards.*

## Example from Family Life

I habitually jumped into the Rescuer/Hero role when a problem arose in my family. It’s my instinct to help, and I get great satisfaction from doing so. But once I realized I was enabling my family members to be Victims, I re-evaluated how I approached conflict.



## The Empowerment Triangle

*The Empowerment Triangle, also known as The Empowerment Dynamic (TED), is a “positive alternative” to the Drama Triangle proposed by business consultant and author David Emerald. TED recasts the roles from negative to constructive ones:*



**The Challenger (replacing the Persecutor/Villain):** Instead of affixing blame and dictating actions, the Challenger builds others up, encouraging them to learn and grow despite difficult situations. In a family, this could be a parent who challenges their child to improve while offering support. In organizations, it's a leader who holds their team accountable in a positive way.



**The Creator (replacing the Victim):** Instead of viewing themselves as a prisoner to circumstances, Creators choose their response to challenges. They focus on solutions and outcomes, not obstacles. At home, this could be a family member who actively seeks ways to solve their problems. At work, it might be an employee who proactively addresses issues and seeks opportunities for improvement.



**The Coach (replacing the Rescuer/Hero/Pacifier):** A Coach provides real support, empowering Creators to solve their problems.

- In a family setting, this might be a Family Member who listens and offers guidance without taking over.
- In an organization, it's a mentor who helps others find their own solutions.
- The Empowerment Triangle offers a clear method to break free from reactive habits and foster constructive interactions.

### Example from Working with People in Organizations

In my business, I often played the Rescuer/Hero, jumping in to fix everything. This quieted the Villain and placated the Victim but didn't solve the underlying issues. Recognizing this, I shifted to the Coach role, empowering my team to find solutions themselves, which led to better outcomes and more effective teamwork.

## Turning Pointless Conflict on Its Head

These models have changed my perceptions and behaviour. By understanding and reframing our roles, we can drive real progress. Instead of enabling Victims, a Coach empowers Creators to think differently about and solve their problems. Challengers focus on encouraging improvement and accountability positively.

### Practical Steps

- **Identify Roles:** Recognize the roles you and others are playing in a conflict.
  - **Reframe Roles:** Shift from the Drama Triangle to the Empowerment Triangle roles.
  - **Empower Others:** Encourage self-sufficiency and growth in family members and colleagues.
- By understanding everyone's place within these triangles, you can positively reframe roles and shift behaviour, resolving problems more effectively. You may be pleasantly surprised at how well a slight change in perspective works to resolve conflicts.

### Summary

- Use the visual to illustrate the transition from the Drama Triangle to the Empowerment Triangle, highlighting the positive transformation in roles.
- These strategies can transform both family life and organizational dynamics, leading to more harmonious and productive relationships.
- Empowerment involves giving employees the autonomy to make decisions within their area of expertise.

### Practice Self-Compassion and Empathy

Understanding that everyone sometimes falls into these roles, practicing self-compassion can help you forgive yourself and others. Empathy allows you to see the perspective of others, facilitating more supportive and collaborative interactions.

### Seek Professional Support

Consider working with a mentor or coach who can provide challenge and support whilst co-creating strategies to help you navigate and step out of the Drama Triangle.

# Thank You!

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