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## *The Enneagram and Executive Coaching: Engaging an Appreciative Perspective to Enrich the Use of Enneagram Wisdom*

William Bergquist and Michael Goldberg

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# The Enneagram and Executive Coaching: Engaging an Appreciative Perspective to Enrich the Use of Enneagram Wisdom

William Bergquist and Michael Goldberg

*The Enneagram is becoming very popular. Those who use the Enneagram as a training, counseling, or consulting tool are finding that it can be of great value with regard to the insights they can provide to the people with whom they are working. They can also often make a living as Enneagram interpreters, charging impressive fees for the workshops they conduct or the private services they provide. This is good news for the field. However, as is the case with any popular success, the good news also contains a cautionary tale.*

*Enneagram interpretation may become quite superficial and many of those using the Enneagram may be guilty of over-promising and under-delivering. The Enneagram may become a “fad,” despite its long history and rich heritage. Furthermore, many of the people with the deepest understanding of and appreciation for the Enneagram are unable or unwilling to ‘package’ it into a brief presentation or trade it on the open market. They have not yet found a venue for the use of Enneagram wisdom that is both financial viable for themselves and true to the cause and tradition of the Enneagram. In this article, an experienced executive coach and one of the most successful authors to write about the Enneagram combine their knowledge and experience to propose a process of executive coaching that is informed by both an appreciative perspective and the ancient wisdom inherent in the Enneagram. This process helps to insure both that the Enneagram is not treated in a superficial manner and that the executive coach will be able to engage her coaching client in an exploration that is rich with insight and application.*

The Enneagram is one of the distinctive and distinguished sources of ancient wisdom that is now available to human service practitioners. Based on wisdom that is at least two thousand years old, the Enneagram provides us with information about nine different character types, as well as information about the interplay among these nine types and the circumstances that encourage us to move between these types. Unfortunately, most recipients of Enneagram interpretations receive only a cursory analysis of these nine types and their relationship to these types.

The typical Enneagram session is brief: a three-hour presentation or at most a 1-2 day workshop. Frequently, the outcome of an interpretive session is the identification of the home-based/dominant type. Beyond this there may be some attention given to the wings and possibly the high performance and stress points. Very little attention is typically given to the other four points. This parallels the problem now being faced by interpreters of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The Jungian theory that underlies the MBTI is typically misused or employed in a superficial manner. Jung would have never wondered about “typing” people, nor would he have felt comfortable knowing that his pioneering work on differences among people

was being used for personnel selection and pop-psych analyses.

In the case of the Enneagram, work must move beyond merely the identification of dominant type. A longer, more in-depth interpretive experience of the Enneagram should be engaged in which all nine types are explored. Like Odysseus (the Greek hero of *The Odyssey*), who traveled through, learned about and learned from each of the nine domains, we must learn about our “1’ness,” our “2’ness,” our “3’ness” and so forth, regardless of our own preferred, home domain.

We are probably sounding at this point like crusty old curmudgeons who decry the work of those “youngsters” who don’t yet really know what they are doing. While we might rightfully be labeled as “reactionary,” there is also an important message in this analysis that should be appreciated by those using the Enneagram – if it is to endure as a source of insight beyond our current decade. In this article, we offer a specific suggestion regarding how the Enneagram might be used in an effective and financially viable manner through the processes of executive coaching. Before offering these suggestions, we will provide a brief summary of Enneagram theory for those not familiar with this

source of ancient wisdom. We have presented this summary not only as an invitation for organizational coaches to make use of the Enneagram in their work with clients, but also as an introspective tool for coaches to use in their own “internal coaching.”

### **What is the Enneagram?**

The Enneagram is a profound, elegant, and compassionate approach to people and their relationships. It describes nine basic worldviews, nine ways of doing business in the world (with perhaps infinite creative variations).<sup>1</sup> Each of the nine personality types is something of a pathway through life, with likely obstacles and pitfalls along the way. Each style has its own natural gifts, limitations and blind spots, its own distinctive ways of thinking, acting and being.

When you know someone’s Enneagram style, you have a sense of the journey they are on. You can begin to see the world as they see it. You can see what they value and how their world makes sense to them. You see, laid bare, the basis for their decision-making. You can address their visions and goals, spoken and unspoken. You can nurture their fundamental leadership. Perhaps more important, when you know your *own* Enneagram style, you can get out of your own way. Instead of acting from a set of unspoken and perhaps unacknowledged assumptions about how the world works and how clients should be coached, you can instead attend to the client’s world. You can see where your client and you are likely to mesh and where you are in some danger of misunderstanding each other. You can serve up your wisdom in a way that it can be heard by the client.

None of the Enneagram types is bad in itself. However, being *unconsciously* wedded to an Enneagram type limits flexibility, imagination and choices. Caught up in habitual ways of perceiving, we miss important pieces of the whole. Even our best strengths applied indiscriminately become our weaknesses. Knowing your vantage point and that of the people with whom you work does more than build perspective; it clears the mind so that discernment is possible. It opens the heart to the experience of others. It focuses the will so that you can act with concentrated intention, power and effectiveness.

Here is the briefest description of each of the nine Enneagram types:

*One - The Perfectionist:* Enneagram Ones want to get things right. Critical, idealistic, judgmental Ones make decisions with an internalized “single correct way” in mind. They want their work to reflect their extremely high standards. Though their continual sermonizing, teaching and monitoring of others may make people

feel nit-picked and rejected, their fiercest anger is turned inward on themselves. At their best, these upright, fastidious, high-energy paragons are honest and idealistic, with superb powers of criticism and a clear vision of what should be.

*Two - The Giver:* Twos want to be appreciated for all they do for you. Sweet, seductive, and manipulative, relationship-oriented Twos make themselves indispensable to and adored by important others as a path to power and influence. Twos are the powers behind the throne, with exquisite radar for the moods and preferences of others. They excel at customer service. The Jewish Mother, the Italian Mother and the Boss’s Secretary Who Really Runs the Company are archetypes. Others may see Twos as prideful and power-hungry apple polishers. However, at their best, Twos can be genuinely sensitive, helpful and humble givers, who inspire and bring out the best in others.

*Three - The Performer:* Threes want to be lauded for getting the job done. Enthusiastic, efficient, high-performing, competitive Type A’s, Threes keep their eyes on the prize (the bottom line) and seek to be loved for their accomplishments. Others may see Threes, concerned as they are with image and approval, as expedient, artificial, superficial and insensitive, and they do run the risk of becoming their “resume” or their long list of accomplishments. But at their best, Threes are charismatic leaders, efficient, practical problem solvers, and accomplished team players and motivators. Threes know how the world works and what to do about it.

*Four - The Connoisseur:* Fours gravitate to the authentic, the beautiful, the true (which is always just out of reach) or the unusual. Melancholic, romantic, elitist Fours look under the surface for the deeper meaning, and manifest impeccable taste in all things. They make decisions based on the vicissitudes of feeling. As they see it, they’re easily satisfied with the best. Others may see them as intense and flamboyant tragedians or snooty, acerbic critics. At their best, Fours are doyens of the creative and the beautiful who live the passionate life filled with panache, elegance and good taste.

*Five - The Investigator:* Fives want mastery over their personal domain. Emotionally detached, penurious Fives seek to observe life from a safe and protected distance while stockpiling facts, theories and information. They camouflage themselves and minimize needs, preferring not to rely on their relationships. Others may see Fives as emotionally detached, scientific observers of life who hide in their office or behind a wall of data or expertise. They can also be wizards, cool decision makers, perspicacious analysts, theorists, and consultants.

*Six - The Troubleshooter:* Sixes are preoccupied with worst-case scenarios. They stew over who can be trusted, whether the boss is on the level, and what could possibly go wrong. The pugnacious, counter-phobic version actively confronts these concerns. Others may be frustrated by Sixes' over-preparedness, procrastination and paranoia. At their best, Sixes can be original thinkers, imaginative, faithful, sensitive, intuitive, committed, and ultimately courageous partisans, especially in defense of the underdog; they are terrific at ferreting out hidden motives and pitfalls along the way.

*Seven - The Visionary:* Sevens want to keep all positive options open and active. Engaging, high-energy romancers, innovative and upbeat planners, Sevens are also the classic superficial Peter Pans who won't grow up. So wedded are they to the glorious possibilities of the vision they are spinning, they have a hard time perceiving the downside and so avoid closure, pain, conflict, ordinary commitments, and routine work. Enthusiastic initiators of projects, they may fail to follow through. Others may experience them as narcissistic, quixotic and irresponsible. The best Sevens are gifted, perceptive and witty idealists, inspirational and charming amalgamators of ideas, and enthusiastic networkers of people.

*Eight - The Boss:* Eights want power and control. Expansive, blunt, and domineering, Eights lack restraint and express anger and loud feelings easily. Contentious, they seek out confrontations (often without realizing it), believing the truth comes out in a fight, and focus on their own strength and the other's weakness. Their bullying, excess, and lack of scruples may repel others. At their best, Eights can be excellent, bold kingpins, entrepreneurs and empire builders, untroubled by obstacles or propriety. Natural paladins, top dog Eights are often genuinely protective of the underdogs in their charge.

*Nine - The Mediator:* Nines want to include all people and points of view and avoid discord. Nines are calming and compromise easily; they see clearly and identify strongly with the needs, enthusiasms and points of view of their fellows that others' wants seem like their own desires. Others may see Nines as spacey and neglectful, as pluggers and plodders, as bureaucrats no matter where they are found, and may be put off by Nine's obsessive being of two minds, their tendency to embrace ambiguity and their deliberate pursuit of seeming irrelevancies. At their best, Nines reflect and identify (with extraordinary clarity) people's positions without their own agenda intruding. They therefore can be excellent counselors, intermediaries, team builders, and peacemakers.

## **The Enneagram and Executive Coaching**

The most effective way in which to respond to the challenge of integrity and longevity for the Enneagram may be a role and process known as "executive coaching." This form of human service is concerned not just with people sitting at the top of organizations, as the term "executive" might initially imply. Rather, it can be of value to anyone who is faced with difficult decisions while living in a complex, contradictory, and often turbulent world.<sup>2</sup> It is in this setting that the Enneagram can be particularly valuable, for it serves better than perhaps any other typology as a guide to any journey through "troubled waters."

A particular perspective on executive coaching, known as "appreciative coaching," may be particularly effective and appropriate in helping another person fully comprehend the implications of the Enneagram for their own self-understanding and life-planning.<sup>3</sup> Appreciative coaching is typically a lengthy process involving three interrelated strategies. The person being assisted in this appreciative manner is known as a *colleague* (rather than "client" or "patient.") While a colleague may come to an executive coach initially to address a specific issue, the coaching process inevitably moves well beyond this convening issue and much broader exploration typically occurs. Here is where the Enneagram can be of great value.

One of the three appreciative coaching strategies is called *reflective coaching*. Through use of reflective coaching our colleague is supported in reflecting on fundamental issues in their personal and work lives. Reflective coaching encourages a colleague to address not only puzzles (which have specific answers), but also problems (which inevitably are messy, complex and interdisciplinary) and mysteries (which ultimately are awesome and unfathomable).<sup>4</sup>

Another strategy, called *instrumented coaching*, provides a colleague with information from multiple sources, including self-assessment, feedback from other people and data about the organizational culture in which the colleague dwells. While reflective coaching focuses on information that comes from within our colleague, instrumented coaching introduces information from outside our colleague which can, in turn, be compared with self-perceptions and predictions regarding how others in the world perceive oneself.

The third strategy, called *observational coaching*, adds yet another form of information to the self-portrait and landscape rendering. Observational coaching involves the coach's observation of the colleague's behavior in the real world. Feedback to the colleague is then blended with information from the instrumented coaching and

both subsequently enrich the ongoing reflective coaching processes.

When this multi-strategy approach to executive coaching is combined with an appreciative perspective, the coaching process becomes particularly effective. This multi-strategy and appreciative approach to executive coaching also enables an Enneagram practitioner to provide six types of insight.

First, Enneagram-based coaching from an appreciative perspective provides a colleague with a deeper understanding and valuing (appreciation) concerning each of the nine domains as it exists within the colleague. Second, this form of coaching enables a colleague to see how his/her home type/domain is a strength that can help or that can be overused or used inappropriately. Third, Enneagram-based appreciative coaching enables a colleague to see how the other domains can be strengths when used in an appropriate manner, at an appropriate time and in an appropriate setting.

The fourth type of insight concerns self-perception. Enneagram-based coaching enables a colleague to recognize how other people perceive them with regard to type and which type(s) are dominant in the settings in which they live and work. Fifth, Enneagram-based coaching from an appreciative perspective encourages a colleague to address provocative questions that move them deeper in their own self-understanding and in examining their own assumptions, biases and life perspectives (within and adjacent to their Enneagram world-view). Finally, any form of appreciative coaching always “leans into the future.”<sup>5</sup> It always traces out the implications for future actions. Enneagram-based coaching which is appreciative encourages colleagues to explore and act upon the insights they have gained from their Enneagram exploration: What have I learned about myself that offers a compelling image for me of my own future possibilities?

### **The Enneagram-Based Coaching Process**

What does a multi-strategy, appreciative coaching process look like if it focused on the Enneagram? It involves at least ten steps when fully engaged.

Step One focuses on establishing a contract with a colleague. This process need not involve a formal, written contract, but it should involve the clarification of expectations, including time commitments, fees, norms regarding confidentiality, and distinctions to be drawn between coaching and counseling/psychotherapy, as well as between coaching and consulting.<sup>6</sup> This first step should also include an overview of the Enneagram. This overview is usually conveyed orally and involves the testing of a colleague’s previous concepts and misconceptions of psychological

types and specifically the Enneagram.

Step Two involves the building of a knowledge base by the colleague. Typically, the colleague will be invited to read one or two books about the Enneagram.<sup>7</sup> They might also be given a homework assignment: for example, interview (or at least briefly talk with) several people whom the coach has identified as representing several different types.

Step Three focuses on the colleague’s acquisition of foundational insights regarding their own dominant style. Reflective coaching can be particularly helpful in guiding this initial exploration.

During Step Four the foundational insights are expanded. Reflective coaching is employed regarding wings and movement to high performance and stress points.

Step Five offers our colleague distinctive insights regarding the Enneagram. Using an appreciative approach, the executive coach helps her colleague more fully acknowledge and understand (appreciate) all aspects of themselves – the way in which all types are represented in their thoughts and actions. Specifically, reflective coaching is engaged regarding the other four types/domains.

Step Six moves the executive coaching process from reflection to instrumentation. It links the colleague’s personal insights regarding the Enneagram to other perspectives on self (Tier One Instrumentation).<sup>8</sup> One or more of the other major interpretive inventories, such as MBTI, FIRO-B or the Strength Deployment Inventory, would be administered and results would be interwoven with the Enneagram analysis.

Step Seven provides a colleague with the perspectives of other people (Tier Two Instrumentation). The perceptions of other people regarding the Enneagram types/domains of colleague are gathered through use of a questionnaire or through interviews. These perceptions are compared with the colleague’s self-perceptions and with predictions made by the colleague regarding the perceptions of other people.

Step Eight involves the distribution and analysis of organizational context (Tier Three Instrumentation). The organizational culture in which colleague works/lives is assessed by means of a questionnaire or organizational diagnosis and this assessment is linked to self-perceptions and feedback data already reviewed by colleague. This assessment may be based on the Enneagram typology or some other organizational culture scheme.

The executive coach during Step Nine moves from reflection and instrumentation to observation. The coach spends one day or more with her colleague, linking the observations of the colleague's behavior with information generated through reflective and instrumented coaching. Attention is paid to ways in which all nine domains are manifest in the daily life of the colleague and ways in which the dynamic interactions among the nine domains are elicited by and played out in various settings and in response to specific relationships and organizational challenges.

The final step involves summation and closure. All of the information collected through the executive coaching process is discussed and synthesized during Step Ten. Implications are drawn with regard to the colleague's future actions. The coaching process might be immediately re-engaged around a different set of issues or engaged at a later time when other complex decisions emerge for the colleague.

### Where Do I Go From Here?

Appreciative coaching always "leans into the future." So it is very appropriate at this point to invite you, the reader, to lean into your own future and ask: "Where do I go from here?" As an organizational coach, you probably now have a clearer sense of how the ancient wisdom of the Enneagram might enhance your own work with colleagues, and how you might be able to employ reflective, instrumented and observational coaching in your own Enneagram-based practice. This brief description, obviously, is not enough. We would suggest that you do some more reading or engage in further training as an appreciative coach and as a student of the Enneagram. We wish you great success in your future endeavors and firmly believe that the executive coaching processes we have described in this article, when based on an appreciative perspective, will help to make the Enneagram a source of wisdom for many people and for many years to come.

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### William Bergquist, Ph.D.

**Phone: 207.833.5124**

**Email: whbergquist@aol.com**

As author of 40 books and more than 50 articles, William Bergquist writes about profound personal, group, organizational and societal transitions and transformations--and often turns to ancient sources of wisdom in gaining insights about these transitions and transformations. The graduate school (The Professional School of Psychology) which Bergquist owns is located in Sacramento California. It has offered Masters and

Doctoral degrees in both clinical and organizational psychology to mature, accomplished adults for the past twenty seven years. Bill has served as a consultant, coach and/or trainer to leaders throughout the world in more than 1,000 corporations, government agencies, human service agencies, colleges, universities, and churches over the past 35 years. He also serves as co-executive editor of *IJCO* and as a founding board member of the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations.

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### Michael Goldberg, J.D.

**Phone: 480.491.3666**

**Email: enneawork@aol.com**

Michael Goldberg, an organization consultant, writer and executive coach, has taught at graduate schools of psychology, management and law, teaches the Enneagram around the world and trains trainers of that approach. He wrote the best-selling *The 9 Ways of Working*. Enneagram clients include the Central Intelligence Agency, Motorola, Philips Electronics, Farmers Insurance, Los Angeles City College, Pima College, St. Francis Medical Center, and many smaller companies and non-profit agencies in North America, Europe and Africa. He is the author of more than 100 professional articles and the forthcoming *The Man of Many Turns: Travels with Odysseus on the Back Roads of the Psyche* that applies the teaching stories of Homer's *Odyssey* to work and to life.

Dr. Goldberg's original Enneagram work has been widely recognized, including articles in New York Newsday; Cosmopolitan; World Business; Fast Company; Organizational Research/Management Science Today; the International Personnel Management Association News; Personnel Psychology, Incentive, Sales and Marketing Management; Human Resource Executive and Men's Health. He has been featured on CNN and in an hour-long interview on the Fox News Channel and internationally in the Manchester Guardian, the London Daily Mail, the Scotsman, the Soweran, the Australian Broadcasting Company, and the BBC.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See much more extensive description of the Nine Types is Michael Goldberg. *The Nine Ways of Working*. New York: Marlow and Co., 1999.

<sup>2</sup> William Bergquist, Ken Merritt and Stephen Phillips. *Executive Coaching: An Appreciative Approach* [Revised Edition]. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> William Bergquist, Ken Merritt and Stephen Phillips. *Executive Coaching: An Appreciative Approach* [Revised Edition]. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2004, pp 18-22

<sup>4</sup> See John Lazar and Bill Bergquist, "Alignment Coaching: The Missing Element in Business Coaching," *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 2003, 1(1), 14-27; and more recently, William Bergquist and Agnes Mura. *Ten Themes and Variations for Leaders and Their Coaches*. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2005, pp. 212-217.

<sup>5</sup> William Bergquist, Ken Merritt and Stephen Phillips. *Executive Coaching: An Appreciative Approach* [Revised Edition]. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2004, pp. 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> William Bergquist, Ken Merritt and Stephen Phillips. *Executive Coaching: An Appreciative Approach* [Revised Edition]. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2004, pp. 9-17.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Goldberg, *The Nine Ways of Working*, New York: Marlow and Co., 1999; Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram: Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram in Love and Work*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996; Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *Personality Types: Enneagram for Self-Discovery*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996; Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram* New York: Bantam, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> William Bergquist, Ken Merritt and Stephen Phillips. *Executive Coaching: An Appreciative Approach* [Revised Edition]. Sacramento, CA: Pacific Soundings Press, 2004, pp. 154-160.

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Hillel and Shammai: These two great scholars born a generation or two before the beginning of the Common Era are usually discussed together and contrasted with each other, because they were contemporaries and the leaders of two opposing schools of thought (known as "houses"). The *Talmud* records over 300 differences of opinion between Beit Hillel (the House of Hillel) and Beit Shammai (the House of Shammai). In almost every one of these disputes, Hillel's view prevailed.

Rabbi Hillel was born to a wealthy family in Babylonia, but came to Jerusalem without the financial support of his family and supported himself as a woodcutter. It is said that he lived in such great poverty that he was sometimes unable to pay the admission fee to study *Torah*, and because of him that fee was abolished. He was known for his kindness, his gentleness, and his concern for humanity. One of his most famous sayings, recorded in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers, a tractate of the *Mishnah*), is **"If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?"** The Hillel organization, a network of Jewish college student organizations, is named for him.

<http://www.jewfaq.org/sages.htm>

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