

How to practise 'No-Triangles'

The best way to deal with an issue is directly with the other person.

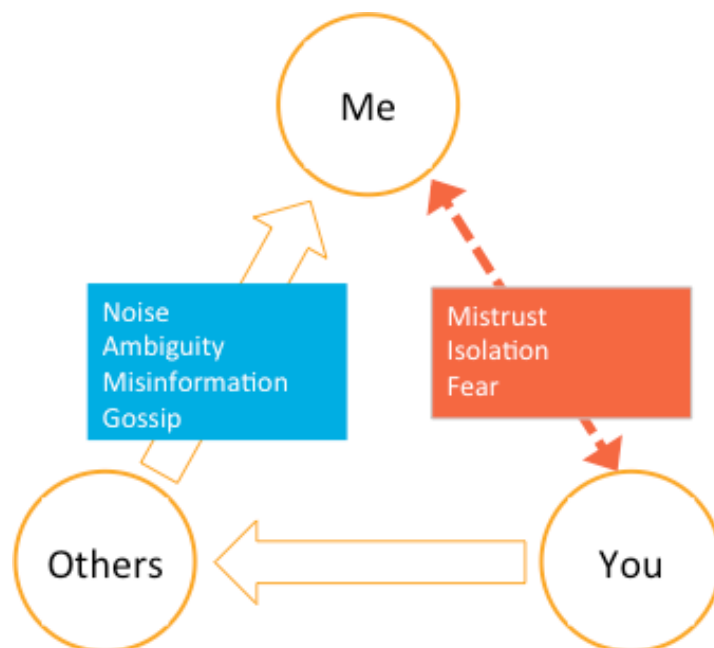
We all face difficult or troublesome situations from time to time. Your own experiences will tell you that when you make the effort to deal directly with the other person the chances of a good outcome tremendously increase.

We know this, yet we often find it much easier to "rope in" others.

Sometimes the idea of confronting an issue head-on can be just too difficult. What if they react badly? What if I don't have the "killer response" to their objection? We are worried about the response we might get so, instead, people will often shop their issue around. It might be to see if other people have the same issue, or to bolster support. It might be so the other person hears it from someone else. Or it might be simply to make it go away.

When we create a "triangle", we create a new set of problems

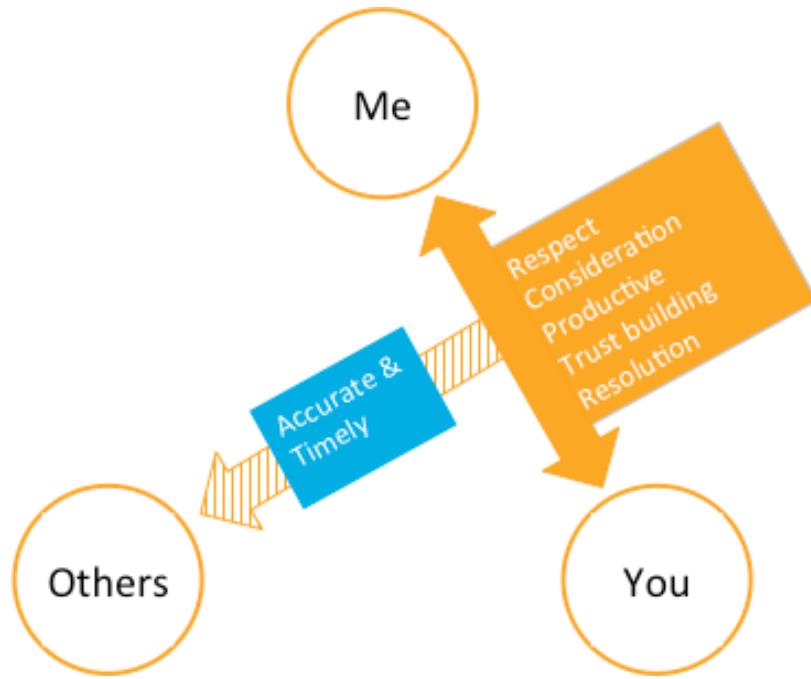
The problems with this approach are numerous.



Firstly, you are telling the other person that you don't have the courage to face them, which is bad for you. Secondly, you are telling the other person that you don't trust them to have an honest and open conversation. And thirdly, you involve other people who may not really want to be involved in the first place. There is also the chance your words can be repeated, out of context, which can compound the issue.

A conscious practice of “no-triangles” is required.

‘No-triangles’ is simply: “You don’t talk to me about her, and I don’t talk to you about him”. Go straight to the source. It will create conversations that are direct and address the issue in a timely manner.



When delivered with grace and humility it affirms both you and the other person, and leads to a successful resolution. It increases the speed that issues are uncovered and ensures everyone is treated with integrity and respect. We don't deliberately set out to upset other people – we don't. Most of us feel terrible if we have unwittingly upset a friend, family member or colleague – now imagine how much worse we feel when we find out the person didn't come and speak directly to us to discuss how they felt, but instead went to a third party. 'No triangles' is about common decency and respect. It's about having the goodwill and courage to speak up and address the person directly.

How to spot a triangle

1. When someone wants to tell you something about someone else, that's a triangle.
2. When you are hurt or miffed at another person and tell someone else at work, that's a triangle.
3. When you hear that so and so thinks or says such and such about you, there's a triangle.

How to make no-triangles work for you

Unfortunately, you can't make a policy, wave a magic wand and all of a sudden have an organisation that practises no-triangles. There are three things you need to do first.



1. **Provide the why** and build awareness of the importance of acting with integrity and respect. Make it clear your team values direct feedback, both affirming and challenging, delivered in a professional and respectful manner. Ask for everyone to commit to “No Triangles” then do it!
2. **Provide the what** and equip people with the tools to have difficult conversations. People often do more harm than good when they give feedback or conduct a challenging conversation without practising what they will say. I developed a 10 point checklist for my Antarctic Expeditioners and coached them through how to have a difficult conversation.
3. **Provide the how** by supporting and celebrating your people's efforts. Change takes time and effort, particularly when it involves behaviour. If someone tries to engage you in a 'triangle' conversation calmly and firmly remind them of the teams' pledge of “No Triangles” and suggest they speak to the other person directly. Leaders also need to make themselves available to coach and mentor people as they start to try this for themselves. It takes time, patience and lots of practise but it will build open and professional communication and the result will absolutely be worth the effort.