

Peaceful Life Radio

Show Transcript

The Dreaded Drama Triangle: Understanding Conflict and Creating a Peaceful Life

David Lowry: 0:36

Hello, everyone. This is David Lowry, and alongside me is my good friend Don Drew. Don, let's tell our listeners about our show today.

Don Drew: 0:44

You bet, David. Today, we're diving into a powerful concept called the Dreaded Drama Triangle. Imagine a stage with three roles. First, the victim feels helpless and blames others for their problems. Second, a persecutor points fingers and criticizes others. And third, a rescuer who tries to save others often enables unhealthy behavior. This triangle represents unhealthy dynamics that can trap individuals and fuel conflict.

David Lowry: 1:10

But wait, there's good news: we can break free from those roles and transform into a creator who takes responsibility. A challenger who offers support and encouragement or a coach who guides and empowers others to develop their skills and navigate challenges.

Don Drew: 1:26

This all sounds great, David. I can't wait to get started, but first I want to take a second and ask our listeners to like, download and subscribe to our Peaceful Life Radio Podcast. It only takes a minute, and it will help us out a lot.

David Lowry: 1:37

Well, Don, I want to describe something for you. Imagine a stage with lights above it. Okay, got it. This stage is triangular-shaped.

Don Drew: 1:48

Okay.

David Lowry: 1:49

Now, Don, you and I love the spotlight because we do this podcast, right? But is this the stage you want to be on?

Don Drew: 1:57

I think I know where you're going with this. And no, I definitely don't. It's filled with drama.

David Lowry: 2:02

Yes, we're talking about a stage you don't want to be on. It is called the Dreaded Drama, and say it with me together, Triangle. Right, the Dreaded Drama Triangle. And this is the best definition of conflict and helps you to understand what conflict all about that is I've ever seen. Honestly, it's just brilliant. I've taught communication studies and conflict resolution courses, and I've seen tons and tons of really complicated stuff. Done mediation. But this right here, if you grasp what we're going to talk about today, you're going to know, oh yeah, I totally see where I'm messing up, where others are messing up. Suddenly, the world opens the clouds' part and the great life. So, Don, there's two kinds of drama. The drama that leads to more drama and drama that can lead to a new mindset.

Don Drew: 2:57

Yeah, what we're looking at today, as David said, is the Dreaded Drama Triangle and we can thank psychologist Dr. Steven Cartman for coining the term in the 1960s to describe the interplay of three dysfunctional roles what he called the victim, the persecutor, and the rescuer.

David Lowry: 3:13

Victim, persecutor, and rescuer. See, you're already learning something today. If you learn these three terms. You are going to be able to understand the Dreaded Drama Triangle. And when you understand the Dreaded Drama Triangle, suddenly you have a map that shows you, okay, oh, I see what I'm doing. I've got to get off of this triangle. What's going on here? Without further ado, let's talk about this Drama Triangle, and let's talk about the victim. Think of the victim, if you have a triangle that's pointed straight down in a point, the victim is at the bottom, like a knife sticking in their chest. Right? This triangle is embedded to them, because all victims believe that they are being victimized, right? If you hear anybody complaining, whining, looking for sympathy, you're probably dealing with a victim. Victims are people who believe that the world has turned against them, their fortunes have been turned against them, and nothing can be done. Woe is me; nothing can be done because I've been victimized. And it's true, Don, that sometimes people do face horrible things in their lives. What is the difference, Don, between being a victim And a victimhood?

Don Drew: 4:31

At times we can find ourselves being victims in the sense that we are being put upon by others and so on. We can feel like we're victims, but victimhood is actually a persona that we take on. It's how we see ourselves as being victimized.

David Lowry: 4:48

It's sort of a life position. Yeah. And you'll meet some people who think the reason I can't do something is because this thing happened to me, or this horrible circumstance happened to me. I want to tell you a story, and this is a true story of a friend of mine who was a psychologist, but also worked in rehabilitation work with people who'd had horrible accidents. So, they would find them a new job. I forget the exact name of this type of psychology work. One person lost a hand in a terrible accident and this person says, I am totally disabled. I can't do anything. I've lost my hand. And then the psychologist described another person several years later they dealt with who had lost a hand-- and it was their dominant hand and they said, What am I going to do? What can you do for me, doc? I obviously have a lot of life left to live. I want to work. He did not declare that he was totally disabled. He did have disability because of the loss of the hand, but he went forward and made a great career with a prosthetic and doing the best that he could. So, there's the difference between victim, being a victim and victimhood.

Don Drew: 5:54

Yeah, it's really a victim mentality. It's an acquired personality trait in which we tend to recognize ourselves as victims of negative actions or others or a situation such as this the, you describe the individual that's lost their hand, and we behave as this were the case in the face of all kinds of contrary evidence to those circumstances.

David Lowry: 6:12

So, Don, I'm going to play a game with you. This is not going to be a very rewarding game for you or our listeners, but it illustrates what a victim is truly like.

Don Drew: 6:23

So, for our listeners, when David says he wants to play a game, what that means is I don't have any idea what's coming next. So here we go.

David Lowry: 6:29

Here we go. We're going to play the why don't you? Yes, but game. Alright, Don. I need to borrow 1, 000. Can I have 1, 000? Have

Don Drew: 6:41

you thought about going to the bank?

David Lowry: 6:43

Don, of course I have money in the bank to do this, but it's in a CD and I don't want to cash my CD, so come on, Don, give me a thousand bucks.

Don Drew: 6:53

Again, I can do that. I don't have a lot of money myself, but is it possible that perhaps you could sell something you have that you don't need anymore?

David Lowry: 7:02

Don, I am a very Zen person. Everything I have is absolutely vital and necessary for my life. There's no way I could just sell stuff.

Don Drew: 7:11

Okay, well, yeah, I think I'm out of ideas.

David Lowry: 7:14

That's what victims do to people. Help. I need help. So, you'll say, well, have you thought about getting a job? Oh, I can't get a side hustle. Whatever you suggest, they can't do. That's victimhood, and you're never going to win with a victim because they are stuck in that mindset. But there is a way out, Don, and that is what we call the creative role.

Don Drew: 7:36

Okay, tell us about that.

David Lowry: 7:37

We're talking to people who want to live a peaceful life. If you catch yourself making excuses, whining, complaining, and things like this, you've got to remember your only way out of that is to become creative. And you say, okay, I need a thousand dollars. And Don, there really are a lot of creative ways to make a thousand dollars. Tons of people go on Facebook Marketplace all the time and do it. They sell their stuff, they get something and sell somebody else's stuff and take a little commission for it. There are so many ways. Don one of my friends when he found himself on the down and outs, he got a bucket, some Windex, and a sponge, and he started knocking doors, cleaning windows. And he made his thousand bucks. My kid, when he was a poor college boy living in Washington, D. C., got a snow shovel and started shoveling snow off the sidewalks to earn his thousand bucks. There are all kinds of ways you can earn a thousand dollars. But the point is, whatever when you feel victimized There's something that can be done, provided you're willing to move from being a victim to being creative.

Don Drew: 8:37

Yeah. One of the effects of becoming a victim is we get a real problem orientation, and we get stuck being focused on and trying to solve whatever the problem of the day is. And there's always problems. Creators actually become creators because they can lift their head up and look beyond the present situation and identify what kind of outcome they want to have.

David Lowry: 8:58

Exactly. Well, the next person on the dreaded drama triangle we want to talk about is the persecutor. These are the villains. I always think the villains are the people who tie people up on the railroad tracks and the train is bearing down on you. Persecutors are bullies, really. They are, well, let's just put it this way. A persecutor is going to basically say, you're the reason why all this trouble has befallen you. Yes you need a thousand dollars, that's because you're a spend thrift. Or you need a thousand dollars, well, you

should have thought about that before you bought the car. Or, in other words they are not going to let you have any peace or joy in your life because they're always blaming you, shaming you, accusing you, guilting you. They have no sympathy. In fact, they seem to enjoy rubbing your situation in your face. Have you ever met a person who's got a little bit of that persecutor in them?

Don Drew: 9:53

Oh, yeah. People who are persecutors often choose the role of persecutor because of fear. If they don't seize control of others, then things won't work out the way they want them to. So, it's a little bit about control and it's a lot about taking advantage of others. We can see who a persecutor is pretty easily because they're always mad at somebody or something. They're wanting to control; they're blaming or perhaps shaming. They tend to triangulate problems and things of that nature. And they basically make life miserable for everyone who allows themselves to be a victim.

David Lowry: 10:24

You mentioned a really important word that persecutors do, and it's called triangulation. Let's describe that for our listeners. If you've never heard this term before, you certainly have experienced it. It goes like this. So, I'm mad at person A, but instead of going to person A and working out my differences, I go to Don. And I say, Don, you won't believe what person A is doing, has done to me, or is doing to others. Then Don, because he's my friend, he says person A is really a terrible person. So now I feel really good as a persecutor because I've got an ally. Right. And so, I gang up on person A. And sometimes people like that will go to multiple people. That's persecution right there.

Don Drew: 11:06

Right. So, I think we've got a pretty good idea about what a persecutor is, but how can we transform our thinking about that?

David Lowry: 11:13

We're going to be a challenger instead. Okay, Don, I need a thousand dollars.

Don Drew: 11:18

Wow, David, what's that about?

David Lowry: 11:20

Well, I need to raise it because I got to pay a bill by the end of the month, and if I don't, I'm going to be in arrears, and it's going to ruin my credit,

Don Drew: 11:27

Let's think of some ways and possibilities, maybe we could help get that money.

David Lowry: 11:32

Well, I thought I might be able to do this little side hustle at 7 Eleven. They have some openings over there, and I could earn some money.

Don Drew: 11:41

That's a great idea. I've got a friend that's a manager at 7 Eleven. Let me talk to him and see if I can help you.

David Lowry: 11:46

There's a world of difference right there. Challenging. Hey, you can do that. Yeah, you could do that. That's not going to be hard to do. I don't know how I'm going to do it, Don. And he says sure you can do it. Get a bucket and go door to door, shovel snow. You can get it done. That's what a challenger will do for you. Don, our last one, is going to be the rescuer. And the rescuer on the Dreaded Drama Triangle has this idea that you'll never be able to take care of yourself, so I must step in and do what you cannot do. And it might feel good at first, you might think, oh good, if I'm a victim, somebody's going to get me out of this mess. But, rescuers really don't have in mind, to get you out of your mess. Instead, they keep helping you stay in your mess.

Don Drew: 12:34

Yeah, what they do basically, David, they are sending you the message that you can't get out of something on your own, that you need help. And so, what they become enablers and not helpers. There's a difference between helping and enabling. All of us need helping hand from time to time. Enabling is different. Even though the rescuer or enabler appears to be a helpful person, their desire is born out of the belief that the other person is incapable of caring or doing something for themselves. And so that kind of a role keeps the victim in place and makes the enabler or the rescuer feel good about themselves. I've got a rescuer story. Kids, when they're in the 5th, 6th, 7th grades haven't learned reliability like we want them too just yet. So, my son is taking band. He goes to school, and he forgets his horn and that's not a good thing to do. I don't know if any of you had an angry band director, but their job is to make you never forget that horn again, right?

David Lowry: 13:30

It's instilling you That horn is important, and you will have it here. So, being a former band kid myself, I said Oh, okay. I'll bring it up to you. Is that enabling?

Don Drew: 13:40

Well, if that's all there is to it, probably.

David Lowry: 13:42

Yeah, it's enabling a little bit, but I thought okay, I don't want him to get in trouble, so I'll do it. But guess what happened, Don?

Don Drew: 13:49

What happened?

David Lowry: 13:50

A couple of days later, he

Don Drew: 13:52

Did it again.

David Lowry: 13:53

Did it again. And this time I'm not feeling as charitable, but since Dad is always trying to help the kids. I brought it up there again. Thank you, dad.

Don Drew: 14:04

You're a good man.

David Lowry: 14:05

Good man. Yeah, I'm sure everybody's happy with me bringing that trumpet up there, but guess what happened, Don?

Don Drew: 14:12

It happened a third time! (Laughter) I've had teenagers too. (laughter)

David Lowry: 14:17

No, I didn't bring the trumpet this time. This time it was like, you're on your own kid. And of course, the band director lit into him and guess what happened after that? He never forgot it again. So, I don't know. There are times when we help people out. I believe in helping people out in their time of need. But sometimes It just encourages them to do it again and again and again.

Don Drew: 14:40

So, the cure for being a rescuer is to be transformed into a coach.

David Lowry: 14:45

Yes. Yes. In this case, it was a logical consequence, you know, don't have the horn, you can't play, don't play. The band director wants to know why. The band director does their thing, but there'll be a consequence, right? But other times it may not work quite like that. If you just say, I'm not going to enable you because, you can do this on your own. And here's how we're going to do it. Maybe we're going to coach you on how not to forget your horn. So, a little coaching, right? Here's how I remembered to take my lunch every day. I set out my big lunch box and I put it right in front of the door as I'm heading to my car. There's my lunchbox right there. Did I remember to put anything in

there? Did I, am I taking it to work? It's like I'm not stepping out into the garage because there it is.

Don Drew: 15:38

So, David we've got the three roles down of our dreaded drama triangle, which are victim persecutor and rescuer, and we're talking about transformation, and I think one of the important things to remember is sometimes we put ourselves in this situation, and sometimes it's our observation of the roles others play, and I can give you a great example for victim and persecutor as a professor, I think a lot of my students see themselves in the classroom as a victim and I am in there the one that gives tests and is there to correct them and make sure they're in class. and you know all that kind of stuff. And one of the things that is helpful is if they can understand this transformation that they actually are creators and that they have the ability to manage their classroom experience and how they respond to me and the questions they ask and the things they do and they can own their education and not feel like it's something that I am a persecutor, you know, pushing it on them and then grading on how well they can remember it. And by the same token, it does me good to remind myself that I can be a challenger every day in the classroom arriving and doing my best work and being prepared and so forth and give them the kinds of learning that they need. And not put the emphasis on all the hard stuff.

David Lowry: 16:57

Yeah, exactly. I see that every day. Don and I both are college teachers and we've worked with a lot of students over the years and sometimes we get asked to do things that are enabling. For instance, I can promise you it's already underway-- happens every semester. There's somebody who drops out of sight and doesn't go to class. Right. Then towards the middle to the end of the class, they suddenly realize I'm probably going to fail this thing. And they come into your office, and they want you to basically forgive all the assignments that haven't been done and take off all the absences and things like this. And those are wonderful learning moments right there. There are many ways you can approach working with a student like that doesn't involve you being a persecutor but being a challenger. There are ways you can work with them to be creative but at the same time not be an enabler, right? And there are times when you can coach them and say here's what you need to do. This is a very workable way of understanding conflict. The next time you're having a disagreement with somebody, check yourself. Are you attacking them, are you belittling them? Are you trying to get others to agree with you? You're probably a persecutor. Are you feeling like you're the one who's being attacked, there's nothing you can do, that people are always ganging up on you? You're probably a victim. Are you the person who wears the cape and tries to swoop in and solve everybody's problem and try to smooth over everything and make everything better? Hmm, you could be an enabler. And there's a lot of really well-meaning people who are enabling when really that's not creating a peaceful life for you. All it's doing is making a lot of work for you creating bad habits in other people and it's not solving your, it's not solving your problem. So, the way off of course is to be a creator, to be a challenger, to

be a coach and you'll find your way out of conflict pretty quickly if you do that. Takes a little bit of mindfulness and I've noticed in myself that when I learned this beautiful information, that at first I would think about it after it happened. Then I would think about it as it happened. Now it's more of, I can see it coming. So be gentle with yourself as you put these ideas to work because they really do work.

Don Drew: 19:10

Thank you, David.