

# Coaching Someone Off of the Drama Triangle [Coaching Demonstration] | Episode 256

**Elena:** If you've ever felt stuck with a client and wondered, how can I get them to break out of this negative pattern, then this one's for you. Hi, friends, I'm Elena Aguilar and this is the Bright Morning Podcast. Every week I will help you lead conversations that build connection and spark change.

Today I'm sharing another coaching demonstration. This time focused on a powerful framework that's helped me and countless educators break out of stuck stories.

The drama triangle. If you've ever worked with a client who blames everyone else for their struggles, who feels perpetually powerless, or who constantly sacrifices themselves to save the day, then you've probably encountered the drama triangle. So in this episode, you will hear how I coach someone off the triangle.

Listen closely to how I use questioning and reflection to help the client move toward a more empowered mindset. Now, before we begin, I encourage you to spend time with the skill session in our coach Learning Library called Getting Off the Drama Triangle. This walks you through everything you need to know.

It tells you what each of the roles on the drama triangle sound like because there are several roles that we can take on that triangle. This skill session talks to you about what you can say in response and how to help someone shift without judgment. It also includes a video of this coaching demonstration and a recording of a debrief conversation where I pull back the curtain on the moves that I made, and you will find a link to that in the show notes.

Okay, here's what you need to know about this role roleplay demonstration. I will be talking to Mike, who will be channeling a ninth grade English teacher. This conversation is taking place the first week of school. It's my first year working with Mike and our first conversation since the school year started, although we did have a kickoff conversation the previous week, so coaching is new to this school, and I have coached in the district before, but this is my first year coaching here.



This conversation is taking place during one of Mike's prep periods. Like most of the role plays on this podcast, we jump into the conversation after the beginning part of a coaching conversation in which we would have had some connection time. You are not gonna hear that today, so I have created a free resource for you that walks you through how to lead that portion of your conversations.

And if you go to the show notes, you will find a link to that resource. Okay, let's jump into this conversation.

**Elena [coach]:** Mike, I wanna just start off our time together by acknowledging that in the email where I confirmed our time today, you responded saying that you're just exhausted. And I know it's the first week of school and this can feel like a hard time to meet.

Before we get into the topics on our agenda for today that I included in that email. I wanted to just give you a little space to share what this week is feeling like, and if there's anything you want to let me know about the exhaustion or what's coming up.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah. Yeah. It's, I don't know. I am already exhausted at the start of the school year.

**Elena [coach]:** I,

**Mike [client]:** there's the graphs that show like teacher energy levels and you start off really high and then you get depleted around the holidays and recharge a little bit.

And I'm like already at the depleted level and it's September and

It's just, it's always new administration, new ideas, new curriculum. Yay. It's, it I'm just, I'm I guess just exhausted by all of it. But it's fine. It is what it is.

**Elena [coach]:** Hmm. Well, It doesn't sound fine and. I'm just considering how much experience you have as a teacher and how depleting this situation sounds and just undermining of your joy of being in the classroom, being a teacher.

I'm wondering if you might be able to complete this sentence with whatever comes to mind first,

**Mike [client]:** Okay.



**Elena [coach]:** and you could repeat it several times if you want. The problem is I.

**Mike [client]:** Oh the problem is oh my gosh, there are a lot of problem is the problem is I. You said, I'm a veteran teacher, I have 10 years of experience. It'd be really nice if that mattered. But it doesn't, and we're still treated like infants who have to be directed and told exactly what to do, and here's the new curriculum and here's what you must use with it, and here's what page you must be on.

The problem is students are coming in less prepared than ever. And it is just exhausting starting from like further behind every year. The problem is admin who just, I don't know, they're just, they're naive to be honest. And I don't really know what to do about that.

But every couple years it's a whole new team and they're bright-eyed and they're gonna be the ones who figure this all out and. New ideas and new everything. And that all falls on us. And then we have to start over and rework everything. And it's not better and it's not any different and we don't get paid any extra for the extra work we have to do.

But yeah. I don't know. I but I'm fine. I'm tired I've been here before. I'll be okay.

**Elena [coach]:** So I know we're just starting to work together and. I might be coaching in a way that's new to you or I just wanna acknowledge that might feel a little different. I'm just curious. You said a number of times I'm exhausted, and then you said, I'm fine, I'll be okay. And I wanna acknowledge that I think I'm actually hearing a broader range of emotions.

I think I'm hearing some, tell me if I'm getting this wrong. I think I'm hearing some frustration, some sadness, maybe some fear. I'm curious if any of that feels true for you.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah, frustration is just like the normal state of the job at this point. It's, it this whole program, right? Oh new coaching program, new ideas, and oh, we're gonna take your prep period to do that. And that's nothing personal with you. You're doing your job.

I'm doing mine, it's another new thing. And here we go. This is gonna be the thing, you've gotta redo your curriculum. But we're taking your prep plan, so I guess you're doing that at home at night. So yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah, so there's definitely some anger there. So I'm curious, it sounds like you're feeling really disempowered, like all these things are happening to you.



**Mike [client]:** Yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah. I wanna ask you a challenging question. Just gonna preface it by saying, this might feel challenging, but, what do you get from feeling that way?

What do you get from feeling like I don't have any power?

**Mike [client]:** Oh, I get tired. I get upset.

**Elena [coach]:** What does that give you?

**Mike [client]:** I don't feel like it gives me anything. I feel like it takes things. It's this isn't what I got into this for and I didn't get into this to be constantly being told by inexperienced people how to do my job, how to run my classroom what, where I'm gonna be every minute of the day.

So I, I don't feel like I get anything.

**Elena [coach]:** Okay. I'm hearing a lot of. The problems or the targets of the frustration are things that sound like they're outside of your control. And so yeah. I'm wondering, do you think there's anything that you might be able to influence in the experiences you're having this situation? Is there anything you might be able to influence?

**Mike [client]:** I've tried a lot of this before. I've tried joining, the curriculum teams and the local site council and trying to, advocate for teachers and trying to make change that way. And it you make one step forward and two steps back and I've just given up on spending my time on that kind of thing.

I know what you're saying. All I can control is what's in my classroom. And I do try to do that, but it's just, it's really hard when there's so many actions getting thrown at me that are from outside my control and I can't do anything about them.

But I don't need to talk about my frustrations all day. I'm okay.

**Elena [coach]:** I am curious if there's any of these problems or frustrations that you might feel like there's one little thing you could do to influence what's happening, to make it a little bit less frustrating.

**Mike [client]:** I think that the only success I've found is working with colleagues. Our English team, we've been working together for, the newest one is five years, so at least five years. And that team gets along really well and we support each other. And so I



think that is the place where , I feel like we can coordinate to say. Here's how we are going to respond to some of these changes, and here's how we're gonna support each other and say, there's new curriculum things we have to develop. So we divide that up and say, okay, you're gonna take this section, I'll take this section. So I guess that's the success I've had.

But outside of that I haven't really found success in trying to change admin or anything like that.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah, so that's. I would say wise, you are thinking about where it makes sense to put your energy and you're not going to choose trying to influence admin. I'm curious if you weren't feeling as stuck as you are right now, perhaps, what might you try doing?

**Mike [client]:** What I would like to be trying to do is what I know how to do and leading my classroom as a veteran teacher. That's what I'd be doing.

**Elena [coach]:** Tell me.

**Mike [client]:** what I know how.

**Elena [coach]:** Okay. Tell me one thing you would do that you feel like you can't do right now.

**Mike [client]:** One of the things I love teaching is writing, which is something everyone likes. And I have developed my sort of personal writing curriculum over the years in how we scaffold different types of writing for different purposes and different audiences. And I get really excited about doing that.

And what we have now is this new curriculum map that totally blows up the way I used to teach writing. And so I do what I'm told. I understand that's part of the job. So we're directed to use this map, and that's what I use. But it just, I know it's not as good as the way I would do it if I didn't have to use this thing.

And so that's what I mean, where it's just every day I'm just like kids, here we go. We're, I know how to do this, but we're gonna use their dumb way instead. And I don't obviously say that to the kids but it's just it's exhausting feeling like, I know the right way to do this for my kids in my class, and instead I have to use this generic, for-profit canned thing that they decided is gonna be the answer this year.

I.



**Elena [coach]:** Yeah, it's really tough. I just really wanna acknowledge, I'm hearing the anger that's based in your expertise.

Yeah.

I'm just curious. I'm gonna tell you what I'm thinking, and I'm telling you this in a way because I really wanna honor your experience as a teacher and you've had enough life experience now, so I wanna share what I'm hearing and see what thoughts you have. So I'm really hearing that you are feeling as I said, powerless.

You're feeling like all this stuff is happening to you. It's what sometimes we think about or talk about as an experience of being a victim of all this stuff happening. And sometimes that can be truly a daily experience. Sometimes it's what's happening in our minds, like we feel like, or it feels like everything is like happening to us and we're just at the mercy of whatever the district decides or admin decides

and so when we feel that way, it is, it's a healthy response to have anger because anger is saying, no, this is wrong. This shouldn't be this way. I guess that's how I'm hearing the situation you're in. Prep was taken away. I have to do this. I don't have any choice but to do this.

I know there's a better way.

I guess, okay, the last thing I'm hearing is that you're just resigned to, I'll just do it. This is how it's gonna be, and it's the first week of school and you're totally exhausted. I guess I'm just curious do you want us right now together to talk about how you might feel more empowered to address this?

Or do you wanna just say no, I am totally resigned and somehow I'll just make it through the year? What do you wanna do?

**Mike [client]:** Yeah, I don't love hearing. Those observations and I appreciate direct feedback. I'm a direct person, so I like the direct feedback. I think maybe you're touching on something that's hard for me, which is that's not how I am outside of school. Don't see myself as a victim.

I'm not a person who makes excuses. But here, what do I wanna do? I want the situation to be different, and it's not a, it's not an imaginary thing that I don't have the power in the building, right? Not my mindset.



That's real. I really do have to use this curriculum that I don't think is what's best for our kids. So I guess I don't, I'm not imagining it and I don't like being in this state, which I think is why I'm so exhausted at this stage already. If you have ideas for how to change that, would love to hear 'em.

**Elena [coach]:** I definitely wanna say I'm not saying it's an imaginary thing. I understand the new it's the new administrators, I'm just wondering really what I'm checking in on is do you want us to explore if there might be anything within your sphere of influence, or do you want to just move on to, we were gonna look at some of the data of your incoming students, and I'll just offer that for example, some of what is within your control or perhaps your influence is how you think about what's happening.

And so we could unpack some of those beliefs that you're holding you are saying prep period was taken 'cause you have to meet with me and that's something, for example, that we could explore. Are there any ways to think about this time and your prep period that could feel just a little bit less like something else is happening to me?

Is there a way to talk about what happens in coaching so that you feel like prep wasn't taken? Now

I get to have time where I get to have my learning and my growth be the center. This is my time.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah. I think for me, the thing that'll be most helpful is I think just focusing on my kids and like us talking about, because that is the only. Recourse I feel like I have is like I just have to put my head down and do what I can in my room for my kids. I don't think it would be a good use of our time for me to just vent about administration during this time.

That's not helpful. That's what we have Friday happy hours for, I get plenty of venting space. I don't need that. So I think focusing my classroom and the kids, and yes I would say I know that I have to use this curriculum and I honestly probably haven't accepted that yet.

And so figuring out how I'm going to use it in a way that maybe still incorporates some of my work that feels like it could be a useful thing. But I don't actually wanna spend a whole lot of time thinking about admin in here because it makes me angry and doesn't do anything.

**Elena [coach]:** Okay, great. So that feels really clear. And I am really curious if there's a way for us to look at the curriculum and consider how you can incorporate what you



know about teaching, writing and focusing on your kids. Okay. So we're gonna stop the role play there and we will do the debrief for the Learning Library.

**Elena:** Welcome back. I hope that gave you a deeper sense of how subtle and how transformative this work can be. So here are a few reminders as you begin using the drama triangle in your coaching.

First, recognize when you or your client is playing a role on the drama triangle. Stay grounded in curiosity and in care, and don't rush the shift. Invite it gently. Helping someone get off the drama triangle isn't about shaming them. It's about holding up a mirror and walking alongside them as they find a new way forward.

So to go deeper, I want to encourage you to check out the skill session in our coach Learning Library called Getting Off the Drama Triangle. And there you will find practical tools. And downloadable prompts and a full breakdown of the different roles that we can play on the triangle.

Plus, how to respond in real time with compassion and clarity.

Friends. If you appreciated today's episode, then please share it with someone you know who would benefit from it. And or hop over to Apple Podcast and leave us a five star rating and a review to help others discover it. And thank you for helping our show. Reach some new friends. And if you love the show and you want to watch me record every episode, then you are in luck because the podcast is now on YouTube.

So check out the show notes for a link to this episode in video and subscribe to our channel. Okay. LesLee Bickford is the podcast producer and Stacey Goodman, does the sound engineering be well everyone?

