



...newsletter

April 2, 2008

## RESCUE ME

**Do you ever feel that someone is playing games with you or that you are being invited to take part in a game?**

In Transactional Analysis (TA) there is an interesting model that was identified by Stephen Karpman called the "drama triangle". I often invite clients to explore this concept and to notice if any of the identified parts seem familiar to them.

In order to play a game you have to step onto the triangle at one of the three points. At each point a role is picked up and played out. The three roles are **Victim**, **Persecutor** and **Rescuer**.



Ask yourself these questions:

**Do I have a sense that any of the above roles seem familiar to me?** and

**Do I feel that I am quite often the victim or perhaps the rescuer, in the work situation or at home?**

In previous newsletters we have explored the "**Victim**" role quite well, so today I would like to have a look at the "**Rescuer**".

### Are you a Rescuer?

To **Rescue** is to do tasks for someone else that the person is capable of doing for themselves. In doing these tasks you are "**discounting or putting down**" that person or yourself in the process. I am not talking about rescuing with a small 'r', which means doing something for someone else that they are not capable of doing for themselves. Likewise, I have no objection to doing something happily and joyfully for someone else because I have the free time and energy to do so, even though this person is capable of doing the task for himself. No one is being discounted (put down) here provided (a) I am not seriously changing my own plans to do this and then feeling a victim because of the hassle of it, or (b) I am not communicating the message "you're incapable, so I'll do it for you". It is important to realise that we are being destructive when we Rescuer even though our intention is to be positive and to help.

**Rescuing is a pervasive problem in our society** - both in the family and the work contexts. In the family it starts when mum and dad complete acts with which their children are having trouble; or speak for them; or make decisions for them; or tell them what to do, when the children are capable, with a little encouragement, of working through all of those things for themselves. If parents continue this behaviour on a regular basis children very rapidly get the message that mum and dad "**don't think that they are capable**". Another message might be "**don't grow up**". Parental Rescuers regularly behave in this fashion in order to meet a need of their own rather than meet a need of the child's. They usually don't want their children to grow up for fear that they will no longer be needed. They

might even go so far as to encourage needs in the children that only they, the parents, can meet. This kind of pattern can also manifest when parents have a poor relationship themselves. The child, even though he or she is fully grown up, becomes the focus of attention for the parent thus fulfilling an empty space in, and helping to distract from, the parent's own dysfunctional relationship.

### **Do you know parents who are constantly Rescuing their children?**

Do you know parents who anguish over making sure their children get up for school, dress properly and brush their hair? If the child is going to be late do they warm up the car for him; and if he is late do they talk to the teacher for him? Of course, they are preparing their child for the real world, aren't they? When that child gets a job there is no question that when he is late the company will send out a warm car for him, and if he makes a mistake there will be someone there to make excuses for him! It is not the real world, yet that can be what we are teaching. What about the child who says he will do something for a neighbour and then doesn't do it? The child ought to face the consequences of the neighbour's unhappiness without the parent Rescuing him. Remember, as an adult, that child, if he agrees to do something for his boss and doesn't do it, could lose his job. I am a parent and I know how parents want to protect their children from some of the pain that they experienced. However, we sometimes grow through our pain and we grow and learn through trial and error.

### **Rescuing takes many forms**

Rescuing may take the form of making excuses for a person or not confronting someone because you think it may hurt his or her feelings. Rescuing runs rampant in many organisations. If someone agrees to do something and then doesn't do it, we Rescue that person by saying nothing, and then feel irritated about it because we begin to feel like a victim. That feeling is a sure sign that you are involved in a game, and you have become the victim. Step off the triangle by asking a better quality of question and inviting the other person to think for himself.

Very useful questions to ask in those circumstances are:

**"What is your outcome?"** and

**"How can I support you in getting that outcome?"**

People will go to their managers/supervisors and ask the same type of questions repeatedly. They do not think for themselves. The managers/supervisors Rescue their employees by repeatedly giving the same instructions. Additionally, supervisors continually make decisions for people that they are perfectly capable of deciding for themselves. I often see employees Rescue their own managers by making excuses for them, covering for them, doing things for them that managers really ought to do for themselves. And so the game goes on and on, job efficiency is down and people at all levels feel resentful and angry. Getting it wrong or making mistakes can be a great thing – if we learn from it. People who reach the top of the tree get there as a result of learning from their mistakes and doing something different. They don't get there by being perfect, never taking a risk and never thinking for themselves.

### **Rescuing can actually be a whole style of life**

Most Rescuers that I have met, including myself, had one or more parent who were Rescuers. The parent's life revolved around taking care of others. This parent decided that their job was to think for everyone in the family, take up the responsibilities of everyone in the family and to mind read and second guess what might or might not be the wants and needs of the various members of the family. A child observes this and perceives, "well, that's the way I'm supposed to be, it is my **duty** to take care of other people". As this child grows up he/she decides that his/her needs and wants **don't count**. That young adult may then, understandably, gravitate towards a mate who agrees that Rescuers' wants and needs **don't count** and that **his/her** wants and needs are the only ones that **do matter**. Does this sound familiar in your life?

## **Awareness is everything**

Just because children receive strong negative messages of many kinds doesn't mean they will decide to follow those patterns. They may decide that their own needs and wants and other peoples' needs and wants are **both** important.

**Isn't it wonderful that once we are aware we can change these childhood perceptions at any time?**

**Remember – if you have a tendency to Rescue it takes strength to decline an invitation to Rescue. You have that strength.**

Sincerely,

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