

Advantages of Adult-Adult Behavior

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My recent columns have described interactions between the Parent, Adult, or Child of one individual with these same “ego states” in another. If you desire these previous articles for reference, please contact me and I will provide copies.

My hope is that you have been able to envision obvious advantages of the **Adult-Adult** working relationship. I welcome the opportunity to talk with anyone who has recently experimented with moving your relationships from a traditional **Parent-Child** approach to the more collaborative **Adult-Adult** approach. Please share with me both your successes and your failures!

Last week I described a deliberate but very effective **Adult-Adult** method for dealing with discipline issues with an employee who repeatedly behaves irresponsibly. Let's look at some advantages that make the manager's self-restraint worth the extra effort.

Perhaps the biggest advantage is that it role-models the **Adult-Adult** decision-making process. Others on the team see its success in the most demanding of circumstances. It is unfortunate, however, that much of the interaction is confidential and executed privately between the manager and the errant employee. Still, every move of the manager is scrutinized in situations like this. So there is usually enough information leaked by the employee (and ultimately enough tough questions asked of the manager) that everyone on the team has a good idea of what has happened.

Other employees see the extra effort being offered. This provides assurance that they will be treated with this level of respect if they ever find themselves in a similar situation.

Because the errant employee is provided with options and the freedom to make his or her own decisions, sometimes the choice is to resign. This is a pressure-reducing outcome for all involved!

If the person fails to resign but employment is ultimately terminated anyway, the result is clearly his or her choice, not the manager's. The individual may claim that he or she was treated unfairly, but the other team members know otherwise.

Managers who stick with this **Adult-Adult** approach gain a great amount of confidence. In future disciplinary situations, these managers respond sooner with appropriate actions. Dealing with the situation at a less adversarial level reduces the likelihood of escalation to potential termination of employment.

If the errant employee chooses properly, he or she retains the job and can become a valuable contributor. I've seen this happen on several occasions. In contrast, the traditional **Parent-Child** approach to discipline causes bitterness. The resentment is often so high, the employee is never able to rebuild a relationship with the manager or company.

Sometimes there are legal repercussions from the decision to terminate employment, such as EEOC discrimination charges or wrongful discharge civil suits. The clarity and specificity in the documentation—showing the options provided to the employee—gives strong substantiation for the actions taken.

I have often used these Parent, Adult, and Child concepts in training business leaders. The **Adult-Adult** relationship is generally the most productive in the workplace. It's a joy to use one's gifts creatively with logical, option-creating, problem-preventing coworkers.

The collaborative planning and production of desired outcomes is not limited to the workplace. These concepts work very well within families. The main job of parents is to transform their children into fully functioning, contributing adults. I encourage creative parents to start **Adult-Adult** interactions with their growing children at a quite early age. It can reduce significantly the **Parent-Parent** rebellion that tends to come during the teenage years!