critical distinction I want you to try on for the rest of our time together is that people in general, and salespeople in particular, only grow within their workplace role when they accept personal responsibility for that growth.

You can’t do it for them. Salespeople need to discover for themselves how and why to become personally accountable for growing within the job and executing the sales process.

The first tool I want to share with you to help you distinguish between whether you’re helping or hurting your team
members’ chances at taking responsibility for their own success is the Karpman Drama Triangle. Transactional analysis pioneer Stephen Karpman came up with this triangle to describe a kind of game that human beings play with one another. Sales managers may not think of themselves as playing games with their salespeople, but I am here to tell you that, if you’re not careful, you can get sucked right into it. This particular game, which is all about manipulation, is a particularly destructive one.

Take a look at Karpman’s model (below) and ask yourself whether you’ve ever found yourself playing it—whether any part of it seems even vaguely familiar. If your answer to either question is “yes,” then you—like me, like most sales managers—have, at some point, with one or more members of your team, been entrenched in manipulation.
This game, as you can see, has three players: persecutor, rescuer, and victim. I know I’ve played all three roles during my career, and I’m willing to bet that you have, too.

Sales managers can be victims very easily, whether or not they choose to say that word out loud. It happens anytime a manager has said or thought, “Woe is me; I don’t have the best salespeople; I’m handcuffed because I have low-level performers like Carl on my team. If only I had the players Julia has, in the office across town, I would do a lot better.”

Enter the salesperson. Now the sales manager turns into the persecutor. “Carl, if only you were performing better, this department would be in a lot better shape.”

Five minutes later, he can be the rescuer: “You can’t do well, Carl, because you are new. Step back and I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Did you notice, though, that in none of those roles does the manager accept any accountability for creating an environment in which growing and developing salespeople is possible?

In all three of those roles, the manager discourages employees from taking personal responsibility for the learning process. In the first, the manager doesn’t accept the members of the team as they are. In the second, he makes them feel bad for failing. In the third, he grabs the golf club, steps onto the green, and says, “Stand back, Tiger—I’ll handle this putt.”

Here’s the secret when it comes to the Drama Triangle. The only way to win this particular game is to choose not to play.
You can’t ever win if you play the game inside the triangle, and neither can your salespeople. The roles bounce around, everybody plays different roles, and people jump into the roles they like best to deal with different situations. But nobody learns anything. Nobody grows.

The only way to win the drama game is to step outside the Drama Triangle.

Don’t play the game.