

LESSONS FROM LIFE



How TA found a way

Eric Berne forged a new and innovative path in the field of psychotherapy through reacting positively to rejection and being a team player. By Gianpiero Petriglieri and Jack Denfeld Wood

BOUNCING BACK IN STYLE

As he walked away from the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute one evening in 1956, Eric Berne must have felt very disheartened. He had just been denied his life goal – certification as a psychoanalyst.

Berne had studied medicine and specialised in psychiatry before WW2, served as a psychiatrist in the army and held various appointments while running his own private practices in California. Yet now his unconventional ideas had put him out on a professional limb.

But he didn't give up. Instead, his rejection galvanised and inspired him to create an original and innovative approach to psychotherapy.

LEADING WITH INNOVATION

Within two years Berne had produced three seminal papers establishing the theory and methods of what he called

Transactional Analysis (TA). It identified the determining influence of childhood 'decisions' and established ways to alter the self-limiting 'life scripts' we unconsciously write as a result.

In the following years, Berne wrote a number of bestselling books – perhaps the most influential was *Games People Play*, published in 1964, which went on to sell more than five million copies.

WORKING TOGETHER

When Berne was rejected by the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, he didn't withdraw or sulk or abandon his ideas. Rather, he allowed his colleagues to gather around and contribute to the development of TA. The focal point for this process was a series of weekly evening clinical seminars, which Berne had started years before as a testing ground for his ideas.

Berne involved those who were

drawn to the development of TA, provided them with opportunities to be successful and always publicly acknowledged their contributions.

The seminars became an incorporated business to handle the funds supporting the Transactional Analysis Bulletin, which was first published in 1962, edited by Berne. In 1964, Berne and his colleagues agreed to create the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA). Despite Berne's death from a heart attack in 1970, aged 60, the ITAA is now a worldwide community of more than 10,000 therapists, educators, executive coaches and organisational consultants in more than 80 countries.

LESSONS TO LEARN

Original thinkers often provoke derision, marginalisation and expulsion because truly innovative approaches put them at odds with the norms of their establishment – their bosses, colleagues and subordinates. The temptation is to give up and adapt to fit back in, or to rebel and withdraw resentfully.

Either way arrests progress. The combination of Berne's "resilient creativity" – the capacity to maintain one's integrity, unique perspective and imagination in the face of an unfriendly environment – and his nurturing of loyal and dedicated colleagues and collaborators, allowed him to leave a lasting and living legacy with TA, and stands as a model for any who dare to innovate in corporate life.

Below: Eric Berne created a successful organisation to promote TA



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