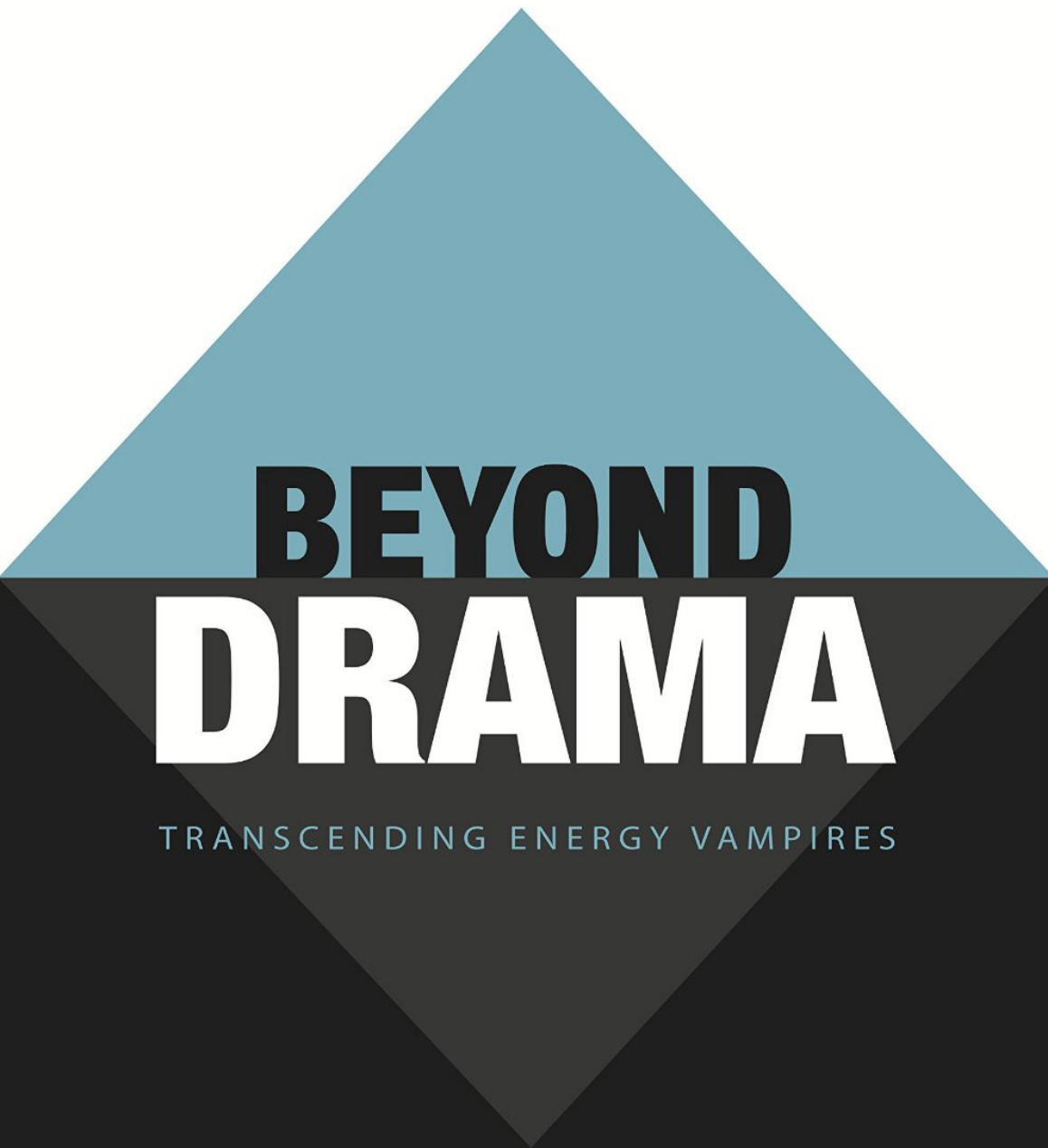


“A handy guide to short-circuiting the energy suckers in your life”

— Daniel H. Pink, *New York Times* Best Selling Author



**BEYOND
DRAMA**

TRANSCENDING ENERGY VAMPIRES

Nate Regier, PhD

Jeff King, MSW

BEYOND DRAMA

TRANSCENDING ENERGY VAMPIRES

by
Nate Regier, PhD and Jeff King, LMSW

Next Element Publishing

Newton, Kansas

2013



Next Element Publishing
414 North Main, Suite 200
Newton, KS 67114
316-283-4200
www.next-element.com

BEYOND DRAMA: TRANSCENDING ENERGY VAMPIRES

© 2013 by Next Element Consulting, LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Next Element Consulting, LLC, 2013
Beyond Drama: Transcending Energy Vampires / Nate Regier and Jeff King
Includes bibliographical references
ISBN: 978-0-9860535-0-4 (paperback)

Cover and interior design: Flint Hills Design, North Newton, KS

Printed in the United States of America

OVERVIEW

Drama is what happens when people struggle against themselves or others to feel justified about the things they do to gain negative attention, with or without awareness. Drama is an energy vampire, sucking the lifeblood out of everyone and everything around it. Drama strains relationships, sidelines teams, and causes companies to operate at a fraction of their capacity. Drama is amazingly predictable yet incredibly resistant to change.

Why does drama happen, why do you allow it, and how can you change it? *Beyond Drama* answers these questions, providing a guide to understand how drama plays out in your life and how to transform it into compassionate accountability, professionally and personally.

The word *Compassion* originates from the Latin root meaning “to struggle with,” a profound step beyond just getting along. To help you achieve com-passionate accountability, *Beyond Drama* will challenge you with provocative new approaches to tough issues, such as responsibility, accountability, expectations, humility, and the Golden Rule.

Whether you use this book to improve family relationships, as a team-build-ing exercise, or as required reading for your executive team, *Beyond Drama* is your guide to achieve greater awareness, effectiveness, and accountability in everything you do.

FORWARD

Nate Regier and Jeff King's *Beyond Drama: Transcending Energy Vampires* is indeed a journey of how for the Process Age. Their book is a practical and applicable guide to increasing our possibilities for professional prosperity as well as enhancing our personal well-being.

For many of us, a GPS (Global Positioning System) helps us get where we want to go on a map. To help us go further in life, Nate and Jeff have given us our own IPS — Individual Positioning System, which identifies where we are with ourselves and others, how to keep ourselves on track, how to deal with the detours, speed bumps, and potholes, and how to keep our energies up and our needs met in order to reach our goals.

This book is full of invitations and examples of how to realize that the very corners of distress we find ourselves in can very well be personal and professional growth opportunities.

When Yogi Berra gave guests directions to his home, he often finished with, “and when you come to the fork in the road, take it.”

Yogi lived on a cul-de-sac.

Jeff and Nate, thanks for this gift you have prepared so wisely for the reader. Your information provides new views of our life's journey, and inspiring us to appreciate the joys along the way.

– Taibi Kahler, President of Kahler Communications Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I've heard from other authors that the first book is the most difficult. I don't know if this is true — yet. I do know that without my terrific team at Next Element, this project would have never made it beyond the conceptual stage. Thank you for giving me permission and encouragement to put our collective experience into the pages of this book, letting me have space to do the work on my terms, and holding me accountable when other shiny objects competed for my attention. Above all, thank you for practicing what you preach everyday.

I want to give special thanks to Norm's Coffee Bar in my hometown of Newton, Kansas. Norm's is my haven, my favorite place to write. Robert, you make the best French press in the world! Our first book signing will be at Norm's, and the first one is on me!

To all the people in my stories and case studies, named or unnamed, thank you! You have been the fabric of my life, the context within which I have struggled, learned, grown, and found my true passion.

Steven Karpman and Taibi Kahler, your discoveries have changed my life. I appreciate your brilliance, creativity, curiosity, encouragement, and perspective. You have helped me understand what it means to own my potency.

Julie, my fabulous wife, you are my inspiration to pursue drama-free living everyday. Life with you and our three daughters gives me more joy and purpose than I ever thought possible. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and belief in me throughout this journey.

Jeff King, my coauthor, business partner, friend, and sparring buddy: You keep me laughing. You keep me on my toes. And you keep me

BEYOND DRAMA

honest. I am grateful for the creativity and energy you've brought into my life and to this book.

– Nate Regier

I want to first thank a man by the name of Paul Unruh. He was the first mentor in my life and the person who introduced me to the concept of “change your language change your life.” Paul, thank you for being a mentor and a role model.

Big thanks to Nate, Jamie, and Michele. In 2008 when we all formed Next Element, it was a first for all us and a scary first step that has paid off tenfold. The three of you are inspirations!

To my coauthor and friend Nate. Thank you! Writing this book has been a first for us and we have accomplished the intention that we set out for ourselves. I will always remember the Arbuckle mountains, where we starting constructing and writing, when we were not cooking wings or exploring the mountains.

To my wife, Rebecca Amis, thank you so much for supporting me and believing in me. This book is only possible because you believed in me and said YES to all my crazy ideas. I cannot express in words how much of an inspiration you are to me. Thank you for being you!

Maggie and Harper, thank you for being in my world!

Derrien, thanks for being authentic to who you are and uncompromising on the person who you want to be in this world. You have taught me to be a better person. Thank you.

– Jeff King

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 1

The Problem



Chapter 1
It's Not What You Say, But How You Say It..... 9

Chapter 2
Why Should We Care about Process? 15

Chapter 3
Understanding the Drama Triangle 25

Chapter 4
Drama: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy 39



The Solution

Chapter 5
A Compassionate Alternative to Drama 49

Chapter 6
Dimensions of Drama: The Big Three 59

Chapter 7
Dimensions of Drama: The Rest of the Story 71

Chapter 8
May I Have Your Attention, Please? 89



The Toolkit

Chapter 9	
Becoming an Effective Motivator	103
Chapter 10	
Expectations: The Double-Edged Sword	113
Chapter 11	
Change and Drama	133
Chapter 12	
Change and Compassion: Transcend and Include	147
Chapter 13	
From Attention to Intention	157
Chapter 14	
Advocates and Adversaries: Building Healthy Community	167
Chapter 15	
The Power of Invitation.....	177
Chapter 16	
Becoming Self-Ful.....	191
Chapter 17	
Living Beyond Drama: Transcending Energy Vampires	197
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	203

INTRODUCTION

Drama is an energy vampire, sucking the lifeblood out of everyone and everything around it. Drama strains relationships, sidelines teams, and causes companies to operate at a fraction of their capacity. Enterprises that allow drama to dominate don't survive for long. Ones that build cultures free of drama can thrive.

What do we mean by “drama”? Drama is what happens when people under stress or distress try to justify their actions even when it hurts themselves or their relationships. Our goal in this book is to help you understand the drama that may be playing out in your own work or home life and how to transform it into conscious, compassionate collaboration.

Our company, Next Element, opened for business on October 13, 2008. Many will remember this month as the official start of the recession. It wasn't our plan to start a business in a recession. And, everyday we thank our lucky stars for this wonderful twist of fate. Next Element is a professional training and consulting firm specializing in reducing drama and increasing compassion in corporate and personal relationships. Drama is expensive, wasteful, and time-consuming. Ironically, most companies spend all their efforts streamlining systems and procedures while avoiding the elephant in the room — interpersonal drama.

Many predicted that we'd never make it past our first year. Entering our fifth year, Next Element has thrived and we are growing! In 2013 we were honored to be selected as a top-five finalist for small business of the year by the Wichita Kansas Metro Area Chamber of Commerce.

BEYOND DRAMA

How have we been successful? We've focused on practicing what we preach — building a drama-free culture inside our own company. Our toolkit is all about transcending drama, and pursuing compassionate contribution. And, it starts with us. Living this philosophy in every interaction is a full-time responsibility. In the way we run staff meetings, how we conduct ourselves at networking events, and how we build relationships with our clients and our families, eliminating drama is our goal. It is the foundation upon which everything else rests.

We didn't have MBAs. We didn't have entrepreneurial experience. We had zero startup capital and haven't borrowed a dime. We knew we could learn about business plans, product lines, accounting, strategic goals, social media, and sales. And the one thing that tied us together was the belief that no aspect of our operational life could be ultimately successful unless we kept drama at bay. Has it been easy? No. It's been the hardest thing any of us has ever done. Drama is human nature. The more passionate you are, the more it wants in. Transcending drama requires constant vigilance, a willingness to engage in productive conflict with each other, and openness to daily growth. Operating a company with a no-drama culture is the most thrilling, liberating, and energizing experience we've ever had. Our passion is to help others experience it, too.

Beyond Drama is a roadmap to transcend drama in your life. This book is a highly practical deep-dive into personal and professional effectiveness. From understanding the dynamics behind organizational and global conflict to decoding power struggles between you and your children, we offer readers an insightful and achievable journey towards becoming a better leader, teacher, spouse, parent, mentor, and friend.

We've distilled current best practices in the social sciences, leadership, and communication literature and then sprinkled it with plenty of personal stories, anecdotes, and case studies to keep it real. The tools in this book are not ivory-tower theory. They are down-to-earth, practical steps you can take today to transform relationships. Is

INTRODUCTION

this a personal self-help book or a leadership book? Both. Is the focus personal or professional? Again, the answer is both. Drama has no boundaries. Personal drama creeps into our professional lives — and the other way around. Maybe you are a leader in your company. You are probably also a friend, spouse, parent, board member, or coach. Compartmentalizing your life might be possible with regard to specific job duties. Beyond that, such boundaries are meaningless. Our needs, thoughts, and behaviors are all connected.

In an age of too much “what,” this book is about the “how.” It’s about how to become response-able, capable, and confident in building more empowering and fulfilling relationships in every aspect of your life. You can use it effectively as a self-help guide, a book study for your executive team, a resource for becoming a better supervisor, or a discussion starter between you and your life partner.

We’ve divided the journey into three sections: The Problem, The Solution, and The Toolkit. Section 1, The Problem, outlines what we are all up against. In Chapter 1, “It’s Not What You Say, But How You Say It,” we demonstrate that the process of how we go about things is often more important than the content of our words and actions. In Chapter 2, “Why Should We Care About Process?” we offer three compelling reasons why a book with this focus is so important right now, as we enter a new era that we call “The Process Age.” Chapter 3, “Understanding the Drama Triangle,” lays out the basics of negative drama — what it is, why it happens, its impact on you and others, and the key myths that keep it going. Chapter 4, “Drama: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” shows how in drama we get exactly what’s coming to us, and challenges us to think differently about personal responsibility. Section 1 ends by outlining four important choices we have when faced with drama.

Section 2, The Solution, offers our roadmap for taming and transcending energy vampires in your personal and professional life. This section will challenge assumptions, habits, and what you think

you know about being effective. Our goal is to take you beyond your comfort zone and inspire you to be more intentional about eliminating drama from your life. Chapter 5, “A Compassionate Alternative to Drama,” gives a whole new meaning to the term “compassion” by describing three core skillsets you can develop to build your drama resistance and begin struggling with people instead of against them.

Chapters 6 and 7 are designed to raise awareness about what drama looks like, sounds like, and feels like. We’ve discovered nine dimensions of drama, each with signature attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Each dimension includes complementary, healthy alternatives. Chapter 6, “Dimensions of Drama: The Big Three,” starts with what we believe are the three primary dimensions of drama, and Chapter 7, “Dimensions of Drama: The Rest of the Story,” explores six additional dimensions. We invite you to use the drama dimension checklists in these chapters to assess where you currently are and begin framing the conversation about where you want to go in your professional and personal relationships. We encourage you to take the time and energy necessary to do an honest self-assessment and engage in candid discussion with trusted others about what you learn. Take it to the next level with your team or organization by accessing our online Drama Assessment at drama.next-element.com. Change begins with awareness. In Chapter 8, “May I Have Your Attention, Please?” we unveil the “secret recipe” to invite people out of drama and into the arena of effective, compassionate behavior.

Section 3, The Toolkit, offers an array of strategies and disciplines for putting solutions into practice. Chapter 9, “Becoming an Effective Motivator,” is a step-by-step guide to applying the information from Chapter 8, along with quick detour into the dark side — what happens when people don’t get their psychological needs met? In Chapter 10, “Expectations: The Double-Edged Sword,” we take on the tough topics of guilt, shame, and entitlement and show how eliminating expectations can help us to lead more effectively with compassion.

INTRODUCTION

How do we deal with change in the Process Age? Chapter 11, “Change and Drama” and Chapter 12, “Change and Compassion: Transcend and Include,” offer an elegant and practical framework for understanding change by looking first at the damaging consequences of drama-based responses to change and then the exciting possibilities that emerge when change is negotiated using the key skills of compassion. Chapter 11 includes change assessments that will help you find out where you are now, accompanied by recommended next steps and leadership responsibilities and opportunities.

How bad do you want it? If moving out of drama and into compassion is your goal, Chapters 13 – 15 will get you started. Drama is a self-fulfilling prophecy and so is compassion. In Chapter 13, “From Attention to Intention,” we provide you with five keys to maximizing the laws of attraction in compassion. Chapter 14, “Advocates and Adversaries: Building Healthy Community,” explores how profoundly we are defined by our relationships and associations. We look specifically at what adversarial relationships look like in business and personal life and suggest a variety of effective responses to them. In Chapter 15, “The Power of Invitation,” we share a tool that is a staple in our own team and in our work with clients — The Formula for Compassionate Conflict. This template and the accompanying examples will help you stay out of drama and invite others to join you in compassionate collaboration.

Chapter 16, “Becoming Self-ful,” is all about you, how you are taking care of yourself, and where you are in relation to others in your life. We offer our perspective on self-care and stewardship of your precious spiritual, emotional, mental, psychological, and physical resources.

With awareness comes responsibility. With new learning comes possibility. Are you ready to accept the challenge of responsibility? In Chapter 17, “Living Beyond Drama: Transcending Energy Vampires,” we invite you to accept five core challenges necessary to

turn what you've learned so far into a powerful force for effectiveness in all aspects of your life.

We invite you to digest *Beyond Drama* at your own pace. Reflect on it in your own space, or share your insights with a trusted friend. As a book study, we guarantee the discussion will be lively. As a personal self-help guide, we believe that you'll be challenged and stimulated to grow. Either way, the roadmap is ready.

Will you accompany us on the journey?

CHAPTER 3

Understanding the Drama Triangle

In the classic Star Wars movies, *The Dark Side* was the metaphor for the part within each of us that has the potential to bring harm to ourselves or others, especially those who are closest to us. Darth Vader was Princess Leia's father. The dark side is most certainly not your best self. It shows up when you travel down the wrong path, ending up with a distortion of your true character. Darth Vader ultimately acted within his true character by saving Luke Skywalker, and we will take a closer look at this emergence of one's "best self" later in the book. First, we will focus on the dark side of human behavior and interaction. After all, it's the suffering caused by this dark side of us that motivates us to do better.

Like Darth Vader, each of us shows the world our dark side behaviors, behaviors that are not in line with our best selves. We have all done things that brought harm to ourselves or someone in our lives. What does it look like when we show our dark side? As Darth Vader did, we cover up our best selves with a mask, a false role. Occasionally, when I (Jeff) am driving to work and get cut off by an inconsiderate motorist, I flip him the bird. I have just played a role, in this case, the role of an aggressive, entitled guy. The role into which I slipped temporarily is

not my true, best self. Nonetheless, I am capable of going there in an instant, even without conscious awareness.

First we will illuminate dynamics of the dark side and then the positive alternatives that represent our best selves. This will set the stage for our journey of recognizing drama, choosing healthier alternatives, and inviting others to join us.

The Drama Triangle

In 1968, Dr. Steven Karpman discovered and named the Drama Triangle to describe unhealthy roles that people play when they are in distress. For this work, he was awarded in 1972 the Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award by the International Transactional Analysis Association. Still today, the Drama Triangle remains one of the most elegant and practical models to understand dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics. It is the core, centering framework from which we begin nearly all our client work. We will use Karpman's Drama Triangle to begin our exploration of how things can go wrong in relationships, and then map a course and offer process-based tools to help get things back on track for you and the relationships in which you work and live.

The Drama Triangle is a model of how people relate to one another in distress, dysfunction, and conflict. We define distress as patterns of behavior we show when we are attempting to get some critical need met in unhealthy ways, usually through seeking negative attention. Drama is how humans negatively seek attention, meaning, and purpose when under the influence of distress. Drama most often involves predictable, habitual roles and accompanying behaviors. Our formal definition goes like this:

Drama is the pattern of habitual and predictable roles that cover up our best selves, justified by myths, which move us further away from solutions, healthy relationships, and effectiveness.

Understanding the Drama Triangle

In distress, we slip into roles virtually without awareness, behave in predictable ways that cover up our best selves, and believe myths about ourselves and others that it's OK to act this way. The result is a distorted sense of reality and responsibility to others for our behavior.

Eventually Darth Vader convinced himself he was doing the right and best thing. When I flipped off that driver I felt justified that it was what I needed to do and that the other driver deserved it.

It didn't help. I only became more upset and the other driver went on about his day. Did I feel justified? Yes. Did I cover up my best self? Definitely.

All of us have been in distress and have committed crimes of Drama. The good news is that this book will show you how to detect and navigate away from Drama in your life and negotiate the Darth Vaders in your world.

The Drama Triangle shown in Figure 1 is comprised of three roles: Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim. By definition, a person in the Drama Triangle is in distress and occupies at least one of these roles, sometimes switching to another as the severity of distress increases.¹

A Persecutor attacks verbally and/or blames; a Rescuer overdoes for someone else, reinforcing over-dependency; a Victim is over-adaptive or feels hurt when attacked or blamed. Let's take a look at each role in detail, exploring how they co-exist to perpetuate drama and dysfunction.

¹ Karpman defines that drama is occurring once a person switches roles on the Drama Triangle. This is what causes unpredictability, second-guessing, and instability in relationships, and keeps the drama going. Transactional Analysis theory identifies the numerous games people play in the Drama Triangle, along with how people switch on each other.

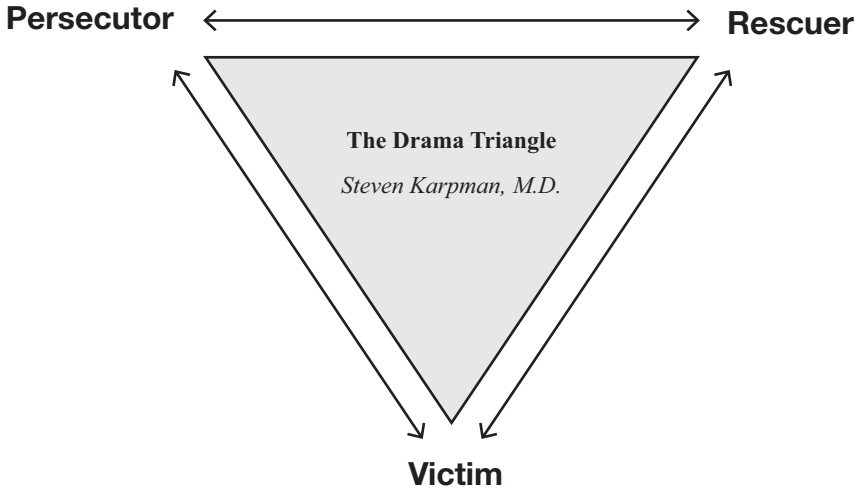


Figure 1: The Drama Triangle; Steven Karpman, M.D. (1968).

The Persecutor

Let's begin with the Persecutor. In this role we verbally attack or blame others, taking the position that "I'm OK, you are NOT OK." It may sound something like this:

"Can't you do anything right?"

"What is wrong with you!?"

"You always screw up!"

"What do we pay you for?"

"Are you ever going to learn?"

"You are so stupid."

"You'll never amount to anything!"

"It's your fault."

"If it weren't for you..."

"I didn't do it."

"You made me do it."

Understanding the Drama Triangle

When we adopt the Persecutor role, we lash out at others with our light saber, with the intention of harming them and righteously prevailing, thereby reinforcing our belief that we are OK and they are not. In the Persecutor role, we believe the illusion that the other person deserves what's coming to them and that we are justified in attacking or blaming. WOW! This role certainly has the potential to harm relationships.

I (Jeff) had a supervisor at one time in my life who was chronically in distress and frequently played the role of Persecutor. Whenever I brought him my written reports, he would get his red pen busy and tear them apart. No, I wasn't in grade school, I was in my thirties with a master's degree and a state license to practice social work. "This is not good enough," he would say dismissively. "Your writing is sub par." He offered no helpful feedback and made no comments about positive aspects of my work. I soon stopped taking my work to him and found other avenues for constructive feedback and self-improvement.

A parent in the Persecutor role might look at her child's report card, focus on the lowest grade, and critically attack with comments such as, "You really disappointed us by not getting better grades." All the while, she believes the illusion that focusing on what's wrong, criticizing, and inviting the child to feel guilty is the only way to improve performance, and that she is doing this because she know what's best.

A husband playing the Persecutor role might critically attack his wife, saying, "You could fit a lot more dishes in the dishwasher. What's wrong with you?"

The child in the Persecutor role may blame others by saying "It's not my fault I got kicked out of class. Johnny dared me to throw that spit wad." A friend in the Persecutor role might go on the attack by saying, "You should have called me and told me about the party last night. It's your fault I didn't make it."

An organization operating in the Persecutor role might institute policies that threaten employees to perform, believing that fear and guilt are the best motivators. A supervisor in such an organization might say

BEYOND DRAMA

things such as “You left me no choice but to fire you,” or “If it weren’t for your behavior, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Each position in the Drama Triangle needs fuel to function, much like the pistons in an engine. Drama is fueled by a distorted sense of reality and responsibility. When this illusion becomes habitual and is used to justify behavior, it is called a *Myth*. Taibi Kahler, a developmental psychologist, has made brilliant contributions to the understanding of Drama in relationships through his Process Communication Model® (PCM). Among his many contributions to the understanding of personality, communication, and distress dynamics, Kahler identified four myths that fuel drama and distress.² The fuel for the Persecutor is the myth “I believe I can make you feel bad emotionally.” This myth justifies the belief that if I attack you, you will feel bad and do what I want. Or, if I blame you, you will feel bad and take over responsibility for me.

See if you can detect the myth “I believe I can make you feel bad emotionally” in the following statements:

“You really disappointed us by not getting better grades.”

“You embarrassed me by hurting your mother’s feelings that way in public.”

“Tell him that. It will make him mad.”

“Make her jealous.”

“I’ll never trust a man (woman) again and have them hurt me like that.”

²Taibi Kahler postulates that when we are in distress and playing a role in the Drama Triangle, we are believing one or more of Four Myths (Kahler 2008, Process Therapy Model), and he has identified the “offering” role and the “targeted” role in the other person to complete the symbiotic miscommunication.

Understanding the Drama Triangle

Although beyond the scope of this book, Kahler’s research also found significant correlations between personality type and the roles and behaviors on the Drama Triangle.³

Table 1 outlines characteristic behaviors and the myth accompanying the Persecutor role.

Persecutor Behaviors	Myth
Blaming, negatively complaining, sarcastic, manipulative, disregard for rules, critical, over-controlling, accusatory, suspicious, self-righteous, judgmental	"I can make you feel bad emotionally."

Table 1: Characteristics of the Persecutor Role

The Victim

In the Drama Triangle, Victims play the “poor me” card, overadapting, believing that things never turn out in their favor and that they don’t deserve to get what they want most. They tolerate and often accept the behavior of the Persecutor. This is the person who frequently puts himself down, talks about how bad off she has it, or gives off the impression that he is worthless. The Victim is a Persecutor’s dream come true!

People playing the Victim role rarely recognize that they choose to be helpless — that they choose not to advocate or initiate for themselves.

³ Taibi Kahler in his 2008 book, *Process Therapy Model*, explains his research correlating personality with specific, predictable distress behaviors, psychological issues and needs behind these behaviors, how they relate to the roles on the Drama Triangle, as well as specific interventions to invite a person out of distress and stop playing the role.

BEYOND DRAMA

Common statements from a Victim include:

“It is too hard.”

“I am never good enough.”

“I always get it wrong.”

“I am just no good.”

“You are always right.”

“If it wasn’t for you, I’d be sunk.”

“You always make me feel so good.”

Victims play out this role as an invitation for others to rescue (save) or persecute (attack and blame) them. In the workplace we see this as the person who feels singled out for criticism, is always tired, always has home issues causing her trouble, and is rarely happy about her life. The bumper sticker, “Life’s a bitch, then you die,” rings true for people in the Victim role. It’s easy to feel sorry for the Victim and want to either come to his rescue or criticize him for his plight. It might be counterintuitive, even heretical, to suggest that the Victim is responsible for his/her situation.

The Victim role is fueled by two myths; *“I believe you can make me feel bad emotionally,”* and *“I believe you can make me feel good emotionally.”* Both myths imply that a third person or situation is in charge of their feelings, and lead Victims to give power over their “OK-ness” to others. They become emotional puppets, allowing other players in the Drama Triangle to pull their strings. Characteristic behaviors and myths associated with the Victim role are shown in Table 2.

Understanding the Drama Triangle

Victim Behaviors	Myth
Suffering passively, complaining without doing anything, being self-critical, withdrawing, losing assertiveness, having weak boundaries, engaging in wishful thinking, being needy	"You can make me feel good emotionally." "You can make me feel bad emotionally."

Table 2: Characteristics of the Victim

The Rescuer

The third position on the Drama Triangle is the Rescuer. Persons playing this role are often seen as meddlers, inserting themselves in others' business. They especially gain a sense of satisfaction when they can intervene between Persecutors and Victims, hoping to save the day by fixing others' problems.

When you play a Rescuer role, you enable others to become dependent on you. You involve yourself with others in ways that don't encourage them to become competent, confident, and independent. You seem to get involved in everyone's problems except your own. This is the parent who takes the homework to school when the child leaves it at home; the employee who takes on additional work to cover for her coworker who is not pulling his weight; the friend who is forever giving advice even when it's not asked for.

While being rescued by others might feel good at first, it eventually leads to feelings of resentment. Strangely, Rescuers are often welcomed with open arms because of how convenient and easy it is to let them think and do for us. A parent can slip into this role easily with children and overfunction for them with comments such as, "I see you did not wear a coat, so I packed one for you." A co-worker can do the same with comments such as, "You didn't make it to the meeting so I looked up your report and handed it in for you." The Rescuer has a very difficult

time tolerating the struggles of others who are experiencing natural consequences of their behavior. Rather than support and empower, they are tempted to give unsolicited advice or take over.

Common statements from a Rescuer include:

“Maybe you should try this.”

“Don’t you think this is a better option?”

“Shouldn’t we stay in for dinner tonight?”

“Are you really going to wear that to school?”

“Why don’t you try this...”

“I went ahead and proof-read that memo for you.”

Unfortunately, rescuing prevents growth and learning. Experiencing the consequences of not having a coat on a cold day, being hungry because a meal was skipped, or figuring out one’s own solution can be positive learning experiences. We believe that much of the entitled and egocentric behavior in younger generations comes from being rescued by their Baby Boomer parents.⁴

In the work environment Rescuers can easily become overworked, tired, and burned out because they cannot tolerate the discomfort of letting their peers experience negative consequences. It is common to hear a co-worker in the Rescuer role say, “If I don’t pick up the slack, they will get into trouble,” or a supervisor say, “I’ll call her at home to remind her about the deadline.”

The Rescuer has a very difficult time coping with his own and others’ negative emotions when natural consequences occur. A parent of one of my (Jeff’s) patients once told me that he did not want his son to experience failure. What? Failure and consequences are growth

⁴ For more on generational differences, we invite you to visit next-element.com, and search “generational differences.”

Understanding the Drama Triangle

opportunities that are often short-circuited by Rescuers. I (Jeff) worked at a residential home for boys who were in foster care and there was a rule made by a supervisor in the Rescuer role that the boys could not go outside in the winter without coats on. Here is what the boys figured out; refuse to wear a coat and I don't have to go to school. Here is what they did not learn; when my body is cold and there is a resource to help with this pain (a coat), I can then use the resources that are at my disposal and even ask for help. This story is not about the coat. It is about a rescuer who attempts to prevent pain for others and does not let them learn and grow. The boys were now focused on getting out of school rather than figuring out how to keep warm and attend school. Before long we had a facility full of boys who figured out how to get out of school. Just forget your coat!

I (Nate) had a supervisor who would frequently send advance notices to other members of our team if she thought I was going to bring up a potentially conflictual topic so as to “grease the skids” for me. I never asked her to do that. I was capable of dealing with transparent communication and potential conflict between all members of management team. The implicit invitation in her behavior was for me to feel grateful for her unsolicited “help” and play the role of Victim.

If you are a therapist, coach, facilitator or leader, what do you do when the person you are with begins to cry. Do you grab a tissue and give it to them? This is rescuing. When I (Nate) stopped handing my patients tissues and started allowing them to reach for the box, I saw noticeable changes in their self-confidence.

Supervisors trapped in the role of Rescuer cannot hold people accountable by leaving well enough alone. They choose to give an employee “one more chance” or save them from themselves. Often what happens instead is that the Rescuer will give chance after chance while picking up the slack themselves because they choose to avoid helping that person be accountable. The end result — ethical violations, broken policies, side conversations, cover-ups, and secrets.

BEYOND DRAMA

One of the most difficult challenges for the Rescuer is being assertive. They choose *not* to say,

“I will support you, but I won’t do it for you.”

“I am not going to bring your homework to school.”

“Will you go talk to him directly?”

“You are fired for not meeting your responsibilities.”

What fuels the Rescuer’s behavior? The myth behind their role is, “I believe I can make you feel good emotionally.” The distorted rationale is that if I do or think for you, you will feel good, do what I want, and I can avoid negative feelings myself.” The distorted reasoning fueled by this myth might sound like this:

“If I take your homework to school, then you will feel good and not get in trouble.”

“If I give you my coat then you will feel good and not be cold.”

“If I do your work, the boss will feel good and you won’t get fired. Then you will feel good too.”

“If I give you advice, then I can make you successful and you will feel good.”

“If I don’t fire you or hold you accountable, I can make you feel good and maybe you will perform better.”

Another manifestation of this myth is the attempt to protect someone from difficult feelings. Statements like, “It’s going to be ok,” “You are alright” or “It will be fine, it’s not that big a deal,” all suggest that I believe I can manage your feelings, therefore getting you to comply with my expectations, avoid the real issue, or avoid my own feelings. Ultimately, the Rescuer inhibits others from learning, growing, tolerating their own difficult emotions, and becoming responsible

Understanding the Drama Triangle

and independent. Their behaviors work against what it means to be emotionally intelligent.

Table 3 shows Rescuer behaviors and the accompanying myth.

Rescuer Behaviors	Myth
Giving unsolicited advice, covering for others, trying to “make it OK,” doing others’ job for them, meddling	“I can make you feel good emotionally.”

Table 3: Characteristics of the Rescuer

The Persecutor, Victim, and Rescuer fit together in a dirty dance of drama, avoiding meaningful and honest conversation, creating unhealthy alliances, supporting secrecy, and diverting precious energy away from the most important things. In the next chapter we’ll explore how this dance results in a self-fulfilling prophecy for everyone involved and how everyone loses in the process.