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Your ways are numbered

Theory of Enneagrams puts personality traits in order

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SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

I'm not sure whether I'm an easygoing Nine, or a detached Five," says a man in his early 50s. "I wanted to be a Four when we started because I like the idea of being a romantic," says a woman in her late 20s, "but after yesterday, I realize I'm a Two. The Twos' focus on making others feel good is where I live."

A parlor game? A coded con-

versation? No, just Enneagram talk.

The speakers are reporting in on the second morning of a two-day workshop conducted recently by the Midwest Institute for Enneagram Studies, 505 W. Grant Pl. (312-871-1127).

The Enneagram (pronounced any-a-gram) is a theory of personality organized around nine core personality types.

Seven men and seven women, including three couples, sit in a

semi-circle in an upscale North Side Chicago loft. They face an Enneagram chart—a circle with nine points and nine connecting lines—puzzling out which number is theirs. The workshop participants—including a flight attendant, a real estate broker, a psychiatric nurse, and an investment manager—may well know their Social Security, phone and PIN numbers, but they paid \$195 each to come here and discover their Enneagram number, the better to

know themselves.

The Enneagram is fast becoming one of the pack leaders in the personal growth movement, with teachers and disciples gathering at private workshops and retreats, in college classrooms and corporate seminars—from coast to coast and in between. With origins in the ancient Sufi mystical tradition, the Enneagram has only gained currency among Western

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Enneagram

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psychiatrists and therapists in the last 25 years.

The First International Enneagram Conference was held in 1994 at Stanford University, drawing more than 1,500 participants from 18 countries. David Daniels, co-director of the conference and clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Stanford's School of Medicine, believes "the Enneagram has hit the mainstream because it shows us how to work with ourselves and in our relationships."

"The Enneagram is not tied to any class, race or gender, but to nine recurring passions or preoccupations," says Helen Palmer, America's Enneagram guru and author of "The Enneagram" and "The Enneagram in Love and Work" (both HarperCollins). "It requires looking inward to discover one's central vice or passion, in order to convert it to a better place. It has immediate take-home value."

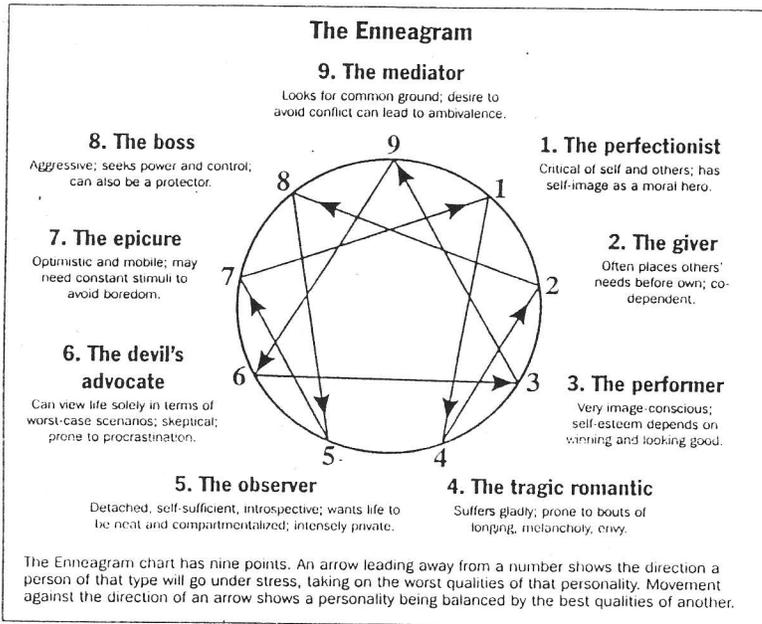
Here's the deal

The nine types are frequently labeled as follows: One is the Perfectionist or Judge; Two is the Giver or Martyr; Three is the Performer or Achiever; Four is the Tragic Romantic; Five is the Observer or Sage; Six is the Devil's Advocate or Doubter; Seven is the Epicure or Optimist; Eight is the Boss or Champion; Nine is the Mediator or Peacemaker.

Within these broad labels are a host of shadings and ample room for change. Enneagram practitioners assert "It's not about boxes, but about understanding patterns of mind," Daniels says. "Once people recognize their own habitual patterns, the Enneagram becomes a potential agent for change."

"No number is better than another," says Chicagoan Elizabeth Taubert, a registered nurse and clinical consultant to industry, who co-directs the Midwest Institute's Enneagram workshops with Chicago psychotherapist Carolyn Schuham, who has conducted a variety of seminars and workshops internationally.

Pointing to the Enneagram circle, Taubert tells the workshop



group. "There is no hierarchy. Each number represents a basic strategy of life, the way a person looks at the world and makes decisions on how to interact with the world."

So, pick a number, any number... Well, not quite.

According to Enneagram theory, a person does not choose to be a bossy Eight, or an image-conscious Three. The number is determined by how a person's innate nature has been shaped by his or her childhood experiences. Each person's number is, in Enneagram parlance, "where they live," Palmer calls it "habit of mind."

Each number has gifts and limitations. "We become identified by our gifts and learn to use them as a defense mechanism," Schuham explains to the participants. "The One kid—the perfectionist—gets identified as good and is not allowed to get angry, so One per-

sonalities go around with a lot of resentment because they have to be good all the time."

"The Two—the giver—starts with the ability to know what others need," says Taubert, "and this becomes their self-definition, but it gets distorted, so the Two has trouble identifying his or her own needs."

Schuham was trained by Helen Palmer, and the Midwest Institute employs Palmer's workshop methods, including the use of panels of exemplars, or people who have identified their Enneagram numbers and share their experiences with workshop participants.

Inside a Nine panel

A Nine panel is in session. Two middle-age men sit on a sofa with the Enneagram chart behind them.

The first exemplar, a commercial artist, talks about his Nine

desire to avoid conflict as much as possible: "I hate arguments. If there's a possible fight, I can let go of my emotions and think about something else and hope the other person forgets the whole thing."

The second, a home inspector, says, "I feel passionless about so many things that I wonder how others can be so excited about things. Sometimes I wonder, 'Why can't I be crazy about something?'"

A workshop member raises his hand. "I thought I was a Two, but I identify with some of these Nine traits."

"With every number, we think, 'Yeah, I do that sometimes,'" Schuham responds. "The question is, is that where we live?"

"We always live in the same place," she continues, "but this can be very different as we grow."

For example, she explains, a Five—the observer—is always

seeking detachment and privacy, but as a Five grows, he discovers the need to move into greater intimacy.

"So an unevolved Five and an evolved Five look very different." A woman muses, "I don't want to be pigeonholed, but I suppose that is my Four nature, thinking I'm special and different."

Another participant is more adamant: "I don't think people can be plugged into a category."

Taubert assures the group that the Enneagram allows for the full range of human behavior. The theory contends that all the traits of all nine personalities are available to everyone, but only after an individual understands his or her own reflex.

"Once you know your number, you know your own habit of mind," Taubert says, "and you can say to yourself, 'That's where I go,' not, 'That's the truth.' You realize your reflex is not totally who you are."

According to Schuham, the workshops "aren't therapy, but a process of self-observation."

Linear thinking

The arrows and lines on the Enneagram chart are key to the theory. They indicate the behavior of each personality type under optimum and stressful conditions.

"The arrows begin to give you a sense of the complexity of the theory," says Schuham. "For example, the Seven—the Optimist—is usually free-spirited and has a very busy way of being in the world." Schuham points to a line on the Enneagram chart connecting the Seven and the One, with an arrow pointing toward the One.

"The way the arrow points is the way the number goes under stress," she says. "So as stress builds, Sevens will go to the low side of the One [the perfectionist] and become real critical of themselves and others, which is not the usual way for a Seven."

Next she points to a line connecting the Seven to the Five, with the arrow pointing toward the Seven. "When a number goes against the arrow, it is moving towards the heart space, or the space counter to the number's natural tendency. For instance, in its heart space of Five, the Seven will take on some Five character-

istics, become quieter, more introspective.

"In its heart space, each number becomes more and more relaxed. This heart space is the point of growth."

"But I'm still not sure if I'm a Three or an Eight," a woman says with some frustration. She is invited to "try on" a number by sitting on the Eight exemplar panel taking center stage on the sofa.

"Both the Three and the Eight have the ability to get things done," says Taubert. "But pay attention to the distinctions: the Three is concerned with image, the Eight with power and control. Where does your focus of attention go?"

The Eight exemplar, an insurance salesman, says, "I don't worry about what other people think. If you've wronged me or someone else, nothing feels better to me than to walk away from you while you're trembling. I know Eights show up as bullies, but I get angry at people who deserve anger. And I can take charge very easily."

The woman nods and says, "I'm confrontational. My husband never confronts me with his anger, so I up it to get a reaction. For me, the hard thing is unexpressed anger. At the same time, I feel I could go anywhere in the world and survive. I'm sure I'm an Eight." She relaxes into the sofa.

For most of the men and women present, the workshop has occasioned similar epiphanies. As the weekend concludes, nearly all the participants feel they have their own numbers.

The Enneagram can be a humanizing influence, Taubert says, because it helps people realize that other people are acting from their way of looking at the world. "This instills more compassion and less fear of differences."

"And when you know your own habit of mind, you know where you are, and that gives you some clues about where you want to go. You have a sense of choice, of direction for your life."

In the sphere of the Enneagram, numbers are anything but impersonal.