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Stories of Growth and Change

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How do we grow and change? How does our knowledge of the Enneagram support us in this process? The following nine stories -- all real -- represent different ways in which the Enneagram has helped people grow and transform. These stories have two elements in common: (1) the individuals involved took advantage of their experiences and *chose* to learn and grow from them, and (2) the Enneagram provided them with an invaluable perspective in this process.

These stories are taken from a companion workbook to my forthcoming book, *Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work: How to Use the Enneagram System for Success* (McGraw-Hill 2004). As you read through the nine stories, please ask yourself the following question: *Do I take full advantage of the opportunities presented to me for my own growth and development?*

A One's Story



Diligence

For her entire life, Elaine, a One, had been plagued with feelings of self-recrimination. While she enjoyed her job as an educator, she often found the pressure overwhelming, and she always felt guilty that she wasn't getting all her work done. No matter how well she organized the tasks in front of her, more work always piled up. One day, she took a hard look at her life and said to herself, *I feel satisfied with my work, but am I enjoying myself?* Her answer to the question was a resounding **NO!**

Using the Enneagram as her guide, Elaine pursued self-discovery with the same diligence she applied to her work. First, she spent three months simply paying attention to her pattern of "right versus wrong" thinking. She realized that almost *everything* she did was accompanied by thoughts and reactions about how well, or more often, how imperfectly things had gone. Informed with this new awareness, Elaine tried to mute her inner critic or at least to deafen her ears to its continuous voice. This tactic, however, was not only unsuccessful, but it also seemed to make her inner critic even worse.

Elaine recognized that the more her inner critic became active, the more resentful she felt. She decided to explore these chronic feelings of resentment. *What, she wondered, am I so angry about?* At first, her answers focused on what others were or were not doing, as if others were doing something to her and she was merely responding to their behavior. Elaine realized that this perception put the responsibility for changing on other people rather than on herself. When she explored what she could do to change her reaction, her first thought was to stop feeling angry -- but when she tried to do this, it only increased her fury.

Elaine finally decided to explore her *own* behavior. Doing this led her to a remarkable discovery: she realized that the real reason for her anger was that she took too little time for herself, taking her responsibilities so seriously that she neglected to achieve any real balance in her life. With this revelation, Elaine decided to structure fun, pleasure, and relaxation into her life on a weekly basis. At first, she planned a specific activity in advance. After several months of doing this, Elaine became more spontaneous and began to schedule a specific amount of free time rather than a specific activity. She was then able to use that time in any way she wanted at that given moment.

The results of Elaine's efforts at self-exploration and change were that her inner critic became less intense, her resentment and anger lessened, and she had much more fun.

A Two's Story



Giving

Ben, a Two, had run a CPA firm for nearly twenty years. Although the company was successful, Ben had been unable to grow it beyond ten employees. Using the Enneagram as his framework, Ben speculated that as a Two he had been focusing on satisfying his current clients at the expense of developing new ones. Further, he wondered whether he might be overly dependent on his relationships with his clients: he noticed that when his clients were satisfied, he felt a strong sense of well-being; when they had problems, he typically became discouraged, with his malaise often spreading to areas of his life outside work.

Ben had been giving a great deal of thought to his inability to grow the company, but he was unable to understand the cause of this problem. It was, however, a nonwork incident that gave him the greatest insight into his work challenges and his own contribution to it. Ben's wife, Robin, had wanted to go alone to a four-day professional conference that would require her to be away for three consecutive nights. During eight years of marriage, Ben and Robin had never been apart from each other for more than one day because Ben did not like being alone; in fact, he hated it. Robin had always accommodated him in this way. After much discussion with Robin, however, Ben came to the conclusion that her going to the conference was a good idea. He knew that the conference was important to Robin, and he wanted her to be happy. He also thought that their being separated for three days would be good for him as well, although it would be a challenge for him to intentionally put himself in the situation he most dreaded.

On the first night of the conference, Robin did not call Ben. She wanted him to have the time alone, and she was also enjoying her autonomy. When Robin did call Ben the second evening, he reported that he was doing fine. When she asked him what he had been doing these two evenings, Ben replied, "I've been having a great time being alone. I've called all my friends. In fact, I've even had time to call some of my old friends from college."

"Ben," Robin remarked, "that's not really being alone. Why do you always have to surround yourself with other people?"

Robin's comment startled Ben. Although he felt defensive and said, "But you're away for several days," her words caused him to really think hard about this issue. After a week of self-reflection, Ben realized that he had felt anxious about being alone after Robin left, and it was his anxiety that had caused him to call almost everyone he knew. He also concluded that he had become so dependent on the positive regard of others that he had a limited capacity to feel good about himself when no one else was around. After this revelation, Ben decided to spend two hours alone each week in order to get to know himself better. For the first few weeks, he did not know what to do with this alone time. However, that "loose ends" feeling passed quickly, and Ben began to look forward to his solitary time.

Not only did Ben grow as a person, but within ten months, he had grown the CPA firm to fifteen employees, and the firm's revenue had doubled. The reasons were directly related to Ben's newfound independence from the reactions of other people. He realized that he had been over focusing on his clients' happiness -- for example, he had called them weekly to check in with them and make sure that they were satisfied -- because he was anxious about how they felt about him and the firm. This excessive client contact had taken time that Ben should have been devoting to client development. He began calling his old clients just once a month, using the extra time he now had to develop new business.

Ben also realized that he had been spending far too much time socializing with his staff to make sure things were going well for them. His behavior toward the staff had, in fact, made them overly dependent on him for advice and support. After Ben cut his interactions with them in half, his staff did even better and took more initiative.

A Three's Story



Perform

Tony and Kevin, both Threes, had been looking forward to meeting each other for two years. Jenna, a mutual friend and colleague had been telling both men how similar they were and how much they would surely enjoy each other's company. When Tony and Kevin finally met over a business dinner that Jenna had arranged, the interaction between the two proved uneventful. Although they did not dislike each other, neither Tony nor Kevin was interested in pursuing a friendship.

The next day at work, Jenna asked Tony, "So, what did you think of Kevin?"

Tony answered, “Kevin’s okay. I didn’t like him as much as I thought I would, though. I felt really tired talking with him.”

“But why?” Jenna asked. “You guys are so similar, I would have thought it would be relaxing.”

Tony replied, “All we were really doing was trying to impress each other. Doing that nonstop last night exhausted me. I’ve been thinking about that all morning. I realize I’m always trying to impress people.”

Tony felt dismayed by this realization and thought about it frequently over the next two weeks. While he wanted to stop his efforts to always create a positive impression on other people, he wasn’t sure how to do this. He also realized that if he did stop this behavior, he didn’t know what to do in its place. This insight made him feel anxious and uncertain. However, he decided that this was part of his challenge as a Three -- to find out and to accept who he was without all the trappings of success.

At first, Tony thought he would have to give up being successful in order to grow and develop, but upon reflection he concluded that his real focus needed to be the discovery of who he was as a person, apart from work roles. Tony had a great insight: he realized that he was overidentified with work and underidentified with his thoughts, feelings, relationships, and personal interests. This led him to a simple, yet profound, idea. Each day, he would spend fifteen minutes doing *absolutely nothing* -- no work, no thinking about home projects, no television. Tony did this for one month and found it to be an amazing experience. He discovered that he had an inner life that had been masked by his frenzy of activity. Once Tony stopped moving at such a fast pace, he was not only able to make remarkable progress in his efforts at self-discovery, he became less driven to create a positive impression in every aspect of his life.

A Four’s Story



Mood

Gabrielle, a Four, had her own public relations firm for fifteen years and was pleased to have numerous Fortune 500 companies among her clients. She took great satisfaction in customizing her firm’s work to the needs of each client, and she believed that no task was too complex or too volatile for her firm to handle.

When she was approached by an extremely successful retail manufacturing company with worldwide name recognition to handle a major scandal, she agreed to take the project on and began work on it immediately. The project timeline was aggressive -- three months from beginning to end.

From the beginning of this project, Gabrielle experienced serious problems. The company had assigned their vice-president of communications, Lauren, to be Gabrielle’s main contact. Lauren was expected to give Gabrielle direction, provide her with access to top company executives, and address any questions Gabrielle might have. Instead, she delegated these responsibilities to Brooke, an external communications consultant who had been hired on a contract basis and was only marginally familiar with the company’s inner workings.

Gabrielle felt frustrated with this situation and voiced her concerns to Lauren, who had been working with the company for only two months. Lauren said she was overwhelmed with adjusting to the demands of her new job and did not have the time to devote to Gabrielle's requests.

Gabrielle did her best to provide the client company with a first-rate public relations plan, and as the work progressed, Brooke and Lauren both told her that they were very pleased with both her work product and her ability to meet their stringent deadlines. Two months into the project, however, Brooke called Gabrielle to say that the company no longer wanted to use her services. The only explanation Brooke gave Gabrielle was that Lauren liked what Gabrielle had already created and believed that she, Lauren, could finish the project herself; according to Brooke, Lauren planned to use all of Gabrielle's completed work on the project. The decision about terminating the relationship with Gabrielle's firm was final.

Gabrielle felt angry, hurt, and deeply confused, and she went into an emotional tailspin. Within several weeks, her hurt and anger had turned into a deep melancholy, which then evolved into a severe depression. Gabrielle analyzed the situation relentlessly, yet she was unable to arrive at any conclusion that made her feel better. Finally, she began to emerge from her depression, having come to the following conclusions: (a) the company had exploited her; (b) Lauren had realized she could complete the project herself because Gabrielle had done such a thorough job on it already; (c) Lauren had taken over the project to advance her own status and visibility within the company; and (d) there was nothing that Gabrielle could do to change the situation. Her final, and most helpful, realization was that the situation had ignited her Enneagram style Four reactions.

With the last conclusion, Gabrielle realized that she felt deeply rejected because the client firm no longer wanted to work with her, and that she also felt completely misunderstood -- obviously, she thought, the company did not understand her unique contribution to the work.

Gabrielle also recognized two things about herself that she didn't like to acknowledge, even to herself. Part of her distress came from her having been abruptly cut off from a project that had been important to her. Fours seek and try to maintain a feeling of connection, and they become disheartened if these connections are severed. However, Gabrielle's most difficult admission to herself concerned the way in which she had colluded in her own demise: she realized that she had felt so flattered that this well-known organization wanted to hire her that she had ignored many danger signs -- for example, her lack of access to senior leaders, and the fact that the liaison role had been delegated to an external consultant. The most significant item Gabrielle had ignored, however, was the company's value system. The firm had a reputation for exploiting employees, chewing up consultants, and engaging in false advertising, all of which ran counter to Gabrielle's value system. However, Gabrielle's need to be special and important to an elite company had become more important than either her own values or her knowledge that not having direct access to key company players almost always derails a project.

Her knowledge of the Enneagram not only enabled Gabrielle to come to terms with this very disturbing incident, but it also allowed her to turn a difficult situation into an opportunity for her own development.

A Five's Story



Knowledge

Kenneth, a Five, was both an engineer and a project manager for an internationally known consumer products company. His project team had been assigned the task of creating new ways of packaging aluminum foil, with the work to include conducting numerous customer focus groups and having a series of conversations with the engineering department. Kenneth and his team were convinced that consumers worldwide were ready to use tinfoil that came in pre-cut sheets rather than only on a roll.

Just as the team was preparing to finalize its proposal for the consumer products review board, Kenneth learned that he was getting a new boss, Stan, whose background was in marketing and sales. Stan, Kenneth learned, did not support the concept of pre-cut foil; the company's advertising unit had told Stan that pre-cut foil would be very difficult to advertise, and this opinion had convinced Stan that it was best to not support Kenneth's proposal.

Kenneth neither respected Stan's intelligence nor agreed with his conclusion. Consequently, Kenneth proceeded to submit his team's proposal to the consumer products review board without Stan's approval. Stan became outraged and exerted pressure on the board, which ultimately turned down the proposal. Kenneth then went to Stan's boss, whom he believed was his friend in the organization, and was extremely disappointed to receive no support from him. Following this series of events, Stan began to treat Kenneth in a disrespectful manner; he ignored his suggestions, criticized him in public, and left him out of meetings altogether. Kenneth received a poor performance rating at the year's end and was eventually transferred to a position in human resources.

Kenneth was furious, and he was stunned by the poor treatment he had received. He had believed that his competence, combined with concrete information from consumers, would prevail; instead, it seemed that only politics and opinions mattered. Kenneth was angry that the company to which he had given more than twenty-five years would shun him so readily and derail his career. Kenneth was angry, hurt, and shaken, and his self-confidence deteriorated.

Professional crises such as this can provide opportunities for growth; over the next two years, Kenneth began to really take stock of himself. Although he had initially felt ostracized by having been transferred to human resources, the change actually gave him exposure to the world of feelings and interpersonal relationships. It was also in this new job that he learned about the Enneagram. Kenneth learned how important it was for him as a Five to feel intense feelings of sadness, rejection, hurt, and anger, and he did so for the first time in his life. Although this was new and difficult for him, he began to realize that he was partly responsible for what had happened to him. Over the next few years, he came to understand that as a

Five, he had valued intellectual competence so highly that he had neglected to develop the strong social relationships within the company that might have supported and sustained him during the difficult period with Stan. Kenneth also realized that he had ignored the political context of the situation, assuming that Stan's boss would support him over Stan solely because his idea was a sound one. Kenneth also admitted to himself that going to the consumer products review board with the proposal in the face of Stan's opposition to it had been partly an act of aggression on his part, fueled by his anger at Stan. As a result of this experience, Kenneth learned that he did need other people, and he also learned how to both feel and express his emotions.

A Six's Story



Doubt

Jackie, a Six, had spent most of her adult life pursuing her dream in journalism, but at forty years old, she was still waiting for her big break. She had spent four years as an assistant producer for a radio news show and had then moved to a job in newspaper journalism, where she wrote news copy for news anchors to read on the air. Still, nothing seemed to materialize that offered Jackie a significant and visible journalistic role.

One day a colleague, Eric, called Jackie to inform her about a columnist position in the well-respected newspaper for which he worked. If Jackie could get her resume and news clips ready for submission, he might be able to help her get this job. Jackie secured this prominent position, and over time she not only became the newspaper's most read columnist but also won several national journalistic prizes for her writing.

Seven years into the job, when Jackie was at the height of her abilities and popularity, she discovered that the paper was about to be purchased by a newspaper conglomerate. At first, she assumed that her stature and reputation would assure her a position after the acquisition. However, she learned that the new owner was married to a woman whom Jackie had criticized in a column two years earlier. At the request of a former editor, Jackie had chastised this woman in a column for her dealings with city hall. Although Jackie had agreed that this woman's behavior was questionable, she would not have included the story about her in the column if she had not been trying to please her former boss.

Jackie soon found herself out of a job, with no new prospects in sight. She was unable to relocate for personal reasons, and very few columnist positions existed in her local area. It took Jackie five years to land a comparable job. During those five years, Jackie had more than enough time to feel furious with the new owner, to perceive herself as victimized by the newspaper business, to feel angry with her past editor for asking her to write the story, and, finally, to engage in enough self-reflection to realize that her demise had been caused partly by her own behavior.

Although it took her some time and a great deal of work in being honest with herself, Jackie realized that her responsibility for what had happened was related to her Enneagram style. Sixes usually try to

demonstrate loyalty and support for their bosses, particularly bosses with whom they have rapport. At the time when Jackie's boss requested she include the critique about the woman's behavior, not only did Jackie think that her boss would appreciate Jackie's dedication and allegiance to her, but she was also convinced that her boss would support and defend her in return, if that were necessary. Jackie did agree that the woman's behavior was unacceptable, but it had not been so important to her that she would have done the story without her boss's request.

Jackie also concluded that this negative column -- and most of her other columns -- were focused on abuses of power, fueled by her counterphobic Six tendency to aggressively hunt these down. As oriented toward the safety and protection of authority as many Sixes are, they can also exhibit the counterdependent behavior of going against authority in an unconscious effort to prove themselves courageous and fearless. Jackie realized that this was what she had been doing. There was, of course, nothing inherently wrong with highlighting wrongdoings, which is often the territory of newspaper columnists. However, Jackie, realized that when she reported on misuses or abuses of power, she needed to follow her own internal compass regarding her topics rather than try to appease her boss, and that she needed both to consider the consequences of her actions in advance and to take full responsibility for them.

As she approached her new job, Jackie did so with the awareness that she no longer needed to be beholden to these two internal tendencies -- the need to prove her loyalty and to confront those in authority. Instead, she would simply enjoy writing a local column, using her fine writing talents and keen insights. Some of her stories still focus on wrongdoings, but she approaches these with a greater understanding of why she is doing this, as well as the potential consequences of her actions. She has changed the proportion of columns devoted to wrongdoings; most of her columns now focus on the exemplary behavior of leaders and common citizens. Jackie has learned to follow her own inner direction when she selects stories about abuses of power -- a change of focus that has also helped her to shift her attention from what is going wrong to what is going well.

A Seven's Story



Options

Damon had been a lawyer in the city office for the division of land acquisition for fifteen years, but he had become bored with his work and frustrated by the poor managers above him. During his tenure with the city, he had worked for five different bosses, but none of them seemed to have the intellect, organizational savvy, or management skills needed to run the department. At the age of fifty-two, Damon decided to leave the public sector for a comparable position in a private land-use consulting firm.

Damon was thrilled during his first three months with the new firm. Around the end of that time, however, his boss, Marianne, began to hear informal concerns from members of Damon's staff about his management and leadership skills. Marianne raised the issue of staff discontent in a private meeting with

Damon. At his suggestion, Marianne interviewed each of the eight staff members about the issues and then provided the following feedback to Damon, keeping the names of the respondents confidential.

Positive Qualities	Development Areas
1. Knowledgeable, intelligent, and respected	1. Needs to be calmer, less reactive, less stressed
2. Says exactly what he expects and gives straightforward feedback	2. Needs to get back to people and remember details
3. Has high standards and holds us accountable for them	3. Interpersonal style can be too direct and impatient at times
4. Can pick out what could go wrong and rectify it in short order	4. Needs to accept that people have different communication styles
5. Outgoing, engaging personality	5. Micromanages too much
6. A sincere person with a good heart	6. Needs to be more organized

When Damon read this information, his eyes went directly to the “Development Areas” list, totally bypassing all the feedback under “Positive Qualities.” When Marianne brought this fact to his attention, he scanned the positive qualities but dismissed their importance. He then proceeded to explain why the developmental area items were incorrect. For example, Damon explained why members of his team might have misread his behavior. In addition, he incorrectly attributed some of the items on the second list to particular staff members, and then found some fault with each of these individual’s behavior in an effort to disqualify the accuracy of the item.

Marianne knew that Damon was a Seven on the Enneagram, and she understood his gifts in thinking and communicating. She also realized that Damon needed to develop a more organized leadership style and to increase his empathy, particularly where his behavior impacted his subordinates and peers. She discussed these areas with Damon, but he dismissed her comments by saying that he was organized, and that there was something wrong with his staff because they didn’t have enough self-confidence to not take the things he said so personally.

Although Damon did not explicitly tell Marianne that he was upset by the feedback, he was so worried that he moved to action quickly. Within one week, Damon had conducted a reorganization without staff input. However, because Damon reorganized the wrong things, the situation only got worse. In terms of empathy, Damon’s only change was to give more compliments to the staff while he continued to micromanage their work. Damon was exhausted from his efforts, yet he was failing at his job. When Marianne put him on disciplinary action, he felt bewildered and had no idea what to do next.

Working with an executive coach who taught him the Enneagram, Damon began to realize that certain skills that had served him to some degree in the past were not serving him well in the present. As he said to Marianne, “These same issues have been haunting me for years. Before, I’ve always left jobs or gotten new

bosses, but I realize that these issues will follow me wherever I go. I know I need to deal with myself and do it now."

With the help of his coach, Damon recognized that he must learn how to focus in every aspect of his life. He had to be able to sustain his focus in the following areas:

- ❑ Setting project goals, deliverables, and timetables and monitoring these consistently
- ❑ Knowing and keeping in mind his employees' long-term needs, and acknowledging that these needs might not be the same as his own
- ❑ Understanding that engaging in enjoyable conversations with staff members was not the same thing as managing the staff
- ❑ Sticking to one subject at a time in his conversation
- ❑ Writing down his schedule and keeping appointments

In addition, Damon had to stop juggling his calendar – for example, double or triple booking himself, and arriving late for meetings.

By learning to focus and then applying this ability to every aspect of his job, Damon became one of the best managers in the firm. His new ability to concentrate enabled him to develop a richer emotional life, benefiting his nonwork life as well.

An Eight's Story



Challenge

Sharon had worked hard for twenty years as a medical researcher. When she decided to parlay her research skills and techniques into the creation of a medical research center, Sharon knew that she would encounter difficulties finding a staff that could match both her pace and her high work standards. She started the center in her own home, working from the dining-room table and employing only one person, a half-time clerical worker. In the second year of operations the center had moved to a large office space with ten employees; by the third year, the staff had grown to twenty-five. Although Sharon had weathered heavy employee turnover in these first few years, by the fifth year the center staff had grown to forty-five in number, and the center was earning a reputation for being the best in its class.

Despite the success of her venture, Sharon could not rid herself of one nagging concern. Although she knew that most people viewed her as highly intelligent, hardworking and as providing strong leadership, Sharon felt anxious because she thought she was intimidating to people. She believed that this had been the reason for much of the early staff turnover; during exit interviews, several departing employees had told the interviewers that they had found Sharon to be intimidating -- for example, they commented that Sharon raised her voice to employees if she did not think that their work style or work product met her standards. They also noted that if Sharon developed a negative opinion about an employee, it seemed that she rarely

changed her mind. In addition to the exit interview information, Sharon had learned that some employees were afraid of her from a few staff members who had mustered the courage to talk to her about their concerns.

The idea that she was too strong, overbearing, and intimidating had haunted Sharon since high school and had followed her into both her career and her marriage. Although she did not consciously try to intimidate others, Sharon knew she often had that effect on people at work. Her husband and children also perceived her as being “too much” at times; they tried to minimize interactions with her when she appeared stressed or tired, and they avoided her completely when she seemed agitated or angry.

As a result of the negative feedback she had been receiving that she led (at least partially) by intimidation -- coupled with the fact that she had never before managed any organization, much less one that was growing as quickly as hers -- Sharon decided to take a weeklong course at a local university on leadership and organizational change. On the next to last day of the course, the instructor used the Enneagram to help the participants understand their leadership styles. As she was among professionally accomplished peers whom she respected, Sharon decided to ask the others the following: *As a leader, I worry that I lead by intimidating people when what I really want to do is to encourage and motivate people. I have no idea what it is about me that is intimidating. Please be honest with me. Do I intimidate you?* Sharon expected the answer to be *No*, and she was stunned when each person, including the instructor, acknowledged having felt intimidated by her at some time during the preceding days of the course.

Each person told Sharon what in her behavior had caused him or her to feel intimidated. Among the reasons given were Sharon’s quickness of mind at grasping complex strategic issues, her lack of questions to others, her fast rate of speech, and her ability to move quickly from ideas to action. Sharon’s fellow participants also admitted that their responses to her said as much, if not more, about them as it did about Sharon -- for example, their concerns about their own intellectual capacity or their ability to process information quickly. They also noted that their occasional feelings of being intimidated by Sharon did not mean that they disliked her, and all expressed a great deal of appreciation and respect for her.

Sharon was so affected by this honest feedback that she decided to use the information to help her with her interactions both at work and at home. She made a concerted effort to ask questions of others, and she perfected this into an art form. She also worked on slowing down her rate of speech and began asking others for their ideas about what actions to take rather than volunteering her own ideas first. Sharon also made a commitment to get more rest, as well as to exercise regularly as a way to release some of the excess energy she always felt in her body. These changes made a dramatic and positive difference not only in her leadership skills and the employee turnover rate in her company, but also in her relationships with family members.

A Nine's Story



Harmony

Bruce, forty-two, had worked in procurement for the federal government for nearly twenty years before leaving his job. During that time he had risen through the ranks, moving from being an individual contributor to a supervisor and, finally, to a project manager. Bruce was now a participant in an intensive weeklong course on the topic of organizational change. In introducing himself to the fifteen other participants, Bruce said that he had recently left his government position and was taking this course to help him decide what he might want to do next professionally. Many of the other participants wondered why Bruce would leave government work at such an early age, but no one knew him well enough yet to ask him.

Throughout the course, Bruce appeared to others to be comfortable and relaxed, while at the same time solid and authoritative. During the course, the instructor taught the Enneagram as a way to help participants both to increase their understanding of themselves and to improve their interpersonal effectiveness as change agents. Although the majority of participants easily identified their Enneagram styles during the four-hour introduction to the system, Bruce was not certain of his style, alternating between styles Three, Six, and Nine. The instructor was also uncertain about Bruce's style. Although Bruce possessed the affability and calm most often seen in Nines, he clearly had no difficulty at all stating his opinions or positions very clearly. In addition, he did not appear to avoid conflict; in fact, he seemed to welcome conflict as a way to get issues on the table. This was true whether he or someone else expressed the anger in an intense and passionate way.

The instructor subsequently conducted a private Enneagram typing interview with Bruce, asking him a variety of questions that usually illuminate a person's style. Through this process, both concluded that Bruce was, indeed, a Nine. However, the instructor was perplexed because Bruce, unlike most Nines, seemed at ease with expressing controversial opinions and participating in heated conflicts. When she asked Bruce if he could explain this discrepancy to her, he told the following story:

Until about four years ago, everything was going along fine in my civil servant job -- I enjoyed the work, made very few waves, got along with everyone, received good performance reviews, and planned to keep working in the same job until retirement. Then I discovered some serious unethical purchasing practices in my department. These involved large sums of money, and the theft was pervasive among some of the managers. At the time, I didn't know what to do. I was probably the last person who would turn anyone in, but my conscience bothered me too much. I couldn't sleep or eat, so with my wife's support, I decided to blow the whistle and go to the authorities. It was the hardest time of my life, but I stayed with it, and I came out a changed person.

I'm not allowed to tell you any more details, but they let me take early retirement, and they paid for this course as part of my departure agreement. What started out as the worst time in my life has turned out to be the best.

Bruce's story provides an excellent example of how people can change dramatically when they are confronted and rise to the challenge of facing their biggest fears.

Conclusion

Various situations present us with the opportunity for development and change. Sometimes we learn from rising to the challenge posed by a painful experience; at other times, we develop through joyful situations, such as falling in love or having a child. We may also grow through an evolutionary awareness or from a commonplace encounter. It is often difficult to see the seeds of opportunity when we are in the midst of a trying situation. During those times, the following thought -- from "Buddha's Little Instruction Book" by Jack Kornfield -- can be helpful:

Imagine that every person in the world is enlightened but you. They are all your teachers, each one doing just the right thing to teach you perfect wisdom, perfect patience, and perfect compassion.

Our opportunities for growth are abundant. The question is whether we can see them when they occur and then take full advantage of them.

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