

The Enneagram is the best system I ever heard of to explain the differences between people—in a way that increases self-knowledge, understanding, patience and gives knowledge about how to relate to others without difficulty. It is an extraordinary system of personality typing. It is extremely subtle yet totally useful in real life.\*

The Enneagram is a pitch-perfect illustration of your own and others' blind spots, of what we do over and over to cause our own problems. (In this regard, it's genius—if you're brave enough to want to know your blind spot...)

I tell them that “ennea” is the Greek prefix for nine and the system defines nine personality types. Each is simply called by its number. (People have made up names for each point on the Enneagram, but I think they're more confusing than helpful, so I'm just going to stick with numbers). At this point their eyes narrow. Is this person going to try and pigeonhole me, they wonder. I CAN'T BE DEFINED BY ONE NUMBER, they say to themselves. YES YOU CAN, I say to myself.

If there's even a little interest, the first thing the person wants to know is which number they are, with a mixture of hope (maybe this will explain some things) and hesitation (is this all a bunch of bullshit). Yes, both instincts are good. Hold both questions in mind as you read the following.

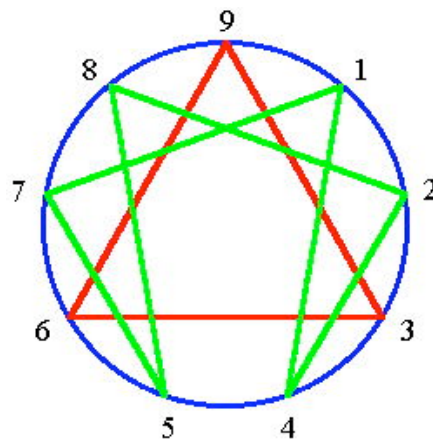
A place to begin identifying yourself, I say, is by trying to figure out whether you're a head, heart, or gut person. The Enneagram is divided into three triads: 2, 3, 4 are the heart triad; 5, 6, 7 are the head triad; 8, 9, 1 are the gut triad. Which one is your primary organ of perception? Are

things made clear to you when you know what you feel about them, what you think about them, or when your instincts come into focus? Already this is very confusing. Of course we all use all of these, but I guarantee you, one of them is primary for each of us.

How do you know which one? A good place to start is by looking at the icky side of each triad. Each triad has its own style of unhealthy reactions. The heart people get emotional as you might expect—this looks like some kind of hysteria or depression. The head people retreat into central headquarters (their mind) and try to come up with some explanation for why everything is a mess—which looks like paranoia or anxiety. By contrast, the gut people (those who move through the word on instinct) don't want to think about it. They don't want to get all weepy. They want it to go away. So they get angry.

When you get all riled up, what is your default unhealthy reaction?

Anyway, back to describing the shell of the system. It will help to look at it.



Remember there are 3 triads. Each triad has a number at the center: 9 is the core gut type, 3 is the core of the heart types, and 6 is the core head type. These numbers form the central triangle of the system. The numbers on either side of it (for example 8 and 1 flank the core gut type, 9) are a *version* of the central number. Most people are all please, please let be a central number. Not so fast. The central number is numb to its essential quality. A second number in the triad over-expresses the core tendency while the third number under-expresses it. For example, on the heart

triad: threes, at the core of the triad, are numb to their own hearts. Twos are wildly expressing its contents left and right and fours are internalizing their feelings and becoming absorbed in their inner life, perhaps to the exclusion of others.

Sixes, at the core of the head triad, are not quite sure what they think about anything and are plagued by doubt. Fives are in the interiorized head point and feel much more at home in their heads than in the world. Sevens are the opposite. As the exteriorized head point, they are all about latching on to idea, possibilities, options as their way of moving through the world.

Nines are numb to their instincts which leads to much difficulty in holding their own agenda as the waves of life wash over them. Eights over-express their instincts and tend to dominate people and situations without pausing to think of others' points of view. Ones internalize their instincts and check them repeatedly for validity which makes them highly ethical but also a bit pokey.

There are good and bad things about each of these tendencies; it all depends on how the person holds them. For example, an eights tendency to dominate can be awful if they're purely self-motivated, but divine when they're motivated by love. They can really protect you.

Okay, so those are the triads. Are you beginning to get a sense of which triad you might belong to? Don't think of yourself as you are today, all mature and well kept—think of yourself when you were 12 or 16 or 20. Which center was home for you before you started therapy or drugs or law school or whatever might be forming your personality currently?

Ask yourself: When I become upset, am I more likely to sob, fret, or yell? Of course you do all three, but which one do you do first? And last?

The key to understanding type is understanding placement of attention. For each type, attention automatically goes to some things and not others. For example, threes enter a room and attune to status: who has it, who doesn't, where do I fit in the hierarchy. Sixes, plagued by doubt, focus on danger: what could go wrong in this situation? Nines, who are unclear about what they want, are sensitive to conflict because conflict would force them to take a position and they don't know

their position. So when you're thinking about type, your own or others, consider where attention automatically goes.

Now that we've got the briefest overview of the Enneagram, I'll sketch each type, very, very, VERY superficially To do so, I'm going to describe each type's:

- Defining Qualities
- Passion (its downfall)
- Virtue (what the passion converts to in the absence of stress)
- Avoidance (what the type thinks is the worst thing in the world)
- Talking Style (each type has a way of speaking)
- What they might do when they walk into a party (ha!)

## Type One

*The introjected gut type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

The gut types are anger types, but for the one, the anger goes in instead of out. There can be a quality of sitting on a volcano and a tremendous amount of self-criticism and the urge to hold others to a similarly high standard. The primary focus of attention is error. They are constantly asking themselves, did I do this correctly? Did she do this correctly? What is wrong with this picture? They're the kind of people who, if you show them a picture with 10 objects, tell them to close their eyes, and then show them the same picture with a few things missing, they can tell you exactly what they are. The good news is they hold themselves to the very highest moral standards and can be very trustworthy. The bad news is they hold themselves to the very highest moral standards and can be kind of priggish.

When they love you, they tell what you're doing wrong. This is their way of helping you.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Anger

**Virtue**

Serenity

**Avoidance**

Anger (so they run on anger and also avoid it—very one foot on the brakes/one foot on the gas)

**Talking Style**

Preaching

**What they might do when they walk into a party**

Point out to the host that they shouldn't have put the food so close to the door—it will get cold.

## Type Two

*The projected heart type*

**Defining Qualities:**

As heart types, twos are constantly searching for emotional connection. They believe their power comes from making close emotional bonds with people who have power. They can be very seductive and magnetizing. They tune into whoever is around them very quickly and can figure out exactly how to make an emotional connection with that person. They think they will get power by making others beholden to them. The bad news is they give to get. The good news is when they become secure within themselves, they just give and become masters of generosity.

Twos are likely to tell you what you want to hear.

**Passion (the type's downfall)**

Pride (of being needed, of knowing just what to give to whom)

**Virtue**

Humility (giving just what is needed and not attaching an agenda to it)

**Avoidance**

Needs (their own)

### **Talking Style**

Flattery

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Suss out who is the most influential person in the room and offer to get them a drink.

## **Type Three**

*The core heart type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

As the core emotional type, threes run on emotion, but they are unaware of their own. Therefore attention goes to appearances, not substance. They truly believe that what they appear to be is what they are. They are concerned with status and achievement. The bad news is they confuse appearance for reality. The good news is they can be masters of efficiency, are unafraid of the mainstream, and can really get things done.

Threes may have a notable lack of an inner life.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Deceit (they lie to themselves about who they really are)

### **Virtue**

Honesty

### **Avoidance**

Failure

### **Talking Style**

Propaganda

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Make sure everyone knows where they went to college and that they made a million dollars last month.

## **Type Four**

*The introjected heart type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

Fours take all emotions into themselves—yours, her own, anyone's. They *feel*. The focus of attention is emotion. They believe that if they work with their own pain, they will discover something useful. They are continually trying to tune into their own feelings more deeply. The bad news is this can lead to serious self-absorption. The good news is they can become extremely sensitive to the pain of others and stand with them in difficult situations.

Fours are very attuned to aesthetics and always think they have the best taste in the room.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Envy (always longing for what they don't have)

### **Virtue**

Equanimity (being okay with what is here right now)

### **Avoidance**

Ordinariness (they want to be seen as special)

### **Talking Style**

Lamentation

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Sit alone somewhere and try to look mysterious.

## **Type Five**

### *The introjected head type*

#### **Defining Qualities:**

Above all, Fives want privacy. They want to control access to themselves. They believe they can master life by mastering a system of thought. Attention goes to understanding with the idea that he who has the deepest understanding wins. Think about computer geeks who do battle on online forums by trying to outsmart each other about how a certain application works. This is the flavor. A great deal of import is put on gathering and sharing information. The good news is they can be fine, astute artists, scientists, software designers, whatever they choose to do. As long as they can be left alone to do it. The bad news is if you ever want to be friends, it's not so easy.

Fives are major screeners and lovers of caller-id.

#### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Avarice (for knowledge and personal space)

#### **Virtue**

Omniscience (knowing what is to be known on the spot)

#### **Avoidance**

Lack of privacy

#### **Talking Style**

Treatise

#### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Look for the exit.

## **Type Six**

### *The core head type*

#### **Defining Qualities:**



Six is a very complicated type. The focus of attention is danger and sixes choose one of two ways to create safety: they either try to make friends with whoever is in charge to get protection or overthrow whoever is in charge so they can't get taken advantage of. Therefore, the former are called phobic sixes and the latter are called counterphobic. They are extremely attuned to authority—getting on the right side of it or escaping it. The good news is they can become exceptional advocates for the downtrodden. The bad news is they're always suspicious and they like to tell you what could go wrong all the time.

When you *want* to know what could go wrong, these are the people to turn to.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Fear

### **Virtue**

Courage

### **Avoidance**

Deviance (from the norm)

### **Talking Style**

Rules and Regulations

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Check to see if the chandelier looks like it might fall down and hurt someone.

## **Type Seven**

*The projected head type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

The focus of attention is possibilities. Options. These are the people who generate a thousand ideas a minute and see opportunities wherever they look. They have a very buoyant quality and are ready to enjoy life all the time. The bad news is, they really don't want to hear about pain,

their own or others and may jump ship when it's not so fun anymore. The good news is they never seem to stay down for too long and are able to impart a sense of joy and hope.

It's not unusual to have a super exciting, rollicking conversation with a seven where thousands of ideas are exchanged and funny stories told—but when you walk away, you can't remember one thing they said.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Gluttony (not necessarily for food; for anything that feels good)

### **Virtue**

Sobriety

### **Avoidance**

Pain

### **Talking Style**

Stories

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Put a lampshade on their head and start telling jokes.

## **Type Eight**

*The projected gut type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

This is the type that projects its core essence out into the environment and find it difficult to leave room for others to make their mark. These people aren't at all afraid to fight, in fact they like it. It feels good. It means they've connected with someone. Attention goes to how they can dominate whatever situation they're in. They have extraordinary life force and you simply cannot out-argue or out-pace them. They're always up for more and are ready to take whatever—a fight, a business meeting, a dinner out—up a notch. The bad news is they trump everyone's energy

with their own. They're always the strongest person in the room. The good news is they will go to the mat for anyone they think requires their protection.

The mafia is a good illustration of eight energy. If you ask for and accept their protection, they will kill for you. If you betray them, they will kill you.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Lust

### **Virtue**

Innocence

### **Avoidance**

Weakness

### **Talking Style**

Laying Trips

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Mention a better party down the road and take everyone there.

## **Type Nine**

*The core gut type*

### **Defining Qualities:**

This type is able to understand all points of view in any situation—except their own. As a core type and therefore asleep, they simply lose track of their own agenda. All the time. They could get up in the morning with only one thing to do: renew their driver's license, say and at the end of the day they'll have maybe read a book about the history of driver's licenses, had several phone calls with friends about Dept of Motor Vehicle mishaps, but they will still have an expired driver's license. The good news is they can be so deeply understanding and empathic and

relaxed. The bad news is their whole life can go by without giving themselves a chance to manifest who they really are.

Nines can often have a very sweet and playful quality.

### **Passion (the type's downfall)**

Sloth

### **Virtue**

Right Action

### **Avoidance**

Conflict

### **Talking Style**

Saga

### **What they might do when they walk into a party**

Notice the room is empty and apologize for showing up on the wrong day.

\*An example of its practical use: I used to work for a guy who would totally ignore me when I told him I was running into difficulties on a project and wanted to talk it over with him. He could not have cared less. Then I realized he was a seven and pain or problems is the avoidance. They like possibility. So the next time I ran into difficulty I told him I had an idea and I wanted his feedback. He was all ears. Then I would tell him my problem. Just a simple language change and the whole “which one of us is the loser” game was over.

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### **Future topics**

**I'll be writing more about the Enneagram, so if the subject interests you, tune back in. I'll be expanding on these topics:**

### *Lines of Integration and Disintegration*

As it become healthy, each type takes on the higher qualities of a second type. When it becomes unhealthy, it takes on the low qualities of a third type. For instance, a healthy four integrates at one (all the emotionality becomes orderly) while an unhealthy four disintegrates at two (they start pandering for approval). Conversely eights integrate at two (they put their power in the service of others) and sevens disintegrate at one (all their jolliness becomes snappy and critical).

### *Subtypes*

There are three subtypes in the Enneagram system: self-preservation, social, and sexual. Each type on the Enneagram has three subtypes. So there are self-preservation ones, social ones, and sexual ones. There are self-preservation twos, social twos, and sexual twos. Etc. The subtypes can look quite different from each other, and if you have trouble typing yourself sometimes knowing your subtype can fill in the missing pieces.

### *How can I tell other people's types?*

When you tune in, you can usually tell what the people around you are. Some people just seem fragile and like you could blow them apart at any moment (heart). Some seem to travel through this world encased in an invisible layer of ice (head). Others you just want to walk on eggshells around all the time (gut). Of course it's not this simplistic, but one way I begin to type others (which you're not supposed to do; more on that later), I draw attention to how my self-talk changes. For example, there are some people around whom I always feel stupid. For me, this is a clue that this person may be an 8. But that's just how I react to 8s.