**Nine Good Ways to Misuse the Enneagram**

**--by Tom Condon**

**Ones** - Ones sometimes distort the Enneagram by turning it into the ultimate criticism. They may use the model as a basis for judging themselves and others, positing a new ideal self to strive for and become. They can see Enneagram styles in a too-negative way, over-focusing on what's wrong and broken; not allowing people to be more than their type. They may also form blanket judgments about other Enneagram styles: "Nines are lazy, Threes are liars, Sevens are dilettantes." Ones also fix their attention on others as a way of not looking at themselves. Some Ones turn the Enneagram into an orthodoxy. They stop using their own words and adopt "Enneagramatically correct" adjectives to describe their personal experience, while imposing Enneagram terminology on others. Ones can also become literal-minded about the system, missing the metaphorical nature of personality styles, thinking they're as real as tables and chairs.

**Twos*****-***Twos sometimes distort the Enneagram by turning it into an instrument of seduction. Knowledge of personality styles helps the Two better blend with other people's criteria to create synthetic personal connections. Some Twos are self-critical and can feel unnecessarily bad about their own style. They'll hate themselves for being a Two, especially if others around them don't like it. Other Twos feel entirely *too good* about their personality style. They relish being a Two as a kind of identity and blithely excuse themselves for manipulating others. They may take a subtle pride in their interpersonal powers and act exempt from the need to look at their behavior. Twos will sometimes also join Enneagram communities and lose themselves in a social context, evading the need for independent, solitary introspection.

**Threes** - Threes may distort the Enneagram by missing its depth, instead seeing people as two-dimensional stereotypes or walking bundles of information. Some Threes fix their attention on people's surface behavior and are unable to recognize their individuality and souls. They may also get fascinated with the way the Enneagram "works," seeing the system in an overly schematic, formulaic way. Sometimes Threes use knowledge of the Enneagram to manipulate others in the service of achievement. "Just look for one of the tell-tale signs that places him or her into one of nine categories," read an especially Threeish advertisement for the Enneagram, "then you'll know everything you need to know about them and be able to change their behavior *without them finding out!*" Some Threes get competitive about typing by trying to do it too fast; they may ask a person five questions and then confidently but erroneously announce the person's Enneagram style.

**Fours** *-* Fours sometimes distort the Enneagram by believing its insights will cure them. They may use the system to pursue the one ultimate insight that will explain why they feel so flawed or alien. Study of the Enneagram becomes license to get newly mired in subjectivity, an excuse to postpone dealing with reality until the day they fully understand themselves. Fours can find the model depressing and damning or feel insulted about being "just another unique person." Some Fours convince themselves they are special for belonging to a "rare" species of the Enneagram, citing a invented statistic that claims there are fewer Fours than other personality styles. Groups of Fours may gather to celebrate their collective uniqueness, an in-crowd for those in the know.

**Fives*****-***Fives sometimes distort the Enneagram by holding it at an intellectual distance, enjoying it as an analytical system but not letting it personally touch them: "I could be a Five or at least one of the fear types. It's very interesting to think about..."Like Fours, Fives can overvalue insight, believing that it automatically leads to personal growth, as if knowing *about*yourself is the same thing as knowing yourself. If your defense is to avoid both intimacy and action by hiding in the study of a complex subject then the Enneagram is a perfect refuge. Fives can get lost in the Enneagram's study, mistaking a mastery of detail for depth, seeing the system as a set of esoteric principles that are divorced from daily life. Some Fives treat the Enneagram as a theory rather than a description of real people; the theory then limits what the Five can actually notice about others. Fives will sometimes use the Enneagram as a way of knowing about people without being involved with them. They may form once-removed, social affiliations to exchange information about the model. A few Fives will avoid deciding on their Enneagram number as a way to resist social definition; the fear is that admitting their style could give others a weapon of control.

**Sixes*****-***Sixes sometimes warp the Enneagram into an excuse to avoid responsibility for their actions. They may fatalistically overidentify with their style, pretending to be a victim of their Sixness in a way that absolves them of the need to claim their power. One Six said, "I'm afraid all the time because I'm a Six. But I can't change being a Six, can I?" Some Sixes reject the Enneagram or overreact to the fact of typing, growing preoccupied with the potential dangers of such a system. Other Sixes may romanticize it, deifying both the Enneagram and its teachers. A system that seems to explain everything makes for imaginary security in an uncertain world; Sixes can think the Enneagram is The Truth and get dogmatic in its defense.  Sixes may also misuse the Enneagram in the service of paranoia, using it mainly to justify their suspicions of people's hidden motives.

**Sevens***-* Sevens sometimes learn the Enneagram intensely but quickly, acquiring a rapid overview of the model and then concluding too soon that they understand personality styles or dismissing the system as a set of restrictive categories. If they study the Enneagram further, they may try to stay noncommittal, refusing to be "boxed in" by their type, holding out for the possibility that they could have several personality styles. Some Sevens get "trait happy" and stay fixed on people's outer characteristics. They may be attracted to formulas and equations as a fast way to learn the Enneagram, hoping to avoid the struggle of ploughing through the whole field. Some Sevens will understand the Enneagram philosophically and idealistically but not experientially. They may put a positive spin on the material, over-focusing on each style's potential as a way to avoid the sting of the Enneagram's diagnostic depth, skipping over details to evade its darker truths.

**Eights*****-***Eights who tend to think in caricature will sometimes come to see Enneagram styles as a set of oversimplified cartoons. It becomes another way to see people two-dimensionally. Eights often externalize their psychological conflicts, so they may see Enneagram fixations in everyone but themselves. They are especially prone to deciding which styles they like or dislike, as if that's somehow relevant. An Eight might locate his shadow in others but then take the realization no further, instead using the Enneagram to justify his biases and limits ("I never could stand college professors and now I know why; they're all a bunch of wimpy Fives"). On the job or at home, Eights can use the Enneagram as a tool for blaming or punishing. Some initially dismiss the system as meaningless; later they may warp it into a justification for why they can't change.

**Nines*****-***Nines can allow the Enneagram to exist in an atmosphere around them while taking no responsibility for what it shows them about themselves. "Other people tell me I'm a Nine..." is sometimes the refrain. Some Nines might be chronically "unable" to decide on their personality style. Others admit to it but postpone facing the implications, focusing on how much work it sounds like or telling themselves that being a Nine is not as bad as some other numbers. There's a quality of almost willfully missing the point, of adding the Enneagram to an already full plate of things that don't matter. Some Nines react as if the Enneagram has given them a suddenly documented identity. They may find false recognition from over-identifying with their style, brandishing their neurotic personality distortions as a badge of confused pride, as if to say, "See, this proves I exist: look how screwed up I am."

Tom Condon (used with permission)

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