

Forward Motion Coaching Newsletter

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Active Inertia

“Active inertia” has been used to describe how business managers tend to respond to change – and even genuine crisis – by doing more of what has worked in the past. This propensity to “do what we know” makes it easy to miss new opportunities and to overlook even painfully obvious solutions to problems.

Working with your Enneagram personality style can provide valuable insight about how your patterns of active inertia are keeping you stuck and limiting your options. Awareness is always the first step to change, as a Three manager learned.

“Laurie” found herself with aggressive revenue targets from a new executive team, and a customer base hard hit by the recession. In classic Three style, she quickly sized up her boss’ expectations, she rallied her team to do what it took to “make the numbers.” The challenge was exhilarating, and she hardly noticed when her customary 60-hour work weeks ballooned to 80. Management was delighted with the quick up-turn in sales and crowd of new products in the pipeline. Laurie projected confidence and optimism as she outlined ambitious growth plans.

Type Three individuals are driven by a need to be recognized for their accomplishments, and will push themselves relentlessly to achieve more and more and more. Reaching one goal and moving on to the next can become an end in itself. Laurie began cutting corners here and there to get projects done, and chided colleagues who she felt weren’t dedicating themselves 110% to the task at hand.

In this instance, Laurie became trapped in “active inertia” when she became so focused on meeting next quarter’s numbers (and earning accolades from senior management) that she continued pushing employees to churn out new products of lesser quality. She made up for shortfalls by slashing budgets and delaying hiring to fill critical positions. Like many Threes, she felt that she was more capable than others, and soon had her finger in so many pies that she became a bottleneck - causing the inefficiencies she tried so hard to avoid.

In working with the Enneagram during coaching, Laurie was able to see how her drive to reach short-term goals was blinding her to the need for a more strategic, long-term plan. In this case, producing fewer, better-quality products netted more profit than numerous mediocre offerings. She also became aware of how her intense, competitive manner inadvertently alienated colleagues who felt that she didn’t value their expertise.

In a similar fashion, Type Two individuals (who, along with Threes and Fours have a heightened sensitivity to how they are perceived by others) could become so self-sacrificing to make the boss look good that they wind up completely overburdened, resentful, and angry. A Four might insist on applying unique and creative solutions to problems better solved with mundane processes. Type Five individuals lose opportunities when they become so immersed in gathering information and analyzing potential outcomes that they lose site of the need to act. The equally analytical Six procrastinates as she vacillates between Option A one minute and Option B the next. Sevens, who along with Fives and Sixes try think their way through life, can become so captivated by new projects and ideas that there’s no time to follow through on any of them.

Eights, Nines, and Ones share a common desire for autonomy. An Eight can apply the principle of active inertia by becoming so domineering that any hint of compromise is viewed as a loss of power and control. Nines tend to go stubborn, refusing to make a decision or simply withdrawing from the situation. And Ones work even harder to get every detail of every project right, limiting the results to black and white – it's either 100% good or 100% bad.

March's coaching challenge: What's your *modus operandi* for responding to stress or change? Where do you notice yourself engaging in active inertia? Instead of automatically "doing what you know," challenge yourself to come up with at least three new ways to approach a situation. "Try on" the point of view of a different Enneagram style and see what happens. Brainstorming with colleagues or friends can reveal "a-ha" solutions that you would never have thought of by yourself (designate someone to write down every idea so you can review them later on; brainstorming works best when you don't edit or debate during the session).

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 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 508/966-2165 or email me at ForwardMotion@erols.com.

Looking for a Speaker for Your Group? Workshops and presentations on personality style, stress management, and coaching can be tailored to the needs of your organization. Call me at 508/966-2165 to discuss your needs.

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