

SETTING THE STAGE

You're the head of marketing, and you've been charged with maintaining a consistent image in everything you produce. Janine is a brilliant designer and a "free spirit." Her deliverables would easily win awards for innovation but are rarely what you asked for. Enthusiastic and loyal, she responds to your verbal work assignments with, "You bet!" "I got it!" "This will be fun!" or "I can't wait to get started." But then her delivery dates slip, the quality is compromised, and the corporate image suffers. What do you do?

Lawrence is the most successful deal guy in the company. He's always pushing the envelope and, most times, it works out great. But in the Investment Committee meetings he's cynical and closed. With his quick mind and slashing tongue, he shreds others' ideas at the "what if" stage. You'd love to tap his experience as you brainstorm next year's strategic plan, but in meetings he usually remains

aloof or throws out one-liners that have the other VPs either scratching their heads or scrambling for a retort. You can feel the energy drain out of the meetings he attends, and you're stumped on what to do.

Suzanne loves the responsibility and precision required in her role as corporate counsel. Her job is to keep the company safe, and she takes it very seriously. Perhaps too seriously—she combs through every contract multiple times and sends it back to the sales team for renegotiation any time there is a hint of ambiguity or risk to the company. Meanwhile, the sales team is going crazy. The team is obligated to revisit already-closed deals rather than building its sales pipeline. According to Suzanne, she needs to be a tough gatekeeper; otherwise the sales team would sell the company down the river. The team members refer to her as “Dr. No” and look for any way they can to get around her. Again, you're unsure of your next steps.

You work for a workaholic, yet gifted, company founder. He's a never-ending waterfall of ideas. When he starts rambling, you're not sure whether he's giving assignments, making requests, or simply thinking out loud. If you start to ask clarifying questions, he either rolls his eyes with an “I can't believe you don't get it” message or moves on to another topic. You find yourself barely keeping up in conversations with him and in executing your assignments. You're starting to burn out. He's a brilliant strategist, the company is growing rapidly, and your options—once vested, in three years—will be worth a lot, but you feel torn. Do you live with the situation, confront him, or quit?

You're totally stretched in your job—you're working seventy-hour weeks and haven't taken more than a three-day weekend in two years. It's gotten so bad your kids are calling you “Uncle Daddy.” But at work, the staff loves you for coordinating events,

handling details, and plugging holes. Part of you wants to blame the company, but you know you are doing it to yourself. Every time a new opportunity emerges, you want to be on the project team or event committee. You can't help yourself. But a few weeks, or even days, into these new endeavors, you start kicking yourself, asking, "Why do I keep doing this to myself?"

Why We Wrote This Book

Over the past decade, we've seen the dynamics described in the previous scenarios in hundreds of business environments. We have worked to address them with thousands of leaders, professionals, and senior associates in corporate environments, at executive team retreats, and in intimate small-group settings. We have served a vast spectrum of enterprises, from multinational public companies, to boutique entrepreneurship, to multigenerational family businesses, to professional partnerships.

At a basic level, we have found that these dysfunctional dynamics derive from *drama* in the office. This drama is the cause of the infighting, water cooler talk, meaningless meetings, and turf wars that drain energy or deflect the work team from the collaborative pursuit of goals. We've discovered that regardless of the type of organization, leaders often avoid dealing with drama in the workplace altogether, or deal with it badly.

Why do leaders settle for drama? There are two reasons: (1) They lack the skills to address difficult interpersonal topics and (2) they're fearful that confrontation will make matters worse. A volatile, yet supposedly indispensable, person will leave. A fragile person will have a meltdown. Employee morale will plummet—and it will be their fault. They'll be vilified. They'll get fired. So nothing happens.

Most of these leaders have a bookshelf of “How to build a great team” leadership books. Yet they find the one-size-fits-all techniques in most of these books don’t address the nuances and underlying emotions that are usually the root cause of the problems.

When drama remains unaddressed, eventually the A-players in the company, the people you want “on the bus,” will either join the dysfunction or leave. Workflow becomes so inefficient that productivity and loyalty are measured by work hours rather than accomplishments or creative breakthroughs. Managers struggle with personnel issues rather than leading a synergistic team. They spend more time addressing their own fears and doing damage control than leading out-of-the-box brainstorming sessions and bringing in new business.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Once you diagnose the drama disease, you can manage it and often cure it. But you must have the courage to identify the problem and apply the appropriate management techniques. While risks exist, the prepared manager can reduce them and make major strides in reducing or eliminating drama.

In this book, we provide you with a variety of indispensable diagnostic and management tools. You’ll learn how to assess the *risks* of having the crucial encounter (nothing happens, resistance increases, chaos erupts, or the relationship ends). Once you know the risks, you can make an *informed decision* on whether to (1) invest in change, (2) cope with the situation (i.e., tolerate the behaviors of an energy-draining associate), or (3) end the relationship (i.e., problematic individual leaves or you leave).

We’ll help you identify each drama role, provide proven tools for defusing drama, and explain which ones to use with specific dramatic types. You’ll also learn how to build rapport before initiating a direct conversation—whether clearing an issue, discussing

performance, or undertaking any number of challenging discussions. Then, we'll teach you how to navigate the encounter. You'll learn when forceful directness is the best approach and when you are better served being delicate. Perhaps most important, you'll learn how to be grounded in yourself so you can be an agent for authenticity without becoming caught in others' dramatic behaviors.

Why You Need This Book

The individuals we work with understand that drama-prone associates sap energy from the organization. They want to plug these energy drains. They want to be in more effective relationships at all levels: subordinate, peer, superior. They want to have the skills and courage to initiate difficult conversations. They want to guide enthusiastic, but less mature, associates. They want to tap their peers' brilliance without either frustrating themselves or stifling less-than-stellar associates. They want to drink from the spigot of a free-flowing entrepreneur without drowning in his idea flood.

You need this book if you are wasting time on drama-filled relationships and want that time back for more productive projects. If the drama runs deep in your organization, you might have fallen into complaining and cynicism yourself. Perhaps you're saying to yourself, "Okay, I get the concepts and tools, but my associates will never change. Maybe it worked in other companies, but it will never work in mine." If you take this position, you can be sure it will be self-fulfilling. You get to be the victim and rationalize your suffering. You get to be right—because nothing will change. As you read this, it might sound silly. Yet, this retreat to victimhood is rampant in most organizations.

Alternatively, you can take healthy responsibility for the situation

and commit to open, curious, collaborative, and authentic interactions. If you take this courageous first step, whatever your title, others will follow your lead. It must start with you.

You want an effective, fun work environment where you face issues and address problems cleanly, and where you collaborate on solutions and celebrate successes. You want to look others in the eye without feeling fear in your chest, anger in your shoulders, or disgust in your gut. You want to plug both the psychic and financial energy drains caused by drama-riddled interactions. You're tired of the dysfunction and you're committed to authentic relationships in every part of your organization.

Perhaps most important, you are committed to your own growth and becoming a better leader, manager, or partner. You want to be drama-free. We will show you how to do all of these things.

The diagnostics and drama-shifting tools we present in the following chapters apply to groups in any size organization, both for-profits and not-for-profits. These groups include the senior executive team, a project team, a committee, the board of directors, and any one-on-one, superior-subordinate relationship. The assessments and tools can be used in managing down, across, or up in the organization. Yes, *up*—we'll even show you how to manage your boss.

Our Unique Approach

Our “lab work” for this book has included intense, candid sessions with over three thousand senior leaders in executive teams, partnerships, family businesses, elite sports teams, and other environments where drama has hampered the effectiveness of the group. In hundreds of off-site retreats, mediations, and coaching sessions,

we've seen the full spectrum of drama, including whiners, pouters, kiss-ups, bullies, mavericks, narcissists, manipulators, loners, and martyrs.

We've determined that almost all of these drama-laden personas can be distilled down to the antics of four sabotaging roles: the Complainer, the Cynic, the Controller, and the Caretaker. Diagnosing and directly managing these four roles when they show up in your subordinates, your peers, your boss, and, most important, yourself, is the gateway out of drama.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR DRAMATIC EMPLOYEE TYPES	
Drama Role	Common Behaviors
Complainer	Whining, waffling, resignation
Cynic	Discounting, sniping, withdrawing
Controller	Steamrolling, micromanaging, impatience
Caretaker	Over-commitment, conflict avoidance, rescuing

Many business books offer practical principles for creating trust, getting buy-in, and monitoring results. While we endorse these practices, they are usually ineffective or even damaging if the underlying drama remains unaddressed. Before you can use the tools, you must first diagnose the type of drama. Then, you must assess the person's capacity to become a productive team member. Using a medical metaphor, imagine your team members are sick. Your job is to accurately diagnose their illness, and then determine the likelihood that the illness can be managed or cured.

This means assessing areas such as your team members' ability

to navigate change; their capacity to receive feedback; their track record in meeting deadlines; their willingness to delegate and empower; their actions when “bad things happen”; their maturity and effectiveness in team settings; and their overall presence around others. Based on this “diagnosis,” you can then, *and only then*, determine the approaches that will optimize their capacity to collaborate with you and with the rest of the organization.

The Three Key Skills

Our goal in this book is to help you master the following three skills, which are crucial for defusing drama and enhancing authenticity in workplace relationships.

1. CATCH YOUR OWN DRIFTS INTO DRAMA

It’s easy to blame interaction problems on others. After all, you’re the good guy in these dynamics; why don’t *they* get it? One of the most difficult challenges for aspiring leaders is to “own their stuff”—to acknowledge that they are equally responsible for relationship shortcomings. So, before you can guide others, you must take inventory of both your interaction strengths and the ways you sabotage relationships. The strength inventory is usually easy; the sabotage inventory is more difficult. It requires the vulnerability and courage to seek others’ candid observations and advice about your behavior. You can’t see your own blind spots, so invite your work colleagues, family members, and friends to give you timely, direct feedback. Ask them to tell you when you slip into any of the Complainer, Cynic, Controller, or Caretaker behaviors. Part III of this book shows you how to identify and get out of your own drama traps.

2. IDENTIFY THE DRAMA STYLE OF THE OTHER PERSON

Before using behavior-specific tools to create a drama-free workplace, you must understand the other person's capacity for authentic interaction. Just as you wouldn't do a tracheotomy to cure a sore throat, it's inappropriate to use ultimatums when a loyal associate makes a rare mistake. On the other hand, you don't use aspirin to treat pneumonia; neither should you coddle the judgmental bully. Skilled management calls for you to know what you're working with before you choose from your suite of interaction tools. In part II, we'll help you diagnose the specific form of drama being acted out by your associates.

3. GUIDE OTHERS OUT OF DRAMA

Once you have diagnosed your own and others' drama tendencies, you need to choose the appropriate interaction tools to optimize the relationship. The problem with many interpersonal dynamics books is that they often assume "one size fits all" when dealing with dysfunction. Recalling the aspirin-pneumonia metaphor, certain tools, like brainstorming, won't work with Cynics or Controllers. Similarly, ultimatums cripple relationships with more thoughtful Caretakers. Part IV offers key tools for coaching others who are stuck in drama.

A Quick Tour of the Book

Part I, "Overture" (chapters 1 and 2), introduces you to the Riva Corporation, its founder-president, and a SWAT team assembled to solve a customer service crisis. In chapter 1, you'll meet Laura, the SWAT team leader, and observe her first meeting with her

drama-prone team members. The remaining chapters interweave Laura's navigation of the Riva drama with stories from our consulting work with management teams. Chapter 2 provides a snapshot of the four drama types and the counterbalancing behaviors and attitudes that you must adopt to breed authenticity in any work-group setting.

Part II, "The Four Drama Roles" (chapters 3 through 6), describes in detail the four primary drama roles: the Complainer, the Cynic, the Controller, and the Caretaker. These chapters offer insights on what's going on inside each role (i.e., why such individuals act in a dramatic fashion), the common dramatic behaviors of each role, and how to manage each role.

Part III, "Getting Yourself Out of Drama" (chapters 7 and 8), invites you to examine yourself and determine where you are prone to fall into drama. You'll learn a step-by-step process for exiting your own drama and becoming curious and open with others, no matter which drama roles they might be in.

Part IV, "Guiding Others Out of Drama" (chapters 9 through 13), presents proven tools for defusing drama and collaborating with your drama-prone associates. We'll then walk you through a proven, seven-step process to set the stage for confronting a drama-prone associate—whether a subordinate, peer, or superior—and having the drama-shifting meeting.

Finally, we will return to the drama-laden crisis at Riva Corporation and see how Laura coaches each of her drama-prone team members. We'll also show how she gets what she wants from her drama-prone boss and finds balance and authenticity in her position at Riva.

Onward!

Let the following chapters guide you in your professional growth. As you read the descriptions of the different drama types, resist the urge to indict others, and instead consider how *you* fall into drama. Choose to eliminate the drama from yourself, and then be the catalyst for others to do the same. You'll find that authenticity trumps drama every time. Your work environment—and your life—will be more productive, efficient, and fun.