

Internally Moving Around the Triangle

by Lynn Forrest

Today I want to speak to you about how we move around the victim triangle internally and how that internal movement around the triangle turns into an external dance around the triangle with others. First we must start by understanding something about the beliefs that set us up for life on the victim triangle.

We all have some sort of internalized limiting belief about ourselves (at least I've never met anyone who doesn't). Most common perhaps are painful beliefs that originate out of an assumption that we are not acceptable to others (or God) as we are. Although we may not have given it much conscious thought, many of us have the idea that we must live up to a certain set of standards – that we must qualify for acceptance or approval from the world and others. We judge ourselves accordingly.

For instance, we may believe we need to be perfect, all-knowing, and/or error-free to be acceptable. Sounds sort of crazy when we say it out loud, doesn't it? Perfection is not possible, we all know that, but nevertheless we often act out of such beliefs without even recognizing that we are doing it!

Such impossible ideas about who and what we need to be create much unhappiness precisely because we cannot live up to the perfection these beliefs demand from us. We end up judging ourselves harshly as a result which only compounds our painful feelings towards our self.

These limiting ideas about ourselves become, what we call, 'core beliefs,' and they determine our quality of life. These life-inhibiting core beliefs generate our feelings and our reactions to life and they put us on the victim triangle where we perpetuate and verify them.

Let's look at how a core belief can move us around the victim triangle internally, and then how we can end up projecting unsavory beliefs about ourselves onto someone else. Tina in the example below is a pseudonym that stands for you and me. I am simply personalizing, for the sake of clarity, a process here that all people do.

Tina believes that she is on some level not good enough: her belief put in words might be stated, "I am unacceptable." She feels inadequate and flawed, although she hides it well. This limiting core belief places her on the victim triangle with herself as her own primary persecutor and sets in motion an internal dance around the triangle that might go something like this:

Believing she is inadequate, Tina desperately wants to feel better about herself, so she initiates a demanding program of self-improvement. Her goal is to fix (or rescue) herself from feeling inferior by shaping herself into someone more acceptable. Tina has moved into the rescuer role on the victim triangle (not that we shouldn't set goals towards self-improvement, but when we do it to rescue ourselves from self-denigration and self-persecution we are on the victim triangle).

No matter how ambitious Tina is in pursuing her latest self-modification program, she is never fully satisfied; no matter how much progress she makes it's never enough to take away the deep-seated sense of inadequacy she feels at her core. She is inevitably left feeling just as defective and inferior. This leaves her feeling hopeless. Tina has moved into the victim role on the triangle with herself.

From the victim role on the triangle, Tina, again, moves into a persecutor role with herself: "What's wrong with me?" she asks herself. "I am just too inept, stupid, and hopeless to ever get it right!"

Of course, this sort of putting herself down is too painful to endure for long. It's only a matter of time before Tina seeks relief (and what person in their right mind wouldn't seek relief?) by rescuing herself again.

Tina (like most of us in such a situation) sooner or later will resort to the ultimate self-rescue; it's one we all inevitably (and unconsciously) do - she finds someone outside herself with whom she can project her judgment towards herself.

Tina finds someone in her life that fits her negative (and largely unconscious) self-assessment and projects her harsh judgments there. Often (but not always) she chooses someone who is close to her. By unconsciously projecting her negative judgment onto the other she is able to alleviate her own internal distress and thus rescue herself even as she persecutes them! (Have you ever noticed that the people we are most judgmental of are the ones we profess to love the most? This is how and why that happens! This is why we say that the things we judge in others are the things we first deem unacceptable in ourselves.)

The dance around the victim triangle has now moved from inside Tina's mind out into her relationship with others. By finding fault with someone else she has unconsciously invited them to join her on the victim triangle. She proceeds to persecute (by judging and blaming them), rescue (through her attempts to change or "fix" them) and feel victimized by them (when they fail to appreciate her efforts to fix them).

As long as Tina judges herself as painfully inadequate she will continue to live on the triangle both inside her own mind and in her relationships with others. She has no choice.

Next week I will share some suggestions about how to get off the triangle with ourselves and others. In the meantime I hope this illustration has been helpful in demonstrating how internally victimizing ourselves leads to an external projection of our negative judgments on others. Perhaps it also helps us understand better what it means to say that we cannot truly forgive others until, and unless, we first forgive ourselves.