

What's Your Type?

Most of the clients I coach, and I presume all of the individuals who attend my workshops, want to understand how their personality style, as defined by the Enneagram ("any-a-gram") tool, affects their perceptions, actions, and decision-making. Whereas I have yet to meet anyone who does not find the descriptions of characteristics and motivation astonishingly accurate, newcomers are often overwhelmed by the volume of material and the nuances involved in interpreting it.

It seems fitting to devote this month's newsletter to some basics about what the Enneagram measures, and offer a few pointers for avoiding common errors in determining which of the nine different personality styles is yours.

In contrast to the familiar Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® which measures behavior preferences, the Enneagram looks at *why* a person responds to a situation in a particular way. Each personality style can be thought of as a lens that someone chooses to look at the world through. The lens brings certain elements into very sharp focus. These are natural strengths. Other elements are fuzzy. These are blind spots. As children, we select the lens that best reflects our underlying assumption about the nature of the world and how to survive in it.

For example, the Type Seven lens magnifies new opportunities, possibilities, and options, and obscures details, time commitments, and limitations. The assumption is that it's better to pursue all of the fun and exciting experiences that life has to offer, rather than acknowledge anxiety and painful feelings. [*This is a simplified explanation of the theory and psychological dynamics of the Enneagram. To learn more, visit the resources section of www.ForwardMotion.info.*]

People mis-type themselves because they focus on behaviors, not what's *driving* those behaviors. For instance, although everyone procrastinates from time to time, Enneagram styles One, Five, Six, and Nine have a greater tendency to put things off. By looking at why that is so, each style is differentiated. Ones want to get the job done right to avoid criticism, and tend to get mired in details. Fives want to be prepared so they won't be caught off guard and exposed, and tend to over-research. Sixes fear being blamed for mistakes and tend to doubt every decision they make. Finally, Nines want to keep the peace, and tend to distract themselves to avoid making a decision that could lead to conflict or an uncomfortable change.

Thus a behavior like procrastinating is driven by the same core motivation that fuels other behaviors of that style as well. To keep the peace, Nines procrastinate, distract themselves, resist becoming involved, deny their anger, etc.

In addition to looking at the *why* and not the *what* of behavior, resist the temptation to decide your type based on one or two words, such as the copyrighted descriptors some authors use to differentiate the styles (Riso-Hudson calls Ones "reformers," and Helen Palmer calls them "perfectionists"). And make sure you're choosing the style that reflects how you are, not how you want to be.

Using the Enneagram to become aware of the patterns that are holding you back requires diligent and honest self-observation. Once you get a handle on your limiting patterns, the next step is to catch yourself defaulting to them (e.g. Nines can catch themselves before they "zone out" to avoid making a decision).

Understanding the dynamics of your type can also provide insight into how others may perceive you, and the unintended messages that you may be sending. For instance, the Four's fondness for the unique and different can be seen as snobbish and affected.

July's Coaching Challenge: Whether via the Enneagram or not, increasing your self-awareness gives you a tremendous advantage in managing yourself and getting along with others. Select one characteristic that you'd like to change, and over the next week, write down every time that you observe yourself engaging in the undesirable behavior. See if there are certain situations, people, or problems that trigger the behavior. Observe any physical sensations associated with it, such as a tightening in your gut, quickening of your pulse, pounding in your head, etc. Being cognizant of body signals helps you stop automatic reactions, so that you can respond in the way that you want to.

Get clear, get focused, and take action! Coaching helps you develop effective strategies for change, eliminate self-defeating behaviors, and step outside your comfort zone. To schedule a complimentary, no obligation coaching session, call 508/835-2482 or email me at ForwardMotion@charter.net.

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