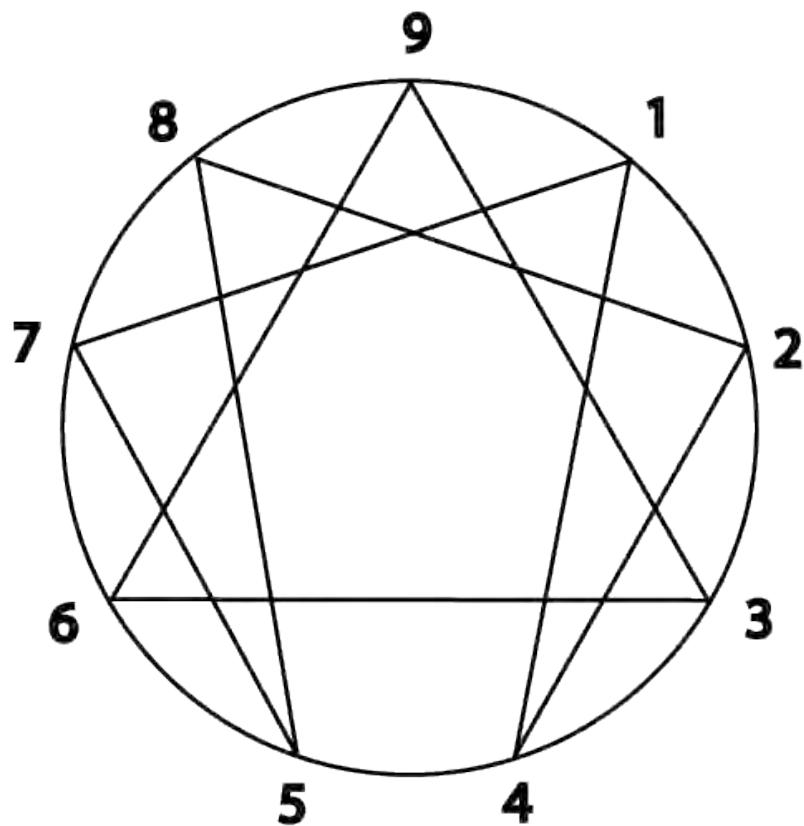




wishful thinking



## An Introduction to the Enneagram

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With thanks to John Eaton and Ray Keedy-Lilley for introducing me to the Enneagram.

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## Wishful Thinking

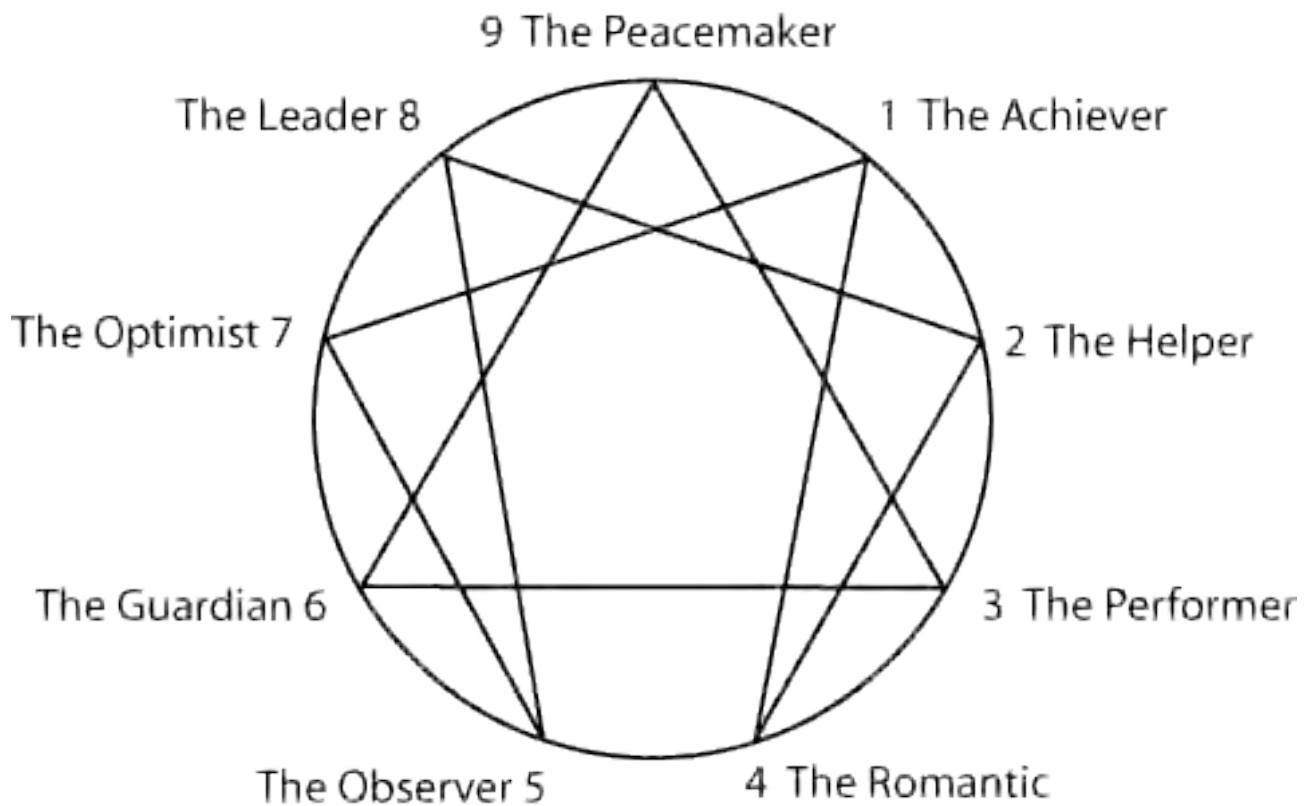
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# 1. What is the Enneagram and why should you care?

## The Enneagram

The Enneagram is a nine-pointed star drawn inside a circle. It has many meanings and uses - currently, it is best known as a system of personality types, where each of the nine points corresponds to a different type.

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## **Wishful Thinking**

I was introduced to the Enneagram in 1997, since when I have found it a powerful and practical tool, in my own life and relationships, and in my work - originally as a psychotherapist and now also as a business coach and consultant.

The Enneagram system is not confined to what modern psychology regards as the ‘personality’ - it includes the whole of human nature, mental, emotional and physical - but I will limit this brief introduction to the personality types and how they can help you in your personal and professional development.

## **What can the Enneagram offer you?**

### **Personal development**

The Enneagram types are not made up of lists of character traits, but are founded on a person’s core values. Each type represents a fundamental decision about what is most important in life - such as power, security, harmony, knowledge or fulfilment. This decision is a two-edged sword: focusing on any of these important values enables us to make a valuable contribution in many areas of life; but it also causes us to neglect other values, creating a psychological ‘blind spot’ that limits our perspective and prevents us from developing beyond a certain point.

Identifying your Enneagram type can show you this blind spot and open up unexpected options for change. It can help you break long standing patterns that have been holding you back, sometimes without your realising it.

### **Professional development**

Whether or not knowing your strengths and weaknesses is important to you personally, it is vital to your professional development. Without this knowledge you risk choosing the wrong challenges or even the wrong career. You are also likely to keep coming up against the same obstacles to success.

Identifying and working with your Enneagram type can help you play to your strengths by choosing professional challenges that are most appealing and appropriate for your talents. Knowing your ‘blind spot’ helps you work around the obstacles it creates for you.

### **Personal relationships**

Well these don’t come with an instruction manual, do they? For most of us, personal relationships are most rewarding or the most frustrating part of life - or both. In some ways we can be so close to another, yet in others feel so apart. How many times have we all felt, when an argument starts or a misunderstanding arises, ‘That’s not what I meant at all!’?

Understanding your own and others’ Enneagram types allows you to relate to others with greater empathy and compassion, leading to less conflict and clearer communication.

## Working relationships

It's hard to think of a job in which dealing with people is not a vital skill. For anyone in one of the 'people professions' - such as managing, teaching, counseling, coaching, consulting, sales, medicine or politics - it is central to the success or failure of your work.

The Enneagram offers you a powerful framework for relating to others more authentically and constructively. Whether influencing, managing, selling, caring, team-building, presenting or advising, it can help you communicate effectively and respectfully, extending your influence and opening up new options for collaboration.

## Spirituality

I've left this one last as it's perfectly possible to use the Enneagram as a practical tool for self-knowledge and relating to others without any spiritual element.

On the other hand, those with an interest in spiritual development will want to know that the Enneagram has been used as a framework for meditation and growth in several different spiritual traditions. For the Sufis, the mystics of Islam, the Enneagram is the 'face of God'. Christian teachers have traced the seven deadly sins - and their antidotes - in the Enneagram types. And Buddhist teachers use the Enneagram as a 'map of attachments' that can guide meditators on the way to awakening. More modern spiritual schools that use the Enneagram include the Fourth Way teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff and the Arica training of Oscar Ichazo.

## So which Enneagram type are you?

Whether you are interested in secular or spiritual development, the Enneagram offers you a powerful lens for examining yourself and others - and making profound changes in your own life and relationships.

The first step towards using it is to familiarise yourself with the nine Enneagram types and start to get a sense of your own type. In the next three chapters I'll describe the nine types, but before we get to that here's a short questionnaire to help you identify your type. It's a shortened version of the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI) devised by well-known Enneagram authors Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson.

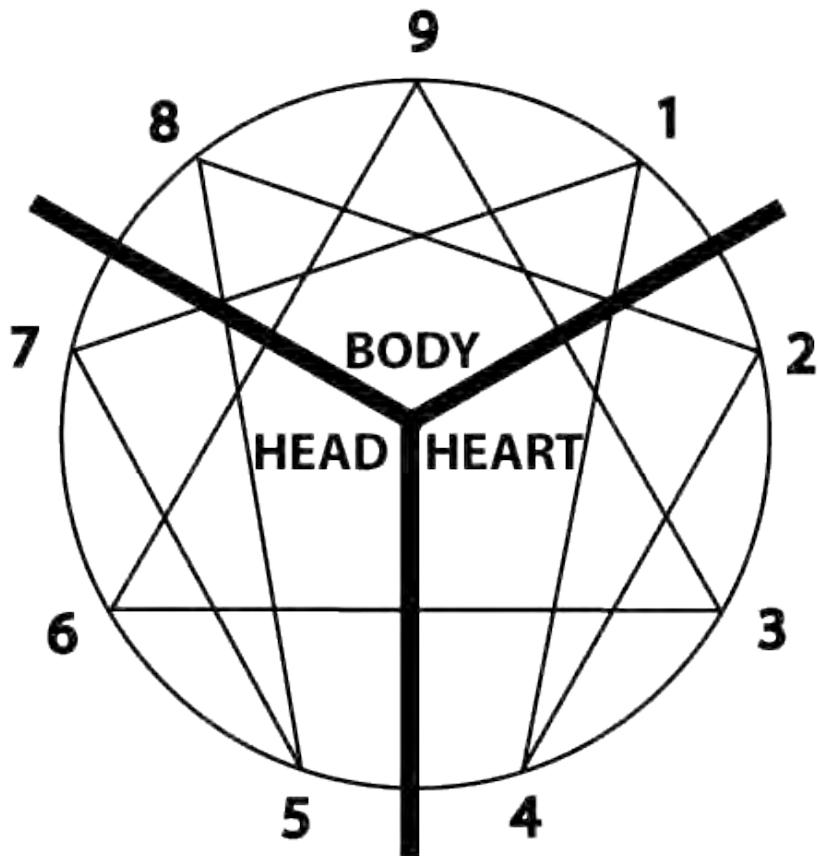
Here's a link to the [free shorter version of the test](#) - take 10 minutes to complete this before reading the next three chapters and it will make the descriptions of the types more relevant and interesting to you.

I'm offering the link here to help you take the first step towards recognising your type - but don't be too quick to jump to conclusions. It took me several months (and some brutal feedback from a well-meaning friend!) before I identified my own type correctly.

## 2. The Heart Types

Having introduced the Enneagram system of personality types, I'll now start to describe the individual Enneagram types.

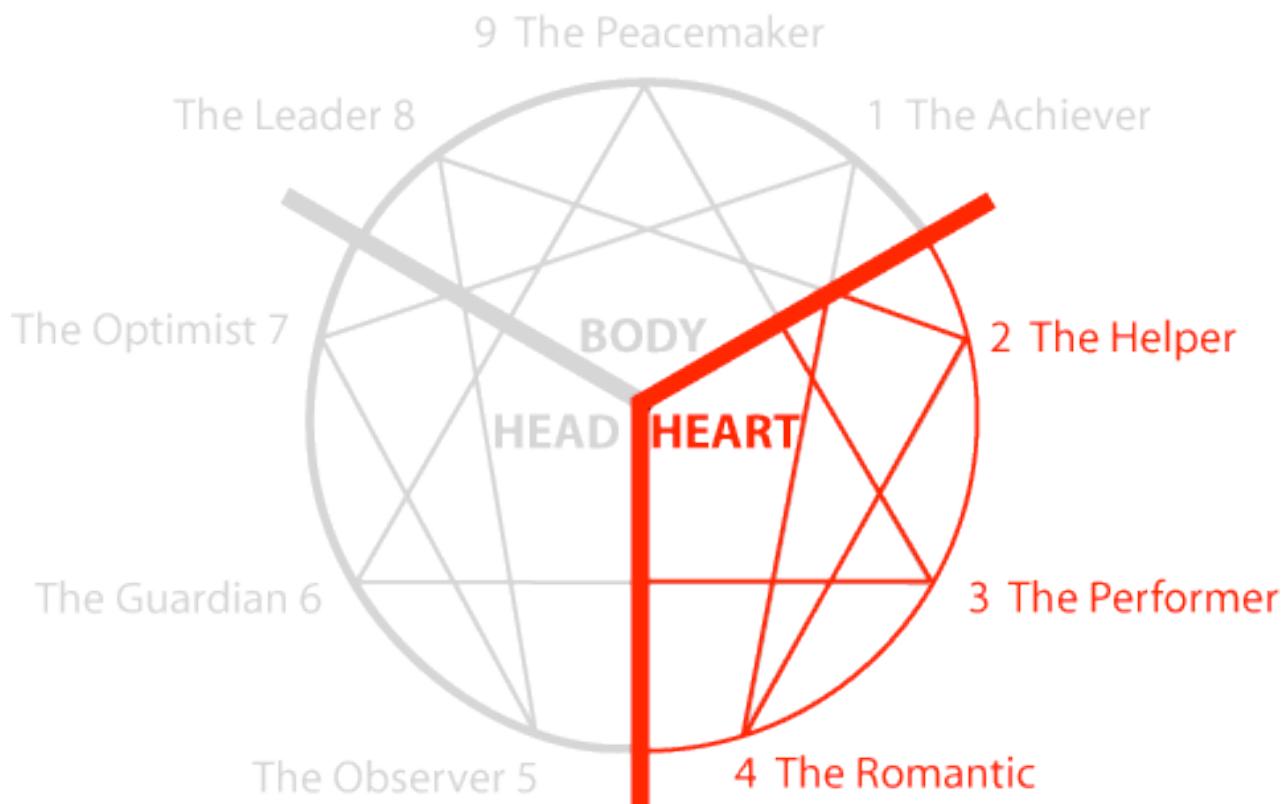
The minimum you need to know about the Enneagram symbol is that it is divided into three parts, representing the three 'centres' or types of intelligence in human beings - emotional, mental and physical. Another way of looking at the three centres is to see them as corresponding to different types of action - relating, thinking and doing.



In this chapter I will outline the three 'Heart' types - Two, Three and Four. These types' strength lies in their emotional intelligence - their ability to relate to others and their own emotions.

It's important to remember that no types are better or worse than the others. Each type has strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles. And the Enneagram is **not** about putting people in boxes - we all have the potential to occupy any position on the Enneagram, and in different situations we can take on the characteristics of any of the nine types.

N.B. The names of the Enneagram types given here are not definitive - different teachers use different names, and some just refer to the types by number.



### Type Two - The Helper

Type Two is skilled at reading others' emotions in order to understand and meet their needs. Twos take their identity from their ability to help others. Generous to a fault, they can be relied upon to step forward and take care of others when needed. Their giving can take many forms - time, attention, energy, experience, influence or money. Problems can arise when they start to give in order to receive something in return - whether material or emotional.

**The stereotype of the Two** is the kindly old grandmother or self-sacrificing carer, but Twos can also take on the role of the 'power behind the throne' of an influential person.

**At their best** Twos understand the joy of service. They are happy to give without seeking a reward in return, since making a difference to another's life is what brings them pleasure. They find fulfilment in the act of giving, without clinging to the image of the 'generous person'. There is nothing neurotic in their generosity, since they are wise enough to balance what they give to others with taking care of their own needs.

**At their worst** Giving becomes a form of manipulation, of making others feel indebted to them and returning the 'favour'. Unable to acknowledge their own needs directly, they use emotional pressure to meet them indirectly, often without realising what they are doing. It is not enough for them to help someone else - they crave praise for their generosity and want to be recognised as a 'special' indispensable person. If they do not get this, they can criticise others and complain of their 'ingratitude'. The dark side of the Helper is the self-appointed Martyr.

**We all experience point Two** any time we help someone else and experience the pleasure of seeing their face light up with happiness - and maybe a twinge of anticipation to see whether they have noticed our generosity?

### Type Three - The Performer

Type Three is skilled at reading others' emotions in order to influence them. Threes take their identity from their ability to win praise and recognition from large numbers of people, or of the most influential people. Because they always have one eye on the public perception of their actions, they become consummate performers at whatever they choose to focus on. Problems can arise when they become so attached to their public persona that they lose touch with their own real feelings and start to deceive both themselves and others.

**The stereotype of the Three** is the actor, showbiz performer or politician, but they can be found in almost any walk of life - such as the highest-profile manager, doctor, writer, salesperson or fitness instructor.

**At their best** Threes are the embodiment of excellence. They deliver a wonderful performance in every sense, and their impressive style is backed up by substantial achievement. They experience joy in the performance itself, without undue concern for their public image. They are able to distinguish between reality and illusion, and to balance public adulation with awareness of their own feelings and honest acceptance of their shortcomings.

**At their worst** Threes are addicted to the limelight and will stop at nothing to bolster their self-image. Cut off from their true feelings, they cling to the external trappings of success and are ruthless with anyone who threatens their position, sometimes resorting to underhand methods to discredit them. To others they look deceptive - all 'spin' and no substance - but they have been believing their own press for so long that they hardly notice the deception. The dark side of the consummate Performer is the plausible Liar.

**We all experience point Three** any time we perform a task particularly well and receive praise and recognition - and maybe the temptation to play to the crowd and bask in the limelight?

### Type Four - The Romantic

Type Fours are highly sensitive to their own emotions, able to introspect deeply and to express these feelings in original ways. Fours take their identity from their sense of being true to themselves and following their own path in life, whatever the prevailing wisdom or fashion. Because of their ability to tap deep wells of emotion, they can create powerful works of art or take unusual and memorable paths through life. Problems arise when their introspection tips over into self-absorption and they start to lose touch with the realities of life around them, including the feelings of others.

**The stereotype of the Four** is the Romantic artist or poet, but their originality is not always expressed through artistic channels - they can be the black sheep or dark horse with a distinctive approach to any profession or life situation.

**At their best** Fours can inspire others with their originality and bring a magical, almost other-worldly quality to whatever they do. Whether artists or not, in their work they create something striking and meaningful that resonates deeply with those whom it touches. Instead of being attached to their own feelings, they take pleasure in expressing them and touching others' hearts. They are able to balance self-awareness with a healthy respect for others' feelings and the reality of the world around them.

**At their worst** they become so absorbed in their inner world that they lose touch with reality and become self-obsessed. Melancholy - never far away - turns into depression and they wallow in negative feelings. They become bitter against a world that 'doesn't understand' them and angrily reject suggestions that they need to take their head out of the clouds and deal with the realities of life. Others see them as self-indulgent and start to lose patience with their negativity. The dark side of the Romantic is the neurotic Depressive.

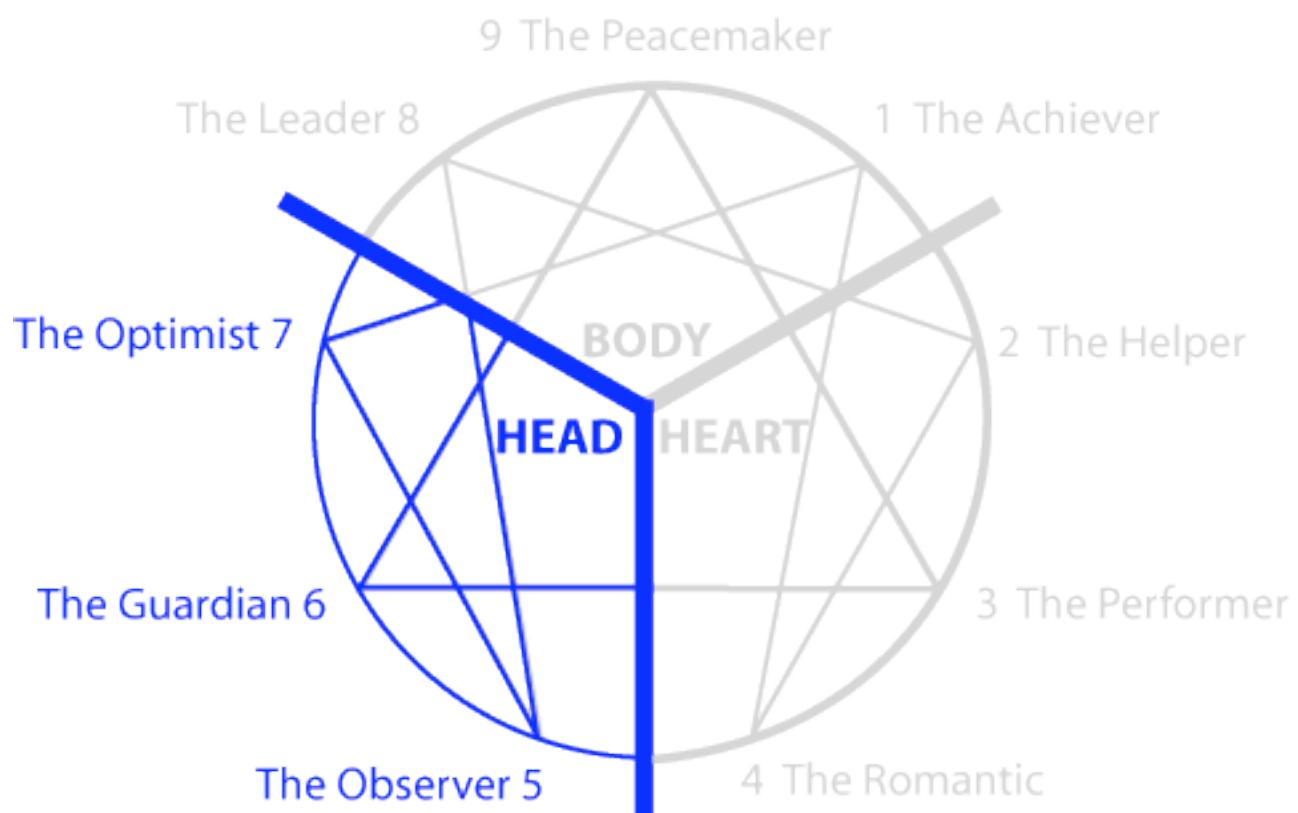
**We all experience point Four** when we feel something so strongly that we have a vivid sense of the beauty and preciousness of life, so that no force on earth will persuade us to go against our true feelings - and maybe the temptation to milk the feeling for all its worth?

### Questions

- Do you recognize yourself in any of these descriptions?
- Supposing you met someone who seemed to be at point Two, Three or Four - how could you 'speak their language' to make them feel at ease and relate to them on their own terms?

### 3. The Head Types

In this chapter I will outline the three ‘Head’ types - types Five, Six and Seven. These types’ strength lies in their mental intelligence - their ability to think clearly, to penetrate deeply into a subject or to create new options for action.



I'll reiterate the reminder that no types are better or worse than the others. Each type has strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles. And the Enneagram is **not** about putting people in boxes - we all have the potential to occupy any position on the Enneagram, and in different situations we can take on the characteristics of any of the nine types.

## Type Five - The Observer

Type Five has a gift for focused concentration and deep thought, able to analyse a problem, topic or situation and reach carefully reasoned conclusions. Fives take their identity from their status as guardians of knowledge and founts of wisdom. Because of their patient ability to explore a subject in depth, they become authorities on whatever they set their mind to. Problems arise when thinking becomes a substitute for action, and when they get so used to 'living in their heads' that they lose touch with their own feelings and become insensitive to others.

**The stereotype of the Five** is the ivory tower intellectual, but they are not necessarily academics - they are the deep thinkers and reserved characters to be found in any walk of life, the ones most likely to take a step back from a situation and give it considered thought.

**At their best** Fives are wise teachers, generous with their learning and eager to help others. They are able to set aside their own prejudices and examine the data impartially, often reaching an original conclusions that it is hard to contest. They know the joy of learning for its own sake, regardless of trappings such as qualifications or high status positions. They are able to balance deep thought with a healthy awareness of their own feelings and deeply felt connections to those around them.

**At their worst** Fives are cold and distant, cutting themselves off from others and withdrawing into a world of abstract thought. The respected authority becomes a boring know-all, highly sensitive to any perceived slight on their status as the fount of all wisdom. The thirst for knowledge turns into an obsessive collection of data, without regard for its utility or relevance. Lost in a world of abstract thought, they lose touch with their real feelings and can compensate through compulsive or addictive behaviour. The dark side of The Observer is the paranoid Pedant.

**We all experience point Five** when we become so absorbed in learning about a topic that we experience a deep pleasure in marshaling all the facts and seeing meaningful patterns emerge - and maybe feel slightly superior to those who haven't looked into it so deeply?

## Type Six - The Guardian

Type Six is a hard-headed thinker who applies practical intelligence to securing the wellbeing of a group - such as a family, circle of friends, team, company or country. Sixes take their identity from their position as loyal members of the group. Because of their ability to spot danger and put the group interest first they are dependable team players. Problems arise when their identification with the group leads to an 'us and them' mentality and they become suspicious of 'outsiders'.

**The stereotype of the Six** is the policeman or security guard, prepared to put their life on the line for the status quo, but they can be found as loyal members of any kind of team - such as those in business, sport, the military, politics or the family.

**At their best** Sixes are loyal, trustworthy guardians whose 'sixth sense' for danger is placed at the service of their community. They are able to keep a clear head even when alert for danger, and

see potential threats in perspective, responding appropriately. They are happy to work tirelessly in the background, without the need for special recognition. They are wise enough balance their identification with their group with a healthy respect for others and their differences, and extend a warm welcome to strangers.

**At their worst** they are suspicious and volatile, quick to accuse and slow to trust or forgive. Their alertness spills over into paranoia. Both Fives and Sixes experience paranoia, with the difference that Fives are typically paranoid about themselves as individuals, Sixes on behalf of the group. Tormented by anxiety, they see everyone as a potential threat - 'insiders' are potential traitors, 'outsiders' are viewed with prejudice and can even be persecuted. The dark side of the Guardian is the paranoid Bigot.

**We all experience point Six** any time we feel part of a team and experience the sense of everyone pulling together to achieve a common goal - and maybe start to see 'outsiders' as 'the opposition'?

### Type Seven - The Optimist

Type Seven has a gift for looking on the bright side of life and thinking up exciting new options. Sevens see themselves as 'the life and soul of the party'. Whether at work or play, they take it upon themselves to lighten the mood and help others to see the glass as half-full (and just waiting for a top-up). Because they are so good at infecting others with their enthusiasm they are charming company and usually surrounded by a group of friends. Problems arise when their optimism leads them to gloss over difficulties and makes them afraid of facing up to the darker side of life.

**The stereotype of the Seven** is the *bon viveur* and party animal, and there's no denying most Sevens have a taste for the finer things in life - but their optimism can also be applied to serious technical, business or life problems, where they can be relied upon to bring a solution-focused mindset and plenty of practical creativity.

**At their best** Sevens are delightful people, the first names on the list when invitations are going out and the last to leave at the end of the evening. They are concerned with others' pleasure as much as their own, and will go to considerable lengths to ensure that everyone has what they need for a good time - all the while insisting that 'it's my pleasure'. They are also wise enough to acknowledge problems when they arise, and to apply their intelligence and creativity to finding workable solutions.

**At their worst** Sevens cling to pleasure, sometimes to the point of addiction, as a way of avoiding difficulties and shirking their responsibility. Delight in the good things in life becomes a sense of entitlement, and they react angrily when others refuse to play the game and indulge their whims. Formerly charming, they can be bitterly critical and hurtful of their 'so-called friends'. The dark side of the Optimist is the selfish Hedonist.

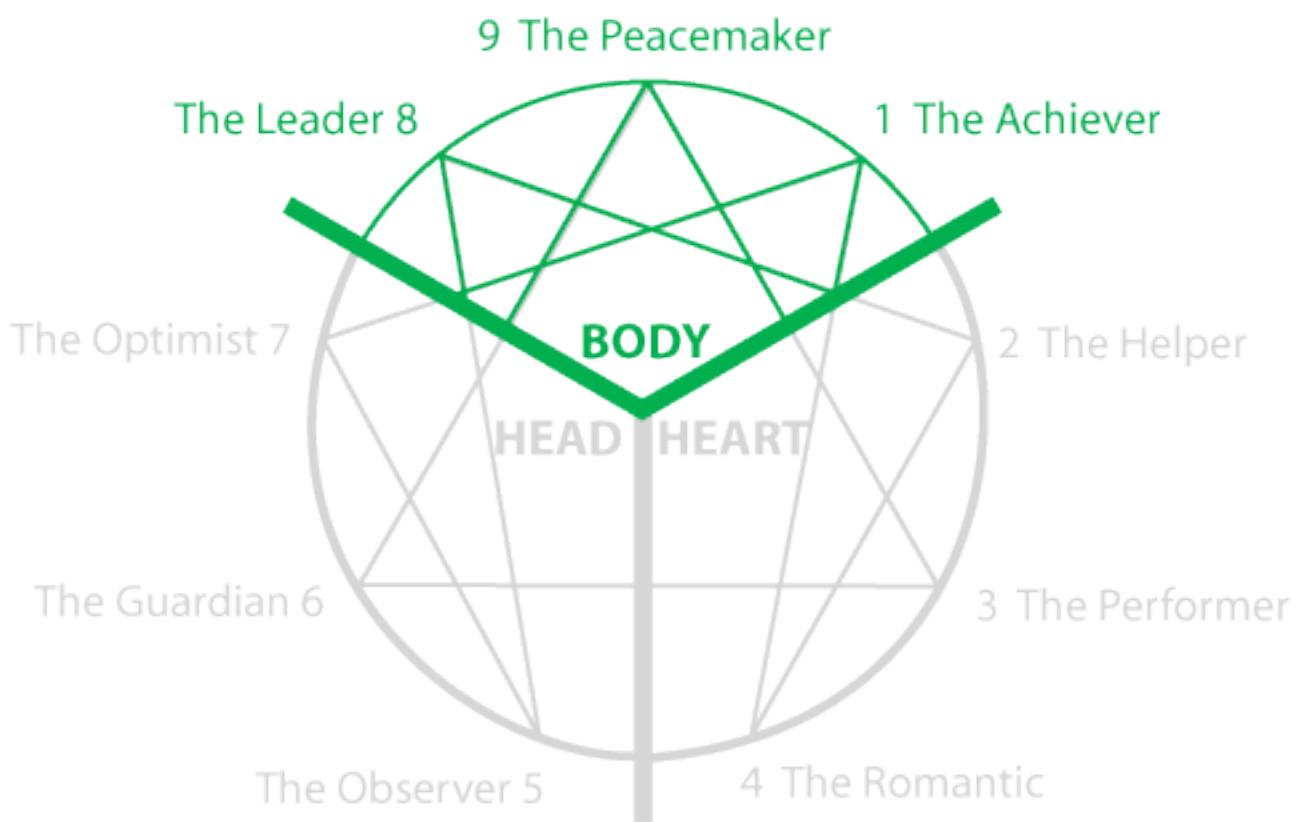
**We all experience point Seven** when we are filled with an irrepressible sense of the joys of life and its possibilities, and an eagerness to share these with others - and maybe when we know it's time to face up to our responsibilities, but want to keep playing just a little longer?

### Questions

- Do you recognize yourself in any of these descriptions?
- Can you think of an example of someone making an outstanding contribution by playing to the strengths of the Five, Six or Seven?

## 4. The Body Types

In this chapter I will outline the three ‘Body’ types - types Eight, Nine and One. These types’ strength lies in their instinctive intelligence - their ability to tune into their ‘gut feeling’ about people and situations, to commit to action and to see it through with grit and determination.



### Type Eight - The Leader

Type Eight is a powerful presence, full of physical vigour, who is not afraid to take the lead and act decisively. Eights see themselves as leaders and pillars of strength, with a duty to guide and protect weaker individuals. Because of their confidence in themselves and their judgment, they have no hesitation in placing themselves ‘in the firing line’ for the good of the group. Problems arise when power becomes an end instead of a means, and they focus more on maintaining the status of leadership than on discharging its responsibilities.

**The stereotype of the Eight** is the military general or political leader, but they can be found in any situation where leadership and decisive action is called for, such as at work, in the home or on the sports field.

**At their best** Eights are noble, almost heroic figures, offering leadership when it is most needed and putting themselves on the line in the service of justice. Their strength is used to protect and serve others, and they have a reputation for fairness and mercy. Because they are focused on others more than themselves, their instinctive judgments rarely lead to errors. They are able to distinguish between right and wrong applications of power, and to balance public status with personal humility.

**At their worst** Eights become intoxicated with power and more concerned with fighting off challengers than on serving the group. They wield their strength indiscriminately and can take sadistic pleasure in making weaker individuals squirm. Their instinctive judgment is clouded by self-interest, so that they are likely to pick the wrong targets and lash out without provocation. The dark side of the Leader is the intimidating Bully.

**We all experience point Eight** any time we assume a position of leadership and find ourselves taking decisive action (sometimes to our own surprise) - and maybe feel a twinge of pleasure when we see others defer to us?

### Type Nine - The Peacemaker

Type Nine's instinctive intelligence enables him or her to tune into the dynamics of a group and intervene to promote harmony and balance. Nines come across as nice people, willing to adapt to others and accommodate their needs. Because of their ability to blend with a group, they can sometimes seem to merge into the background and do not always receive due credit for their influence. Problems arise when their habitual focus on the group leads them to neglect their own needs and to hesitate when decisive action is called for.

**The stereotype of the Nine** is the mediator or the elderly grandmother who is only concerned that everyone will get on and be nice to each other, but Nines are found in any situation where balance and harmony are required. In spite of their retiring temperament, this can make them excellent leaders.

**At their best** Nines are aware of their influence and are not afraid to intervene to promote harmony - even if that means a few sharp words are in order. They understand that many things are important in life, but none so much as being at peace with yourself and with others. This is the message they convey to others, sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly, in the way they conduct themselves and their relationships. And they are wise enough to balance the interests of the group with speaking up for their own needs.

**At their worst** Nines are anxious to keep the peace at any cost, and will play the part of the 'nice person' even while seething with a sense of injustice. They mistake a calm exterior and cordiality for real peace and accord. This means they fail to speak up or take action when it is called for, so that problems fester and important issues are neglected. They are easily distracted and can fritter away days or weeks by zoning out in their 'uncomfortable comfort zone'. The dark side of the Peacemaker is the anxious Placater.

**We all experience point Nine** any time we recognise the futility of a conflict and intervene to restore peace and mutual understanding - and maybe when we know an issue needs to be raised, but are afraid to rock the boat?

### Type One - The Achiever

Type One's physical drive is channelled into a sense of mission, of something important that needs to be achieved and which may require sacrifices. Ones identify with their sense of purpose and feel the need to measure themselves and others against a set of high standards. They have a deep-seated sense of justice and fairness, and will not hesitate to speak up if they feel these values are being flouted. Problems arise when they become more concerned with rules and standards than with relating to fallible human beings - themselves included.

**The stereotype of the One** is the exacting teacher or dogmatic cleric, but Ones are found in any situation where high standards are required - whether as performers or examiners.

**At their best** Ones are exemplars of purpose and efficiency, working tirelessly to achieve a worthwhile goal. They are idealists in pursuit of perfection - if they don't reach it, it won't be for want of trying! Because they aim high, they often achieve more than was thought possible - and they are realistic enough to accept that they will never get everything 100% right. They are wise enough to recognise that rules are means and not ends, and to accept the flaws in themselves and in others.

**At their worst** Ones become obsessed with the 'right way' to do things and refuse to give themselves or anyone else any peace until conformity is achieved. High standards give birth to a harsh 'inner critic' with which they constantly berate themselves for their failings, so that they constantly feel guilty and irritable. Not content with making their own lives a misery, they insist that others conform to their rules, with dogmatic pronouncements and even violent 'punishment'. The dark side of the Achiever is the merciless Critic.

**We all experience point One** whenever we push ourselves to raise our performance and achieve something we believe is worthwhile - and maybe start to think the world would be a better place if only other people made a similar effort?

### Questions

- Do you recognize yourself in any of these descriptions?
- Do you know anyone who seems to be at point Eight, Nine or One? If so, what's the most likeable thing about them?
- Now that you've read descriptions of all nine points, can you think of any bloggers whose blogs exemplify the best qualities of any one of the points?

# 5. Using the Enneagram - Working on Yourself

The Enneagram is about movement and change, letting go of fixed identity and opening up to the possibility of transformation. G.I. Gurdjieff, the teacher who first brought knowledge of the Enneagram to the West, taught that we have two natures – ‘Personality’ which is essentially illusory, an image of ourselves that we learn from others; and ‘Essence’, our true nature. The Enneagram type belongs to ‘Personality’ in this specialized sense – and is therefore false, something we are unnaturally attached to through conditioning. The aim of Gurdjieff’s system was to help people let go of this false self-image so that their true Essence could emerge.

So the point of identifying your Enneagram type is not to put you in a box or stick a label on you – but to show you where the type (your self-image) helps you and where it is getting in your way. By deliberately working ‘against’ your type, you can open up new perspectives and make changes in long-established habits.

To give a personal example – by nature I’m quite a serious character (point One) who has always been keen to work hard and achieve things. In my early twenties I became very earnest about my personal and spiritual development – training as a therapist, attending meditation retreats and studying the Enneagram(!). This was very different to some of my friends who spent a lot of time at point Seven and were more playful and spontaneous – and usually ribbing me to get me to lighten up a bit.

Unfortunately, my friends were right. Much of my earnestness was the result of spending too much time at point One. Far from making me an ‘evolved’ person, it merely confirmed that I was trapped in the limitations of my type. So the Enneagram showed me my ‘blind spot’ – taking life too seriously. It showed me that for the sake of my personal development I had to have more fun and indulge in the vulgar pleasures of life!

So I made more time for fun, playfulness and hanging around with silly friends. Less time meditating, more time watching football and going to parties. I started to watch out for my tendency to criticise new ideas and to look for options instead of flaws. Gradually this led me to move away from exclusively focusing on the ‘serious business’ of psychotherapy and towards my passions – writing poetry and coaching artists and other creative professionals.

This doesn’t mean I completely changed my character – I can still work hard and strive for excellence in whatever I am doing. But it does mean I can let go of some of the seriousness of point One and experience more of the joy of life – ‘all work and no play’ is a very relevant saying for point One!

## Observing your Enneagram type

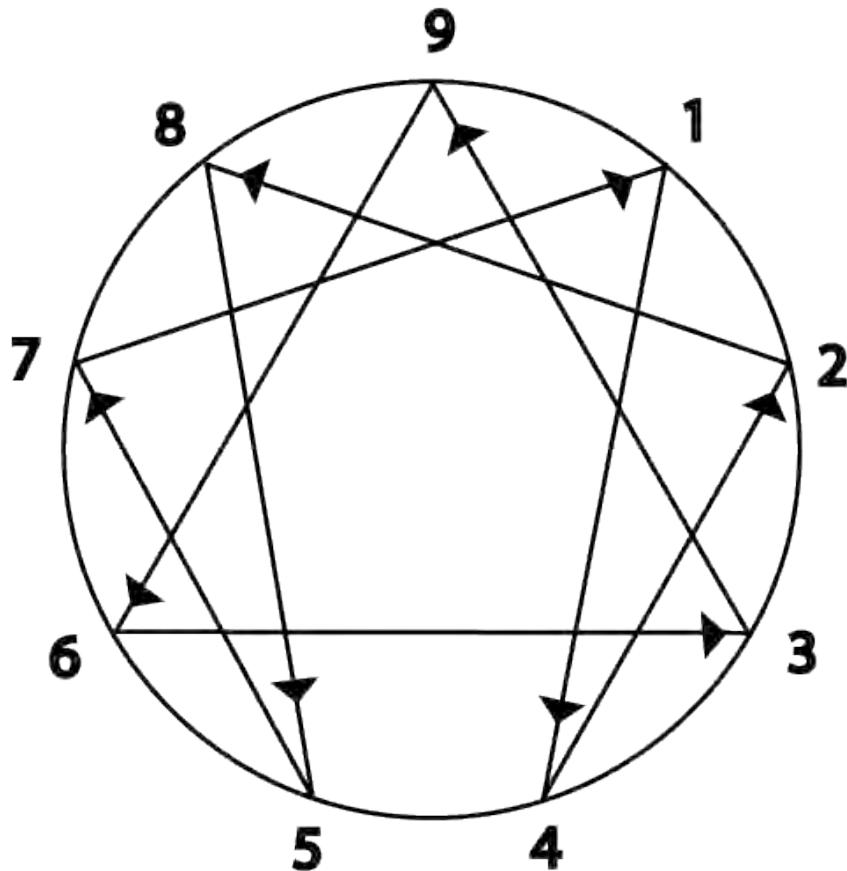
Enneagram teachers typically recommend two ways of working on yourself with the Enneagram. The first is simply to observe your type - read the descriptions and notice when you find yourself compelled to act according to type. For example - if you are at point Two, notice when you feel compelled to help someone; if you are at point Seven, notice when you get bored and feel the need to lighten the mood; if you are point Five, notice when you feel the need to withdraw from the group and gather your thoughts.

Getting into the habit of 'just observing' yourself is a great way to learn about yourself, even if the observations can make uncomfortable viewing at times. One Enneagram teacher, Richard Rohr, says we haven't really 'got' the Enneagram until we have been humiliated - meaning that it is a humbling experience to realise how much of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are conditioned by our type. On the other hand, this can also help us to develop compassion for ourselves - and for others, when we notice that they are also trapped by their type.

If you're feeling really brave, you might want to show the description of your type to a trusted friend and ask them whether they think it's accurate - pick your friend wisely, and be prepared for a few home truths!

## Working against your Enneagram type

Let's have another look at the Enneagram symbol:



Notice the arrows that have been drawn on the diagram - these indicate the 'path of least resistance' in the face of the difficulties of life. So for me at point One, the path of least resistance leads to point Four - whenever I am overwhelmed by the difficulties of achieving my goals, I am tempted to retreat to Four and take on the less desirable qualities of that type, by getting depressed and lamenting the state of the world. If I move in the other direction however, against the direction of the arrows, then I arrive at point Seven, which is when I lighten up and start to embrace the positive side of life.

## Challenges for each type

Each Enneagram type faces a similar challenge in moving 'against the arrows' in order to overcome the limitations of their type:

- **Point Two** - can you move to point Four and focus on your own needs as well as others?
- **Point Three** - can you move to point Six and spend time out of the limelight as a member of the group?
- **Point Four** - can you move to point One and adopt a more objective critical perspective on your own feelings and dreams?
- **Point Five** - can you move to point Eight and put yourself on the line by applying your knowledge in the world of action?
- **Point Six** - can you move to point Nine and set aside your suspicion by trusting others and celebrating difference?
- **Point Seven** - can you move to point Five and stop being a butterfly by focusing on one option and seeing it through to completion?
- **Point Eight** - can you move to point Two and set aside your own love of power by using your strength to serve others?
- **Point Nine** - can you move to point Three and allow the spotlight to rest on you as you perform at your best?
- **Point One** - can you move to point Seven and let go of your drive to achievement long enough to enjoy the pleasures of the moment?

## Questions

- Has there ever been a time when you've caught yourself 'responding from type' and been surprised at how easy it was to get carried away by automatic thoughts and actions?
- Has there ever been a time when you've gone 'against your type' – either deliberately or because the situation demanded it – and discovered how liberating it can be?

# 6. Using the Enneagram - Working with Others

Unlike working on yourself, in relating to other people it is important to work with, not against, their Enneagram type. The aim is to recognise and respect - even celebrate - the differences between their ways of being, thinking and feeling and your own. If you can do this, it will not only make them feel valued and understood, it will make the relationship easier, more fulfilling and (in a work context) more productive for all concerned.

## At Work

Supposing you are a Two (Helper) with responsibility for managing an Eight (Leader) and a Four (Romantic). As you yourself are typically eager to help others, it would be easy for you to fall into the trap of assuming others have the same motivation. So when allocating a task to one of your staff, it might seem natural to tell them how helpful it will be if they complete it quickly, and how much they will be appreciated by others. Unfortunately 'appreciation' is not a key motivator for either Eights or Fours, so you could well become frustrated by their apparent lack of enthusiasm for the task. Yet the real problem is that you have not spoken to each of them 'in their own language' and you have failed to appeal to their core values - power and justice (Eight) or authenticity and originality (Four).

So supposing you were to approach the Eight slightly differently - instead of talking about helpfulness and appreciation, tell her that you have selected her for the task as it is a tough assignment and will require strength of character to overcome entrenched opposition. Emphasise the essential justness of the outcome and that success will represent a victory for right over wrong; the Eight will feel valued for her strength and eager to exercise it in the service of a just cause. (If this seems slightly melodramatic and overly 'confrontational', remember that is your perspective as a conciliatory Two, and that some tasks do require a firmer hand.)

Similarly, supposing you were to take the Four aside and let him know that you have selected him for this task because it requires someone with an original perspective, who will not be overly influenced by received ideas within the organisation, and who can be relied upon to stay true to himself even when others are challenging him. Tell him that considerable creativity will be needed to find a solution that sidesteps others' objections and results in a memorable and distinctive outcome. (If this sounds as though you are pushing him 'out on a limb', remember that is your perspective as a Two with a strong need for connection with others, and that Fours often relish their 'outsider' status.)

## Personal Relationships

A few years ago there were posters all over London for a play called [I Love You, You're Perfect - Now Change](#). I never saw the play, but couldn't help smiling every time I saw the posters - they summed up so much about the expectations we place on partners and others who get close to us. When we first meet someone, we are struck by how new and exciting they are - we are entranced by their personality and the aura that surrounds them, and we find ourselves idolising them, including all the ways they are different to us.

Fast forward a few years (or even months) and the aura often fades, so that differences that were once charming can become confusing or even irritating. We start to notice their 'faults' and can't help offering gentle hints and constructive criticism to help them overcome them - and get back to being the wonderful person we first met.

According to conventional wisdom, this is because we were intoxicated by love and placing them on a pedestal - the more time we spend with them, the more their true nature is revealed and we see their flaws. But the poet W.H. Auden argued that conventional wisdom has got things the wrong way round - it is when we first meet someone that *we see them as they truly are*, and later on, it is *our own faults projected onto them* that spoils the picture - and if we are not careful, the relationship.

As far as I know Auden was not familiar with the Enneagram but his attitude is very close to the way the Enneagram encourages us to relate to others - by looking for the source of conflict in our own skewed perceptions and assumptions, rather than seeing it as a fault in the other person.

So for example, a Three (Performer) and a Five (Observer) might fall in love - the Three entranced by the 'mystery' of the unfathomable Five, and the Five bowled over by the 'glamour' of the confident, successful Three. But conflict will arise whenever the Three fails to understand why the Five doesn't 'push herself forward more' and gain more rewards and recognition for her knowledge and insights. Equally, the Five needs to watch out for her tendency to judge the Three as 'shallow and materialistic' in his pursuit of worldly success.

Having spent a fair amount of time working as a couples therapist, I've noticed it represents a significant turning point when two partners learn to let go of their expectations that the other should change, and learn to respect their differences - however irritating or strange they might appear! In terms of the Enneagram, this means accepting the other's type and dropping the unspoken demand that they become more like our type. In the above example, this will happen when the Three learns to respect the Five's need for privacy and autonomy, and when the Five learns to take the Three's public success at face value and celebrate it.

## Using the Enneagram to relate to others

When dealing with others, especially in pressured situations or when conflict arises, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What expectations am I placing on the other person as a result of my own Enneagram type?
2. Where would I place the other person on the Enneagram? What core values does this type have?
3. How can I appeal to those values and ‘speak their language’?

### Questions

- Has there ever been a time when someone has made life easier for you by speaking the language of your type and appealing to **your** core values rather than theirs?
- Have you ever succeeded in doing this for someone else? How?

# Further reading

Here's a personal selection of books by well-known Enneagram authors:

## **Helen Palmer - *The Enneagram* and *The Enneagram in Love and Work***

Two excellent books that introduce the Enneagram in more depth, the latter focusing particularly on the application of the Enneagram to personal relationships and workplace effectiveness.

## **Richard Riso - *Personality Types***

Another very well known and respected Enneagram author. If you are having difficulty getting a clear sense of the character of the different types, this book gives a clear and memorable description of the Enneagram types.

## **Michael Goldberg - *Insider's Guide to the Nine Personality Types: How to Use the Enneagram for Success at Work***

If you are primarily interested in workplace applications of the Enneagram, this book will give you a clear and concise introduction to the types and practical tips for using the Enneagram within your company.

## **Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert - *Discovering the Enneagram***

A good book for those interested in the spiritual dimension of the Enneagram. Written by a Catholic priest and a Lutheran minister, it should appeal to followers of any tradition or denomination.

# Who's Who

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Mark is a poet and a business coach who runs [Wishful Thinking](#) - a specialist consultancy for companies in the creative industries sector. He writes the [Wishful Thinking blog](#) about creativity, people and business. His poetry publications and thoughts on poetry can be found on his poetry blog [Mark McGuinness|poetry](#). Mark was introduced to the Enneagram in 1997 as part of his training as a psychotherapist, since when he has used it for his own personal development and in his work with individuals, families and organisations. [E-mail Mark](#).

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Liz Strauss, a writer, a teacher, and a strategist works with individuals and businesses to find the passion and the message that resonates. Through her [Perfect Virtual Manager](#) service, Liz guides and learns by listening and moves clients forward almost immediately. She'll tell you that *relationships are everyone's business - head and heart belong together*. A founder of [SOBCon07](#), Liz has developed products in print, software, and online publishing with small companies and giants such as Pearson, Reed Elsevier, and Wolters Kluwer. Her writing is known for its warm, authentic voice that shows sincere appreciation of others. You'll

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