

TA Tribe

ONLINE TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS TRAINING AND SUPERVISION
FOR ORGANISATIONAL PRACTITIONERS

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FOCUS PAPER

Introduction to Transactional Analysis Concepts

CORE CONCEPTS IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Transactional Analysis (TA): what is it? TA in this instance is nothing to do with uniforms and assault courses – it is a social psychology, a theory of human personality and a systematic approach for growth and personal change of individuals, groups and organisations.

Still a bit much to digest? I like to think of it as a framework of helpful concepts which explain to me why I say the things I sometimes say, and how by using the framework I can enhance my personal and professional relationships and use the tools for personal growth. I can get better results and feel less frustrated with myself and others!

From birth, as human beings we collect information - it is like we are storing away on special CD roms inside our heads the history of our world: how our parents behaved around us, what they said to us and how we felt when they said it; the things we learnt in order to get by in our family society and the society of the greater world around us; we gathered facts and information and evaluated that material against what we already knew. And this process continues throughout our life, so whether you are reading this article at the age 18, 28, 38 or 68 we continue to add to our “CD roms” and use the material already recorded there.

With this information, we make decisions. At the age of 2 or 4 or 6 etc, we “choose” to believe certain things about ourselves, based on what is happening around us. These decisions contribute to our “script” – our version of the world and our place in it.

This knowledge guides our behaviour and therefore the results we get in life – and the crucial point here is that some of this knowledge may be faulty. And the tragedy is that we still use it! And by doing this, we sabotage ourselves, we limit our horizons and caution ourselves against connecting with people, achieving our potential and living a life “on purpose”!

This is serious stuff! And help is at hand!

By using the tools of TA, we can analyse and recognise the underlying faulty beliefs and, once in our awareness, we can do something about them. With the tools, we can challenge ourselves (in a robust, but caring and loving way!) as to the reality.

For me, one of the wonderful things about TA is that it rests on humanistic beliefs in the capacity of human beings to fulfil their potential and flourish. Eric Berne (the founder of TA) used the word *physis* to describe human growth, the energy through which we can develop ourselves and work towards being “script free”. It’s the difference between being “plugged in” to our power, our unique strength and energy, and being “unplugged” – drifting about in a sort of mucky, buzzy, fog which is unreal, and where we feel weak and out of control. Which, incidentally, is exactly where many of us spend our time! It does not make us bad people, we even seem to act fairly normally as we fit in with the others around us, but we are missing out on how our lives *could* be.

TA as a framework is growing and developing all the time, which is one of its inherent strengths. As a body of work the concepts are constantly strengthened, tested, evaluated and improved. I list below the main concepts with a short description of each one.

EGO STATES AND TRANSACTIONS

One of the corner stones of TA – the recognition that we all have five main parts to our personalities: Controlling Parent, Nurturing Parent, Functional Adult, Adapted Child and Natural Child. Having an understanding of the ego state behind our words and the words of others will enable us to understand how our behaviour impacts on others and how we can get into a repetitive dynamic in conversations with others which may be unhelpful and leave us feeling “unplugged”, ie scripty!

LIFE POSITIONS

As small children, at some point we make a decision about our place in the world and we measure everything that happens to us against that benchmark, and filter out information that does not fit our chosen view. So for those of us who default to a negative Life Position, based on not a great deal of knowledge about the world, we write our script for the play which is our life – and as a programme it gets imbedded and played out again and again! Unless we do something to stop it.

DRIVERS

From our observations around our parents (or primary care-givers), we learn strategies for keeping safe in our world which is our family. If we get praise for doing things perfectly, we do more of that behaviour. If we get praised for not crying or not showing emotion, we continue with that strategy for the rest of our lives. There are five personal drivers: Hurry Up, Be Perfect, Try Hard, Please People and Be Strong, and each have a negative and a positive side to them.

STROKE PATTERNS

We have a hunger for attention, recognition and praise. If we do not get enough positive strokes, we will create situations where we get negative strokes. Because although negative strokes may make us feel uncomfortable, unhappy, (“unplugged”!) at least we know we are alive – and it is much better than being ignored.

DISCOUNTING

We “ignore” information (we unwittingly tune it out, we simply do not see it) which would help us to solve a problem, fulfil our potential or prevent an accident. We discount ourselves, other people and situations. We do it to maintain our Life Position – a double whammy!

GAMES

When we are stroke hungry, when we are discounted or when we are discounting others, we play games in order to top up our battery of strokes. They are repetitive, limiting and even destructive – and they land us back in that mucky, foggy unplugged place. Seriously unhelpful.

TA emphasises the importance of behavioural change and recognises that as human beings we are all capable of making the changes we feel are necessary. And what I really love about TA is that it is not elitist – it uses language that is accessible to all and that as a teacher of TA I teach the tools to individuals so that they can apply them to themselves – forever! TA does not create a dependency on a teacher or psychotherapist, once an individual has a firm understanding of the tools and concepts they can use them to strengthen themselves. What a gift! One that has no sell-by date, will not run out of batteries and will not wear out!

So there you have it – a brief outline of this fascinating psychological bag of goodies.