

Being Triggered: A Preview for Secret Roles

“Secret roles are part of the personal experience of the individual. It is not integral to the maintenance of the relationship, yet influences it strongly. These secret selves are deep aspects who dance through individuals and through their relationships. Deep Democracy states that you are whole only when all the different voices of who you are, are represented. To be in right relationship with your partner, you must be in right relationship with yourself. Then, and only then, can there be understanding, pride and compassion for how different selves dance within you, and with your partner’s different selves. Each individual not only lives in a complex land, but in that land, there is a mansion that represents the entire self...the infinite cast of characters from bitch to saint. For most of us, the key to understanding our own complex nature is to be found in relationship with other human beings. It is in relationship that these selves get called up; it is our partners who show us the different rooms in the mansion of our being. It is in opportunity to reclaim their wisdom aspects.

The most provocative challenge of secret roles occurs around the experience of ‘being triggered’. It is common for every human being to be triggered by people and events, and it impacts one’s ability to function in relationship. Being triggered is a milder form of flooding (see Relationship River) and it is associated with a memory or an associational cascade. Characteristics of being triggered has been described as feeling blank, like a deer in the headlights, having an over-exaggerated response to a situation or feeling like who is responding is ‘not quite like you’...When someone is triggered, we can use our mansion metaphor to understand it. It is as if an aspect of self who lives in the cellar or in the back of the house, suddenly shows up in the front of the door of the mansion claiming executive powers! The adult self, who regularly runs the mansion, has been pushed out of power. De-triggering in coaching is about creating relationship between adult self and that aspect, and negotiating that aspect to step down. When partners (business or social) are triggered they will be challenged to be relationship masters! Imagine a bully aspect in relationship with a scared teen...Relationship mastery comes about when individual partners have good relationship with all their different selves, and can negotiate adult executive functioning aspects to be in relationship with one another. AND, there are times when kids want to play with kids, or teens want to do mischief together, or young ones want to be nurtured by older ones...it is not about banishing these aspects. It is about {being} personally right relationship with these aspects and from there moving into right relationship in partnership. As long as partners are at choice about who is relating to whom, relationship master is possible.

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