Time to Adjust?
TA and Attitudes to Lateness

Abstract
An analysis of patterns of lateness, examined in terms of ego states, injunctions and driver behaviour: how the Winners' Triangle offers a useful model in moving out of script and game behaviour.

The meeting has begun. The group is engaged and attentive. Suddenly, the door crashes open and in walks Sue.
 "Sorry I'm late," she exclaims breathlessly. "I was just……."
The excuses flow, and for the meeting a crucial moment is lost.

As trainers, leaders and managers, we have probably all had that experience, and dealt with it in a variety of ways. However, perhaps we are the person who crashes late into the meeting, or in contrast, hates being late and will become panicky and close to hyperventilation at the thought of it. Lateness may be our choice, or the result of circumstances beyond our control, and it also may be the result of out-of-awareness patterns of thinking and behaviour. This essay is an exploration of some of the possibilities.

Lateness and Ego States
It is the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland, who is constantly late.
"I'm late! I'm late for a very important date.
No time to say hello
Goodbye
I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."
Eric Berne suggested six modes of time-structuring.[1] These are ways that we choose to spend our time. They begin with withdrawal, moving through ritual (the hellos and goodbyes of life) to activities, pastiming, gaming and finally intimacy. The intensity of stroking increases as we move from withdrawal to intimacy, and so, Stewart and Joines suggest, does the degree of psychological risk as perceived from Child.[2] Lateness may be a Child defence from the contaminated Adult against the possibility of intimacy, like the White Rabbit not making time to say hello or goodbye, but staying in the place of withdrawal. It may also be a Parental contamination, justifying lateness -
"It's not worth arriving on time because it always starts late / everyone else is late / nothing important is said in the first 10 minutes." Lateness can be a game in itself, avoiding intimacy, but receiving strong, gamey strokes of recognition. Depending on the culture of the group, it may result in a negative stroke, such as being "told off" for arriving late in class, or a marshmallow stroke of receiving too much attention, but in game thinking that is better than being ignored.

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[1] Berne, Eric (1964) *Games People Play,* Penguin
[2] Stewart,I & Joines, V (1987) *TA Today,* Lifespace Publishing

The dictionary defines lateness as being "after expected or usual time".[3] However, this is a word that carries overtones built up within the structural ego states over years. The word may imply disapproval, missing deadlines, shaky boundaries and lack of control over life. Yet, without the negative internal Parent holding the clock, would lateness carry all that meaning? When we find ourselves "running late", I suggest that an internal dialogue ensues between the Parent and Child. If there is not enough Adult available to hold the reality of the situation, responses to lateness will come from Parent and/or Child contamination of the Adult.

Archaic responses to lateness rest in the Parent (P2) and Child (C2) of the structural ego state. The P2 will have introjected voices from the past with comments about punctuality, respect and punishment. It may contain the teacher's voice, viewing lateness as an extreme discourtesy. It will certainly contain parental attitudes, whether strict and controlling such as a parent speaking to their teenager, "When I say be home by 10 p.m. I mean 10 p.m." or the laissez faire attitude of time not mattering – "Turn up when you feel like it." The cultural experiences of different generations will also be held in the P2.[4] Parents who had to 'clock on'; those who served in the war and experienced military attitudes towards time keeping; others who went with the flow of the swinging 60s! The C2 will contain child attitudes to the reality of time, perhaps remembering the elasticity of time in the never-ending days of the summer holidays. It will also hold the memory of parental disapproval and school punishments for lateness. There will also be the very early C1 somatic experiences of being an 'early' or 'late' baby.

These structural attitudes towards time can be traced in the form of internal dialogue between Parent and Child ego states. They may lead to an impasse, the sense that there is no choice about time keeping. We are either always late or always early.

The internal archaic attitudes become apparent in a variety of ways. For example, internally, we may be aware of the Negative Controlling Parent voice of disapproval, ("You're going to be late.") and the anxiety of the Negative Adapted Child ("Oh no! I'm going to be late again."). The Child becomes more and more anxious, fretting and worried by the growing magnitude of the internal Negative Parent response.

In Fig.1 I've mapped some of the possible internal dialogue responses to lateness in terms of functional ego states. Some of this internal dialogue may become expressed transactionally as the person arrives late.

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[3] Ed. Pearsall, J. (2002) *Concise Oxford English Dictionary,* Oxford
[4] Drego, P. (1996) *Cultural Parent Oppression and Regeneration* TAJ 26:1 Jan.1996
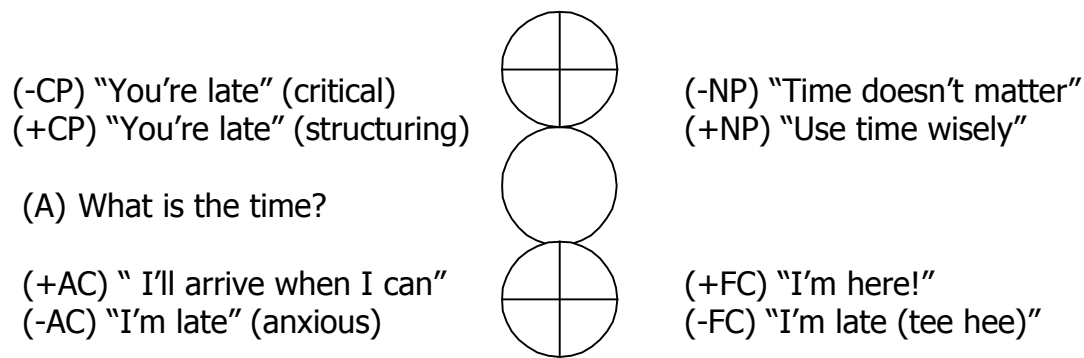
(-CP) "You're late" (critical)
(+CP) "You're late" (structuring)

(-NP) "Time doesn't matter"
(+NP) "Use time wisely"

(A) What is the time?

(+AC) " I'll arrive when I can"
(-AC) "I'm late" (anxious)

(+FC) "I'm here!"
(-FC) "I'm late (tee hee)"

Fig 1. *Functional Ego State responses to lateness, based on diagram by Susannah Temple (1999)* [5]

Lateness and injunctions

The early parental messages are fed to the developing personality in the form of injunctions from which the child may choose some to become part of the life-script. Messages such as Don't belong, Don't be important, Don't make it, Don't have needs link into discounting behaviour associated with punctuality and lateness. For example, if someone has a Don't Belong injunction, they may often be late for meetings in order not to have time to make friends and belong. Don't Be important and Don't Have Needs injunctions may lead to discounting of personal needs around time – whether it's more time to get there, more time to be there or time to do your own thing. Other injunctions such as Don't Be You and Don't Exist may lead to a need to be seen and make one's presence felt by being late and making an entrance.

This paper came about because a group of us, studying advanced transactional analysis, used an occasion when our normal patterns of lateness and punctuality seemed to be reversed to talk about our attitudes to being late. One person, A, who in the past has regularly arrived late to our sessions, was on time and another, B, who rarely arrives late, was extremely late. We discovered that person A's usual pattern of lateness was often a way of being noticed and a reaction to her Don't Be You and Don't Exist injunctions. Person B's response to Don't Be You and Don't Have Needs injunctions is to be over-aware of the effect of her behaviour on others. Her response is to be 'good', arrive on time and not to risk upsetting others by being late. On this occasion her late arrival came from an Adult decision to allow herself to be late, because she did have needs. Person A's decision to arrive on time was due to the Adult realisation that her need to be seen could be met in ways which were not gamey.

Our attitudes to punctuality and lateness arise from a complex web of experience and feeling that we can link with recognised drivers. These are developed as ways of resisting the power of the internalised injunctions and are recognisable patterns of defending against the final script positions as I've shown in figure 2 below. The driver positions offer a personal and working style,[6] but when these patterns are pursued out of awareness they can topple into miniscript behaviour leading to the final miniscript payoff.[7]
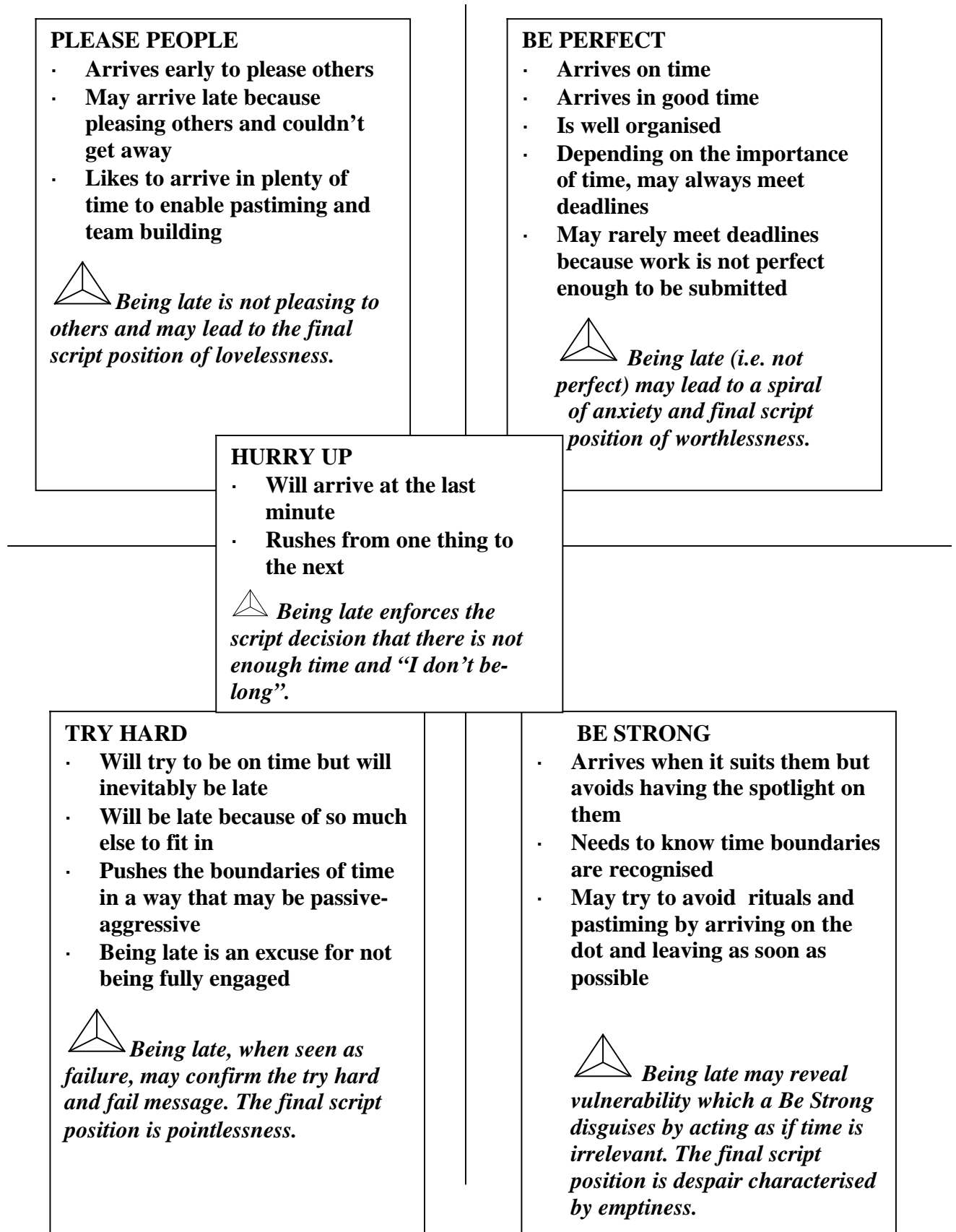
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[5] Napper, R & Newton, T (2000) *Tactics,* TA Resources
[6] Hay, J (1992) *Transactional Analysis for Trainers,* Sherwood Publishing
[7] Kahler, T & Capers, H (1974) *The Miniscript*, TAJ 1V:1 Jan 1974

These are some of the experiences of drivers and script of people in our training group.

Fig 2. Lateness, Driver behaviour and Miniscript

PLEASE PEOPLE
· **Arrives early to please others**
· **May arrive late because pleasing others and couldn't get away**
· **Likes to arrive in plenty of time to enable pastiming and team building**

Being late is not pleasing to others and may lead to the final script position of lovelessness.

BE PERFECT
· **Arrives on time**
· **Arrives in good time**
· **Is well organised**
· **Depending on the importance of time, may always meet deadlines**
· **May rarely meet deadlines because work is not perfect enough to be submitted**

Being late (i.e. not perfect) may lead to a spiral of anxiety and final script position of worthlessness.

HURRY UP
· **Will arrive at the last minute**
· **Rushes from one thing to the next**

Being late enforces the script decision that there is not enough time and "I don't be-long".

TRY HARD
· **Will try to be on time but will inevitably be late**
· **Will be late because of so much else to fit in**
· **Pushes the boundaries of time in a way that may be passive-aggressive**
· **Being late is an excuse for not being fully engaged**

Being late, when seen as failure, may confirm the try hard and fail message. The final script position is pointlessness.

BE STRONG
· **Arrives when it suits them but avoids having the spotlight on them**
· **Needs to know time boundaries are recognised**
· **May try to avoid rituals and pastiming by arriving on the dot and leaving as soon as possible**

Being late may reveal vulnerability which a Be Strong disguises by acting as if time is irrelevant. The final script position is despair characterised by emptiness.

Lateness, script and games

The script story that we choose in childhood may have our favoured response to lateness contained within it. In several stories, lateness leads to being caught or caught out in some way. Little Red Riding Hood chooses to be late and sets herself and others up to be caught. Goldilocks sleeps late and is caught out when looking after herself. Perhaps the script message here is if you take what you need or even what you want you'll get caught. Cinderella stays too late at the ball and is nearly found out for the person she really is. The message here is to stay in control of time so that no-one will really know you. In the Sleeping Beauty tale, the bad fairy arrives late and curses the baby princess, and the prince has to arrive at the 'right' time to rescue her. Here, lateness leads to powerful curses that can only be undone by magic.

As teachers, trainers, managers, leaders and learners awareness of script thinking about lateness is helpful. Whether we are running a meeting with latecomers arriving, or running late for a meeting ourselves, awareness of our personal response to lateness will enable us to deal more effectively with the stress that lateness can induce. Lateness may be part of our driver behaviour, our script story, and it may be a way of playing games – either to avoid professional intimacy or as a substitute for professional intimacy. In terms of the drama triangle, we may adopt any of the three positions. Our lateness may be Persecutory. It may be a display of power, disrupting the meeting or the class by being late. It may be the result of Rescuing behaviour, late because we have been busy rescuing elsewhere and so apologetic it disrupts the meeting. Finally, lateness may be the result of Victim behaviour, displaying powerlessness ("I couldn't help it. It wasn't my fault.") and an unwillingness to accept responsibility for our own actions. If the leader of the meeting also adopts a game position (see fig. 3 below), the scene is set for a huge game from which the meeting may never quite recover.
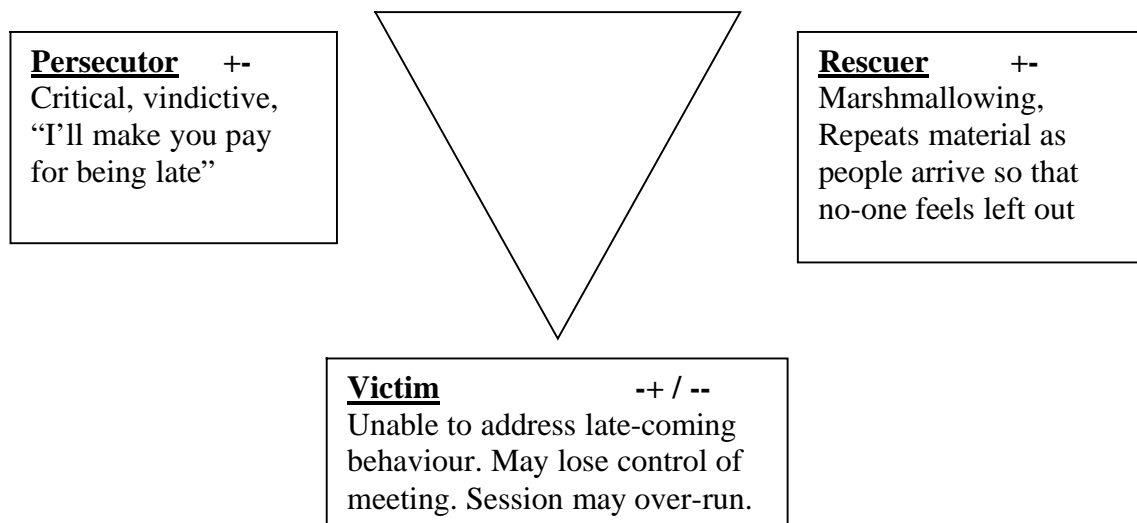
Persecutor +-	**Rescuer** +-
Critical, vindictive, "I'll make you pay for being late"	Marshmallowing, Repeats material as people arrive so that no-one feels left out

Victim -+ / --
Unable to address late-coming behaviour. May lose control of meeting. Session may over-run.

Fig. 3 Lateness and Possible Drama Triangle Positions for Leaders, Teachers & Trainers[8]

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[8]Karpman, S (1968) *Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis*   TAJ 7:26

The power of the game is in the switch of drama triangle position between leader and latecomer. How many lessons, meetings and training events have been undermined and side-tracked by the latecomer and leader ready to play a game? The game may well last a long time too – not just a few minutes, but hours, days and even weeks!

Lateness and the Winners' Triangle

In dealing with lateness whether as leaders or as latecomers ourselves, we need to shift to the "I'm OK, You're OK" position. There may be good reasons that people arrive late. However we also recognise that the behaviour can be hugely disruptive. Whatever the reasons, the rest the group too will have their own individual script responses to lateness and there will also be a cultural response from the group and the organisation of which it is a part.

The Winners' Triangle provides a way of identifying an "I'm OK, You're OK" response to lateness in ourselves and in others. Remaining in a ++ position could mean recognising

- Proactively, I have the power to manage my time and reasonably expect others to do so as well.
- Realising that I have responsibilities and others do too. My time and the time of others is a boundary which is to be respected.
- I can give voice to my needs and I can choose to be on time or after time. I can ask in a ++ way that others recognise that too.

The Winners Triangle, developed by Acey Choy[9] and further developed by Rosemary Napper and Trudi Newton,[10] makes it clear that all three positions need to be available to us in order to keep clear of games. Below (Fig. 4) are possible responses within the Winners' Triangle.
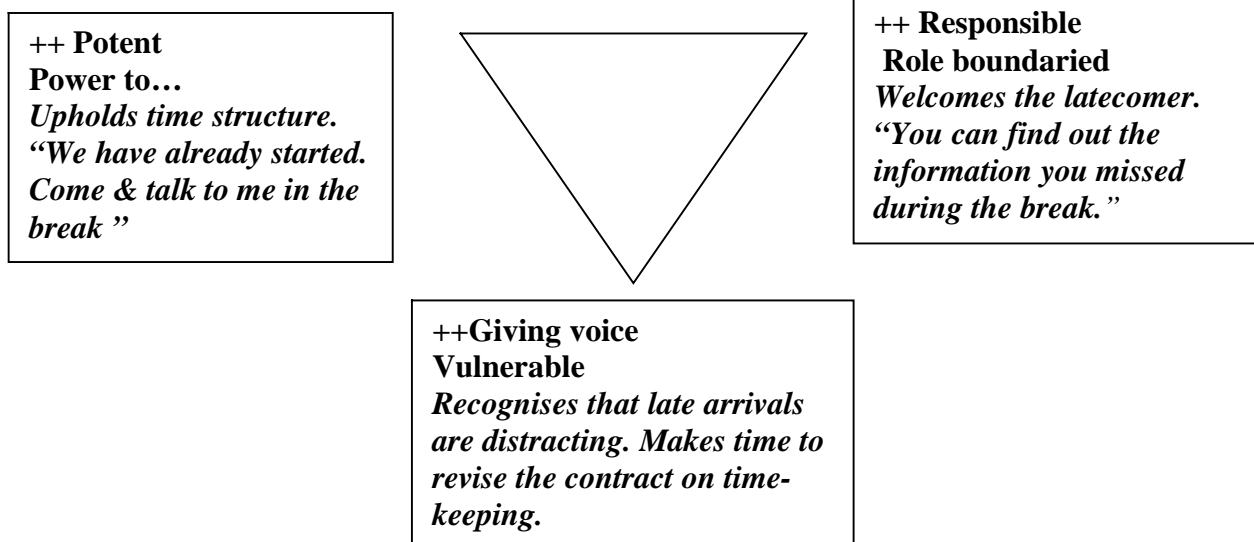
++ Potent
Power to…
Upholds time structure.
"We have already started.
Come & talk to me in the
break "

++ Responsible
 Role boundaried
Welcomes the latecomer.
"You can find out the
information you missed
during the break."

++Giving voice
Vulnerable
Recognises that late arrivals
are distracting. Makes time to
revise the contract on time-
keeping.

Fig.4 The Winners' Triangle - possible responses for Leaders. Teachers & Trainers

[9] Choy, A (1990) *The Winners' Triangle,* TAJ 20:1
[10] Napper, R & Newton, T (2000) *Tactics,* TA Resources

If we are to use the resource of time with autonomy, we need to use Adult thinking to recognise that this is a finite resource for us all. Lateness doesn't just happen to us. There are choices to be made.

Rosalind Steel B.A.(In Training)
With the Advanced TA Training Group (Oxford) led by Rosemary Napper TSTA(O)

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