

# **The Enneagram at Work**

# What's in it for me? A journey of self-discovery.

Emotional intelligence is the corporate buzzword of the past decade. But success has always been linked to interpersonal relationships – to get where you want to go, you need to connect with others on an emotional level. There are those who seem to possess an innate aptitude for connection and leadership. But for most of us, guiding and inspiring others requires discipline, time, and self-awareness. Enter the Enneagram: a centuries-old framework that'll help you better understand others, foster self-discovery, and serve as a roadmap to achieving your full potential. These blinks don't promise a quick fix to life's problems. But they do offer insights and actionable exercises you can use to improve, not only as a leader but as a human being. In these blinks, you'll learn

why the Enneagram won't try to change your core; the five principles of great leadership; and how to fail well.

## The Enneagram can help you capitalize on your strengths and chuck your weaknesses.

The Enneagram isn't a new concept. It first appeared 2,500 years ago and has been linked to mystical and religious practices like Sufism and Christianity throughout the ages. In the twentieth century, the enigmatic model was updated with modern psychological terms – and it shot into public consciousness. What was once considered “woo-woo” by some is now firmly embedded in mainstream practice. The Enneagram is often used to resolve workplace conflicts and marital troubles. And companies like Chanel, Geico, and Best Buy have integrated the Enneagram into their corporate culture to strengthen employees' personal performance and interpersonal dynamics. The key message here is: The Enneagram can help you capitalize on your strengths and chuck your weaknesses. As a leader, possessing an awareness of assets and blind spots – both in terms of yourself and your colleagues – is invaluable. Knowing what makes you and the people around you tick and, conversely, stall is an invisible superpower that can boost trust, morale, productivity, and profit. The Enneagram provides a springboard for cultivating that awareness. A geometric model of the human psyche, it outlines patterns in how people understand and navigate the world. What it won't do is try to fix you. In fact, the Enneagram's underlying message is that you're fine just as you are. But being doesn't equal knowing. While the Enneagram won't try to alter your core, it'll reveal your behavioral patterns and help you build on the strengths that benefit you while demonstrating how to release those patterns that don't. That said, change won't come easy. If you're like most people, you're probably very attached to your behavioral patterns. They're comfortable and familiar, even when they're hurting you. Because of this, trying to break free of them is difficult. As you work on shedding ingrained habits and behaviors to reveal your true core, you may be met with resistance – both internal and external. But by gaining a comprehensive understanding of who you truly are, what motivates you, and how you connect with your peers, you will grow and evolve. Self-acceptance is key – acknowledging that this is where I am and committing to this is what I'm working toward. Practicing patience is also essential. By taking things slow

and being open about your process with yourself and those around you, you'll have a better chance at achieving the behavioral metamorphosis you're striving toward. These blinks are just the starting point!

## **Use the Enneagram to discover your true essence.**

Now that you have a general sense of what the Enneagram can do, let's dive into the specifics of what it is. The word Enneagram comes from the Greek ennea, or "nine," and gram - "written." Evenly spaced around a circle, connected by a nine-pointed star, are nine personality types. These worldviews aren't meant to box anyone in. Instead, each is associated with certain patterns of behavior that can be used to glean insight into the inner workings of yourself and those around you. The key message here is: Use the Enneagram to discover your true essence. The first Enneagram personality type is the Strict Perfectionist; this comprises people who are driven by what should be done. Perfectionists have high ethical standards and can be very critical - both of themselves and others. The second type is the Considerate Helper. Helpers are happy to sacrifice their own needs in order to support others, in the belief that this will garner love and devotion. The third type is the Competitive Achiever - someone who forgoes feelings in favor of professional success and for whom goals and status are paramount. The Intense Creative is the fourth type. These individuals want to feel special; they're very emotional, crave deep personal connection, and are drawn to dramatic situations. Fifth up are the Quiet Specialists. They prize logic and intellectual reasoning - and can be emotionally detached. Specialists thrive in peaceful environments where they can process the world's demands. Loyal Skeptics, the sixth type, are worriers: they doubt their own power - and that of others - and are always ready for the worst-case scenario. Next are the Enthusiastic Visionaries. Charming, upbeat, and adventurous, their fear of being limited by commitment drives them to see life as a string of infinite possibilities. The Boss is the eighth type: someone who likes being in control. Assertive and straightforward, boss types respect skilled mental or physical sparring but sometimes neglect to notice others' feelings. The ninth and final type is the Adaptive Peacemaker, a diplomat by nature who can see all sides of the equation. For peacemakers, decision-making is difficult - every option has its merits. Saying no is also a challenge. Going with the flow is easier than charting their own course. Your type might not be immediately obvious. People are complex - often we're a little of this and a little of that. But take a moment to calmly reflect. Ask yourself which description resonates with you the most, and you'll discover your true essence. From here, the possibilities for growth are endless.

## **To be an effective leader, you need to cultivate self-awareness.**

Crazy, big fears used to dominate author Jim McPartlin's life. It helped him in terms of his career - he was always prepared for the worst. But anxiety pervaded everything he did. Then, one day in 1993, he attended a seminar on the Enneagram. When the presenter reached Type Six, the Loyal Skeptic, McPartlin exclaimed, "Holy shit!" She was describing his life and personality without knowing him at all. That experience enlightened him as both a person and a leader. It made him see just how much about

himself he couldn't articulate and showed him the importance of self-awareness – one of the most overlooked aspects of leadership. The key message here is: To be an effective leader, you need to cultivate self-awareness. Self-awareness was once considered squishy self-help fodder. But in the modern workplace, it's as critical for success as technical competency. Research also shows that confidence and creativity come from seeing ourselves clearly. We build stronger relationships, perform better, and lead more effectively – which in turn leads to more profitable companies. Being self-aware means not allowing your patterns to function on autopilot; instead, it's seeing your mind as a muscle you can direct and focus. And, just like with any muscle, you can train and focus the mind to become stronger – through meditation. McPartlin, true to his type, was a meditation skeptic at first. But he found that it really works. Here's how to begin: just breathe. Wherever you are, notice your breath and focus on it. How do you feel, both physically and mentally? Next, focus on something – it could be as banal as a piece of carpet fuzz – for ten breaths. Notice it in a nonjudgmental manner, and welcome any thoughts or feelings that arise. Can you simply let them exist? Now ask yourself what you want to do next. Self-awareness, or rather know thyself, is the first of McPartlin's five Enneagram-inspired leadership principles. The second is be curious. By starting each day with the aim of learning something, and ending with a reflection on what you've learned, you'll build personal growth into your daily routine. The third principle is honor your commitments. This is doing what you say you're going to do. This proves you're reliable, trustworthy, and that you don't put yourself above your team. Remember, honoring commitments is also knowing when to say no. Next, choose your team carefully. Once you understand yourself and how you work, you can bring together people who complement you. And finally, pay attention. Whether you're in a meeting or making a sandwich, practice being present – the meditation exercise you learned will help with that. You may be surprised by the increased productivity and respect you achieve.

## **Balance your three centers of intelligence to activate your core and access your best self.**

Within the Enneagram circle of worldviews lies a triangle. This triangle represents the three centers of intelligence – logic (head), action (gut), and emotion (heart). All nine personality types stem from this triangle. Those with personality types in the action triad rely on their instincts, while those in the logic triad experience the world in a mindful way. Emotion types perceive the world through feelings. You might associate the brain with logic, but, in effect, we have action and emotion “brains” too – and they're just as powerful. When they're functioning at their best, our head brain makes us observant and creative; our gut brain makes us feel alive and grounded; and our heart brain makes us authentic and receptive. The key message here is: Balance your three centers of intelligence to activate your core and access your best self. McPartlin met Julia Child at an event held in honor of her 90th birthday. He saw her that night, laughing and talking with guests while balancing a martini in one hand and her walker in the other. To him, she appeared to be in total harmony. This equilibrium seemed to have permeated her life as well. All three centers of intelligence were balanced – in her kitchen operations (action), her endless curiosity (mind), and her love of a fine meal (emotion). We're not all yet at Julia Child's level – most of us need to work to achieve balance. Each Enneagram type naturally relates to a certain center of intelligence. To

find yours, ask yourself, How do these three expressions of personality play into my life? Which one do I lean on the most? Which do I often ignore? Learning to balance your three centers of intelligence is the first step toward core activation – being able to operate consciously and access your best self. You can do this through an exercise McPartlin calls The Pause. Subtly stop whatever you’re doing and tune in to your centers of intelligence. Ask yourself, What do I think? How do I feel? What can I do? If you’re alone, touch your temples, heart, and belly as you ask these questions; if not, imagine these motions. Which centers are the most expressed? Which are least expressed? Take a cleansing breath, and lean into the center that’s being neglected. Along with a daily meditation practice, pausing throughout your day – especially during moments of stress – will allow you to cut through your autopilot reflexes and rebalance yourself.

## **Being able to give – and receive – feedback and mentorship is a hallmark of great leadership.**

Criticizing others. With the exception of maybe a Type Three (Competitive Achiever) or Type Eight (The Boss), most people don’t really enjoy it. But as you’ve most likely experienced, delivering and receiving feedback is a part of life – especially as a leader. A four-step feedback model can help activate your core and make giving and receiving feedback less scary. With it, you can ground yourself and objectively respond to any situation rather than having a subconscious, emotional outburst. The key message here is: Being able to give – and receive – feedback and mentorship is a hallmark of great leadership. First, observe the behavior you wish to address. This should be stated as a straightforward fact, the way you’d observe it was raining: “John, I noticed you were late today.” Second, interpret. In any situation, but especially as a leader, it’s crucial to give the person the benefit of the doubt: “John, I noticed you were late today. Maybe it’s because the subway was delayed?” Third, feel. We all process anxiety differently, but try to be as direct as possible while still being sensitive to the other person. “John, I noticed you were late today. Maybe it’s because the subway was delayed. However, I’m feeling frustrated.” Fourth, need. That is, tell the other person what you need – taking care to keep the inflection of your voice in check: “John, I noticed you were late today. Maybe it’s because the subway was delayed. However, I’m feeling frustrated. I need to know what it’ll take for you to be on time.” Being able to give and receive mentorship, a more involved version of feedback, is also entwined with good leadership. According to McPartlin, mentoring is the noblest thing you can do as a leader. Why? Not only does it reap you good karma, ensure organizational cohesion, and bring satisfaction – it also strengthens your core. In mentoring another person, you have to focus on and hone your own three centers of intelligence. If neither you nor your mentee has a lot of Enneagram experience, read up on it, take an online test, or attend a class together. You might not fully understand their Enneagram type at first – and be careful not to box them in. But your mutual awareness of each other’s type will lay the foundation for productive conversations that, in turn, will result in a more authentic and fruitful working relationship.

## **Tap into humor, self-awareness, and**



# **other Enneagram types to manage fear and failure.**

Facing fear is something we all go through in life – and public speaking tops the list of anxieties for many people. But as a leader, having to regularly address an audience is inevitable – whether it's five people or 500. You could continue to lose sleep over it. Or, you could use the Enneagram to work through your fears and successfully command a room. Let's take a Type One (Strict Perfectionist). Their core fear of public speaking is feeling imperfect – so a useful tool before giving a presentation is practice. Laughing with Type Ones can also be great, for both the speaker and audience. In fact, humor in general is a great way to manage tough situations, improve morale, and boost productivity. The key message here is: Tap into humor, self-awareness, and other Enneagram types to manage fear and failure. Our fears often have a way of taking on a larger aura of menace. To pop that balloon, take a cue from the Harry Potter spell “Riddikulus,” which transformed the young wizards' worst nightmares – like a giant spider – into humorous forms – like that spider on roller skates. First, identify your fear. Then direct your attention to the issue and quietly say, “Riddikulus” until you've cracked a smile. Failure is another big fear. But let's compare breaking your leg in a skiing accident to getting fired or missing a promotion. With one, you go to the hospital, get a cast, and take time to heal. With the other, you beat yourself up, go into denial, or act out in rage. How does that make any sense? When you fail, which is in itself a subjective term, rejuvenation should be your priority. The best way to fire up this process is by tapping into your three centers of intelligence: practice compassion in your Heart Brain, use your Head Brain to rationally contemplate what happened, and gear up your Gut Brain to move forward. The day McPartlin got fired from his position as a hotel general manager forever changed the course of his life – for the better. After an initial period of shock, sadness, and rumination over a chocolate milkshake, he put in his earbuds, turned on the Hercules soundtrack, and stepped into his future as an Enneagram consultant. To fail “well,” he committed to breaking free from his own Type Six (Loyal Skeptic) patterns by embracing the strengths of every Enneagram type. For example, he thought, How would a Type Three (Competitive Achiever) prepare for his week? He'd make a list of things to do! Each of the nine types provides tools you can take advantage of. Trying on a different type, even for a short while, can help you rise from the ashes and reorient yourself.

# **Diffuse conflict and foster collaboration by recognizing and releasing your patterns.**

Conflict happens daily – and it can derail even the most well-intentioned leaders. It has infinite potential causes, including contrasting value systems, differing competitiveness levels, and mismatched opinions over the quality of a deliverable. But the single largest source of conflict? Differences in pattern expression, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstandings. Before attempting to mediate others, you need to comprehend how you're self-managing. And this starts with taking a detached look at your own behavior patterns. The key message here is: Diffuse conflict and foster collaboration by recognizing and releasing your patterns. There's a series of paintings by George

Rodrigue called Blue Dog. The images depict his deceased dog, Tiffany, who's traveling through space and time to find her owner. In a smaller series, the same dog isn't blue, but red. According to Rodrigue, this is when Tiffany is "being her bad self." Like Tiffany, each of us also has a good and bad self. Different personality types instinctually manage discord in various ways – but regardless of the approach, there is a higher and lower expression for each type. For example, in a stressful situation, a Type Four (Intense Creative) will express their good self as being self-aware and calm; their bad self, on the other hand, will be exasperated, dramatic, and withdrawn. We all possess an inner observer. During a tense moment, practice tuning into this impartial set of eyes to identify when you're slipping into your bad self – and shift course in real time. This will diffuse conflict and improve your leadership game. Just as it can help you express your best self, the Enneagram can help bring out the best in collaborative teams. The key to effective, fun teamwork is learning to acknowledge another's point of view, voicing your own, and then solving the obstacle together. There are three Enneagram subtypes, or instincts, that can help you gain a more nuanced understanding of others' positions: self-preservation – which entails a sense of security; social – wanting to belong within a group; and one-to-one needs like partner intimacy or close friendships. We each naturally gravitate toward one of the three. Have you ever immediately clicked with someone? That's probably because your subconscious types are synced. Then there are people you just don't like working with. What about them rubs you the wrong way? And what do you do to push their buttons? If you know, for example, that the Type Four's trigger points are feeling ignored or devalued, you can make a concerted effort to show you care about and value their input. Letting go of your patterns without knowing if the other party will follow suit is hard – and the learning and growing process might go on forever. But, as with any great relationship, it's worth the effort.

## Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Learning to lead starts with learning to manage yourself, and the key to this process is self-awareness. The Enneagram is a tool you can use to get in touch with your core strengths and blindspots. Yes, your patterns are hardwired, but they don't define you; instead, by seeing them clearly, you can make them serve you. In the end, you're fine just as you are – but with some active introspection and focus, you can evolve from fine to amazing in both your professional and personal life. And here's some more actionable advice: Walk the walk in order to talk the talk. You can't effectively lead others until you've walked in their shoes. As a new hotel school graduate, Jim McPartlin cleaned rooms, and then outdoor toilets, in the Florida summer heat. Fast forward a few years, and he became a hotel manager – but he stayed connected to that initial experience. The bottom line is, you're never too senior or highly ranked to do the unglamorous "dirty" work. Having – and acting upon – such a mindset will foster a team culture of mutual awareness, trust, and respect.