



## The Key to Leading Effectively - Step Outside the Leadership Drama Triangle

Avoid playing the role of a victim, persecutor, or rescuer. Instead, take ownership and make the required changes

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(originally published on [Inc. Magazine](#))

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Times have never been so difficult for leaders. Leaders are doomed to successfully deal with several challenges at the same time. The pandemic, climate change, raising interest rates, high inflation, difficult labor markets, the war in Ukraine, and corresponding supply chain disruptions are tough external challenges leaders are facing. The key to leading teams effectively through this crisis is to step outside the leadership drama triangle.

The drama triangle is a tool usually used in psychology to visualize difficult relationships, especially conflicts. But, in my experience, the logic also applies in leadership. The leadership drama triangle reflects the shifting roles leaders and team members play in times of conflict and crisis. The three roles are the victim, the persecutor (or villain), and the rescuer.

### The Leadership Drama Triangle



If you want to succeed as a leader, you better avoid playing any of these roles. Here is why:

*Don't play the victim:* The victim is not an *actual* victim. Rather, it's someone feeling or acting as if he or she cannot do anything to change the situation. Victims like this role because they do not have to change, they do not have to tackle problems, and they can avoid making tough decisions. You play the victim if you think 'poor me'. 'Poor me' that the external circumstances are so bad.

*Instead, consider the external challenges opportunities to grow:* If you face external challenges, remember the dichotomy of control. The only things you are in complete control of are your judgments, decisions, and actions. Everything else depends, at least to some extent, on external circumstances you cannot influence. Therefore, I suggest you embrace the external challenges as opportunities to grow as a leader. Instead of referring to the bad external circumstances, influence your *internal* circumstances. Make the required changes.

*Don't play the persecutor, or the villain:* Persecutors blame others for the situation they are in. They say things like, 'This is all your fault' and 'He made this decision, not me'. For instance, leaders switch into the persecutor role if they blame their shareholders, their employees, their partners, or any other stakeholder for not having helped, for not living up to promises made, or for not having 'pulled it off'. The beauty of being in the persecutor's position is that leaders can neglect any responsibility and do not have to change themselves. Same as with the victim role.

*Instead, take ownership:* As I have already stressed in my article on leadership debt: if a team or organizations fails, there is no one to blame but the leader. If team members make mistake, don't forget that you have hired them. Don't forget that you have been in charge of leading them. If you want to succeed, take ownership of your situation, your actions, and the results you, your teams, and your organization achieve.

*Don't play the rescuer:* Rescuers demonstrate a 'let me help you' attitude. Victims often look for advice from rescuers, but the role of a rescuer is dissatisfactory. If the rescuer succeeds, the victim remains a victim because he or she was unable to solve his or her problems on his or her own. And if the rescuer fails, both rescuer and victim can switch into the persecutor role and blame each other for having failed. While the intention of being a rescuer who gives advice, makes decisions, and solves problems may be good, doing so can turn you into a bottleneck. The last thing you want in this crisis is team members who are paralyzed and always approach you for advice, decisions, or solutions.

*Instead, empower your team members:* If you have hired strong talent, put them into the right positions, and ensured they embrace teamwork, you should have trust in your team members and their capabilities. You should empower them to find solutions themselves and to make decisions themselves. The next time a team member approaches you and asks for advice, take a deep breath, and think about the leadership drama triangle. Instead of playing the rescuer who gives advice, try to help your team members find the answers to their questions themselves. By this, you empower your team members and educate your organization in the sense that you appreciate employees to take ownership of their tasks, projects, and the results they achieve. They become leaders themselves. They feel empowered to make decisions

themselves. This is the culture and organizational spirit that will help you get through this crisis.

If you want to lead people, groups, and organizations successfully through this crisis, step outside the drama triangle and avoid playing a victim, persecutor, or rescuer. If you are even slightly like the leaders I've been working with throughout the last two decades, you are desperately looking for a leadership system you can follow to become a better leader every day. You'll find this system in my leadership tale '[The Leadership House](#)'.

### **Want to know more?**

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