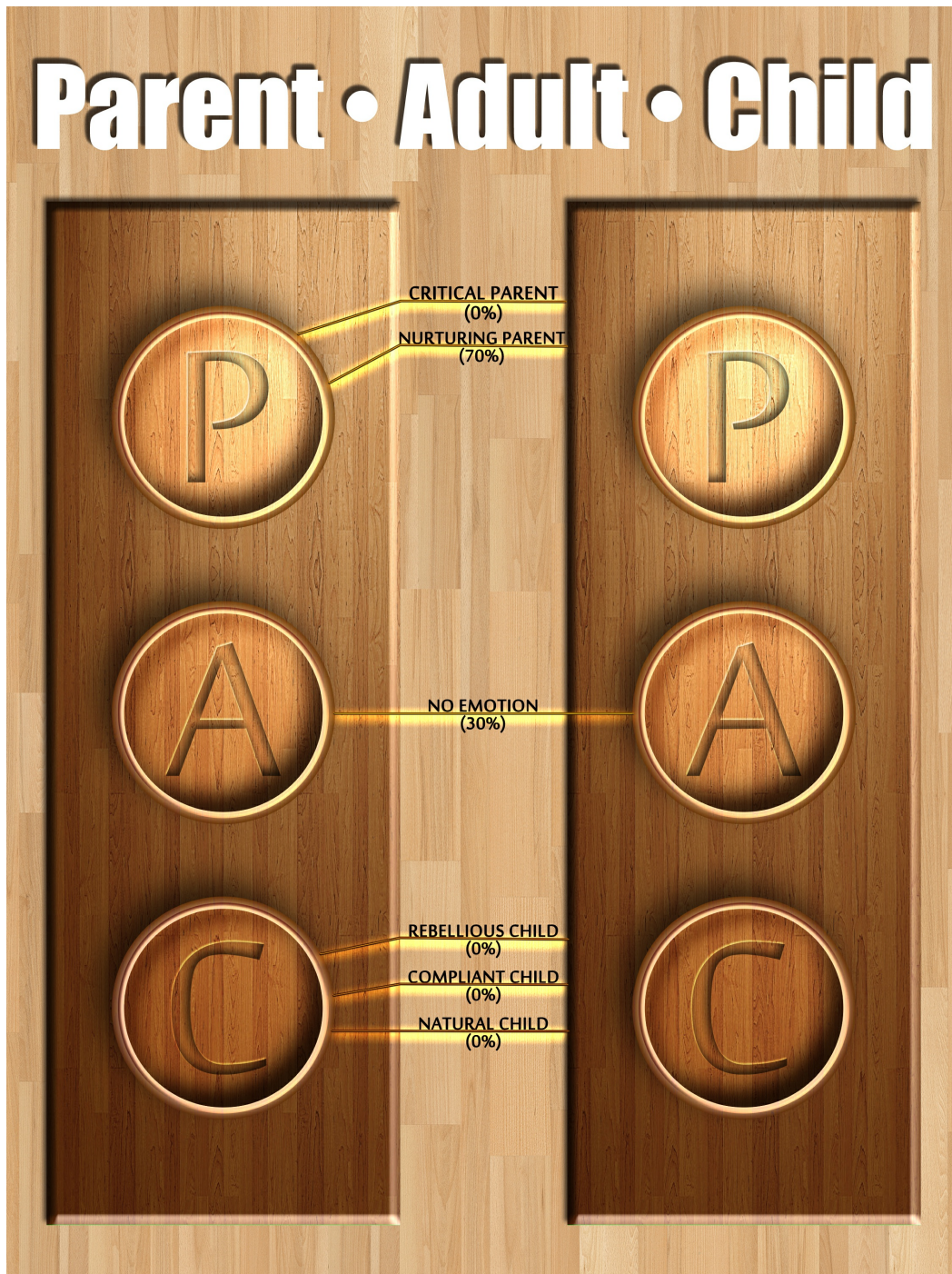




Sixty Second Insight #15: Transactional Analysis

by Dave Arch

Parent • Adult • Child



Sometimes referred to as “transactional analysis,” the “parent-adult-child” (PAC) model gives us a good starting place for understanding interactions with others and building our charisma as leaders. Those who study this particular model indicate that we talk to each other from one of three ego states.

I can speak to you from my parent ego state, my adult ego state, or my child ego state.

Has anyone ever “gone parental” on you? Then no doubt you know what it's like to be spoken to from someone's parent ego state. As you'll see from the above graphic, within my parent ego state, I have a critical parent and I have a nurturing parent.

I also have a child ego state. I have a rebellious child, a compliant child and a natural child. A rebellious child lives just below the surface. It's the part of me that just wants to scream, "You're not the boss of me." When you come at me with your critical parent, you're going to trip my rebellious child or my compliant child. My compliant child is that part that wants to please. I might tell you what I think you want to hear, not really telling you the truth. My natural child is that playful part of me. The child ego state *never* gets emotionally older than seven years old. That part of us has all the fears, concerns, and lack of self discipline possessed by a seven year old.

The adult ego state has no emotion. All emotions reside within the parent and the child ego state. The adult would say, "That could be a problem" with no emotion (not even a raised eyebrow).

In relating to others as a leader, I find that the ideal is to relate 70% from your nurturing parent, 30% from your adult. Don't let the critical parent speak and don't let the rebellious, compliant, or natural child in the room. We say, "Leave the child in the car."

When tempted to go to your critical parent, go to your adult. The adult would say, "That could be a problem" with no emotion either verbally or non-verbally in the expression of your words. By taking that approach, you do not trip an emotional reaction in the other person. Instead, the person you're addressing will probably ask, "*What* could be a problem?" and a fruitful conversation has started.

Now, on this particular graphic the circles look very evenly balanced. However, as you look at the following graphic, you'll notice a variety of dysfunctions.

Three PAC Dysfunctions



Looking at the panels on this graphic you will see that the first one shows a large parent, smaller adult and smaller child ego state.

This picture of a person with a large Parental Ego State is probably a person who doesn't know how to relate to someone if he or she isn't "giving down" to the other person. The person with an oversized Parental Ego States oftentimes won't be able to relate to you unless you're willing to have them "parent you." It might either be nurturing (which can be smothering) or critical (which can be demoralizing). But it will be parenting.

The middle panel in the graphic portrays a person with a small parent, a small adult, and a big child. Here, a seven year old runs the life. There is very little self-discipline, very little self-control, they are totally fearful. They are essentially everything a seven year old would be.

The third is a large P, a small A, and a large C. Most people I work with in my executive coaching look like that third panel. They have continued to raise themselves after their parents quit raising them. Their critical parent continues to try and get their compliant child to do the heavy lifting.

Oftentimes in sales, it will have to do with cold calling. They know they need to cold call. And so, the critical parent inside begins belittling the child inside – trying to shame the child into getting up in the chair and making those cold calls.

“What are you afraid of? They’re not going to kill you. Get up in that chair. What’s that? You don’t want to?” Any seven year old would be afraid of cold calling. But the parent eventually coerces the child into the chair to make the cold calls.

This person doesn’t understand that they have an adult ego state in there who will understand much more about cold calling than you’ll ever convince a seven year old. How much better to nurture the child with words such as “I see you’re afraid. I see you’re scared of cold calling. Why don’t you stay here. I (that would be the adult) need to go make some cold calls” would be a much healthier internal conversation.

The adult ego state needs to be exercised. In fact, exercising the Adult is one of the best exercises you can do. Standing in front of a mirror - working hard at saying things without any emotion can be time well spent. No emotion allowed, not even a curled lip. I find you can say almost anything to anyone when you speak with no emotion from the adult.

Practice this ego state so that you can access the ego state that’s appropriate for any given communication. When tempted to speak from the critical parent, go to your adult, but seek 70% to speak from your nurturing parent.

Then again on any given day, you might not be able to find your nurturing parent. That’s when the words “Help me understand” become important. That word track is the battle cry of the nurturing parent. “Help me understand how that happened.” “Help me understand what was going on when that occurred.” The nurturing parent often has to begin with a word script (i.e. behaviorally). The emotions can come along. but on any given day you might not be able to find the nurturing parent, and you’ll need to lead from your behavior.

The parent, the adult, the child — three key parts of who you are. It ends up being a practical model for better understanding how we connect with other people in our leadership role.