

There's a Little Girl or Boy in You!

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Maybe you think you have grown up. You may be intelligent and sophisticated and highly respected. Still, that little five-year-old is alive and well and makes her or his presence known once in a while, sometimes when you least expect it!

Is that good? Is that bad? Let's just say that sometimes that little kid gets in the way, and sometimes that youngster is the key to your success!

Forty years ago, Thomas Harris published a book entitled *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. Three years before that, his colleague Eric Berne had published a book entitled *Games People Play*. These two books birthed an approach in psychology known as "Transactional Analysis." Their model identifies three different "ego states" in each of us. Any "transaction" between two people can be analyzed to determine which ego state is engaged in each person.

The ego states are designated Child, Parent, and Adult. We all know what is characteristic of children. We've all been a child, and we've all been around them. Children are wonderfully curious, creative, impulsive, hopeful, energetic, and playful. They often make choices based on the amount of fun they are likely to enjoy!

Children are emotional, and their emotions swing unpredictably. Sometimes they are filled with bravado—they are willing to try anything, even if it involves great risk! But sometimes children are filled with fear over the craziest things. (What were you afraid of as a kid?)

Children can be unrealistic, idealistic, unreasonable, irresponsible, dependent, and self-absorbed.

You may think, "Oh, no! Not me!" Don't fool yourself—that little kid is alive and well in you!

We all display these qualities at times. The question shouldn't be whether having childlike characteristics is good or bad. For most responsible individuals (especially leaders), the question is, "Am I effective?" That is, do you influence others to make choices that productively accomplish the desired outcomes of your organization?

I teach this Parent/Adult/Child model to leadership teams. We seek ways to make the relationships between people in the workplace healthier. As we explore habitual routines, many leaders realize their controlling, judging Parent is often dominant. They sometimes treat employees as if they are irresponsible children. That's a hard habit to break, but well worth the effort.

This Parent/Child "dance" never occurs instantaneously. It develops after many interactions where each party conforms to their scripted roles. The boss (Parent) demands harshly, and the employee (Child) retreats in fear and disappointment. The next time, the employee is less willing to risk, and the boss is even more frustrated at the lack of responsibility.

Typically, neither party can improve this interactive "dance" alone. An effective moderator can intervene appropriately, providing feedback and offering options to both individuals. A desirable outcome is to move toward collaboration between rational, analytical, problem-solving, and problem-preventing Adults.

Your irresponsible Child ego state is rarely a beneficial contributor to the health of the workplace. Still, your little boy or girl brings value in terms of creativity, energy, and persistence! Celebrate that Child in you! Nurture your Child and learn when and how to let him or her flourish appropriately!

Your Child is the source of your dreams! The tenacity of your little boy or girl who's willing to do whatever it takes to be successful can be a huge contributor to the success of your workplace!

Dennis Hooper is an executive coach helping leaders appreciate their Child, understand and properly orient their Parent, and link their Adult with other Adults in their organizations. For more fun and greater effectiveness, contact Dennis at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com or (770)-286-2250.