

Winning Relationships Part 2 Felipe Garcia

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In Winning Relationships part 1 (Net Newsletter, Winter 07), the characteristics and behaviors of dysfunctional competitive relationships and the characteristics and behaviors of cooperative relationships were identified compared and contrasted. Healthy competition in business, politics, sports and games challenges participants to do their best, sell their products and present the reasons why they should be elected to office. Competitive transactions in relationships, however, are counter-productive at minimum and can escalate into conflicts, psychological and/or physical violent and war. Identifying competitive transactions, attitudes and beliefs at lower levels before they escalate and shifting to collaboration instead can help resolve conflicts and avoid wars in personal relationships, in business relationships and intergovernmental relationships.

Transactional Analysis has a lot to offer mental health workers, organizational developers, pastors, educators, government leaders, parents and laypeople in terms of effective tools and a philosophical base that support and can result in collaborative transactions and relationships. We will identify and illustrate some of these useful TA concepts and tools here.

The Transactional Analysis concept of “OKness” emphasizes the worth and dignity of every individual and Berne’s belief that except for a few persons with severe brain damage, everyone has the capacity to think for themselves using their Adult ego state, is also the cornerstone of collaboration and winning relationships. Winning relationships are based on the assumption that everyone is worthy of respect and every member is important to the success of the group, couple and family. This concept assumes that:

I can think for myself and you can think for yourself.
I deserve respect, you deserve respect and others deserve respect.
My thoughts, ideas, opinions, feelings and needs are taken into account.
Your thoughts, ideas, options, feelings and needs are taken into account.

There is room for more than one reality and /or point of view and option in discussing any situation. It is important that we all win when experiencing differences by acknowledging, understanding and appreciating the differences and even if for practical reasons we decide to act on one option; other members’ opinions and suggestions are appreciated and acknowledged. (Batts2002b)

Winning relationships emphasize the importance of people winning together rather than at the expense of each other. Winning together is achieved by focusing on the mutual goal that persons in relationship share in common.

Some examples of mutual goals are:

Maintaining a couple and/ or family relationship that is loving and supportive of each others health and personal development, growth and success. .

Establishing and maintaining our work team to succeed in our mission and goals including increased profits and excellent results or products.

Other Transactional Analysis tools which are helpful in supporting winning relationships include the following.

Strategic use of the Parent ego state.

Nurturing Parent behaviors encouraging desired behaviors and creative thinking.

“that is a great idea; let us see how to include it”.

“You are a very important part of this team and we all value and appreciate your presence and contributions”.

Avoid abusive critical and controlling Parent. behaviors.

“You are stupid”

“that is a stupid idea”

Asking before giving unsolicited advice;

“I have some suggestions on how to do that in a way I have found to be effective, are you interested in hearing it?”

Refraining from dysfunctional rescuing by doing something for another that they can do for themselves. Not giving team members, students, family members or subordinates feedback on behaviors that are negatively impacting their career or life and getting in the way of the team’s working and winning together.

Passing judgments without owning it as opinion and not fact also constitute competitive transactions because of the implication that there is one right way of doing things or one reality and my way is the right way.

Understanding and practicing proper use of strokes.

Avoid giving and receiving unconditional negative strokes. This happens most often out of awareness rather than intentionally as in dysfunctional rescuing mentioned above or avoiding authentic contact concerning the other persons input, ideas, feelings, differences and needs. There is no scarcity of strokes. Give and receive conditional and unconditional strokes abundantly. Give negative conditional strokes with permission to do so and in an unconditional positive context. “You are a valuable part of this team; you delay the work of the team when you do not have the financial reports to the committee two days before the meeting.”

Understanding and avoiding behaviors corresponding to not-ok life positions, (Ernst 1971)

“get rid of” behaviors, “get away from” behaviors and “go no where” beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are all competitive behaviors and interrupt the capacity to win together.

We are all familiar with the theory and are committed to avoiding not- ok behaviors however, in the stress of the moment we fire people or ideas (“get rid of”) those with whom we disagree or disagree with us instead of confronting inappropriate behaviors using Adult and Child as appropriate to problem solve and stay open to other’s points of view and ways of doing things.

Another way we use competitive not-ok life position behaviors is to avoid (“get away from” or “get no where”) problems and people because of our fear of confronting when we are operating from win-loose frame of reference. Examples of this dysfunctional co-dependency is illustrated in the section on Passivity and Discounting below.

While adhering to a cooperative frame of reference and relationship, we invite ourselves and others in conflict to join us in finding win-win outcome to address our difficulties and our differences. Reminding ourselves and others of the mutual goal that we have in common makes working though the conflicts easier. This is true in interpersonal relationships as well as in group to group, government to government relationships.

Practicing options to Game and the Pay-offs (Karpman 1971)

We all learned in our TA101 how to avoid Games, which by definition are competitive in nature; either you win or I win and mostly neither of us wins. All options offered by Karpman in his award winning article “Options” are excellent guides in moving to a cooperative relationship. In confronting the initial Game con, we invite others to be straight with us about their needs. In avoiding the con we avoid stroking ulterior or “crooked” communications. Not accepting the Game pay-off prevents us from re-enforcing our not- ok life positions and instead invites us to learn about ourselves and about others. The most powerful way to avoid the competitive transactions of Games is to offer positive strokes to ourselves and others directly which if the strokes are accepted can go a long way in maintaining cooperative and collaborative relationships.

The theory of passivity, symbiosis and discounting (Schiff and Schiff 1971)

This theory offer a rich assortment of Transactional Analysis tools helpful in shifting from a competitive to a cooperative paradigm.

Passive behaviors:, doing nothing effective to solve a problem, over adapting and pleasing instead of self care, agitating (non problem solving activity), incapacitation (either becoming totally dysfunctional) and/ or attacking others are all competitive behaviors. Such behaviors invite and sometimes force other to intervene in problem solving and reinforce the competitive “I’m not ok you are ok” and the corresponding “I’m OK, you’re not OK” life positions which are characteristic of dysfunctional symbiotic and co-dependent relationships..

Discounting (Mellor/Schiff 1975) the problem or stimulus, minimizing the problems, the significance of problems, the solvability or ones own capacity to solve the problem prevent collaboration in identifying options for winning together.

Held resentments, revenge, secrets, lies and power plays (Steiner2003)

Claude Steiner in his many writings though the years has pointed out how held resentments, secrets, lies and power plays initiated from a one down “I can’t”; “poor me” or from a one up “I have the power and demand you to do it my way” perpetuate inequality and disrupt winning relationships. “Getting even” and actions to get revenge which are so predominant in competitive relationships and war are competitive in nature and do not support or encourage winning relationships.

Contracts (Berne 1968)

The importance of contracts in human relationships emphasized by Eric Berne and his protégés is one of the most significant transactional analysis tools for maximizing winning relationships; avoiding Games and passive and other competitive behaviors Therapeutic contracts, work contracts and relational contracts all emphasize the active participation and understanding of all parties in the relationship. Contracts that support working towards mutually understood and supported goals are the safe-guards of maintaining winning relationships.

Transactional Analysis offers us an abundance of tool that can be very useful in building and maintaining winning relationships. Interpersonal tools are effective to the extent that each of us are committed to achieving mutual group goals; believing that it is possible for all of us to win together; avoiding destructive competitive behaviors and practicing collaboration and cooperation with each others.

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