



Why So Many are Disengaged at Work

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A recent report from the Gallup polling company is very alarming. According to the Gallup Management Journal's Employee Engagement Index, only 29% of employees feel fully engaged in their work, while 54% report not being engaged, and another 17% are knowingly disengaged. **Figures indicate that no more than 1/3 of employees report that they are passionate about the work they do.**

Working with a wide range of leaders and teams, I see many work-place dynamics that may explain why workers are feeling less passionate about their work. In the public sector, severe budget cuts and anti-government sentiment have taken its toll on many public workers. In the corporate world, work overload is high with constant pressure to increase productivity and efficiencies. Non-profits have experienced more demand for their services and less resources.

I have observed, however, that ineffective relationships in the workplace are the primary reason so many become disengaged at work. In simple terms, workplace "drama" drains our energy, reduces innovation and depletes our passion for our work. These dynamics are cultivated and reinforced by a problem-oriented mindset that focuses *more on what we don't want than what we do want.*

When I ask people to describe what it is like to experience "the drama" they usually report feeling frustrated, reactive, gossipy, blaming, and burned-out and say "I feel like a victim." That is why my husband and I call this mindset the "Victim Orientation." No wonder it is a challenge for individuals to feel fully engaged in such an environment!

These relationships often fall into the Dreaded Drama Triangle (DDT) first described as the drama triangle by Stephen Karpman PhD. The DDT involves three intertwined roles:

1. **Victim.** The central figure in the DDT, a Victim is one who feels powerless or, in this context, has lost a sense of purpose, passion and engagement with their work.
2. **Persecutor.** The Persecutor serves as the cause of the Victim's perceived (or real) powerlessness. The Persecutor may be a person such as a "bad boss," or difficult coworker, or challenging customer, an illness or a circumstance such as an economic downturn. The Persecutor seeks to maintain a "one-up" position through a variety of assertive and/or manipulative means and keep the Victim "one-down."
3. **Rescuer.** The Rescuer is any person or activity (unfortunately addictions often become the Rescuer) that serves to help a Victim relieve the "pain" of Victimhood. Despite

having helpful intentions, the Rescuer reinforces the Victim's powerlessness. This renders the Victim dependent upon the Rescuer for a sense of safety or security.

These three "drama roles" have been played at since the beginning of time. We see them in fairy tales, novels, movies, politics and the nightly news, which is filled with victims, persecutors and rescuers!

There is an alternative to the drama and it requires a completely different mindset. The roles we play in this mindset are healthy, life-giving and energizing. In this mindset the first shift we make is to *focus on what we want rather than what we don't want*. We call this TED* which stands for The Empowerment Dynamic. The three roles in this dynamic serve as an antidote to the toxic roles of the DDT.

1. **Creator.** This is the central role of TED* and is the antidote to the powerless Victim. A Creator cultivates their capacity to create outcomes by adopting a Creator Orientation which greatly increases their ability to choose their response to circumstances (even in the harshest of situations), rather than merely reacting to them. Creators seek and form relationships with other Creators, both to support and to be supported through the other two roles that make up TED*.

2. **Challenger.** A Challenger serves as an antidote to the Persecutor. Some of the Challengers we encounter in life may be a person, condition or circumstance and come into our experience uninvited. Creators are able to embrace the experience of a Challenger as a call to action, learning, and growth.

3. **Coach.** As the antidote to a Rescuer, who reinforces the powerlessness of a Victim, a Coach views others as being inherently creative and resourceful. A Coach sees each person they relate to as a Creator in their own right, and seeks to support others in the process of creating outcomes. A Coach does this by asking questions that help clarify envisioned outcomes, current realities, and possible next steps.

Here are my suggestions to "stop the drama" and begin shifting from the Victim to Creator mindset:

- Practice focusing your attention on what you do want rather than what you don't want. Because human beings are excellent adaptors, it's understandable why it is sometimes easier to focus on problems and threats. The problem focus will keep you in the Victim mentality and promote the drama.
- Move from reacting to choosing your response to life experiences. Slow down and become mindful of choosing what you really want.
- Transform your relationship with Persecutors so that you see them as Challengers. Step up to the plate and accept the challenge of where you need to learn and grow.
- Shift from Rescuer to Coach by seeing others as creative and resourceful. By asking clarifying questions, you will stop doing for others what they can do for themselves

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(which keeps them a Victim) and help them to clarify and take action toward what they want.

We have all experienced working and living in the drama. It's not fun! I believe the unhealthy DDT relationships are a big reason why so many workers are disengaged at work. Practice some of the coaching suggestions that will help you step into the TED* roles. I guarantee you will feel renewed passion for your work and those around you will see that you are engaged.