

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

in the workplace

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS IN ACTION

The “parent”, “child” and “adult” respond very differently in a given work situation. For example:

Your manager says to you, “You got that promotion because of your beautiful smile.”

Possible responses:

Parent: “I’ve told you not to say that sort of thing. Now just stop it.”

Child: “Thank you, Mr Tebbitt, you’re very sweet.”

Adult: “Mr Tebbitt, I’m sure that’s not what you meant to say. We both know my qualifications for this job. I’d appreciate it if you did not say that again.”

Your assistant is late for work, delaying your departure for an important meeting.

Possible responses:

Parent: “You’re hopeless. Will you ever learn to manage your time?”

Child: “See what you’ve done to me? I hate it when you do this.”

Adult: “Next time, if you know you’re going to be late, I’d appreciate it if you’d let me know so I can go on ahead.”

A new position opens up in your department. You notice that your team is tense.

Possible responses:

Parent: “Don’t worry, girls, you’ll live through this. Now, get back to work.”

Child: “You’re all making things hard for me.”

Adult: “Let’s plan a time to discuss that way this change will affect us.”

Your team tells you that the MD has set an unrealistic deadline.

Possible responses:

Parent: “I don’t want to hear any complaints about you having to stay late or come in early.”

Child: “One day I’ll show that guy.”

Adult: “Let’s figure out how to get this done. We’re a good team and we can pull this off.”

Source: timetothink.com

MBE recently hosted a workshop on the principles of Transactional Analysis and how it can be applied to optimise relationships in the workplace. Below are some of the things we learned.

Have you ever heard of the phrase “parent and child relationships” outside of the familial context? Did you know that behaviours learned growing up could apply to different aspects of your life? This article is going to look at Transactional Analysis and how it plays a part in day to day office life.

What is Transactional Analysis?

Transactional Analysis was developed in the late 1950s by Eric Berne. The basis of the theory is that everyone has three different ego states: parent, adult and child. These different ego states can result in a variety of thoughts, behaviours and feelings, and cause us to have different transactions (or interactions) with people around us:

Parent

These behaviours are learned from our parents and other important people that have helped us through our childhoods. The parent ego state can be both critical and supportive.

Adult

This is the state that relates to the here and now, rather than things you learned during childhood. This is often thought to be the most rational part of our personality.

Child

The child state is one that goes back to the behaviours learned during our childhoods. Depending on the influences during this early years, the child ego state can be free or strongly linked to parental influences.

Everyday Applications

So how can Transactional Analysis appear in our workplaces and affect interactions with our colleagues?

The aim of every transaction should be one of adult to adult, the healthiest approach. During an adult to adult transaction you are most likely to find that you will talk to each other respectfully and take the time to listen to the other person.

This isn't always possible to achieve, however, and sometimes you will find yourself angry or annoyed by something a colleague has done. In these circumstances, it is very easy to slip into a child state. This could mean that you end up arguing with that colleague (behaving like a Free Child). You could also find yourself in a Critical Parent mindset, and will find yourself telling them off.

Sometimes a parent to child interaction is required, and can be healthy. It can be an assertive approach to take, and can help ensure that any requests are met. It can, of course, be equally unhealthy.

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Other forms of transactions include more social adult to adult interactions, which is when you take down time from your task to have a conversation about the weather, the football or a book that you are reading. Child to child transactions can also be great when you need creative minds that will come up with new and innovate ideas.

When it comes to Transactional Analysis in the workplace, the best idea is to be aware of the interactions that you have, and whether or not they could be improved. You may find that whilst you think you are firmly in adult mode, you may, in fact, be in parent mode.

By being aware of the various subconscious roles we play in our workplace (and other) interactions, we can more easily identify our own common triggers and pitfalls, as well as our personal strengths, and modify our behaviour accordingly.

The following sources contain further reading and examples to illustrate the interactions described above:

1. <http://www.timetothink.com/uploaded/Games%20people%20play%20at%20work.pdf>
2. <http://www.businessballs.com/transactionalanalysis.htm>
3. <http://www.ericberne.com/transactional-analysis/>