

The Long and the Long of It Inside and Out the Practical Enneagram

by Lyle Rumpel
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“Droopy tulips are Enneagram type Three”.

So my friend concluded about her purchase from the corner florist this past Spring, after the red petals (curiously, not the stems) had flopped, then cooled and reformed their cups by the next morning. I had her comment in mind later when Penny Whillans suggested that I might like to write an article about the Enneagram and its possible applications. If in horticulture, why not other unexplored fields – like tulips in drawing, painting, and photography, all from the perspective of their Threeshness?

My initial exposure to the Enneagram has felt like a personal search for belonging, and to attempt to consider its other applications feels like a speeding up of Mr. Yeats' gyre. The focus spins outward as well as vertically – downward in layered weights at times, and, when our stars begin to align, upward in aliveness, spaciousness, and clarity.

The attraction that we seem to find in discovering our orientations in Enneagram terms is perhaps very fundamentally located in our desire for a home that provides a sense of where we fit in relation to others – where we differ, and ultimately what we share on the most essential terms. If I, and we, are honest and steadfast with our curiosity, and reflective, must we not inevitably, in considering the form of our personality, and its complex of associated movements and orientations, also become aware of our higher and wider vantage point – our home of Being?

Looking at ourselves through the understanding of the Enneagram guides us on route in this process of awareness. Also seemingly true, although more subtle, is that the developing of this awareness helps us more intuitively know the stages that our personal development requires. Awareness itself guides us. We follow the paths, but they require a direction.

hazy moon eclipse
the computer screen
darkens

(Five)

Some of the enneagrams' applications in relation to personal growth may seem intrinsically the most obvious. But understanding and using the Enneagram inevitably means interpersonally as well as personally: the map (or, say, “star chart”) of movement among and within different types creates an appreciation of and interrelating among all types, which is as life-giving as relating to the earth through tulips.

hazy moon
 through the hospice window
 shadows on her face (Two)

In theatre and film, performers and novelists reflect our fascination with and our love of our varied expressions of humanness. Personality systems like the Enneagram can provide a chart for those who act and create and for those who reflect on these entertainments and expressions of ourselves.

If a novelist can use the Enneagram to develop new possible protagonists, so may a poet who considers his or her own personality's perspective and how that may limit or enhance writing. I've enjoyed playing throughout this text with the haiku subject of "hazy moon" (I've used "desk haiku" taking liberties with the lack of spontaneity of the moment, and incorporated the actual hazy moon that appeared as I was considering what the common subject of these haiku would be). I've attempted to write about the same subject from the perspective of the nine Enneagram types, and then reread them to feel the different experience they convey.

avoiding the party
 deep in the garden
 a hazy moon (Four)

In the same manner an artist might play and experiment with the Enneagram typology to reach the essence of the person who is to be represented in paint. Is it better to represent a type Four in deep blues and mauves? Perhaps in watercolour. An Eight in reds? And standing by the mantel rather than sitting?

A wood carver from the west coast recently commented to me how a request for a cedar panel from some customers might be too general. He told me that he would interview these people to determine more of their character and in that way decide whether the subject matter of the work would better suit a particular patron's home (would an owl be better than a wild woman figure?). So also might a dancer or choreographer interpreting the demeanor of a ballet, and its characters, or an emotion in modern expressionist dance, use the Enneagram chart as a guide of the rich range of form's expression as points manifesting our world of space.

In a personal counseling or self-inquiry context, or for any health professional, coach, spiritual advisor, or teacher, trying to understand and help a patient, client, parishioner, or student, having some general chart of the location of personality, or at least a compass, might help the journey toward seeing more of the overall available terrain, would likely facilitate diagnosis, self or otherwise, as well as prescription and self-development. If I discover some Seven tendencies in myself, wow, the other charted pathways available, up, down, and sideways in different circumstances, and in relation to different qualities of myself, can seem like possibilities of adventure and freedom. With of course, daunting and narrow passes sometimes looming. Then arrived; then navigated.

before the new job
 hazy moon
 rises for an early start (Seven)

A logical extension of this potential for individuals' expansion is better understanding interpersonal communications, whether in relation to romances and friendships, or in an organizational human relations context of employee hiring, counseling, training, feedback, evaluations, conflict resolutions, or team projects.

Do the employment ads you read or publish invite personalities to apply? It may be difficult to find much about personality in some employment advertisements or in the hiring process. Does something seem amiss when what you are asking for is people but you don't invite personality? Does the job ad appear to be more interested in finding someone simply to plug into the operations? For a willing employer (and this is fundamental) looking not simply to fill an opening but to adapt and grow, the Enneagram might provide wider (and higher) perspective, a perspective enhancing the fine-tuning of what type of person may be wanted or may best help an organization. It could help add balance to the range of skills in the organization, both horizontally and vertically, inclusively and creatively growing an organization's self-perception and ability to undertake new challenges. It is not a question of taking a chance or whether an organization loses something if an employee does not fit a strict company profile. The world is bigger than this, and revolving.

If I'm a socially concerned One employee, my employer may want better to co-ordinate and utilize that energy in relation to the company's mission, its efficiently functioning Six production, as well as to my Five colleague's research, or Three goals. I and the company might scale the cliff together.

mining town
 hazy moon in the eyes
 of the late shift (One)

And a company might want its research, marketing, and sales personnel in on Enneagram training. Consider though, that, whatever its initial purposes, the company may find that it develops even more of a perspective of social conscience by applying the Enneagram. The Enneagram does not discriminate; its underlying vision is one of inclusion of all perspectives rather than imposing one. Rather than a manipulative marketing tool, the Enneagram is about appreciating and accepting differences, and at the highest level of the personality types it is about the common thread of human spirit, its ultimate common goal.

An organization may want to make available some resources for managers to take a course in executive coaching, and executive coaching educators may want to include the Enneagram in their courses.

hazy moon
 in their relationship
 he picks up the pace (Three)

A classroom of developing children probably presents a ready collection of many of the possible Enneagram types, and a teacher who understands them could give much encouragement and direction, tailored to each student's current level and directional growth.

band shell in the trees
 a hazy moon
 between performers (Nine)

Conflict resolution and mediation could well consider the benefits of the use of the Enneagram. Examples might be within the practice of law, or any context in which having knowledge of people's ways is important – as in jury selections; a judge hearing from different lawyers and facing different accused; negotiation between states. I suspect that public speakers and political campaigners could appreciate being versed about the types people they will meet, and the ways they are likely to express their opinions.

acceptance speech
 he points beyond
 the hazy moon (Eight)

Enhanced performance is a common goal of sports, and conceivably of a sports psychologist who understands the possibilities and not-so-possibilities, and the side-tracking, of a competitor's Sevenness. A coach who recognizes the Eight, Four, or Six personality not only of individuals but of entire teams, might well be able to use that to advantage by design of plays using those traits, for example utilizing the Eight player when a team needs some energy, or developing a strong defensive team around its Six nature.

under a hazy moon
 under the snow
 the dog team running (Six)

In practical terms, what does knowledge and use of the Enneagram provide? Aside from direct applications like those above, it points to the possibility of increased awareness of ourselves and our differences interpersonally, including in a larger context of interactions globally. It identifies clusters of personality orientations, and how we move among and beyond them. As constellations on the star chart Enneagram types guide the growth of what we are essentially, and point us beyond when we consider and reflect truthfully on all aspects of our inner nature and experience. Then we better view the galaxy of our life from a higher and wider space – a space we move toward inevitably, it seems.

winter barn dance
the stars still
swinging

Lyle Rumpel considers himself very fortunate to write from an eastern window over the garden, at the end of a short street of chestnut trees leading to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. He is uncertain of his Enneagram type proclivity, although he feels closer to discovery than during his past endeavours related to the practice of law. He is a student of the Diamond Approach. He does a lot of contra and English Country dancing, but especially enjoys waltzing.