

Psychology on a Page 3: Transactional Analysis (TA)



Throughout my early career I became something of a specialist in advertising development research: the kind of project where you take a set of scripts or storyboards out into groups to see if they grab people or not and if they do, how they work.

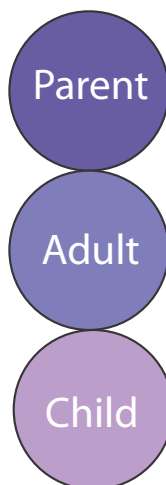
One of the essential components of this kind of work is to have a language for talking about the tone of voice/style of behavior depicted in the prospective commercial and whether it works to engage and motivate or not. Transactional Analysis intrigued me because it had tackled just that problem – the issue of finding an easy-to-

understand language to communicate with patients about the workings of their minds. The photo above shows Eric Berne the originator of TA.

This realisation of Berne's was also one of the earliest examples of the 'Intersections' style of insight, described in our 'Paths to Insight' Course. Berne practiced on the West Coast and connected the idea of characters and their tone of voice from the movies with the tones of voice we hear in our head, in our inner worlds.

This new language, with its famous Parent, Adult, Child model was particularly appropriate for advertising because so often commercials attempt to skirt the rational defences of the mind and engage the childlike delights or pleasures. Berne called these voices the Ego States.

The basic TA model is here:



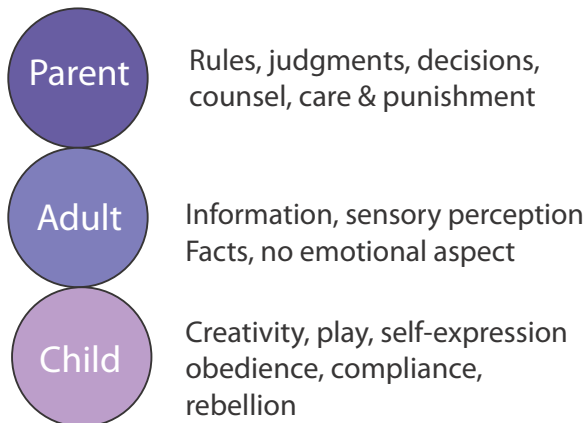
TA, the three Ego States

The idea is that there are three core components to consciousness, three voices if you like – a Parent, an Adult and a Child. Each one has a particular tone and affect and these are summarised in the next diagram, below:



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TA - the structural model of the psyche



The fun thing is that you can experience each of these voices for yourself from moment to moment. Your parent voice can be either controlling or nurturing, your adult presents facts and observations while your child hums that jingle or pop tune you can't get out of your head! The beauty of the model is that it can be checked out experientially by any of us at any time. We can feel its reality: our inner voices do speak to us in different styles. In advertising research we often used references to these voices to analyse the impact – or lack of it – of advertising.

There is a brilliant example of a TA enhanced commercial here: the R White's Secret Lemonade Drinker:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqBa7eay6Fo>

Here an adult who creeps downstairs in an exaggerated pantomime 'tippy-toes' walk to help himself to some Lemonade from the fridge. He is totally gripped by his Child ego state. His expression is of delight. Just as he drinks his lemonade, his wife appears behind him, completely in her Adult, and we wonder for a few seconds whether she will scold him (Critical Parent) or empathise (Nurturing Parent).

Because the advertiser wants to encourage our empathy and participation, a smile dawns on her face and she accepts her man's bizarre behavior. All of this takes place over a jingle, a mock rock track sung in a very Free Child voice.

