

ENNEAGRAM ENRICHMENT

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All right. You know your nine styles, 18 stress and security points, 18 wings and 27 subtypes. With this basic Enneagram, you have a formidable diagnostic tool and template for personal growth. So how might one use all the lovely lively self-help books as you try to integrate all their helpful insights into your template?

I will employ the traditional debate axiom, “Never deny, seldom affirm and always distinguish.” That is, I am not going to try to demonstrate some kind of superiority of the Enneagram, nor will I even approve of the self help books I treat. Instead, I will try to integrate the Enneagram with some of the popular books. This may entail distinctions the Enneagram can bring to the discussion of personal and business growth.

Full disclosure. The Enneagram acknowledges bias. I do style Seven, so I will begin with a book whose title seduces a Seven’s attention: *The Happiness Advantage*, by Shawn Achor. a Harvard professor. His seminal thesis is that the traditional formula is broken. Conventional wisdom has it that “If you succeed, you will be happy.” We, as a culture, hold this truth to be self-evident and Achor says this is backwards. You begin by being happy and then you will be successful. He slithers from “happiness” to “being positive,” early in his work, but this Harvard researcher (and his work fairly bristles with academic footnoted credentials) has evolved far from the Norman Vincent Peale tradition of smiling in the rain.

Achor provides seven principles of happiness. Neurological bliss flows from being positive, our aperture determines what we see, we need to see what we haven’t seen before, focus is crucial, we need to be creative after a setback and our experience is (almost) determined by our outlook. He has another principle that says that we need to “invest socially.” We deal with stress and difficulty best by having a strong network of family, friends etc. This is not a happy meal for the Fives among us. He has a principle I’ve not seen before: “The tetris effect,” which means that if you think of something a lot, you’ll see possibilities that you couldn’t see before. (Tetris is a computer game that plays with shapes).

An Enneagram student will see all these as good ideas and workable practices, but we have a deep appreciation of how difficult it is to change one’s view of the world. We also know that, as with most self-help books, the advice is usually a bit too conscious. Telling someone, or resolving to make a conscious change has a trail littered with broken conscious resolutions.

This cognitive confidence shows up in friendly advice like “to be happy, do something you are good at.” If you oblige him by confining this to technical

things like baking, driving a forklift or playing the piano, that might work. But let's say you are a Five and what you are good at is collecting information. To solve or salve your problem, you go get some more information. Not if you know the Enneagram –that's how you mired down in the first place.

Achor, Harvard sheltered, assumes a definition of success that is all-American and commerce-tested. One wonders what he would say about a vivid Four like W. F. Nietzsche who was brilliant, influential and "best-seller," but who dealt with his misery by giving us encouraging sayings like "What does not kill us, strengthens us."

Jennifer White had (she died young a few years ago) a column read by 750,000 a week and her book, *Work Less, Make More* is easy to read and has lots of good advice, especially if you are a style Three. I can't prove it, but it seems to me that most time management books are written by Threes for other Threes. The book's subtitle is "*Stop Working So Hard and Create the Life You Really Want.*" That seems like the advice an Enneagram coach would give most Threes.

Other Three footprints show up like this passage. *Make sure you focus your talents around something people want to buy....Having talent is not the issue, we all have unique gifts and talents. The key is honing what you do well that people will pay for.* (p. 59) One can hear a style Four indignantly refusing to do just that.

Her special section on breaking the adrenaline habit is wonderful for Threes who can live on caffeine, applause and dopamine.

White's advice is good all the way through, providing you accept that one size fits all. She has advice on procrastination and as an Enneagram coach I assume people procrastinate for nine different reasons and each one procrastinates different stuff. Ones may procrastinate if directions are not clear or detailed, but Sevens don't worry about the clarity of the directions because they may not follow them anyway. Eights have been known to acknowledge directions before doing things their way anyway.

Daniel Pink's bestselling book on motivation, *Drive*, reinforces and brings to the business community the thesis of Alfie Kohn's great book, *Punished by Rewards* that intrinsic motivation is superior to extrinsic motivation. An Enneagram student will accept their thesis with no problem but then will wonder if every style is motivated by the same things. Pink's motivations are general enough so that they don't conflict with most Enneagram styles (except for style Three who is largely motivated by external rewards like money, applause, recognition and status). But the Enneagram could add nuances that would really help. One of Pink's universals is that everyone wants control. Eights want to be in control and have much less need for security than Sixes, who would like control over smaller assignments and who would prefer security to control if the control position requires much risk. Pink's clear thesis illustrates a general principle for reading self-help books: most authors will have a "one size fits all" understanding of inner dynamics that Enneagram students will need to divide

nine ways. Pink's banner reads "The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us," and to that we would add, the nine different motivations we employ when we work.

Chip and Dan Heath have an unusually helpful book, *Switch*. It's about change—always a tantalizing topic for a coach. They employ a nice metaphor for the rational and emotional-intuitive parts of us: Elephant and Rider. The Rider is our conscious intention and resources; the Elephant is the unconscious emotional-intuitive part of us. They employ this metaphor effectively through much of the book and an Enneagram student or coach can see why the book works. One can also see how to enrich their work with the Enneagram. Our emotional-intuitive side can also be described as our Enneagram style in the narrow sense of our just barely acknowledged preferences, filters and responses. If you are going to appeal to someone's "elephant," it is really helpful to know what that elephant likes. You persuade an Eight to join your cause by emphasizing the helpless vulnerability of the people you are going to help, you persuade the Three by mentioning that this will look good on her resume and the boss will be watching (or a reporter, perhaps). In either case, you know the general contours of the "elephant's" desires. Our usual moralizing about treating others the way want to be treated is wrong and the same applies to motivations: the Enneagram has discovered nine species of elephants.

Probably one of the most harmful of the self-help and success-in-business-and-in-life books is the granddaddy, *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill. His exhortations to work hard, desire intensely, and focus intently has seduced more students than prom parties. He assumes focus is completely under our control and all we have to do is point our attention to our goal. He assumes that hard work will be rewarded. Ask the tens of millions of people out of work today. He assumes that desire can be pointed toward the goal we set. Enneagram students know that in addition to whatever goal we set, we have this other one specific to our Enneagram style which functions like a conditional clause. Style Seven says she will work hard (as long as the work is interesting). Style Two agreed to focus on his goal (as long as he has people to work with). Style Nine agrees to the goal, which he is going to pursue avidly (any day now). His childlike confidence is purely rational effort is touching, and his continuing popularity only underscores the need for the depth of the Enneagram.

Self-help books are quite helpful, but once you know the Enneagram, you can improve on almost all of them, regardless of the depth and range of the material offered. I offer these as a sample. Arrogance is out of place, but confidence is warranted.

References

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