The Drama Triangle
Stephen Karpman, 1968

1. **The Victim**: The Victim’s stance is “Poor me!” The Victim feels victimized, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless, ashamed, and seems unable to make decisions, solve problems, take pleasure in life, or achieve insight. The Victim will seek out a Villian to blame and also a Hero who will save the day (but also perpetuate the Victim’s feelings of helplessness). The Victim typically sees themselves as the “innocent victim”, having no fault in the situation/relationship.

2. **The Rescuer** (aka, **The Hero**): The Rescuer’s line is “Let me save you!” A classic enabler, the Rescuer feels guilty if they don’t go to the rescue. Yet their rescuing has negative effects: It keeps the Victim dependent and gives the Victim permission to fail.

3. **The Persecutor** (a.k.a. **The Villain**): The Persecutor insists, “This is your own fault!” The Persecutor is controlling, blaming, critical, oppressive, angry, authoritative, rigid, and superior. Often, a Victim who is sick of being victimized decides to “counterattack”, becoming a Villain to the other party.

Application:

- **In what situations you see yourself playing the Victim?** Who do you see as the Villain in this situation? Who are you expecting to be your Hero?
- **How might you alternate among roles even within that same situation / challenge?**
The Empowerment Dynamic

David Emerald, 2009

1. **Creator** – *Victims* are encouraged to take responsibility for choosing their response to life challenges. They should focus on resolving "dynamic tension" (the difference between current reality and the envisioned goal or outcome) by taking incremental steps toward the outcomes he or she is trying to achieve, whether in relationships or in life.

   - **Freedom**: The Creator chooses freedom to make choices, set healthy boundaries, ask for healthy assistance (but not rescue), and gives others the *freedom to do the same*.
   - **Requests**: The Creator lets go of “idealistic (and unrealistic) expectations”, but makes reasonable, realistic requests of others.
   - **Boundaries**: The Creator develops and sustains healthy boundaries – not "limitless codependence", nor “razor wire fences”. Healthy, reasonable, protective boundaries.
   - **Consequences**: The Creator assesses and accepts the consequences of their choices and does not blame others or expect to get everything with no cost.

2. **Challenger** – A *Victim* is encouraged to see a persecutor as a *challenge* that forces the creator to clarify their needs, and focus on their learning and growth. A *Persecutor* can shift away from anger and blaming, while maintaining accountability, challenging assumptions, maintaining boundaries and encouraging action.

3. **Coach** – A *Rescuer* can shift to become a Coach by to asking questions that are intended to help the individual make informed choices. The key difference between a Rescuer and a Coach is that the Coach sees the Creator as accountable and capable of making choices, solving his or her own problems, and facing the consequences of those choices. A Rescuer “saves” a Victim from short-term consequences, which prevents growth and learning. A Coach asks questions that enable the creator to see the possibilities for positive action, while experiencing the consequences of their choices to act or not to act.
Making Reasonable Requests

+10 – Ideal – “I wish you would ….. (be perfect!)”
  - As great as it would be, this is unrealistic and unreasonable

+2 – Reasonable Request – “Would you be willing to …..?”
  - “If this request can’t be met, I have a healthy boundary in place; I can accept it.”

0 – Minimal Acceptable Behavior – “I can live with this, but not less”
  - “If this can’t be met, I need to make a change in the boundaries of our relationship.”

-1 – Unacceptable Behavior – “I need to establish a firm, healthy boundary.”
  - “There are consequences for this behavior.”

-2 – Unacceptable Relationship – “I can’t be in relationship with you.”

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Boundaryless Swamp</th>
<th>Healthy Boundaries</th>
<th>The Razor Wire Fence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No / weak boundaries</td>
<td>Realistic, well-informed, flexible boundaries; can move in either direction in response to relationship</td>
<td>Extreme, rigid, demanding boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You’re out of control!”</td>
<td>I am in control of my SELF – I will Not try to control Others.</td>
<td>“You’re Dead to Me!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You always do this. You’ll never change.”</td>
<td>“You are free to choose your actions, as am I. There are consequences to our choices…”</td>
<td>“You have to stop doing that!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It’s OK. I don’t mind. I’m fine.”</td>
<td>“I am angry about that, but I will not act out of anger. I will act in alignment with my values.”</td>
<td>“You Make Me SO ANGRY!!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t want to talk about it.”</td>
<td>“We need to discuss this. I’d like to hear your side, and I need you to hear mine.”</td>
<td>“I’m going to tell you!!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I don’t want to risk the relationship.”</td>
<td>“I will not compromise my core values.”</td>
<td>“I will never speak to you again as long as I live.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I don’t want to offend them or lose the relationship.”</td>
<td>“I need to maintain a healthy boundary, or, I will choose to not be in this relationship.”</td>
<td>“They’re Dead to Me.”</td>
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Application:

- *In situations where you see yourself playing the Victim, how can you shift to become the Creator?* How can you shift your perception of the Villain? How can you shift your expectations of a Hero?

- In what situations do you play the Hero? Who are you trying to rescue? How can you shift to become a Coach instead?

- In what situations do you play the Villain? Who are you ‘persecuting’ others? How can you shift to be a calm-yet-firm Challenger?