



#GSD POST

MINDSET SHIFT: FROM VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE TO CREATOR WITH THE EMPOWERMENT DYNAMIC

BY J. SCOTT

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Execution Leaders see what's next to make what's new

Introduction:

This article is based on the work of David Emerald and his book **The Power of TED (The Empowerment Dynamic)** and links it to what it means to be a transformational leader. It's about stepping out of the reactive, waiting-for-things-to-happen mode and into the realm of creating the future. This is how we stop being a bystander and start being the architect of our destiny, our team's success, and our customers' satisfaction.

A **Execution Leader** doesn't wait for opportunities to come to them—they create them. They embrace a mindset of empowerment, focusing on long-term goals, and actively shaping the future. By leading with intention, purpose, and a clear vision, they inspire others to do the same.

Where Are You and Your Team On the Journey?

The Untrained Leader

We've found that Untrained Leaders are reactive, and focused on the problem Du Jour, they are stressed out, burnt out, and fostering a culture of constant urgency without a destination.



Symptoms Include: Their team members defend missed deadlines and insufficient outcomes by complaining that they have too many #1 priorities, too much work on their plates, and their solution is always external - better tools, more people, better management, less work.

The Execution Leader

Execution Leaders aren't reacting to the future, they are 100% focused on creating the future. They are intentional about only working on things that will measurably improve the three pillars, they are intentional about the battles they take on, they have a fierce commitment to team alignment and clear expectations, and foster a culture of discipline, trust, transparency, and accountability.



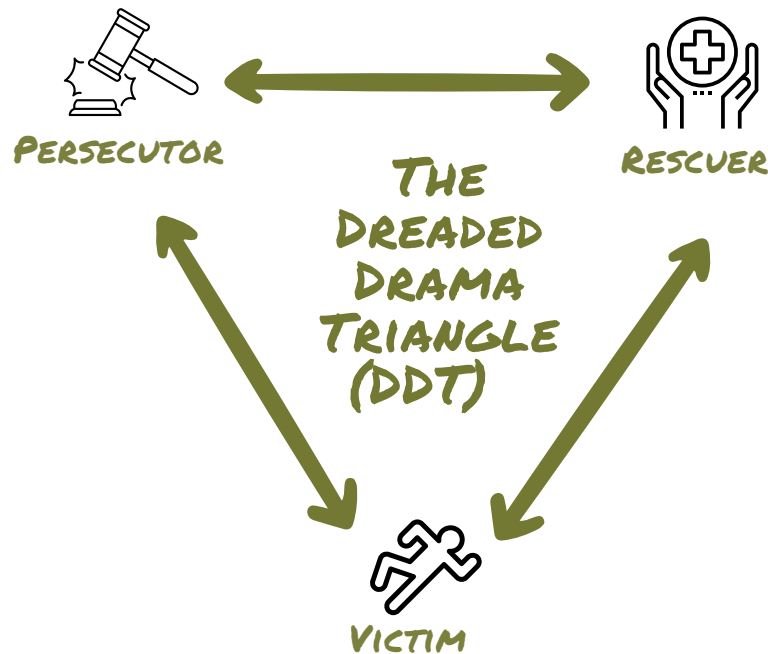
Symptoms Include: Their way of working results in a high-performing team that isn't stressed out, burnt out or working nights and weekends. They have esprit de corps, high levels of engagement, teamwork and success.

Karpman Drama Triangle - The Reactive Trap

Let's start with our default mindset as humans, the Drama Triangle. The Drama Triangle is a self-reinforcing trap where many people get stuck. There are three alternating roles, the Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer - roles that keep us reactive, defensive, and stuck in the status quo.

Being a Persecutor means we're pushing people around, blaming them, and creating a toxic environment. It's not leadership; it's fear-based management. They are not building the future; they are just guarding the past.

Rescuers might look like they're helping, but they're really just keeping people dependent. It's about control, not empowerment. As a leader, our job isn't to do everyone's job; it's to coach and empower them to do their own job better.



This is the "things happen to me" mindset. It's passive, it's reactive, and it's a leadership killer. If they are always waiting for the market, their boss, or their customers to dictate the moves, they are playing the Victim.

Why We Fall into These Roles



We get stuck in these roles because they're hard to shake, they're familiar, and they're what we've seen modeled. To be a transformational leader, we've got to break out of these patterns. We've got to start leading with vision, with purpose, and with a proactive stance. In the Karpman Drama Triangle, the roles of Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer are distinct and fluid, with people frequently shifting between them in response to changing circumstances and interactions.

For instance, a person who initially identifies as a Victim, feeling oppressed and helpless, might later adopt the role of a Persecutor, lashing out in frustration or anger. Similarly, a Rescuer, initially intervening to solve someone else's problem, might later feel unappreciated or overwhelmed, and transition into the Victim role. These shifts happen as reactions to the dynamics of the situation and the behaviors of others involved, often without conscious awareness.

Within the confines of the Drama Triangle, our gaze is fixated on the problems. Things that are happening to us, things that are inbound and it often feels like we can't get ahead, but we can't stop running or we will fall further behind. This problem-focused mindset ensnares us in a cycle of reactivity.

“Focus determines our inner state and inner state drives our behavior” – David Emerald

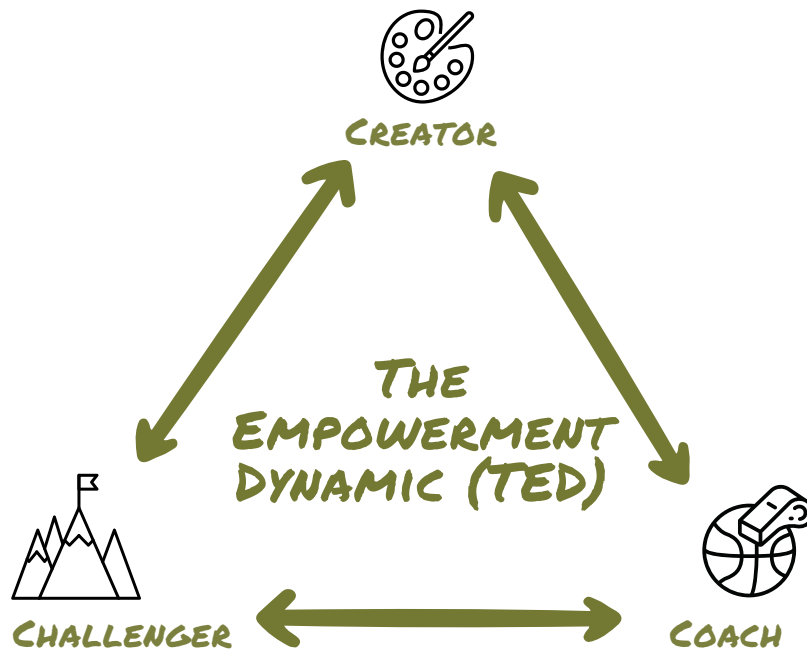
When humans are focused on a problem, our inner state is usually anxious if not completely immersed in fight or flight. We react to this anxiety by doing whatever we can to return everything to a state of calm as quickly as possible. Then, we move on to the next dumpster fire, often, without solving the root cause of the last. This perpetuates the feeling of not being able to get ahead because inevitably, that unsolved problem is going to show up again.

The Empowerment Dynamic (TED) - The Future-Creating Framework

TED is where we start creating the future. It's about shifting our mindset from reactive to proactive, from being a follower to being a leader. TED gives us three powerful roles: Creator, Challenger, and Coach. This is the toolkit for transformational leadership.

“Understanding that a sign of emotional intelligence is refusing to let feelings dictate decisions. Feelings are electrical signals in the brain. We don’t choose every sensation, but we are responsible for how we react. Emotions are rarely calls to action. They’re usually cause for reflection.” – Adam Grant

Creators are the visionaries. They're not waiting for orders; they're setting the agenda. They're focused on what they can do to improve customer satisfaction, team member satisfaction, and profitability. Creators are the ones who see opportunities where others see obstacles. Creators see what's next so they can help others make what's new.



Challengers are the catalysts for growth. They're not about tearing down; they're about building up. They challenge the status quo, push for innovation, and drive continuous improvement. Challengers are essential for keeping our team and our organization moving forward.

Coaches empower. They're not solving problems for their team; they're helping their team solve problems. Coaches develop their people, guiding them to find their own solutions and to take ownership of their work. This is how you build a team of leaders, not just a team of doers.

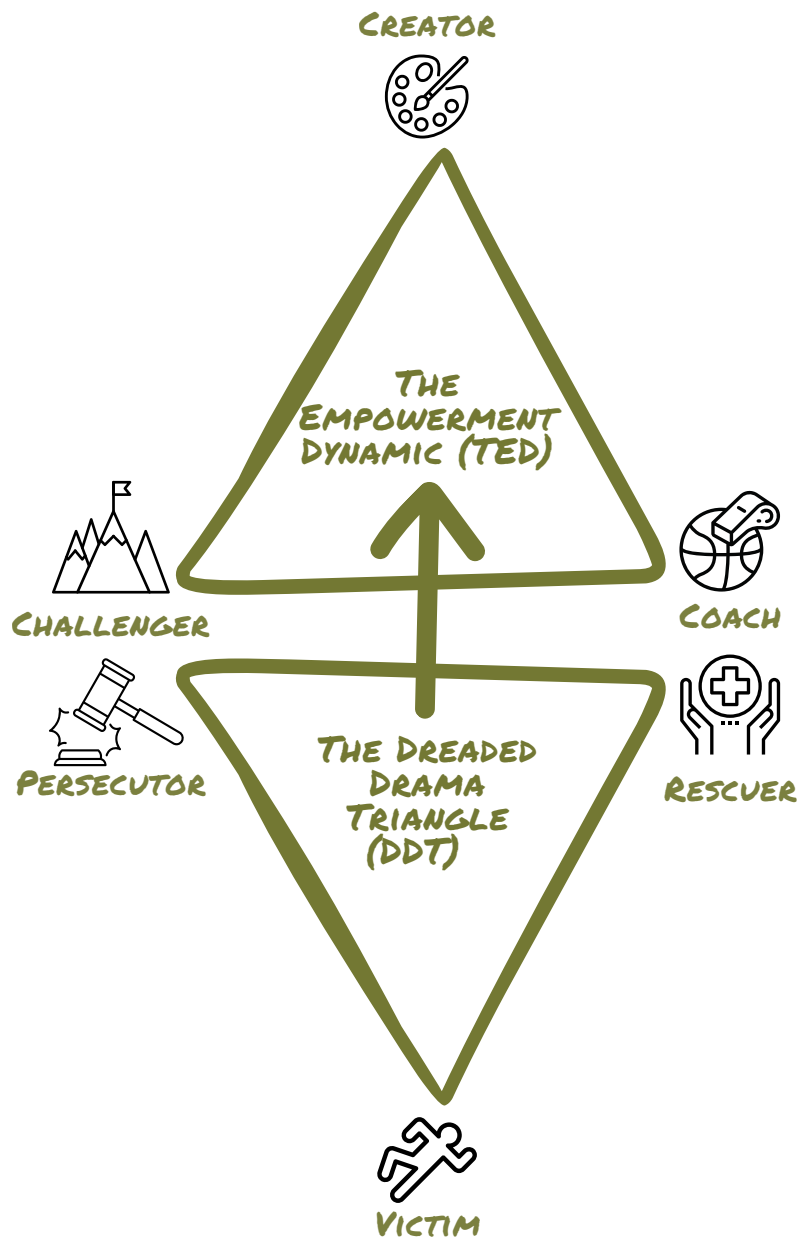
Making the Shift to The Empowerment Dynamic

The shift from a victim orientation to a creator orientation is fundamentally about changing where we place our focus. As victims, we often find ourselves fixated on the problems coming at us, a focus that inevitably creates anxiety and leads to reactionary behavior. It's a cycle that keeps us entrenched in a narrative of powerlessness, reacting to the world rather than shaping it. However, the real opportunity for change emerges when we redirect our attention.

It's not just about paying attention; it's about coupling attention with intention. This is where we ask ourselves, "What do I really want?" rather than "What's holding me back?" Shifting our focus from the problems and the anxiety they foster to the vision of what we want to create is the first step towards becoming creators in our own lives.

It's a process that requires not only clarity of vision but also the courage to pursue that vision. This isn't merely a change in perspective; it's a change in how we engage with the world. When we start with what we want to create, we move from being passive recipients of our circumstances to active architects of our reality.

It's in this shift from problem-oriented reactivity to intention-driven proactivity that we find the power to not just imagine a better future, but to start building it, one decision, one action at a time.



Making the Shift to The Empowerment Dynamic



When you apply the principles of TED, you're not just changing how you lead; you're changing the game. You're moving from a leader who reacts to the future to one who creates it. This shift has a massive impact on everything from customer satisfaction to team morale to the bottom line.



For example, instead of waiting for customer complaints to dictate changes (Victim), you're proactively seeking feedback and innovating to meet their needs (Creator). Instead of enforcing outdated policies (Persecutor), you're challenging your team to find better, more efficient ways to work (Challenger). And instead of micromanaging your team (Rescuer), you're coaching them to take the initiative and own their results (Coach).

Execution Leadership in Action

Being an Execution Leader means you're at the forefront of creating the future. You're constantly looking for ways to improve, to innovate, and to lead your team to new heights. It's about being proactive, not reactive. It's about seeing the potential in every challenge and turning it into an opportunity. And, intentionally modeling a culture of discipline, trust, transparency, and accountability by:

- 1 Thoughtfully creating your 2x2 prioritization matrix, being disciplined about your weekly focusing exercise, and blocking time to advance the items on your 2x2.
- 2 Using your daily eyes-up report to acknowledge accomplishments, plan how you will advance your 2x2 items the next day and align your team.
- 3 Using the 2x2 to get alignment on your and your team's priorities with stakeholders and negotiate for the resources you need to add items to the 2x2.
- 4 Creating agendas and leading meetings that progress your 2x2 items.
- 5 Maintaining and working on your to-do log.
- 6 By challenging and coaching your team to help them reach for THEIR potential.



Founder & CEO of 120VC
Trusted by executive leadership teams to stabilize execution and deliver measurable returns

J. Scott is the founder of 120VC, an execution leadership firm built on a single proven belief: leadership is not developed individually, it is installed as a **team**.

He is the person brought into board meetings when results matter more than excuses, turning leadership teams into execution engines that deliver return.

For more than two decades, J. has led transformation inside complex, high-pressure organizations including AT&T, Blizzard Entertainment, Sony Pictures, Trader Joe's, First American Financial, ResMed, and others.

Jason's work focuses on solving a problem most leadership programs avoid: the reason execution breaks down, even when teams are smart, motivated, and experienced.

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