

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



In a regular series, **Carol Wilson** identifies the tools and models frequently used during coaching projects. This month, she looks at the Enneagram

The Enneagram (pronounced any-a-gram and sometimes referred to as 'Enneagon') has its origins in ancient philosophy, possibly as far back as 4,000 years ago.

Derived from the Greek *ennea*, meaning 'nine', and *gram*, meaning 'point', the name refers to a circle depicting nine personality styles. It combines archetypal spiritual wisdom with modern psychology, uniting the work of Jung and the Greek philosophers and including Islamic Sufism, the esoteric Russian Gurdjieff and South American psychologists along the way.

Today, people from cultures all over the world are able to recognise their psychological and spiritual values in the universal reach of the Enneagram.

The nine points of the Enneagram vary in name according to different sources, but mean broadly the same. The following terms (below) are the ones used by the Enneagram Institute:

As the Enneagram has travelled down the ages through different sources, there is no one correct set of questions. An effective Enneagram exercise asks many questions, some quite similar but coming from slightly different angles, and is thus able to identify the subject's core values and personality traits.

Each type ranges along a continuum from a positive manifestation to a limiting one, as described right.

The Enneagram seeks to enable people to differentiate their core values from personality traits that they may have developed as a way of surviving the trials and challenges of life. For example, a woman who is a type three Achiever may need constant affirmation from others that she is of value and worthy of respect. She may appear to be confident and, indeed, many such people are successful in life precisely because they have been driven to excel by this deep-seated need to meet what they think



are the expectations of others. Such a woman may not even be consciously aware that she is living her life to impress; one result of this might be that she chooses a partner who 'ticks all the boxes' in terms of what she thinks the world views as an ideal mate, yet who may not actually fulfil her deepest needs.

Most people lean towards one main type and are potentially influenced by two lesser types. It is easy to mistake one's type; for example, the Loyalist (six) can be miss-identified as the Challenger (eight), because both may exhibit authoritarian anger.

No-one manifests their primary type all the time; for example the Peacemakers (nine) may indeed be aggressive sometimes, but they will eventually return to peacemaking as a sort of 'home base' and the anger itself will arise from different causes to that of an eight, whose anger will, in turn, derive differently from a six.

When we are functioning from our core values, we are at our most powerful and there is a sense of ease in making decisions, coping and triumphing, whatever the challenges we face. However, without realising it, we sometimes function from our 'strategic' personality, which may have been created in childhood or to deal with later challenges.

People sometimes live their whole lives according to the values of, say, a domineering parent, choosing jobs and partners that conflict with core values they may have lost sight of along the way. Studying the Enneagram and asking well-devised questions can reveal such anomalies and set the subject on a journey of self-discovery that will lead them towards a more fulfilling and effective life.

It is common for people to feel that there is a unique 'pathway' waiting for them in life, if they could only find it! Sometimes we

	Type	Positive	Limiting
1	THE REFORMER	Rational, determined, disciplined, idealistic and a perfectionist	Controlling, domineering, critical
2	THE HELPER	Emotionally demonstrative, caring, sympathetic, with a desire to please	Sycophantic, easily led, a self-styled martyr
3	THE ACHIEVER	Success-orientated, focused on excellence, image conscious, outwardly confident	Ruthless with self and others, willing to sacrifice values to win or to be popular
4	THE INDIVIDUALIST	Introverted, sensitive, withdrawn, original, creative, true to oneself	Self-obsessed, selfish
5	THE INVESTIGATOR	Deep thinking, cerebral, passionate about ideas	Secretive, cynical, isolated, obsessive
6	THE LOYALIST	Committed, trustworthy, responsible, faithful	Suspicious, anxious, misguided, afraid
7	THE ENTHUSIAST	Versatile, busy, energetic, passionate, fun-loving	Short attention span, scatty, not finishing, unreliable
8	THE CHALLENGER	Confident, persuasive, decisive, strong, brave, enjoys taking risks	Aggressive, confrontational, rash
9	THE PEACEMAKER	Amiable, balanced, inspires confidence, impartial	Self-effacing, complacent, downtrodden

happen on a situation, project or relationship with which we feel completely at one – we might use terms like *'it was meant to happen'* or *'this is what I was born for'*.

It is at these times that outside circumstances have coincided with our core nature. Life feels inspiring, even magnificent, yet has a certainty that makes every step seem simple. Nothing feels like hardship during these times, whether they bring a scarcity of material comforts, long working hours, or the sacrifice of existing relationships.

The Enneagram is at once immensely complicated and beautifully simple. As with all systems that attempt to define personality types, it is crucial that tests are not done in a way

that will limit people's own belief in their abilities. The system is designed to enable transformation and should always be explored with this in mind. ■

More information:

- 1 Free test on <http://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test.php>
- 2 Enneagram Institute: <http://www.enneagraminstitute.com/>
- 3 Riso D and Hudson R *Understanding the Enneagram* Houghton Mifflin 2000

Carol Wilson is managing director of Performance Coach Training, a joint venture with coaching pioneer Sir John Whitmore's Performance Consultants International, and head of accreditation/honorary vice president at the Association for Coaching. She can be contacted on + 44 (0)17784 455297 or via www.performancecoachtraining.com