Transcending The Victim-Rescuer-Persecutor Triangle

The Victim-Rescuer-Persecutor Triangle is a psychological model for explaining specific co-dependent, destructive inter-action patterns, which negatively impact our lives. Each position on this triangle has unique, readily identifiable characteristics. Whenever a person becomes entangled in any one of these positions, they literally keep spinning from one position to another, destroying the opportunity for healthy relationships. The good news is that once a person becomes aware of these positions and chooses to break this cycle, they can transcend the V-R-P Triangle. Resolving these dysfunctional behaviours is one of the main keys for healing ourselves and creating healthy relationships. After describing each position and showing how each position relates to the others, I will describe how to break free of this triangle's destructive patterns.

The Victim - Victims honestly believe they have no power and that nothing positive will ever happen for them. Their focus is on the past and negativity. They spend endless hours talking about their problems, their bad luck and how they have been hurt. They are depressed and wallow in self-pity. Their suffering is their identity. Things are never right and there is never enough. They feel helpless, hopeless, reacting rather than responding in a healthy way to the world. They always need something more before they are willing to take responsibility for their life, to take any action, to change or to heal - more love, more attention, more time or more information. They tend to be confused, living in constant fear of making a mistake or looking foolish. They always have an excuse for inaction. Apathy, depression and anger are typical symptoms. Even when something good starts to happen, they will tell you "I know it won't last" and, as they predicted, it soon ends in failure. After spending time with a victim you feel worn out, depleted and depressed from their negativity. You may feel as if your energy has been drained from you. Regardless of how much time, information, energy or support you provide Victims with, they seldom change. It is important to remember that people only change when they are ready to take full responsibility for all of their thoughts, words, actions and creations - till then, there is little positive momentum!

The Rescuer - Rescuers believe they have all the answers and know the right solutions for others. Although their own lives are often in shambles, they spend hours, days, weeks or even years attempting to change, control and to get love from others. Rescuers frequently wear a false cloak of power and superiority, always appearing to be confident and in control. Rescuers love to take care of and direct the lives of other people. Through controlling and changing others, Rescuers attempt to gain a sense of identity as well as to gain love, attention and respect. They pretend to know more than other people and frequently have an answer for everything, even though they have little, if any, actual knowledge or experience regarding the subject. A Rescuer, on the surface, looks like the "good guy/woman" and is often depicted in movies as the "hero" wearing a white hat and riding a white horse. Rescuers are personified and glorified as saviours or white
knights saving others from distress and evil. Without someone, something or a cause to Rescue, these people are lost and jobless! They don't realize they need to rescue themselves!

The Persecutor - Persecutors blame others for their upsets. Here both Victims and Rescuers, become Persecutors, venting their frustration, anger and resentment at others, blaming others for their negative feelings. Rather than taking personal responsibility and walking away from the person who they accuse of irritating them, they stay locked into the destructive patterns, antagonising and attacking the "source of their frustration." The Victim is angry with the Rescuer, claiming they push too hard, demand too much, bring up pain, pressure them to change, etc." The Rescuer is angry with the Victim for not appreciating, not understanding or not changing fast enough, making comments such as "if only you had taken my advice, if only you would listen, change and do what I say ... etc." Persecutors punish others through destructive actions such as dominating, controlling, nagging, belittling, shaming, blaming and humiliating. A Persecutor needs to disengage, to focus on taking care of themselves and getting their own life in order!

Breaking The Cycle - Simply becoming aware of and understanding these patterns are good first steps. Once we are aware of our patterns we can choose to help ourselves to change, to break free and to step off the triangle. Understanding that most "Professional Victims" really do not want help, nor do they want to change, makes it much easier to avoid getting caught up in their games. They might want your attention, time, love, support, money, energy and nurturing, however few "Professional Victims" are really willing or committed to making the effort and taking the actions required to actually change their circumstances. They are masters at the game! That is where the term "Professional Victim" comes from. Oddly enough, when you reach out to help a "Victim," telling them that they are beautiful, intelligent or fully capable of being happy and achieving love and success, the Victim will often argue with you, telling you all the reasons why they are not, cannot - and why your suggestions will not work. Their constant focus is on their past, their problems, fears and failures. I love Richard Bach's famous quote from his book "Illusions" - "Argue for your limitations and they are yours!" This statement says it all!

Rescuers, people who initially appear to be so caring and self-sacrificing, are often dysfunctional. This is especially true if they are playing the role of Rescuer in an attempt to feel good about themselves, to gain attention, love, feel more powerful or to control others. Oddly enough Rescuers are seldom happy in their own personal life and their relationships are usually in chaos. They never seem to be able to use all their "supposed knowledge" to heal their own lives.

Victims and Rescuers are drawn together to play out their game. They need each other. After their initial joyful honeymoon, a time during which each is able to "Star" in their favourite role, they soon tire of this very demanding and exhausting game. When either person, or both, gets bored with the game and wants to change or stop, or even to heal themselves, they frequently end
up Persecuting each other rather than seeking healthy ways of interacting. Any change can trigger a conflict because the "Game" and the "Rules" have changed. Both the Victim and the Rescuer have a vested interest in keeping this "Dysfunctional Game" going. If they end it and heal, who would they have to play with? Taking personal responsibility and identifying their own innermost wants, needs and desires is not the strong point of any of the positions on the triangle.

Society has programmed us with the dream of being rescued. Books and movies are filled with Victim-Rescuer stories like Cinderella, The White Knight on the White Horse, Superman and Rambo. Some people spend their entire lives waiting for someone or something external, such as the right relationship, marriage or even having a child, believing this will somehow magically fix everything, saving them and providing the perfect solution to all their problems.

**Getting Off The Triangle** - The first step is to ask, "What is my motivation for acting the way I do? Am I consciously acting out of choice and giving freely, or are my actions designed to change, control or get love from others? Do I give and do things freely, with love, or do I have expectations? The minute we expect things in return from people, we are being dysfunctional.

The key to getting off the triangle is to change from external referencing (the unhealthy and dangerous pattern of looking outside of ourselves for answers, solutions, love, our identity and happiness) and to start internal referencing. To accomplish this a person must stop looking outside and be willing to become still, quiet their mind and to go deep inside to get in touch with their authentic self, to receive their answers and solutions. Healthy relationships include honour, respect, sharing and communicating. To accomplish this a person must be willing to energetically stay present, to tell the truth as best they can, to be independent, and to take absolute and total responsibility for every aspect of their life, including their time, happiness and success.

The Victim must stop looking for someone or something outside them to fix them, to give them the answers or to give them the love and support they need. The Rescuer must stop trying to change, control or get love from others. Both must learn how to love, honour, respect and support themselves. Persecution, blaming others, only creates further negativity and never accomplishes anything positive. Each of these unhealed positions leads to even more serious challenges.

To break free, improve your attitude towards change, control, risk and responsibility. Make peace with and welcome change, see life as a grand adventure rather than a prison sentence to be endured. Remain open, spontaneous and curious, like a playful child. Permitting yourself to be imperfect and feel out of control allows you to feel, risk, try new things and go to new places. Breaking free of old patterns allows the opportunity for profound transformation. Eventually,
most people realize that they can never change or control anyone, except themselves. Attempting to manipulate, change, control or to force others to love you is insanity! It never ever works!

A simple, easy formula for learning to connect with yourself, is to STOP, take a few very slow deep breaths, disengage from any trauma/drama, become still and then ask yourself - (1) What am I feeling right now? (2) Ask yourself, where in my body am I feeling it? Take a moment and really feel all of your feelings without judgment. (3) In this moment, what is the single most important thing I can do to take care of myself? What is it that I truly want, need or desire? (4) What positive changes can I make in my life, right now, that would assist me to accomplish this? (5) What positive actions can I take, right now, that would best support my healing process - and allow me to take total responsibility for my life? (6) What positive actions can I take to continue to support myself as I risk, learn, change and grow? (7) What can I do, right now, for myself that would be positive kind, loving, gentle, nurturing and supportive? (8) What goals, dreams and objectives would I like to achieve and in what time frame? (9) What are the positive things in my life that I am grateful for? Make a list every day! (10) Ask, decide and choose - What are the most important actions can I take, right now, to start my life moving in a positive direction? (11) Take positive action and start moving right now. Keep your focus on where you would like to go and who you would like to become - not where you have been!

Graduating to Self-Mastery - Taking Complete Responsibility for Everything You Attract and Experience - To take a quantum leap forward and move into Self-Mastery, imagine yourself gently rising above the apex of the highly emotional, trauma/drama dysfunctional positions on the triangle. From this detached, non-emotional vantage point, allow yourself now to look down and simply observe the games you and others have been playing.

If you are willing, honestly ask yourself, "What part am I playing in all this? In what ways am I still on this triangle? Am I a helpless Victim or am I somehow, consciously or unconsciously, creating this? What is it that I really want, need or desire for myself and from others?" When we move away from feeling powerless and blaming others, to the place of focusing on what it is that we truly want, need and desire, we have the opportunity to take powerful life-affirming positive steps.

One of the ultimate positive steps is to move from believing that we are at "Effect" (the world does things to us and therefore we have no choice or responsibility) to the concept of "Cause" (our thoughts and actions create our reality, hence we are ultimately responsible for everything we experience in life). This shift in perception is so profound that it can literally move a person completely off of the triangle! To achieve Self-Mastery, simply stop what you are thinking and doing, shift your focus to one of taking total responsibility for creating everything that you are experiencing in your life and start asking, "Why am I creating this? How am I creating this? What can I do to change this? And, finally, to ask, how can I take positive action to create something more harmonious, more positive?"