

Hay, Julie (2006) What coaches can learn from TA *Coaching at Work* 1:5 35-39

# IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS

Organisations are waking up to the value of Transactional Analysis as a valuable coaching tool. In this special report we take a look at an increasingly popular concept

By Julie Hay



A freelance Transactional Analysis (TA) consultant approaching an HR director about potential work might be told that TA is not used or wanted within the organisation. Yet when the consultant talks about what the organisation does use, or meets the in-house trainers or potential participants, the following concepts often crop up: 'I'm OK – You're OK'. 'You're playing games with me'. 'Controlling, critical, nurturing parent'. 'Adult ego state'. 'Adapted, natural, free child'. 'Little professor'. 'Drivers' (hurry up, be perfect, and so on). And 'working styles'.

Interestingly, all of these familiar coaching terms actually have their origins in TA. They've now become embedded in our everyday language – so that we often use TA without even realising the source.

Increasingly, TA is being woven into coaching to help analyse what goes on between coach and client and as a tool for clients to analyse their own functioning.

## What is TA?

According to the ITAA (International TA Association) and EATA (European Association of TA), TA is a theory of human personality and social behaviour. It is a comprehensive system of psychotherapy founded in the late 1950s by Eric Berne (1910-70), author of the book *Games People Play*.

## TA – common myths

### • Isn't TA an outdated California hippy type of thing?

TA developed in California in the 1960s but has gone on to become a well-respected approach, with international, European and national professional associations throughout the world.

### • Isn't TA a therapy approach?

TA was developed within therapy settings but the theories relate to human functioning, so are just as relevant in any context, provided the approach is adjusted accordingly.

### • Isn't TA rather simplistic?

TA terminology is deliberately accessible, which sometimes creates a false impression. There is considerable depth in the theories, which may be overlooked if professionals rely on popular TA books rather than proper training.



## TA for coach training – key topics

**Contracting** – to ensure clarity of expectations, establish boundaries, take all stakeholders into account

**TA 'proper' and ego states** – as a potent way to analyse interactions, at both social and psychological levels

**Strokes** – for checking both the stroking within the coaching relationship and how this is influenced by the wider stroking patterns of coach and client

**Games** – to understand when things go wrong, and what to do differently

**Working styles/drivers** – an easy-to-understand model that shows how strengths may turn into weaknesses, plus the impact on relationships

**Discounting** – why clients don't always spot their own problems, or can't imagine what to do about them (and how the same applies to coaches!)

**Symbiosis** – raising awareness of the tendency towards dependency, and how to 'parent' in ways that stimulate client autonomy

It is not only psychotherapists who use TA. There is a thriving community of developmental transactional analysts who apply their version of TA in organisational and educational settings and coaching, concerned with development and growth.

TA's name originated from work on analysing transactions, or interactions. Nowadays, analysing transactions is one of a wide range of interlocking constructs and frameworks. These are grounded thoroughly in therapeutic practice but converted into practical versions suited to anyone who wants to:

- Help people understand themselves better
- Enhance their relationships
- Solve problems
- Make positive changes in their lives.

### Why use TA?

TA provides a systematic approach to understanding the links between human needs and behaviours, as well as frameworks relating to the ways that organisations function. This makes it extremely useful as a framework for analysing what goes on between coach, client and any other stakeholders in the relationship. It is something that can be taught easily and quickly to clients so they can analyse their own functioning and identify areas for change. The key principles of TA are:

- All people are OK as human beings, even though their behaviour may be unacceptable

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TA helps us to make fresh decisions where our old choices are leading to current problems

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- People have an urge to grow and develop themselves, even though they may be repressing this without realising
- We make decisions and are therefore responsible for our behaviour.

We are likely to have made many of our decisions when we were young and lacking options and information. A function of TA is to help us understand this and to make fresh decisions where our old choices are leading to current problems.

Another significant advantage of TA comes from its contractual approach.

### TA and coaching

There are many possible applications of TA to coaching. They include:

- **Contracting** The practitioner contracts with the client, and if necessary with the organisation, to avoid situations where clients feel coerced into coaching or expect the coach to take over and solve problems for them
- **Discounting** An internal process whereby we minimise or ignore some aspects of self, others or the situation.

#### Contracting

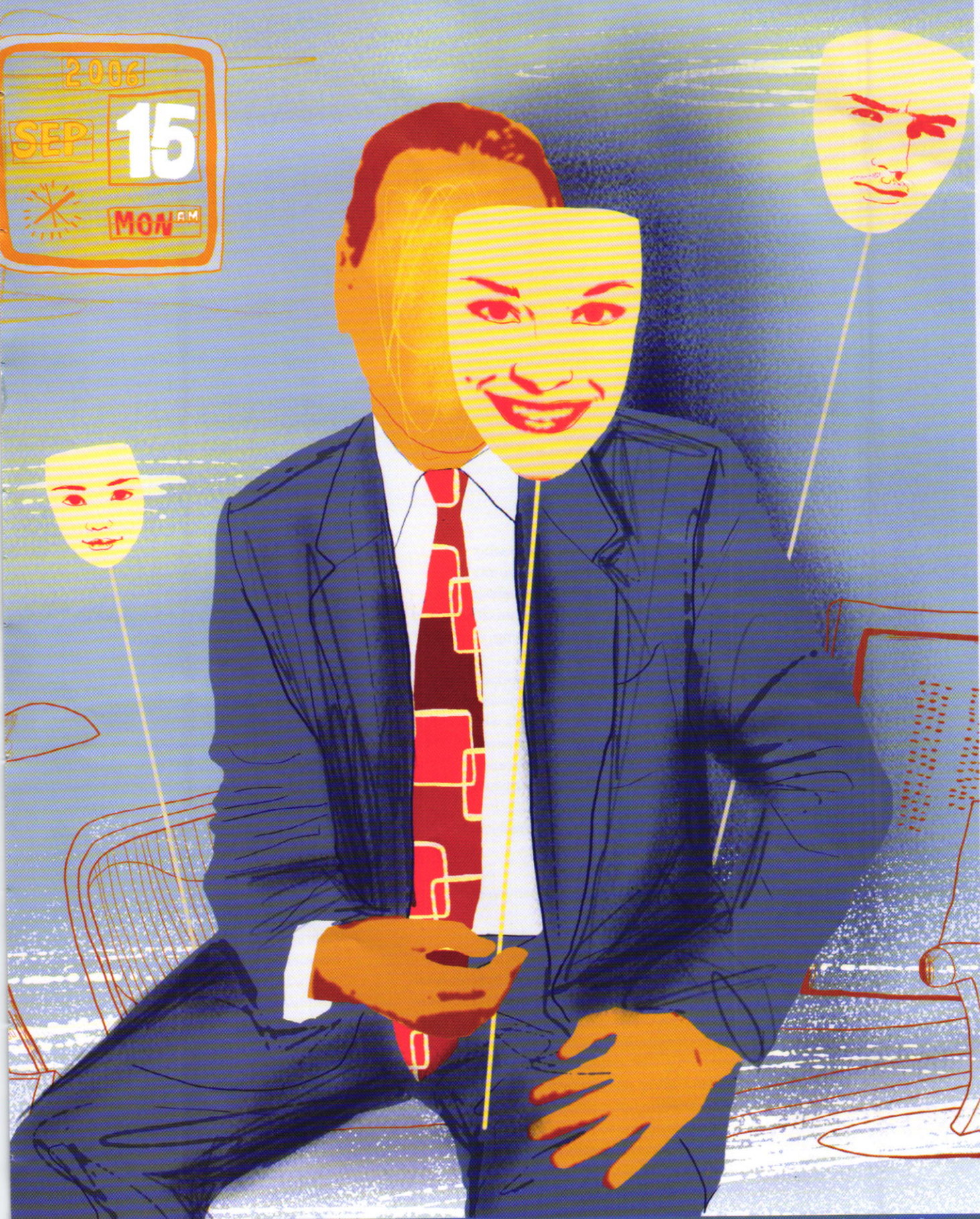
The main point about written or verbal contracts is that we discuss and agree why we are interacting when we plan to use TA to help someone grow.

When coaching is done as part of an organisational scheme, the rights and responsibilities of all parties must be respected and balanced (see page 40, *How to use TA in multi-party contracting*).

Contracts operate at different levels but need to be clear to avoid unwitting sabotage:

- **Procedural** – which includes administrative and logistical details.







## TA concepts – a guide

**Adult** – ego state system, appearing grown up, also defined as being in the here and now

**BARs** – sequence of Beliefs, Actions, Reinforcements

**Child** – ego state system, based on experiences in childhood, may be regression

**Discounting** – not being aware of something about self, others, situation – we don't know what we don't know

**Drivers** – characteristic ways of behaving that 'drive' us

**Ego states** – states of being and functioning

**Games (psychological)** – repetitive interaction patterns that lead to negative payoffs

**Parent** – ego state system, copied from parent figures, may be regression

**Strokes** – units of recognition

**Scripts** – unconscious life plans determined in childhood

**Transaction** – interaction between parties

**Working styles** – positive version of 'drivers'

- Professional – what am I offering as a professional coach, what do you need, how competent am I to meet your needs, what does the organisation expect?
- Psychological – what might occur outside our awareness, how we might sabotage the process, how might other factors interfere?

### Discounting

I often teach this as the secret to the universe. Discounting occurs out of awareness and is how we maintain our frame of reference. We tune out anything that doesn't fit our preconceptions. This can be a healthy process that keeps us sane by filtering out unwanted information – such as traffic noise. However, it is also why some clients seem unaware of the impact they have on others, or insist there is nothing they can do.

We can consider discounting on several levels, as forming a series of steps. For example, a client may:

- Seem unaware that they are not completing allocated tasks (*Situation*)
- Claim it doesn't matter (*Significance*)
- Insist there are no ways they could work better (*Solutions*)
- Agree others could work better but they personally lack the ability (*Skills*)
- Accept they could maybe learn the skills but they don't have time, or money, to see to that just now (*Strategies*)
- Devise a plan but fail to put it into practice because they don't feel motivated enough (*Success*).

Discounting at one level implies discounting at all higher steps. The coach will often be able to observe the client's discounting because it is as if the coach stands on a higher step. When this happens, the coach needs to join the client on whatever step the client has reached, so as to gently lead them up the steps. This same process may also occur when the coach goes for supervision.

Here are some other useful TA constructs:

- A model of change based on child development. Using this (instead of the metaphor of death and loss that is so common) makes it clear that change is a healthy process that allows us to learn.
- Ego state models, incorporating the familiar Parent-Adult-Child, provide ways of analysing how people are behaving and why: are they in the here-and-now or have they unwittingly regressed? TA can be used to analyse coach/client interactions as well as how the client interacts with others.
- Stroke theory enables us to analyse stroking, or human recognition, patterns and plan improvements, making sure we are not relying on our clients for our own strokes, and that they do not become over-dependent on us for theirs.
- Knowing about working styles, which become drivers when we are stressed, allows us to reinforce client strengths and help them avoid unhelpful automatic responses – this applies to the coach as well.
- Life positions provide an explanation of why we opt for believing we or others are not OK, or are more OK than others. BARs show how we run closed systems of limiting Beliefs, which influence our Actions, so that we generate Reinforcements that support the original Belief.

Hopefully, this article has piqued the curiosity of your child ego state, has provided enough information on the professionalism of TA to satisfy your parent ego state, and has prompted your adult ego state to consider taking further action. ■

Julie Hay is president of the European Mentoring & Coaching Council. She was the inaugural chairperson of the IDTA. Julie is internationally accredited as a trainer and supervisor in TA. She is also a licensed trainer of NLP.