

Forward Motion Coaching Newsletter

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Assumptions

The philosopher Epictetus presaged modern cognitive therapy with his observation that, "Man is not disturbed by events, but by the view he takes of them." In other words, your feelings are dependent on how you choose to interpret a situation, not on what someone else "does" to you. (That lets a lot of people off the hook, doesn't it?!)

One of the reasons I am so enthusiastic about using the Enneagram personality typing tool in my coaching is that it helps clients understand "the view they take" about themselves, other people, and life in general. Each of the nine types has a core assumption, or blind spot. Once you identify the assumption for what it is – a guess about what might happen in the future, based on a belief from the past – you are free to choose more productive ways to respond to life.

For example, an Enneagram Type One manager was having difficulty with a colleague who made frequent errors. People with this personality style put an enormous amount of energy into doing things The Right Way. So it was a short leap for the One manager to assume that the colleague made mistakes because she was "lazy" and "sloppy." He felt completely justified in berating the woman for her carelessness, which of course led to even more tension and mistakes.

Working with the Enneagram, the manager was able to see how his basic assumption locked him into critical, rigid thinking. He was also able to appreciate how he projected his *own* fears about making mistakes onto other people. By challenging his One world view, he was able to come up with a proactive solution – more training for his colleague, and a streamlined information gathering process.

In addition, the manager became more patient and tolerant of other people *and himself*. His colleague, a Six, was able to acknowledge how *her* assumptions about bosses "brow beating" subordinates contributed to the fray.

Whereas Ones want to help others correct their inadequacies, people with Enneagram style Two assume that "people can't get along without my help." Thus they have a hard time saying "no," and usually end up resentful about always putting others first.

Threes assume that their worth as people is directly correlated to the number and scope of their achievements. In their drive to accomplish more and more, they push their emotions aside, and lose sight of what they really want out of life.

The basic assumption of Fours is that their emotions are reality. They take life quite personally, and have a hard time evaluating situations objectively. (A Four manager in the above example would have wondered what *he* did wrong.)

If they give freely of themselves, Fives believe that they'll be overwhelmed by the demands of others. So they conserve their expenditure of emotions, time, and energy, and retreat into the mental world of information and ideas.

Sixes assume that the world is dangerous and that you never know who you can trust. They question authority, doubt their own decisions, and tend to presume the worst in any situation.

In contrast, Sevens assume that by concentrating on happy possibilities for the future, they can avoid pain and anxiety in the present. In their unflinching optimism, they tend to scatter their energy on too many projects, and have difficulty following through.

Eights assume that life is hard and you need to fight for what you need. Their strategy is to seize power and control, and challenge people to see whose “side” they’re on.

Nines assume that it is better to go along with crowd rather than risk following their own agenda. In contrast to Twos, who deny having needs, Nines become too wrapped up in the desires of the group or a significant other to really notice their own.

February’s coaching challenge: The next time you find yourself upset by a person or situation, or believing that something can’t change, ask what assumptions you are making. How did you come to believe that this situation is true, or that this is what “always” happens? What else could explain the condition or behavior? What’s one thing you could do to challenge your belief?

Reader’s Question: *“I’ve been a marketing professional for 20 years, and am looking to make a career change. I’ve been told that I’m an Enneagram Type Six. Can you suggest the type of job or environment I’d be suited for?”*

Although an individual’s Enneagram style is not predictive of his or her ability to succeed in a specific job or career, it’s certainly possible to describe some characteristics of a good Six environment.

Sixes are logical, analytic thinkers who also enjoy using their creative skills. They become anxious if job expectations are not clear *out of fear that they’ll be blamed if things go wrong* (Nines, by contrast, want to know what’s expected so they won’t offend others by rocking the boat). Sixes also want to know the rules of the organization, and the chain of command. They take their responsibilities seriously, and expect the same of the people they work with. They want their concerns about what could go wrong to be taken seriously, as well.

Individuals with this style enjoy working collaboratively with a group or as part of a team, and Six managers take care of “their people.” Loyalty and trust are very important, so an environment without these values will be stressful. (And a Six will spot incongruent management practices in a second!).

Send your questions about the Enneagram and personality to ForwardMotion@erols.com. They may be answered in a future newsletter.

Get clear, get focused, and take action! Coaching can help you eliminate the assumptions, fears, and self-defeating behaviors that are keeping you stuck. To schedule a complimentary, no obligation coaching session, call 508/966-2165 or email me at ForwardMotion@erols.com.

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