



Dealing with Difficult People through Transactional Analysis

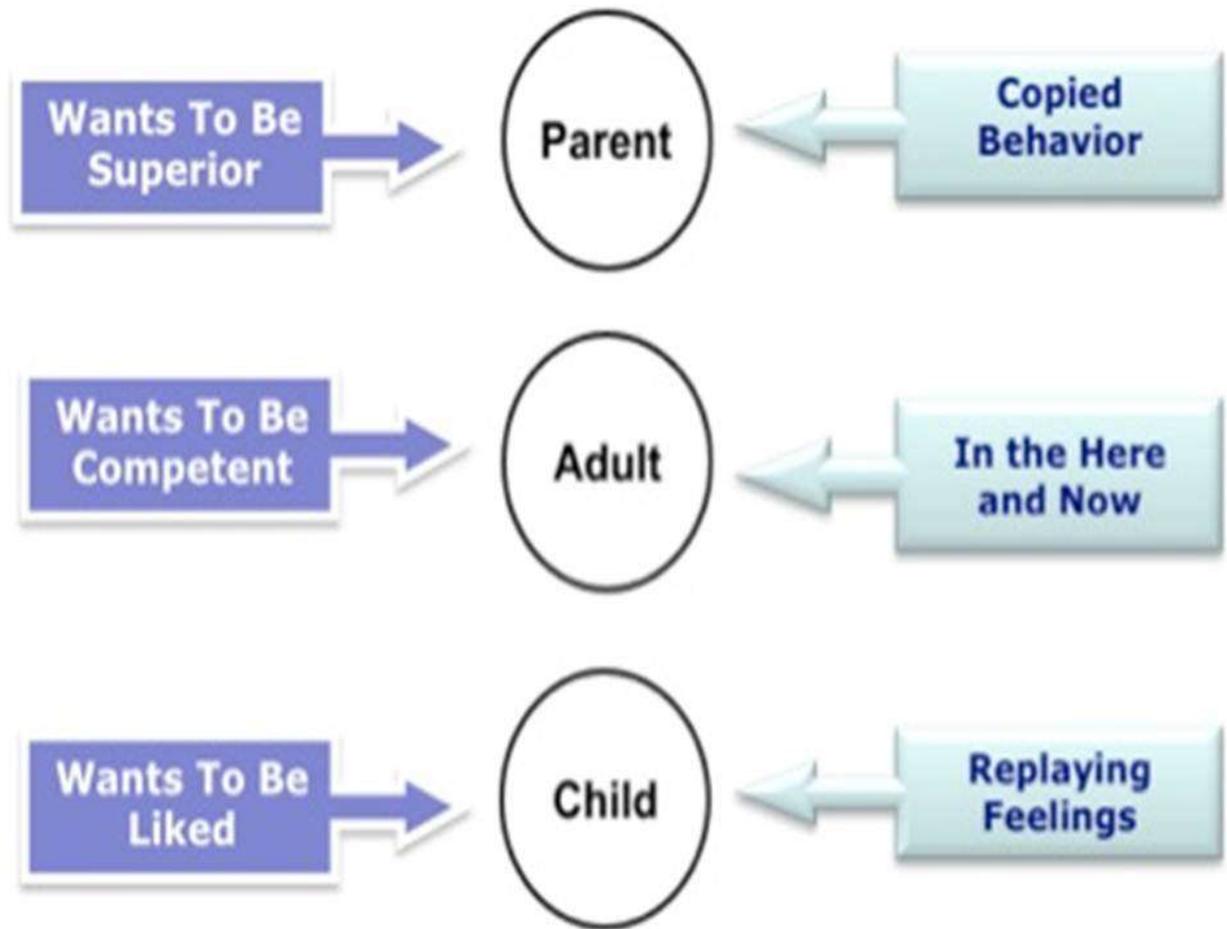


Most people have distinctive personality traits – which is their way of dealing with the world (both inwardly and outwardly). The reality is we need to deal with all differing personality types (just as others need to deal with our personality foibles!). Understanding what causes people to behave the way they do and having strategies to better influence these people will definitely help make your life easier and more successful.

Transactional Analysis (TA), developed by Dr Eric Berne in the late 1950's, is a useful tool that helps you to understand what makes you and others tick and helps you to enrich your communication in the workplace and interactions with all types of people.

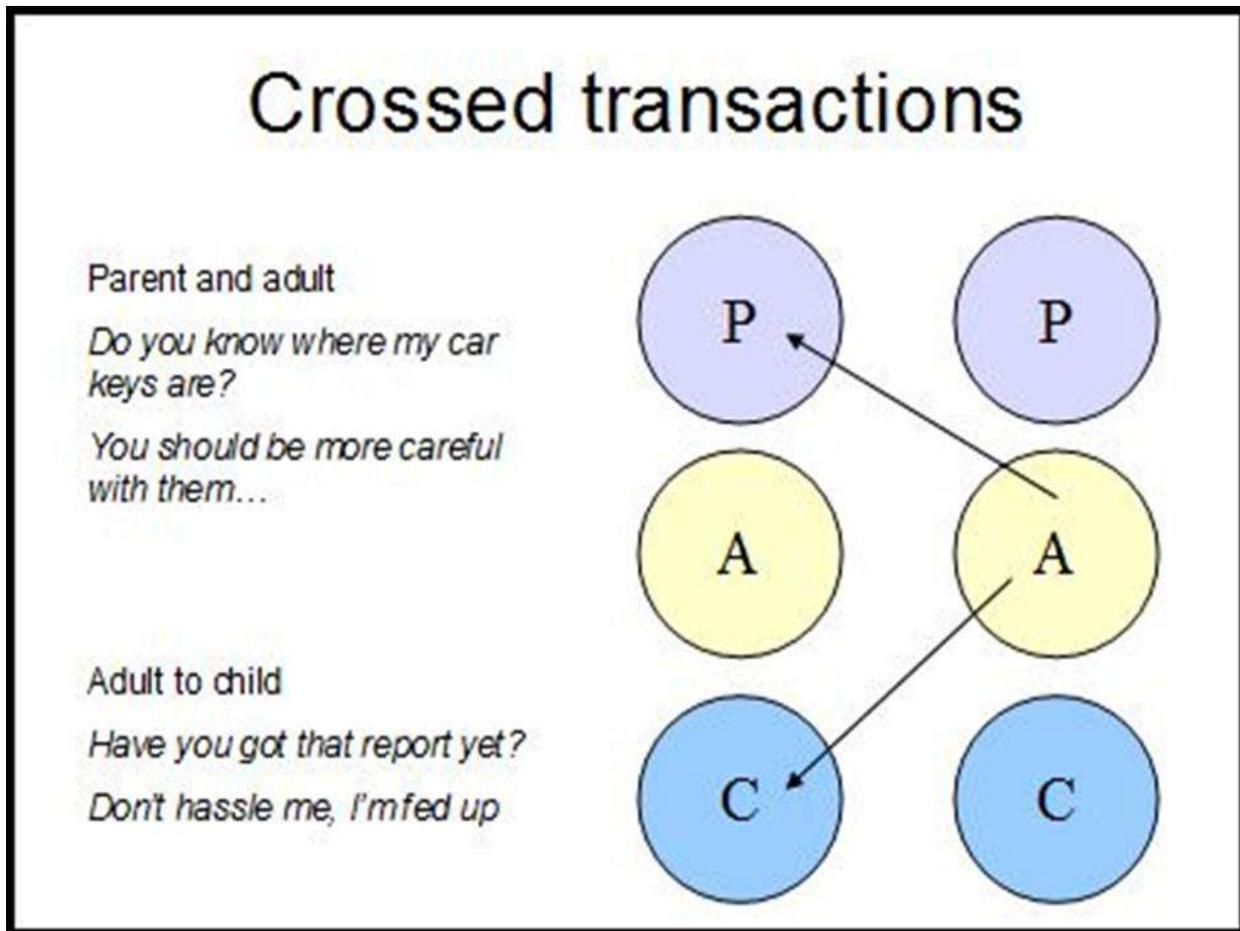
According to TA when we interact with others we do so from one of three states. We can talk as a parent would, speak and interact as a child would or communicate as an adult would.

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We don't actually have separate compartments like this within us and in the space of a single conversation you could easily flick between each of the three states! But a model such as this makes it easier for us to understand personality traits and gives us a common language ... which helps us improve our interactions with others.

At one time or another, everyone will display the characteristics associated with each of the three Ego states. However, most people have a 'home zone' that they are more inclined to go to in times of stress or pressure. Different people are more tuned in, (much like tuning into the wavelength of a particular radio state), to some States than others. For example a person may tune in and use the Parent Ego State far more regularly than the Adult or Child.



The better you are able to identify the Ego State of another person and respond from a wavelength that complements theirs, the more effective your communication in the workplace will be.

The Parent Ego State – And How It Can Stop Communication In The Workplace Dead!

The Parent Ego state contains the values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, prejudices, opinions and behaviors you recorded as a child ... which are generally handed down generation to generation ... with (unfortunately in many instance) little to no editing.

There are two aspects of Parent that you would have recorded:

The Critical Parent is controlling and restrictive and uses words like:

- You must
- You should
- Never
- It is inappropriate to
- That's not how we do things around here

We very frequently see the Critical Parent Ego State in the workplace and having a very negative impact on communication in the workplace. (Sometimes the Critical Parent is known as the Controlling Parent. Many organizations still use the very outmoded Command and Control type organization structure – and therefore in this type of organization you will find a lot of Critical Parents in operation).

A person with a strong Critical Parent, will generally be very rule bound, wanting things done his/her way – regardless of the needs of the situation. They tend to be critical and bossy in their style – and consequently often not much liked.

A person who frequently uses the Critical Parent style can be challenging ... particularly when he or she finds themselves in a leadership role. They try to 'shape' everyone up to perform and behave in the way they think 'this is how things should be done around here'. More often than not a person with a strong Critical Parent creates a very rule bound work place ... one that stifles creativity and thinking out of the square behavior.

Deepen Your Ability To Identify and Deal Effectively With The Different Personalities

To improve communication in the workplace a bit more Nurturing Parent may well be needed in many organizations ... a person who notices when others are stressed and overwhelmed and makes them a cup of coffee, or really goes out of their way to show the 'new person around is calling on their Nurturing Parent Ego State.

The downside for a person, who is strongly attuned to the Nurturing Parent, is that he or she can run the risk of being cloying and may inadvertently stifle the growth of their people by constantly doing things for them, taking up the slack and hovering.

The Nurturing Parent is helpful and caring and uses words like:

- Let me take care of it for you
- You'll be alright
- I can help you
- Be careful
- Look out for

We Need More Adult – But Not Too Much! – To Improve Communication In The Workplace

The Adult is the part of you that figures things out logically, looks at facts and figures and then reasons out an appropriate answer. In your Adult you remain rational and non-emotional – no matter the circumstances or aggravation going on around you. Facts not feelings!

The more you can utilize your Adult the better most interactions will progress. But a caveat: If someone uses the Adult all the time they are a fairly boring person to be around.

The Adult is analytical, fact-based, rational and calm and would say things like:

- What are the alternatives?
- Lets look for causes
- According to the statistics
- If we take a calm, rational approach

The Child

The Child Ego State is the 'felt' part of you and is the storehouse of your creativity, curiosity and the desire to explore and understand. When a person is in the grip of feelings, (for example, their anger dominates their reason) we say their Child has taken over.

Imagine someone comes to you and says, '*Hurry, the boss wants to see you*'. Most people's immediate reaction is for their stomach to lurch and thoughts to the effect of '*What have I done wrong?*' This response is their Child ... transporting them straight back to school days when called into the Principal's office ... feelings of anxiety and nervousness at some (yet unknown) wrong doing.

Like the Parent, there are two aspects of the child: Natural and Adapted. However, the Adapted Child can be split into two further types: Rebellious and Compliant.

Have you ever had one of those days where you just felt on top of the world ... A Disney type day where everything you did and encountered you just felt wonderful – nothing could shake you from the sense that everything is okay with the world? That was your **Natural Child** coming out to play.

You will hear someone in their Natural Child saying things like:

- Let's make sure this is fun
- It's so great to be here at work
- I'm really feeling sad that we didn't achieve our goal

The Compliant Child wants to do the right thing: polite, sociable and considerate of others. S/he knows right from wrong and conforms to what is expected. The problem faced by a person who is strongly tuned in to the Compliant Child is that they lose sight of their own needs, always looking to how others want them to be, they can lack initiative and feel quite vulnerable in the world.

In the workplace these people are seen as 'Yes Men'. Lacking initiative. They follow the meaning of the law rather than the spirit. Having many unexpressed needs the person with a strong Compliant Child may internalize a lot of resentment and one day it will overflow and there will be an explosion ... leaving everyone around that person wondering what on earth happened!

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At work you will hear the Compliant Child saying things like:

- Here it is, just as you asked, sir
- Sorry, I'll try to improve
- We'd best follow the procedure

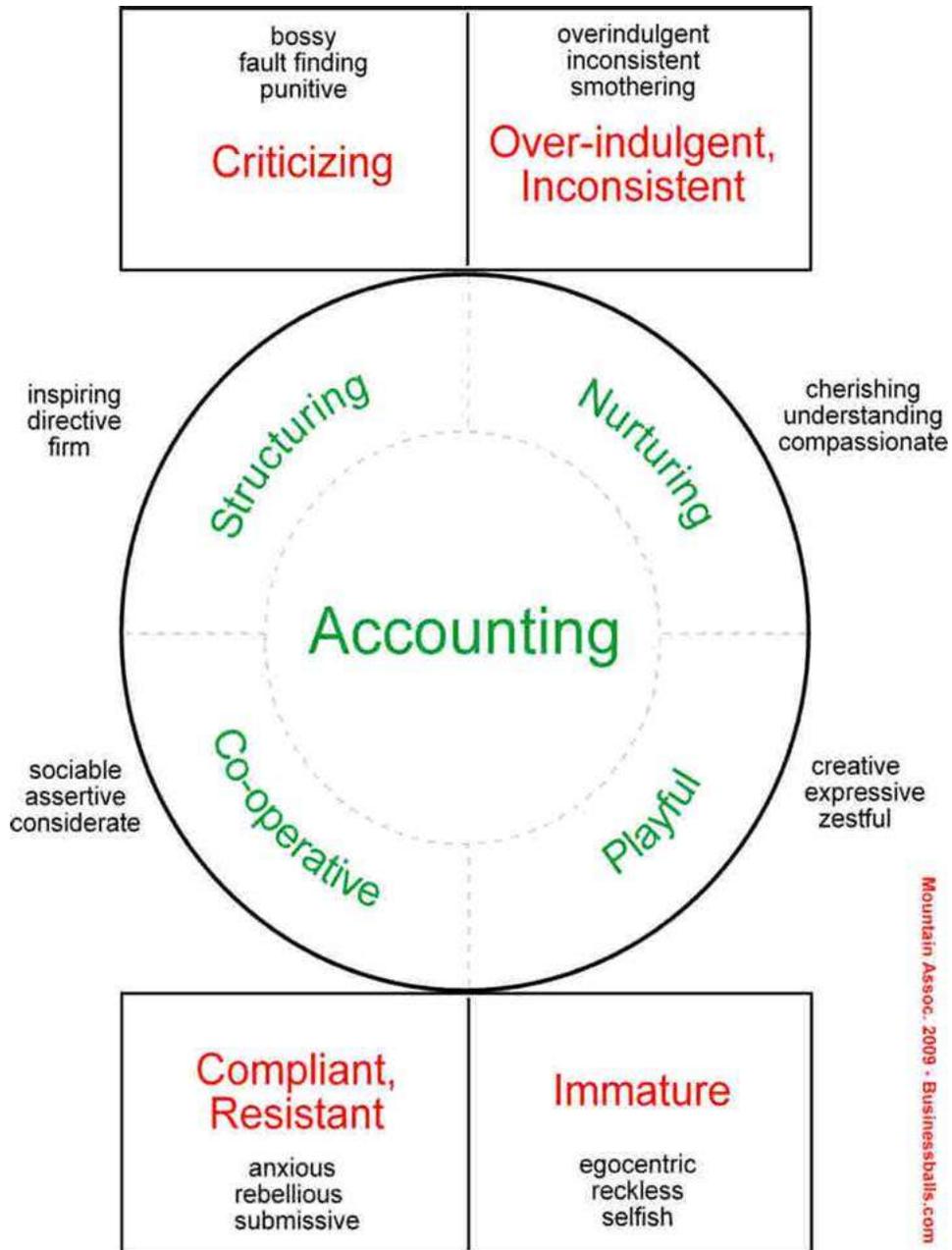
The Rebellious Child is the part of you that resents the demands of others and complies with them grudgingly. This is the sulky argumentative, authority questioning part of you.

Because they can show more initiative than the Compliant Child, if handled well, the Rebellious Child can be a good leader.

At work you will hear the Rebellious Child say:

- That's a stupid rule anyway. Let's do it this way
- Forget about it, he's just the boss, this is how we do it around here
- Let's knock off for today! It must be beer o'clock somewhere!

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Communication will improve when you select the right/appropriate state

All three Ego States have their benefits and disadvantages.

If you have struggled when interacting with others (particular team members, co-workers or your leader) and don't like the way these others perceive you, or maybe feel that sometimes your responses have missed the mark ... Maybe you cracked a joke, became critical or gave a pep-talk that just didn't hit its mark. If so, you possibly used the wrong ego state.

What You Need To Watch Out For ...

Often when people are in leadership type roles they mistakenly feel the need to use a more controlling style (Critical Parent). Certainly, there are times when this style is needed, however overdone it simply alienates and causes people to not want to be around you or willingly do things for you. If you feel that you have been using Critical Parent too much, 'telling' people what to do, there is one simple thing you can do.

Maybe you could make more use of the word maybe or could. This is a much gentler way of suggesting to people.

- Maybe you could try this ...
- Maybe a different way of looking at it is ...

If you have a strong Nurturing Parent you need to be aware that even though everyone will think you are nice and caring, you can come end up with more than your fair share of work and you may also end up with a group of people reporting to you who aren't stepping up and shining to their full potential ... because you haven't trusted them to be able do more.

If you have a strong, predominant Adult, then you are great to have around in emergencies and your opinion is often respected because of your cool head. But the downside is that you are seen as far too serious and dull!

Finally a strong dominant Child means that you can easily spread good will and cheer, that you can be creative and spontaneous and will often easily influence people through the sheer force of your personality. The watch out is that you can easily slip over to the 'devil' side and spread disharmony, angst and selfish reactions.

Want to improve communication in the workplace? Over the next couple of weeks take the time to analyze conversations you are having with various people. Ask yourself:

WHO IS DOING THE TALKING?

Then decide if you should choose to use a different Ego State to respond to that person from in order to get a better reaction.

How do you recognize the 'right' tone? Do you connect to ego states through logic and emotion?



What are your thoughts and experiences?