

THE CAREER WITHIN YOU

By Elizabeth Wagele and Ingrid Stabb

Reviewed by Mario Sikora

“The first mistake is to believe that there is a self; the second mistake is to believe that there is not.”

Sunryu Suzuki Roshi

With *The Career Within You*, Elizabeth Wagele and Ingrid Stabb have made a useful contribution to the Enneagram literature that expands the practical application of the system in a respectful and respectable way. I’ll admit to having had some reservations about the project when Wagele first told me about it—it is easy to see how the Enneagram can be misused for simplistic prescriptions for almost any area of life—but upon reading the book I saw that my fears were unwarranted. (By way of disclosure, I was one of the many people interviewed during the authors’ research for this book.)

In my work as an executive coach, I am often asked about the interplay of personality, temperament, career choice, and career success. My response invariably begins with, “Well, it’s complicated.” I then quote Suzuki Roshi and tell the questioner: The first mistake is to assume that one’s Enneagram type influences job choice and success; the second mistake is to assume it does not.

Understanding the Enneagram can be very useful when thinking about job selection, but only in the sense that it can provide a range of factors to consider during one’s deliberations. It certainly cannot be used to match a person to a specific job (or to refuse an assignment to someone based on their type). It would be the grossest misuse of the Enneagram to tell someone, for example, “You are a Seven, so you should be in sales,” or, “You are a Four, so you could never be in sales.” Such pronouncements might seem sensible based on what we know about the types in theory, but a simple survey of the people one encounters undermines such oversimplifications. In my very own family there is a Four who is very good in sales and a Seven who would rather eat snails than go into sales.

Yet it is foolish to ignore the influence of temperament on career choice. As the (admittedly soft) science of personality advances, it becomes clearer and clearer that at least some elements of temperament are stable over time. Many evolutionary biologists would argue that there are different “personality types” (according to whatever model or typology one uses) because a social species (such as humans) is better equipped to thrive when there is variable expression

of the characteristics that support the division of labor. In other words, a group works better when some members have the characteristics that make them better hunters, some members have higher anxiety and thus more attunement to threat, some members are better at gathering information that can then be shared with the group, etc. One researcher recently wrote:

The many roles and occupations in our complex society require that we have a population with a very wide range of skills and dispositions. Outgoing and gregarious individuals are wonderful for certain types of occupations but probably would not make good air traffic controllers. For our world to function it is critical that we have a very diverse array of talents and temperaments.¹

The utility of Wagele and Stabb's book is that it draws a link between temperament (through the lens of the Enneagram) and an array of possible careers. It will serve as a great tool for someone who is re-evaluating his or her career, or is just starting out in adult life and trying to narrow down choices. While the book is solid throughout, its strengths lie in two main areas: the simple, but clear and accurate, descriptions of the types, and the Wagele-Stabb Career Finder.

The type descriptions are a strength, because the authors take a very neutral attitude toward each type, rather than focusing on pathology. Wagele and Stabb point out the strengths and weaknesses relevant to career choice, and their anecdotal examples ring true. The descriptions are accompanied by Wagele's light-hearted but insightful illustrations, which will be familiar to readers of her articles or previous books. This neutral attitude is important in a book like this; a focus on pathology would cause difficulty for the reader in taking a fresh look at temperament and how it might positively influence a choice of careers.

I can also say from experience that this approach works particularly well with corporate people. Before having co-authored a book aimed at that audience, I would give my coaching and consulting clients Wagele's *The Enneagram Made Easy* and a much more in-depth volume; they almost always preferred Wagele. While I don't think corporate executives will be the typical readers of this book, those looking for career-choice insight will also respond better to this approach than a "deeper" look at the nine Ennea-types.

Slightly adjacent to this point of accessibility, the authors choose to downplay the word "Enneagram"—I found the word only one time in the book—and the diagram does not appear anywhere. While this may offend some purists, I don't think it harms the book.

The "Wagele-Stabb Career Finder" takes an interesting approach: it identifies five strengths for each type and then indicates the relevance of those strengths in a

list of 150 possible careers, separated into a dozen categories. So, for example, we find that five significant strengths of “The Asserter” (Ennea-type Eight) are competitiveness, leadership, logical thinking, protectiveness, and self-reliance. We could then look at a career such as “small business owner” and find that three of the strengths (competitiveness, leadership, and self-reliance) are exceptionally important, so an Eight may want to consider this choice. The strengths for the Asserter are not as relevant for the job of “meditation or yoga teacher,” according to Wagele and Stabb.

Wagele and Stabb are very careful to point out that this is a “food-for-thought” approach designed to start a process of organized thinking about one’s career, rather than giving specific guidance on what career one should take. That is, they don’t say, “Since you are an Eight, you should be a small business owner and not a yoga teacher.” Such an approach is both ethically and practically sound.

The authors also provide useful guides on “Fundamentals to Look for in Your Work Situation” and “Job Hunting” as concluding chapters that job seekers will probably find useful.

I do have a couple of quibbles with *The Career Within You*, but they are small and don’t diminish from the overall usefulness of the book. First, I find the title *The Career Within You* to be a little problematic. I run into many people who feel that they should be able to find some purpose or ideal career existing inside of them *a priori* that simply needs to be uncovered. I disagree with this fundamental premise, and believe that both purpose and the ideal career are evolving affairs. In fairness, the authors within the pages of the book seem to agree, and they are advocating a process of “creating” rather than “uncovering.”

The second quibble is even more unfair, but it kept coming to mind as I read the book: the instinctual subtypes are not taken into account. I believe our instinctual bias is as much an influence on our choices and motivations as our Ennea-type, and the book might be better if it took them into account. For example, while I agree that “meticulousness” is a general strength of “The Perfectionist” (Ennea-type One), the subtype influences the things about which they are meticulous. A Self-Preservation One would be more likely to be meticulous about, say, numbers while a Social One would be much less concerned about that. In fact, relying on broad generalities, I would pick a Self-Preservation Eight as my accountant over a Social One, all other things being equal. It’s not fair to criticize a book for what it is not rather than what it is, however, and including the subtypes would have made the volume unwieldy. Still, I encourage Enneagram “professionals” to factor the subtypes when considering such issues.

These small points aside, Wagele and Stabb have done an excellent job with this book and have expanded the field in a useful new way.

Endnote

¹Kagan, J. (2010) *The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are*. New York, NY: Dana Press pp. xvi-xvii.