

FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES PROBLEMS OR OUTCOMES

By Kathy M. Haskin

The broadcaster's smiling, though stoic, manner presented the environmental news of the day. Issue after issue, my thoughts searched for something I could do. Should I buy that tomato? Use that light bulb? Write my congressman? Find some way to decrease my "footprint?"

I turned on the comedy channel instead. The comedian spoke of his relationship with this teen son. "Well Dad," he changed his voice to a teen tone, "your generation created all of these problems..."

Switching to his smiling yet stoic tone, the father leaned in. "Yes, and we are counting on your generation to fix it all for us!"

Regardless of the manner in which it is presented, drama follows environmental issues. Listen and you can hear the victims, persecutors and rescuers in our voices. Dr. Stephen Karpman was the first to observe this drama triangle of interactive roles. Though common and often the default of many situations, focusing problem-oriented drama is not productive.

The victim, which is the central figure in the drama triangle, sees life as happening to them and believes they are powerless in the face of the onslaught of the problems they encounter. Sound familiar? "What can I do about climate change?"

In order to be a victim, however, one must have a persecutor. The persecutor is very often a person, but it can also be a condition or a circumstance. When a victim encounters a persecutor, they then look for a rescuer to save them or, at least, to alleviate their suffering. Enter the experts.

Each day we are inundated with the doom and gloom of a planet in peril. We feel like victims of the environment itself. We are then bombarded with suggestions for "Saving the Planet." Be it ten things or eight, there always seems to be a list to focus on, urging us to be the rescuers solving the problem of the day. And so the drama perpetuates the roles and the roles engage in the drama.

Author and self-leadership coach David Emerald refers to this triangulation of roles as the Dreaded Drama Triangle (DDT) because of the toxic nature of the relationships that thrive in such an environment. In his book, *The Power of TED** (**The Empowerment Dynamic*), Emerald offers the opportunity for more productive alternatives to these roles. It all has to do with focus, and where you put your attention.



THE
POWER
OF TED*

Are you focusing on the problems you want to avoid, or the outcomes you want to create? *The Power of TED** suggests an alternative to the DDT through the outcome-oriented roles of creator, challenger and coach.

As an antidote to the victim, the creator is the central role in TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic). When this role is consciously chosen, a creator taps into his or her capacity to choose their response to life's experiences. This person also owns their responsibility and contribution to their current circumstances. This way of acting and responding is result- and goal-oriented, focused on desired outcomes. In my opinion, a creator is a person who can take on an environmental issue. Should we put our ingenuity into blaming the problem like a victim or pursuing a solution like a creator?

It is all about knowing your current reality, and seeing your desired outcome. Take a rubber band, stretch it between your two hands. Can you feel the tension? Think of your left hand as the current situation; consider your right hand to be the outcome you want. The pull in between is what Emerald refers to as "dynamic tension." If you take your right hand out of the band, forget about your desired outcome, while the tension will be gone, your current reality has not changed. But rather, if you leave the tension there and move your left hand closer to the right, this step brings your current reality closer to your desired outcome.

In other words, don't try and avoid the problem – in fact Emerald stresses that it does not help the creating process to deny, minimize or explain away current reality. Instead, use the dynamic tension to encourage a step toward a solution. The size of the step does not matter. Even a baby step moves you closer to a solution and fuels your energy for more action.

A creator invariably meets up with the challenger, which is the antidote to the drama role of persecutor. Creators welcome challengers. Creators are able to transform their perspective toward difficulties with people, conditions and/or circumstances into challenges to be met, understood, and (whenever possible) overcome. An environmental crisis may act as a challenger if we are able to see the opportunities for transformative change.

Forty years ago Senator Gaylord Nelson harnessed the dynamic tension of the day, challenging people to focus on the current reality of our planet. Originally designed as a "teach-in", the focus of Earth Day began in an effort to promote awareness and appreciation for the Earth's environment.

Reflecting back to that time, Nelson once wrote, "Earth Day worked because of the spontaneous response at the grassroots level. We had neither the time nor resources to organize 20 million demonstrators and the thousands of schools and local communities that participated. That was the remarkable thing about Earth Day. It organized itself." Senator Nelson challenged the world to change their current reality by creating a day with a focus on our planet, communities and homes. What a great first step toward a desired outcome.

The third outcome-oriented role in The Empowerment Dynamic Emerald refers to is the coach. In order to more effectively move toward their dreams and desires, a creator can benefit greatly by having a coach, which is the antidote to the role of the rescuer. Environmental education has the

potential to serve as a coach and to empower students of all ages to be creative and resourceful as we shift focus from environmental problems to environmental outcomes.

I choose to be outcome-oriented rather than problem-focused and see limited energy resources as a call for a different outcome and technological advances rather than a doomsday report.

JRR Tolkien once wrote “It’s a job that’s never started that takes the longest to finish.” As the next Earth Day approaches, I challenge all of us to join in the effort to create a world which we will be proud to pass on to future generations. Let’s approach our environmental realities as creators as we work on producing future outcomes with our current actions. Take a “green” step toward that goal today. If it is a personal goal of decreasing energy use, start with changing those light bulbs. If it is a larger goal of decreasing negative effects on the environment, start by learning as much as you can. Opportunities for action in positive change will present themselves. Be ready for daily steps toward your goal. As David Emerald would say, “What will you create today?”

Kathy M. Haskin is an environmental education curriculum specialist and writer. The foundation of her business, Hands to Heart Learning, is the belief that meaningful experiences create memorable connections, as well as motivation for learning and better understanding.