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Don't Let Your Personality Drive the Bus

Steer with Self-Awareness

It is not only the most difficult thing to know
oneself, but the most inconvenient one, too.

—**Josh Billings**

Enneagram, revealing your unique personality portrait from the most common tools.)

The Enneagram framework shows nine different personality types (named One to Nine) that tell you *why* you feel, think, and act the way you do. If you only know *what* or *how* you do something, you're fixing something externally that rarely lasts (and often comes out sideways with unintended consequences). When you know *why*, you can leave behind the spiraling in Unknown, and you have the freedom to choose differently. And that freedom is where joy begins, when you curiously observe yourself, how you interact with others, and how you react to difficulty.

The Ground Rules for Exploration

"Some people are concerned about using personality as part of our professional development," my corporate client shared in a prep call before our event.

"Tell me more," I said. (My all-time favorite conversation-continuer is "tell me more.")

"Well, some of our staff who came from another agency had DISC profiles displayed, and their personality profiles were used against them in performance reviews."

Flames, flames. On the side of my face.⁸

If you've had a bad experience with any personality tool, I would bet all the money in my pockets that your training and implementation inflated your personality to more than what it is. To prevent misuse of the tool, I have a few rules of the road:

- 1 **Curiosity is the foundation.** You may have an inner, "Nu- uh!" come up as we go through these types. Or you may feel attacked because you feel a little too seen for your liking. When you experience that, channel curiosity. Even if you just say to yourself, "What if I were curious about this?" you will stay in the work.
- 2 **Start with yourself.** "There are three things that are extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self," wrote Benjamin Franklin.² Because it's hard, we instead want to label and talk about other people. "My wife is just like that." "This is totally my boss." Here's the deal: You can never know if they don't tell you. Motivations live behind the Façade. If your mind wanders to other people, make a note for later, and bring it back to you.
- 3 **No swords or shields.** Swords attack based on type: "She's so mean. She's such an Eight." "Of course he won. He's a Three." Shields excuse bad behavior or a refusal

to change: “Oh, they’re just like that, never deciding. They’re a Nine.” “Oh, I can’t do that. I’m a Four.” We’re not doing either of these here in *Joyosity*. It’s like an online cookies agreement. By continuing to read, you’re agreeing to terms.

Say Hello to the Nine Enneagram Types

Jim simply wanted to do something nice for Pam, and Dwight kept being, well, Dwight.

In this episode of *The Office*, Dwight closed the office and put the entire office staff in a temporary workspace: the Work Bus. Jim begs Dwight to take them to Laverne’s Pie Shack, so this isn’t the “worst day ever.” With the entire bus chanting “Pie, Pie, Pie,” Dwight shouts, “Everybody, hang on!” as he shoves the bus into first gear.

The tires screech out of the parking lot, and at the first haphazard turn, chaos ensues. Nothing is getting in Dwight’s way. He’s getting pie before Laverne shuts the shack for the day.¹⁰

Your personality is a lot like the Work Bus. The motivations of all nine Enneagram types ride on your bus. One of them barrels to the driver’s seat and will speed off with all the mayhem of Dwight downshifting to get pie. Figure out which one is driving, pry its hands off the steering wheel, and be the driver of your life.

Treat your personality as a knee-jerk reaction, a reflex trying to keep you safe. It’s not you shining—it’s you surviving. These descriptions use patterns and defaults as a way for you to understand yourself and others better. Ask yourself, “How much is this like me?” and rate yourself on a scale of one to five. *One*: This is nothing like me. I don’t even understand how someone operates like that. *Five*: This is me to my very core. How have you seen into the depths of my soul?

As you read a description, you may feel suddenly exposed, a heat rise in your body, or an urge to throw this book across the room. You may feel a gut punch of anger, shame, or fear. That type is very likely your core Enneagram type.

Self-awareness as a practice of leadership requires ruthless self-honesty and radical self-compassion.

If you can’t decide immediately what your type is, that’s OK. Consider this as a test drive that you’ll use as you go through the rest of the chapters. (If you want deeper descriptions and more, grab the *Playbook*.)

The Five Unconscious Motivations

Every personality type has five strings directing it. These five strings are the deep *whys* that shape every first feeling, initial thought, and gut reaction. The Five Unconscious Motivations are:

Trusted Tactic: “Here’s how I get it done.”

Your brain uses a consistent strategy to protect you and get your needs met. It’s your go-to that is so natural you don’t even question it.

Fundamental Fear: “Whatever you do, don’t do that!”

This fear looms larger than the monster under your bed. It’s what your personality believes will be the absolute end of you—the very worst, most destructive thing that could happen. You’re always running away from it because you want to prevent that fear from coming true.

Driving Desire: “I want to be where the people are . . .”

This is the “I Want” song of your life (Think Ariel singing “Part of Your World” on that rock). It’s the flip side of the core fear. Your personality perpetually strives for this goal. It believes that if you get this, you will have the love, safety, and belonging that solves everything.

Persistent Pattern: “Why do I keep doing this?”

This is the consistent tendency you face throughout your life. Sometimes it’s amazing, and other times it’s problematic because the best parts of us are also the worst parts of us. This pattern comes around again and again, like a Ferris wheel. The goal is to recognize the gondola when it shows up, so you don’t get smacked off the platform with the worst of you and instead choose to ride with the best of you.

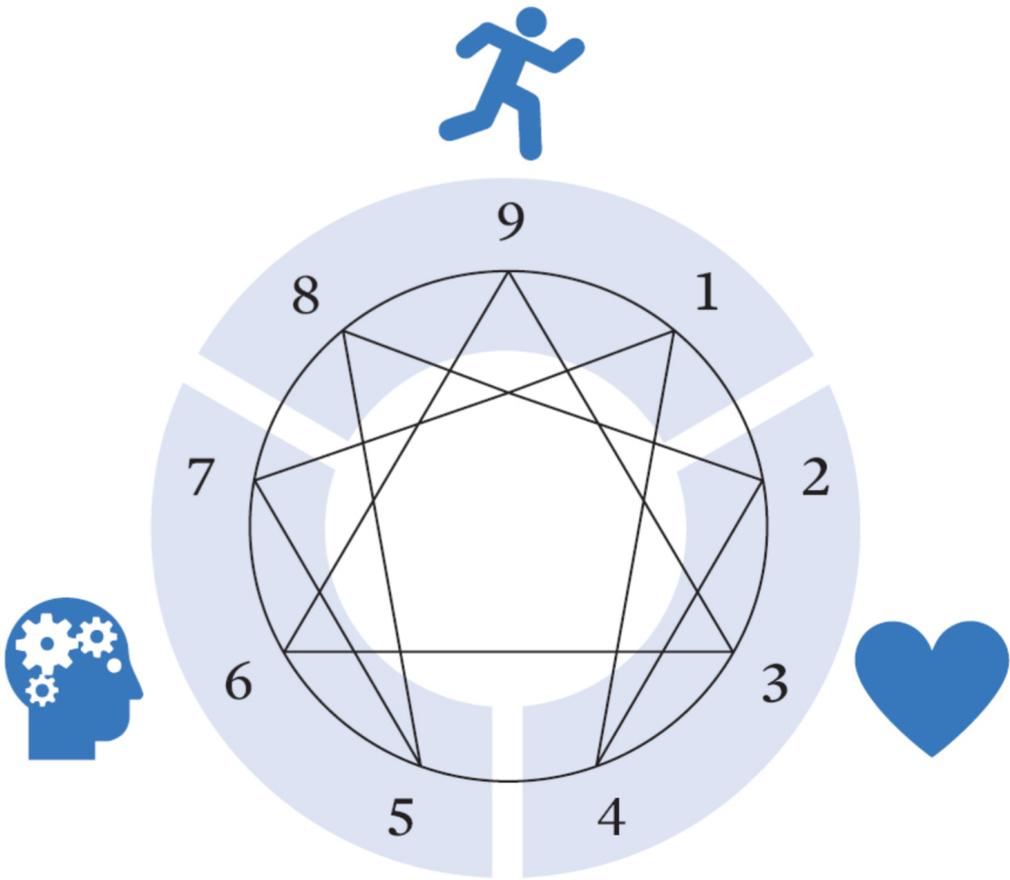
Lasting Longing: “Oh, please let that be true.”

This is the deep message your heart wants to hear. You looked for it around every corner

as a child and into adulthood (yes, it follows you into work). It's the message you are desperate to believe is true. Because if it is, you're safe, you belong, and you are loved.

These five unconscious motivation strings come together like DNA strands. Each is its own thread, weaving to form your personality. And each Enneagram type has its own unique set of five.

Each type also grounds itself into one of three groups: the Body Group, Heart Group, and Head Group. Each group shares a core emotional struggle and common desires. We start with the first in the Body Group: Eights.



Description

The Enneagram personality model is represented as a circular diagram with nine numbered points 1 through 9 arranged around the circle perimeter. Each point is connected to others by a series of intersecting lines forming a geometric pattern within the circle. The diagram is divided into three sections, each associated with a specific center of intelligence, which are the head, heart, and body. On the left side of the circle, an icon of a head with gears represents the head center, associated with points 5, 6, and 7. On the right side, a heart icon symbolizes the heart center, linked to points 2, 3, and 4. At the top of the circle, a running figure icon represents the body center, connected to points 8, 9, and 1.

The Body Group

This group struggles with anger, and most desire justice, respect, and belonging. They take in information first through their physical body or gut instinct. The Body Group's strength is a connected groundedness, an invitation to presence, and embodied belonging. When they misuse or overuse these strengths, it leads to control, impulsivity, or inertia.

Enneagram Eight: The Protective Challenger

Trusted Tactic	Protect
Fundamental Fear	Being vulnerable, powerless, weak, controlled, or manipulated
Driving Desire	To protect yourself and those closest to you
Persistent Pattern	Excess and intensity
Lasting Longing	"You will not be betrayed."

Strong and protective, Enneagram Eights don't show weakness, fearing someone may control or manipulate them if they do. Rather than risk someone playing them

like a puppet—or worse, betraying them—they snip the strings and take charge themselves. For an Eight, protecting themselves and those they allow inside their castle always takes priority. If there’s a leadership vacuum, an Eight will stride forward to fill it and manage that scene. In taking charge, Eights don’t end up powerless.

The Eight intensity can hit like a tsunami. They have the most energy of any Enneagram type, and others don’t always know what to do with that intensity, tagging them as “bitches and bullies.” For the Eight, they simply believe they’re the only ones who take responsibility or say the hard truth directly. They trust their gut and their ability to see the entire system to solve problems quickly, often before others have even processed the situation. If they trust someone else’s authority, Eights will follow, and even be relieved to not always be the strong one. But at a whiff of weakness or manipulation, Eights will rush right back into the driver’s seat. Eights want belonging, but they’ll settle for power.

At their best, Eights lower their bar required to trust others and use their strength to care for people in a genuine, tender way. Eights have a melty center of compassion hidden by a rougher exterior. Ultimately, Eights remind us that real power doesn’t come from dominating others. They show us how to create belonging by standing firm for what’s right and shielding those who need protection. When they harness their fierce energy for good, Eights become unstoppable champions of justice and loyalty.

Enneagram Nine: The Harmonious Peacemaker

Trusted Tactic	Withdraw
Fundamental Fear	Loss of connection and belonging, conflict, being overlooked
Driving Desire	Internal and external harmony, stability, and peace
Persistent Pattern	Disengagement
Lasting Longing	“Your presence matters.”

JOYOSITY: HOW TO CULTIVATE INTENSE HAPPINESS IN WORK

Easygoing and accommodating, Enneagram Nines desire both internal and external harmony. If folks around them don't respond with a similar vibe, Nines will merge with what others want, just to keep the peace. They believe their deepest fear is conflict, but underneath, it's loss of connection. Nines believe if they assert their independence and autonomy, they'll lose belonging. Instead of voicing their own ideas and feelings, they fall into patterns of indecision, procrastination, and disengagement. Broom in hand, sweeping difficulties right under that rug, often sounds like, "Whatever you think. I don't know." Sometimes, it looks like daydreaming or escaping to numbing activities (Netflix and a cozy blanket, anyone?).

To manage the compulsion to maintain peace and an even-tempered image, Nines avoid disagreement. Preserving external harmony leaves them disconnected from their own wants, needs, and sense of worth, creating a deep lack of harmony within themselves. Surprisingly, Nines are the most stubborn of the Enneagram type structures. Because they want to maintain that easygoing image, they find subtle ways to resist rather than offer an outright no. One of their go-tos? Adjusting the pace. Push a Nine to hurry, and they will find a lower gear you didn't know existed. No conflict to see here, just a slowdown. Nines want to be connected, but they'll settle for keeping the peace.

At their best, Nines build consensus, employing their ability to see all sides of an issue. They show up to the table ready to contribute thoughtfully and confidently while smoothly incorporating what others bring, cultivating belonging. In this space, Nines show us that real connection isn't keeping the peace—it's making peace by valuing everyone in the process, including themselves.

Enneagram One: The Reforming Perfectionist

Trusted Tactic	Perfect
Fundamental Fear	Being bad or wrong, unredeemable, misaligned, rude, or corrupt
Driving Desire	Goodness and rightness

Persistent Pattern Resentment

Lasting Longing “You are good.”

Principled and ever-improving, Enneagram Ones strive to make everything and everyone better—no detail too small, no spreadsheet too color-coded. Fueled by a deep desire to be good all the way through, Ones fear any hint of flaws or wrongdoing because they believe that negates their goodness. Enter the ever-present inner critic, barking orders like the middle school queen bee who dangles belonging and then changes the rules. “Yes, you finished that project, but you should have done more.” This internal scorekeeper keeps them locked into perfection mode.

All that drive for precision simmers into frustration when the world refuses to meet their standards, leaving Ones feeling like they’re the only adults in the room. To others, it can feel like Ones must always be right, but really Ones want to be in “rightness,” aligned to the external rules (and whatever the queen is berating them about in the moment). Inside they wrestle with overthinking, shame spirals, and never-ending to-do lists. Over time, that internal pressure morphs into resentment—a mixing bowl of anger, envy, and judgment. Others seem far too lax about, well, everything. Ones want to be good, but they’ll settle for being right.

At their best, Ones relax their perfectionism and release resentment. Chris Heuertz, Enneagram expert, writes that they realize the “nuance between the binaries of right and wrong, good and bad, or perfection and imperfection.”¹¹ When Ones lower their shoulders and unclench their jaws, they invite their natural power of creating order out of chaos. With flexibility, they become inspiring problem-solvers, empathetic motivators, and compassionate advocates for fairness and belonging. Ultimately, Ones remind us that true integrity shines brightest when we balance high standards with a willingness to let life (and ourselves) be delightfully imperfect.

The Heart Group

This group struggles with shame or grief, and most desire significance, identity, validation, and love. They take in information first through emotions. The Heart Group’s strength is a high level of empathy and emotional intelligence. When they misuse or overuse these strengths, it leads to insensitivity, oversensitivity, or emotional manipulation.

Enneagram Four: The Romantic Individualist

Trusted Tactic	Create
Fundamental Fear	Being insignificant, typical, or flawed, lacking unique identity
Driving Desire	Be authentically yourself
Persistent Pattern	Envy
Lasting Longing	“You are seen for who you are.”

Dwelling within a rich internal landscape of feelings, beauty, and imagination, Enneagram Fours long to be fully known. They fear they have a tragic flaw, a missing piece that others seem to possess. Whether it's creating vivid designs, penning heartfelt words, or cultivating an intangible atmosphere, Fours imbue life with depth and intensity. Behind the scenes, the creative expressions come from deep pain and melancholy. Never wanting to be ordinary, they imagine an ideal that they can never quite reach while at the same time believing other people can't really see their suffering or true selves. And everyone else seems to be able to just enjoy it all so easily.

Fours despise small talk and welcome complexities and paradoxes. And they lean in, amplifying emotions to feel truly alive, pulling friends into swirling seas of memory or imagination. Whatever the emotion, Fours want it more intensely because that feels like the path to authenticity: not angry, livid; not happy, elated; not sad, morose. But having feelings, then thoughts about the feelings, then more feelings about the thoughts about the feelings, leaves Fours stuck in cycles of longing rather than action. Both craving and shunning external validation, Fours often resist practical solutions that feel too “everyone does that.” Fours want to be known, but they'll settle for being noticed.

At their best, Enneagram Fours usher the world into authenticity, deep beauty, and powerful insights. When they recognize they already are inherently special (no grand display required), they channel their capacity for beauty and authenticity into meaningful

action. They bring us back to the values we say we want to live by. Fours remind us how to be fully human, revealing the unique gifts of the most ordinary moments.

The Head Group

This group struggles with fear and isolation, and most desire security and safety. They take in information first through their minds and intellect. The Head Group's strength is to connect complex ideas, create creative options, and offer wise counsel that provides psychologically safety. When they misuse or overuse these strengths, it leads to cynicism, intellectual superiority, or decision paralysis.

Enneagram Five: The Curious Specialist

Trusted Tactic	Intellectualize
Fundamental Fear	Being incompetent, ignorant, or helpless
Driving Desire	To be capable and competent
Persistent Pattern	Avarice
Lasting Longing	"Your needs are not a problem."

Reserved, private, and curious, Enneagram Fives believe competence and capability will keep them safe in the unknown. If they can master the facts—researching, analyzing, and synthesizing data and related information—then maybe they'll stave off any threat of internal depletion. Believing it's not OK to be too comfortable, Fives see their own needs as an intellectual exercise in solving a problem statement. From the constant inquiry, analysis, and questioning, Fives require a significant amount of energy management. Think of a Five as starting each day at 60 percent battery, and that's what they've got for the rest of the day. They work meticulously to preserve their energy and avoid unwanted demands.

Fives can get stuck in planning mode. They can fall down a research rabbit hole—Reddit

thread, data drive, library session—convinced they don't yet have enough information to decide. But once they've mapped out a detailed solution, they've effectively solved the problem. Oh wait, they didn't actually take action to complete the plan. Meanwhile, their fear of depletion can lead to hoarding time, resources, and knowledge—a tendency known as avarice. Interaction with the outside world feels like it drains their internal battery even faster, so they keep to themselves to protect their mental reserves. Fives want to be safe in the unknown, but they'll settle for being the competent expert.

At their best, Fives offer specialized expertise, bringing invaluable data, context, and institutional memory to the table. (And usually a witty comment that surprises everyone.) They begin to balance curiosity and investigation with experimental doing, trusting they already have enough insight to act. Additionally, they believe asking for help doesn't equate to incompetence. Five's careful observations and thorough thinking become indispensable assets for teams and projects. Ultimately, Fives remind the world that curiosity safely navigates us all through the mysteries of living.

Enneagram Six: The Loyal Skeptic

Trusted Tactic	Prepare
Fundamental Fear	Lacking support or guidance, or being blamed or abandoned
Driving Desire	To be secure and have guidance and support
Persistent Pattern	Angst
Lasting Longing	“You are safe.”

Enneagram Sixes live in a world of potential pitfalls, ever on guard for what might go wrong. Afraid they'll be blamed and abandoned, they prepare for every eventuality for themselves and others as if they are writing the worst-case scenario guidebook. Sixes have an internal

conference room hosting a committee of competing voices: “Have we considered this angle? What if that happens? Are we sure we can trust this person?” Have you made decisions by committee? Exhausting. All the internal debate erodes trust in their ability to make decisions in the face of a world that feels extremely insecure. Hence, they prepare for it all.

Sixes flow along a continuum, from compliance and rule-following to oppositional scrutiny, testing whether leaders and systems are actually worthy of their loyalty. Individual Sixes seesaw on the continuum depending on the committee report.

The elaborate scenario building leads to indecision, self-doubt, and the constant companion of low-grade angst. Sixes second-guess themselves and others, worried someone’s overlooking a crucial detail. Craving security, they barrage others with questions, unintentionally appearing resistant or parental, maybe hearing a mumbled, “Killjoy.” Frequently the truth is they want to ensure they’ve poked enough holes to help an idea succeed. Sixes want to have security, but they’ll settle for being the ever-ready supporter.

At their best, Sixes transform “what-if” worries into pragmatic plans. Because nobody sees the hidden snags and potential crises like a Six, their questions spot risks, leading to robust strategies. When they trust their own judgment (and tell the internal committee to sit it on down), they discover they may not be fearless, but they can trust themselves. In an unpredictable world, Sixes remind us that solid plans (and maybe a few backup plans) go a long way, and courage means feeling the fear and doing it anyway.

Enneagram Seven: The Enthusiastic Visionary

Trusted Tactic	Reframe
Fundamental Fear	Experiencing pain, feeling trapped or limited
Driving Desire	To be fully content and satisfied
Persistent Pattern	Voracity
Lasting Longing	“You will be taken care of.”

Excitable and deeply optimistic, Enneagram Sevens strive for the next thing that will satisfy the discontentment they keep hidden. Beneath brainstorming options and finding the silver side of that rain-cloud, Sevens desperately want to avoid pain. Believing others won't come through for them, Sevens learn to find multiple options to keep themselves safe from pain. Others see days filled with group chats, airplane tickets, creative endeavors, and the latest innovation. Sevens are managing a deep fear of missing out, being trapped in disappointment, or—heaven forbid—dealing with the low-level anxiety creeping around in the basement of their minds.

Because limits, micromanagement, or boredom feel painful, Sevens keep themselves preoccupied and switch-tasking—reading multiple books at once, juggling disparate projects, or dreaming about the next destination while wading in the ocean on their current vacation. They'll grab for “Well, at least . . .” or “It's not a crisis, it's an adventure!” And when Sevens drop to neutral, people are disappointed because they want the Chief Optimist. That pressure makes it all the more confusing when unchecked reframing swells into toxic positivity, leaving others hurt and exhausted. FOMO might be the motivator, but ironically, the bigger fear is being left alone to deal with the messy feelings that they've been sidestepping with all that fun. Sevens want enduring contentment, but they'll settle for thrills.

At their best, Sevens lead with hopeful visions and deep empathy. They're masters of turning challenges into opportunities and sparking creative solutions. When they learn it's OK to not be OK, they begin to trust that life won't implode if they pause long enough to feel uncomfortable emotions. Their natural optimism matures into genuine resilience and commitment. Sevens remind all of us that we have endless imagination *and* limits are good. We don't need every waking minute jammed with novelty to feel safe.

Lead with a Clearer View

As you go through the rest of the book, explore how your Enneagram

type shows up in different contexts. If you find the one you've chosen right now doesn't fit, come back here and test drive another.

Remember, these are thumbnail sketches of a complex personality structure. No one fits perfectly into three paragraphs. Resist the urge to head to the internet to take a test (I know you may have already done that!). Identifying your Enneagram type is self-awareness, digging out of the Unknown. Don't abdicate that to a multiple-choice test, expecting it to give you the deepest motivations of your soul.

The Enneagram is a shiny lens but not the goal itself. Use the Enneagram to keep from repeating patterns without knowing why. The more clearly you see yourself, the more choices you have in how you respond to the slings and arrows life throws your way. And that's where the roots of joy begin.

Balancing on the Rock

Many days, trying to stay in the Joy Ratio feels like balancing on the edge of the rocks, keeping yourself and other people safe on an uneven surface. It's easy to see a woman on the edge of the cliff doing a handstand and think, "I can't do that, so I'm not as good." That's just a story you tell yourself. (Good thing that's up next!)

The temptation to compare is human, but indulging it will keep you ineffective at best. Comparisonitis will slowly destroy you, increase your toil, and steal your joy. At this moment, there is no way on God's green Earth I can do a scorpion handstand, let alone perform that on a rocky outcropping. But I do know I can do a solid Warrior III. Not because I'm a yoga expert, but because I accurately see and accept myself.

Your greatest joy and power as a leader don't come from being like anyone else. Your joy grows from knowing yourself fully and completely, and being that human every day.

The Gist

Leadership without accurate self-awareness is a liability. So you need to understand yourself, including what's underneath the surface. The Enneagram reveals the unconscious motivations steering your behavior so you can stop reacting and begin leading yourself toward real joy.

Leadership requires ruthless
self-honesty and radical
self-compassion.

—Jenn Whitmer