

## The Deadly Triangle of Relationships

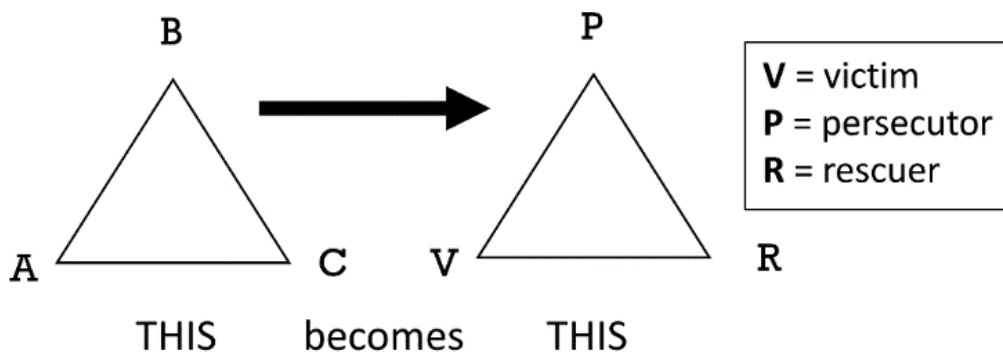
Divisiveness is one of the most destructive forces in teams, families, marriages, friendships, and organizations. When it is avoided, cooperation and unity prevail. When it takes root, all kinds of trouble and negative fruit is produced including the deadliest triangle of all – triangulation.

Let me start with the problem in relationships and how division and triangulation occur, what the goal is in our relationships (regardless of the arena), and a pathway to shape the culture so triangulation is avoided.

### The Problem

I'm A, and you're B and someone else is C. I'm bothered, disagree with, or don't like the way you confronted or challenged me and I feel hurt. Instead of going to B and talking about what just happened, I start to see B as the persecutor and go to C and complains about how B treated me. I say things like "They were mean and abusive and attacked me." It worsens if C says, "You're right! They are an idiot. That's OK. You can tell me how you feel."

A does not go to B to gain greater understanding, clarity or find out what they meant by what they said. Instead, they talk to C, not for support to go and work things out with B but to complain, look for sympathy and gain comfort in their affliction. That my friends is the problem!



And guess what, you now have division not only between A and B but between C and B since C is now on your side. One more challenge is that B now loses the motivation to fix the problem. Henry Cloud says, "Person's who use rescuers for validation seldom look at themselves and change."

The fruit of the VPR triangle is wrecked friendships, seeds of strife and unhealthy gossip. "Overlook an offense and bond a friendship; fasten on to a slight and – good-bye, friend!" "A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends" (Hebrew proverbs).

## The Goal

The goal is to keep is to learn how to deal with relational tension, conflict and misunderstanding in a way that promotes unity, forgiveness, understanding and open dialogue. In situations where there is a safety issue in terms of approaching B, C can look for ways to help A go to B and talk it through – including going with them.

“Forgiveness is the key to action and freedom” (Hannah Arendt). “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong” (Mahatma Gandhi).

In Dave Ramsey’s company, they have a no gossip policy that I think could be applied in organizations and families. The rule is, if you have a problem with someone in the company and you are found talking to someone else who can’t help solve that problem, you are encouraged to go and talk to the person you’re having the problem with and work things out. If you don’t take that approach but keep “talking” about it or reoffend, you’re fired.

## The Pathway

What would it look like to create healthy environments (families, non-profits, businesses) where triangulation was not allowed? Consider these ideas.

- Be aware that the danger exists for all of us.

“You can have no greater sign of a confirmed pride than when you think you are humble enough” (Law).

- Set up rules to avoid the deadly VPR triangle

Be clear, if B offends you, go to them and seek to work it out. If that doesn’t work, get some help. If someone in your life has been offended by you – they’ve grown silent – take the initiative and seek them out. “Is there something between us?”

If you are being drawn in to a triangle with a victim-like person, say “time out” and add, “Are you prepared to go and make things right with B?”

- Grow yourself and others in the three roles

Wisdom for A – refuse to nurse a grudge, hold on to an offense, or gossip  
“Overlook an offense and bond a friendship; fasten on to a slight and – good-bye, friend!”

Wisdom for B – be a good receiver of feedback  
“Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others” (Hebrew proverb).

Wisdom for C – refuse to listen to gossip but develop skills of the supportive friend

Source: Henry Cloud, *The Power of the Other*