



Spirituality in the Workplace

By Ginger Lapid-Bogda, Ph.D.

The most frequently asked question about spirituality in the workplace is this: *How can the Enneagram be used to bring spirituality into organizations?* This answer begins with a caveat -- *Beware (or be aware) of dualistic thinking.*

Dualistic thinking involves the division of something whole into separate parts. The question above -- *How can the Enneagram be used to bring spirituality into organizations?* -- reflects an implicit assumption that spirituality is not already present in organizations. A non-dualistic way of asking the same question is: *How can we use the Enneagram to elicit the spirituality that is already in the workplace?*

Non-dualism in thinking, language, and behavior is important because it reflects a more comprehensive and holistic view of reality. Holism also creates fewer obstacles to success; if something is already present, it is far easier to elicit and augment it than it is to start from scratch. Imagine the difficulty of teaching someone empathy if the assumption was that he or she had absolutely no feelings or compassion for others.

Non-dualism also changes how we approach spirituality in the workplace. Instead of pushing the rock uphill like Sisyphus, only to find the force of gravity undoing our efforts, a holistic perspective allows us to approach spirituality in the workplace like the gardener who tends both the seeds that have already sprouted and those that lie dormant, waiting for water.

From this holistic perspective, the Enneagram is a remarkable tool for implicitly and explicitly eliciting spirituality in the workplace. The implicit ways became clear when I was writing *Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work: How to Use the Enneagram System for Success*. While writing the business application chapters -- communication, feedback, conflict, teams, and leadership -- and delving into detail about the precise patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior of the nine Enneagram styles, four words emerged as implicit themes throughout the book: *attention, awareness, presence, and acceptance.*

Implicit Spirituality – *It Happens Naturally*

These four qualities -- *attention, awareness, presence, and acceptance* -- are all outgrowths of using the Enneagram to increase personal and social competence at work. All four traits also transport people into the spiritual arena.

Attention When individuals use the Enneagram as a frame of reference for observing themselves and other people, they must pay close attention to the details and nuances of human behavior that they may have never noticed before. For example, when people learn to communicate more effectively, they must examine their tone of voice, the language they use, the nonverbal gestures they exhibit (and those they don't), the blind spots that detract from their ability to communicate effectively, and the ways they unconsciously distort what they hear. This attention to the obvious and subtle patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior are essential before a person can change how they communicate.

Awareness Individuals who want to manage conflict more effectively must also allow themselves to become more aware of what they are thinking, how they are thinking about events, and the pattern of their thinking when they feel agitated. This newfound level of awareness must also be demonstrated in the arenas of feeling and behavior. For example, in order to deal with anger in a constructive way, Ones need to become more aware of the sources of their deep-seated fury, and Nines need to become conscious more quickly that they actually feel hostility toward someone else. Eights have to become more aware that they do, at times, try to intimidate others, while Fives need to be more aware of and willing to express their feelings in conflict situations.

Presence When individuals pay close attention to themselves and those around them *and* simultaneously allow themselves to be more fully aware of their own thought processes and patterns of feelings and behaviors, they become more fully present. Presence, both to oneself and others, is the territory of spirituality. When the Enneagram helps people become more fully present, spirituality does not need to be explicitly taught. People increase their spiritual capacity in an effortless way because they have just had a direct experience with it.

Acceptance When people learn the Enneagram system and work with it over a period of time, they understand these principles: (1) everyone is different; (2) neither they nor anyone else is necessarily crazy or flawed; (3) Enneagram style imperfections and strengths are part of the human condition; and (4) it is a major challenge to change Enneagram style-based patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving and each Enneagram style has a different but equally difficult challenge. All four principles

foster acceptance and compassion for oneself and others. Genuine acceptance and true compassion are certainly among the most important spiritual qualities.

Explicit Spirituality – *The Importance of Language*

The connection between spirituality and the Enneagram can also be made explicit in organizational work, but language is critically important. While most organizations shy away from mixing religion with work, they do want their employees to feel inspired and find meaning in what they do. Thus, framing the Enneagram as working with meaning and the deeper connections that people feel to themselves, others, and work is often more effective than using the word *spirituality*.

The Special Sensitivities of the Enneagram Styles

Language is also important when presenting the spiritual words associated with the Enneagram styles -- the Holy Ideas and Virtues. While these words sound too overtly religious for many organizations, the notion that each Enneagram style has a special sensitivity -- and that the personality is organized in relation to this sensitivity -- tends to produce greater acceptance among people learning the Enneagram system in the workplace.

I have been working for several years to find a language that describes the sensitivities of the nine Enneagram; I use this language (shown below) to clarify how the personality is an attempt to replicate the special sensibility of the Enneagram style. Many people are receptive to the idea of these special sensitivities within the first few hours of learning about the Enneagram at work, while others may be more responsive to these ideas after they have learned the system in greater depth and understand the system more fully.

The Special Sensitivities of the Nine Enneagram Styles

The One Sensitivity: There *is* an intrinsic perfection in all things.

The Two Sensitivity: There *is* a profound purpose to all that occurs.

The Three Sensitivity: There *is* a natural flow and order to everything.

The Four Sensitivity: Everyone and everything *is* connected at the deepest levels.

The Five Sensitivity: There *is* true knowledge and wisdom.

The Six Sensitivity: There *is* meaning and support in the world.

The Seven Sensitivity: There *is* a bigger plan for everything.

The Eight Sensitivity: There *is* a universal truth.

The Nine Sensitivity: Unconditional regard *is* connecting everyone and everything.

The special sensitivities of the nine styles can also be used as either daily affirmations or as a form of self-talk; individuals can use these style-based statements when they are in the throes of their Enneagram-based patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. For example, in moments of doubt and

anxiety, Sixes can find great reassurance by saying these words multiple times: “There *is* meaning and support in the world” (*implication: I don’t have to keep looking for it everywhere*). Threes in a hyper-work mode can repeat this themselves: “There *is* a natural flow and order to everything” (*implication: the world is not solely dependent on me to achieve results*).

Transformations of the Head and Heart


The Enneagram style transformations of the head and heart -- from Fixation to Holy Idea and from Vice or Passion to Virtue -- are directly related to these style based sensitivities. Although the transformations of the head and heart are spiritual in origin, they can be readily accepted and used by people in organizations. The language used to describe these transformations, however, is critical to whether or not these transformations are rejected as too religious in nature or readily accepted as part of organizational work with the Enneagram.

The classic Enneagram teaching uses the word *Fixation* for the individual’s less developed mental state and *Holy Idea* for the transformed mental state. Similarly, the words *Vice* or *Passion* refer to a person’s less developed emotional state and *Virtue* to the transformed emotional state. In many organizations, these words carry a religious connotation and, therefore, are likely to generate some resistance. However, when the word *Fixation* is changed to *mental pattern* and *Holy Idea* becomes *higher belief*, receptivity to these ideas increases. Similarly, the words *Vice* or *Passion* can be changed to *emotional habit* and the word *Virtue* can be shifted to *higher awareness*.

In addition to the language issues mentioned above, many of the words that are used for the less developed and the transformed states of each Enneagram style are ambiguous. This ambiguity even confuses individuals who have been studying the Enneagram for many years. However, when the meaning of these words is clarified, the transformative words become easy to understand and to use for personal, professional, and spiritual development.

For example, the Nine’s mental Fixation, *indolence*, and the corresponding Holy Idea, *love*, can be confusing because *indolence* sounds body-based and *love* is a word commonly associated with the heart. Similarly, the Nine’s emotional Vice, *laziness*, and the transformed emotional Virtue, *right action*, sound as if they lie in the physical arena rather than in the area of the heart.


However, these words can be translated into language that is easier to understand and use. The following mental transformation for Nines illustrates this translation:

Transforming the mental pattern of  **into the higher belief of**

indolence (the process of mentally diffusing your attention so that you forget what is important to you and also refrain from stating your opinions and positions, thereby minimizing your conflict with other people)

love (the belief that there is an underlying universal harmony in the world based on unconditional regard and appreciation for one another)

The translation for the Nine's emotional transformation is shown in the example below:

Transforming the emotional habit of  **into the higher awareness of**

laziness (lethargy in paying attention to your own feelings and needs, thus disabling you from taking the action you most desire)

right action (the state of feeling fully present to yourself and others so that you know exactly what action you must take)

Translating the mental and emotional transformations of the eight other Enneagram styles -- framed in language that is easy to grasp on first exposure -- helps people who want to know themselves more deeply so they can use the Enneagram for their personal and professional development.

Final Comments

The consultant, trainer, coach, manager, or employee using the Enneagram to elicit spirituality in the workplace faces three initial challenges:

- (1) To approach spirituality in the workplace from a holistic rather than a dualistic perspective
- (2) To teach and use the Enneagram in such a way that the spirituality inherent in both the workplace and the Enneagram emerges naturally
- (3) To translate the language of Enneagram so that it both fits the culture of organizations and is easier to understand

The final test for consultants, trainers, coaches, managers, or employees is far greater -- to embody psycho-spiritual awareness and transformation themselves. There is an adage that says, "Those that can't do, teach." If we want to use the Enneagram to elicit and nurture spirituality in the workplace, we must do before we can teach.

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