

The Enneagram Advantage

By Theresa Gale and Mary Anne Wampler

Study and use of the Enneagram in organizations significantly impacts both personal and organizational results. This cutting-edge technology describes nine distinct personality styles that have a distinctive way of thinking, acting and being. Each style has its own natural gifts, limitations, blind spots, and approaches to communication, decision making, team work, leadership, and learning. Understanding the style of co-workers and leaders in the organization dramatically increases communication, productivity, employee morale and bottom-line results for the organization.

One of the values of this tool lies in its ability to give insight into the ‘why’ behind behavior. While many of us might have difficulty with time management (the behavior), the reasons ‘why’ (motivation) each of us has difficulty are most probably different. Many personality systems on the market today, i.e., Myers-Briggs, DISC, The Big Five, etc., while insightful and useful in their own rights, describe or predict behavior that an individual will exhibit. Only the Enneagram goes underneath behavior and reveals motivation. Once an individual understands ‘why’ he/she does what he does, then, change is possible.

Another value of the Enneagram is that it shatters individual perceptions of other individual’s intentions and reasons for acting. The Enneagram teaches that there are nine different ‘lens’ or ways of interpreting the world in which we live. Through this lens or style, each of us interprets situations, events, encounters and experiences through only one-ninth of the truth. There are 8 other ways to view the same situation and yet, I seem to believe that my interpretation is the ‘right’ interpretation.

The Enneagram helps us understand that in any dialogue there may be distinctly different points of view. Likewise, how one interprets a situation may not truly reflect the intentions of others and one may make assumptions and take action based on incomplete information. The end result is that miscommunication, misunderstandings, and inaccurate assumptions get in the way of communicating and working effectively with others.

A third value of the Enneagram lies in its ability to reveal individual barriers to success and to offer a prescriptive path for continuous learning, development and growth. In learning my style, each of us gains insight into our ‘lens’ of the world, understands what may be missing as we interpret situations, uncovers individual motivations for the way each of us acts and reacts to situations and reveals the habitual, automatic and often, unconscious responses we resort to on a fairly frequent basis.

How does knowing all this help the employee? Well, the habitual responses we learned and know so well don’t always get us the results we want or need. Likewise, our reactions, if unhealthy, may significantly impact how we relate to others and how others relate to us. Knowing our style helps us increase our level of awareness, through self observation, to these habitual patterns of thinking, acting, reacting, and interacting and with this awareness, we now have a choice as to how we want to act or be in any given situation or moment. Imagine not having to feel bad, apologetic or guilty about how you reacted to a person or situation but actually having the awareness and making the choice for how you act in the moment. This is the power of the Enneagram!

How does knowing all this help the organization? When leaders and employees take responsibility for their reactions, understand their impact on others and are open for feedback, ask rather than assume the intentions of others, and engage in dialogue that is free from judgment and hidden agendas, imagine the level of productivity that can occur amongst individuals and teams! Improving how employees interact and work together increase bottom-line performance results, and creates a positive work environment that attracts and retains productive and highly motivated employees.

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