
I KNOW YOUR TYPE

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Most of us live well ensconced in our personal narratives. Our narratives are the stories that we have created about ourselves and our world, which help us make sense of things. Regrettably, our narratives not only lead us to repeat behaviors which are no longer appropriate for changed circumstances but shape those perceptions which reinforce beliefs which long ago should have been abandoned. Our beliefs are the outcome of the myriad of judgments that we make each day, day after day, over the course of our lives. Many of our judgments concern our judgment of others and, more particularly, ourselves.

Despite our many years of individual experience, most of us are not particularly skilled at judging either ourselves or others. As we lay our narrative's foundation at about the age 6, and continue to build upon it thereafter, our judgments are heavily biased by our early perceptions of the world. How many opportunities have we missed for friendship or understanding because we could not overcome our first reaction to another? As lawyers, who tend to be more judgmental than most, how many times have we overlooked opportunities for creative problem solving because we are so trapped by our limited perspective?

In 2003, the Harvard Business Review accepted the proposal of Robert Sutton, Stanford University Professor of Management, Science and Engineering, to publish his article, The No Ass-Hole Rule. When published in 2004, the article set off a mild firestorm which led to a more extended treatment of the subject in a book published in 2007 by the same name. I bought the book. I read it. But there was something about it that seemed like "fast food" - filling but not satisfying.

At that time I had begun a study of personality typologies. I had been introduced to personality typing through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was first published in 1962, based on typology theories originated by Karl Jung. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator postulates four pairs of preferences - extraversion and introversion; sensing and intuition; thinking and feeling; judging and perceiving - which result in 16 possible psychological types. While useful in the identification and understanding of types, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator does not effectively assist the "typed" individual to move beyond the label.

I next came upon the Enneagram system which describes nine distinct personality types and the interrelations amongst them. Unlike the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator I, the Enneagram is directed toward individual development, freeing individuals from the habitual, unconscious narrative patterns of thought, emotion and behavior.

I became a student of the Enneagram and have had the opportunity to expose it to my coaching clients. Most have found it extremely helpful in breaking free of destructive behavior patterns. Before briefly describing the nine personality types, a few caveats. Personality typologies are an aid to understanding. They are not proven, "hard science." The principal purpose of Enneagram is to help individuals understand and move beyond their own personalities - not to empower "labeling machines" for others. When you have considerable experience under your belt, it is possible to make some pretty informed guesses about others' "types." Such information can prove useful. However, the Enneagram is all about you and your path.

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The modern Enneagram was developed in the late 20th century by hybridizing modern psychological characteristics on the ancient spiritual symbol of the Enneagram. The work matured in the San Francisco Bay Area through the collaborative efforts of psychologists, mental health professionals, teachers, clergy and others. The Enneagram's theory is that the mechanism of the personality is developed in reaction to a basic fear which emerges in early childhood. To compensate for this fear, a fundamental desire arises. The desire is what you use to defend yourself against this fear to continue to function. While nothing is wrong with the desire, as you develop you often begin to fulfill it in misguided ways, which eventually become self-destructive. The job of the Enneagram is to lead you to greater self-understanding, allowing you to eliminate destructive behavior.

Briefly, the fears and desires of each of the types are: Type 1 - fear of being defective and desire to have integrity. At low levels, 1s can be critical perfectionists; Type 2 - fear of being unworthy of love and desire to be loved. 2s can lose sight of themselves in the relentless service of others; Type 3 - fear of being worthless and desire to be valuable. 3s can become obsessed with chasing after society's notion of "success"; Type 4 - fear of being without personal significance and desire to be a whole human being. 4s often deteriorate into self-indulgence; Type 5 - fear of being useless and desire to be competent. 5s can engage in useless specialization and attachment to information; Type 6 - fear of being unsupported and desire to be secure. 6s can descend into chronic pessimism; Type 7 - fear of being deprived and desire to be happy. 7s can be frenetic escapists; Type 8 - fear of being controlled by others and desire to protect themselves. 8s can relentlessly seek power and control; and Type 9 - fear of loss of connection and desire to be at peace. 9s can become self-forgetting and indolent. You can test yourself to determine your Enneagram type at www.enneagraminstitute.com and other online Enneagram sites. Testing generally takes less than an hour.

The Enneagram types are most pronounced and destructive in individuals who have not achieved a high level of personal development. That is, you each are on your own evolutionary path. As you evolve, you develop a more sophisticated and encompassing view of the world, which allows you to shed the personality constraints.

So here is how I have applied the Enneagram to my life.

First, I am an 8 with a 7 wing, meaning that I share more personality traits with a 7 than I do with a 9. In my quest for self-protection, my life, personally and professionally, has been dominated by self-confidence, decisiveness, willfulness, and confrontation. Studying my type gave me considerable comfort. I was not out there alone. Millions of other 8s are out there stumbling through life much like I have. I also began to understand why recurring setbacks in my life had such similar characteristics. My 8 view of the world continued to circle me back on the same perceptual errors and behaviors. The Enneagram provided a map of the chronic cycle of 8 behaviors. I learned practices to break the cycle.

Finally, I began to see how my interactions with other personality types led to chronic successes or failures, depending on the type. For example, a 3 colleague, who is an associate, will blend into my style to achieve success. As long as I am the "success" prototype, all is well. If circumstances evolve such that I become subordinate to a higher authority, the 3 will morph values to match my superior. 5s are a great match for me because of their intense attention to detail. All of this is well and good as long as I am involved in long term projects. When we are in crisis mode, facing a series of short deadlines, 5s often break down. They simply cannot meet their own criteria for thorough, highly-detailed work.

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I began to understand the constellation of types working with me and how one colleague's motivations affected one another. As I began to understand my colleagues' motivations, I was able to adapt my language, tailor work assignments and set expectations to create a greater likelihood of success.

The same was true of my interactions with clients, public officials, opposing counsel and judges. It was as if I was given the "decoder" to the human behavior "code." One of the more useful books on the Enneagram at work, *The 9 Ways of Working* by Michael J. Goldberg, details how types are likely to interact with one another and how best to affect positive outcomes.

By the way, do not be surprised if the Enneagram provides you with a greater understanding of your family dynamics, as well as a path to direct yourself beyond what had appeared to be intractable difficulties.

Probably one of the most profound and enduring outcomes of my study is how it relieved me of the compulsion to judge others. There are 8 other types out there, each dealing with their interpretive systems, all proceeding from different levels of development. Their view of the world might not be all together understandable by or acceptable to me. But, it has proven much more effective for me to observe, and to look for patterns, than to judge. An understanding is much more likely than a judgment to lead to mutually satisfactory outcomes. I prefer a solution to being victorious. All of this has had the effect of lightening my load, invigorating my career and improving my life.

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