

AWARENESS TO ACTION: THE ENNEAGRAM, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND CHANGE

Robert Tallon and Mario Sikora

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Reviewed by Ed Zakrzewski

Awareness to Action is not a “workbook” without depth and rigor, yet it is a practical book you can work with at work, in that it delivers on both understanding *and* application. It is not an interpretation of an interpretation of the Enneagram. It represents a new approach to the meaning of the points in a rich, clearly written, and compact reference tool, which enables improvement and change in individuals and organizations.

The authors use a unique approach in the way they frame the Enneagram in terms of personal *strategies*. They provide clarity and rigor based on extensive experience within businesses, and they offer a simple yet profound process for improvement designed to take individuals from “awareness to action.”

The frame that Tallon and Sikora use to create understanding and “awareness” using the Enneagram is to define the 9 points as personal *strategies*, in contrast to the practice of referring to personality traits or the typical behaviors of a type. I have found in my own leadership and organization development work, many offerings that assess type through self-evaluation tests measuring such traits and behaviors result in a high level of mistyping. This appears to be related to the inherent distortions of individuals “picking or rejecting” traits based on their desired self-image or other perceptual filters. By defining the Enneagram points as personal *strategies*, I find assessment gets closer to the core thinking patterns and motivations that produce the traits and typical behaviors of the type. As such, in line with the authors’ expressed intention, the application of the Enneagram as a tool for development becomes more actionable and durable.

This well-structured book describes the specific characteristics and behaviors associated with each *strategy*, or Enneagram point, with a chapter for each. Within each chapter is a “portrait” or sample vignette that reflects how someone with the given strategy might behave. The “preferred strategy” (primary Enneagram point) is described behaviorally followed by the “neglected strategy” (opposing Enneagram point) and then the “support strategy” (compensating Enneagram point). Accounts of each point under particular conditions, titled “typical,” “stressed,” and “at their best,” respectively, are included in each of the chapters on the nine points.

Descriptions of “emotional intelligence” competencies focused on self-awareness, self-management, and relationship-building are also included in each Enneagram *strategy* chapter. This puts valuable “handles” onto behavioral concepts that have become acknowledged as critical to effectiveness and success in business organizations as well as outside the workplace.

The “Awareness to Action” improvement process is the leveraging component of this volume. It is a profound, yet simple three-step process to address critical issues of the preferred *strategy*, to achieve greater balance and improve effectiveness or performance. Using this process, a broad range of behavioral improvements can be achieved within or away from the work setting. The process requires an initial “awareness” step of recognizing the need to change a specific ineffective habitual behavior. Then the individual must take the second step of “authenticity.” This involves taking responsibility for making changes to one’s preferred strategy where it conflicts with the desired new direction. The third and final step calls for “action” through observation and feedback to assure the continued performance of the new behavior.

This process does not ask one to change the preferred *strategy*, but rather to expand its definition to include more effective behaviors that simultaneously balance out the preferred *strategy* and build on its strengths. For example, if as a Seven (striving for excitement) I am often too fearful of becoming bored to enter into discussions with my employees, I can use a new behavior of proactively asking them questions that are pertinent and interesting (exciting) to me and will guide them to good results, as opposed to avoiding dialogue or reacting negatively to people verbally.

In practice, I have personally observed the process of “Awareness to Action” to be consistently effective, though, of course, an individual’s commitment to improvement is a critical factor. When introduced to an organization as action learning designed to enhance effectiveness and and communicated in the right way, significant individual and group improvement can be predicted. A particular strength of this book lies in the fact that much of the foundation of the book is based on the actual application of “Awareness to Action” and the feedback and data that resulted from this work.

Tallon and Sikora have translated Enneagram theory into a practical behavioral model of development. They have produced a volume that describes personal strategies and behaviors that are related to the Enneagram points and integrated these with the competencies of Emotional Intelligence. In doing this, they have adapted this new framework to the world of organizational life, relationships, and teamwork. They have then applied this system of knowledge to a simple yet powerful and practical improvement cycle that literally does take the individual from “awareness to action” and creates the real potential for realizing the ideal of the “learning organization.”