

Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

No Moveable Types, by Clarence Thomson

Early Enneagram students talk in ways that indicate they don't understand two things. When they speak about "going" from Eight to Two or "moving" from 7w8 to 3w4 they don't seem to realize it's not possible to consciously "move" from one style to another. There is unanimous agreement among veteran Enneagram teachers and coaches that one never changes one's Enneagram style.

There are solid reasons for thinking we never change our style, besides observing that it doesn't happen. An Enneagram style is a basic focus of attention, which is not just directional – like pointing a camera – but is a hunger. "This is what I need to survive and flourish." My dog pays Enneagram-style attention when I grill hamburgers.

With this focus goes energy. The lethargy of a bored teen-age girl becomes the sparkle of a summer sky when her favorite male calls. We all talk energy. "Are you up for lunch?" is not about time but about energy and will.

Each style has bodily energy, speaking styles, long-term life patterns, and unconscious motivations rooted in a model of the universe. You don't just change all those things by conscious decision and you seldom do it alone. Like a fish oblivious to water, we assume we see things "just as they are."

Let's take a vivid public example. Newsweek magazine put Michelle Bachmann's picture on its cover. Her fans saw something they didn't like: she looked, in their term, "crazy." Well, we're all a little crazy in one way or another, but Enneagram students know that as we describe our craziness, we can identify a pattern of decay. In Michelle Bachmann's case, she is a counterphobic Six. Newsweek caught the glint of terror in her "deer in the headlights" expression, but they attributed it to the rage of the Tea Party. The Tea Party and sponsors saw it because it was so close up and didn't like what they saw. But it isn't rage, it's fear. Bachmann is doing what Sixes do – she's making home movies in her head of how awful things are getting and those movies frighten her. She has a terror problem only Enneagram students know about.



Then after you see the riveting picture, you look for the other signs of a Six. She is utterly faithful to the creed of the Tea Party. Sixes are loyal to whatever cause they espouse and she has the best record for doctrinal purity. A basic fear of style Six is fear of deviance from the group. Bachmann doesn't deviate.

In her model of the universe, someone else is always the evil one. The books call it by its technical name – projection. She focuses on the evil of the president. Her mantra is that Obama must be one term.

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No Moveable Types (continued)

She has charm and charisma – Sixes often combine a confusing mixture of pleasant personality and gloomy future predictions. Smiling Jon Stewart laughs all night as he ridicules one public figure after another. The smile and charm are to assure the rest of us that Sixes are nice and we should be nice in return. Bachmann's strong attacks on Obama are the energy of the Counterphobic Six attacking what she fears.

Sixes, even though they are at the center of the head types, have a specific problem with information. They sort (they filter) for what is missing, for the meaning, intent and missing information that they are sure is there. This can lead them miss what is actually said.

Bachmann has said that all of congress should be investigated to find out who harbors “anti-American” ideas. When you want everyone in congress investigated, you are looking for what you're sure is there; it's just that we haven't discovered it yet.

She is extremely loyal to her model of the United States. In her model, we are the greatest nation in the world. So she says the founding fathers all condemned slavery because that's what would have been ideal. Her facts are wrong. When we are in the grip of our style, facts get systematically filtered, ignored, exaggerated, rationalized and otherwise rendered irrelevant. Several commentators pointed out that her followers will not be at all upset that she got her history dramatically wrong. Silly facts – no match for an Enneagram style.



Only when you see the expression, you know the background (she has an ultra-conservative evangelical background), you notice the language, you notice the slippage between fact and imagination, you know the context (Tea Party fidelity) can you decide what her Enneagram style is.

Can you imagine her deciding to be a Two or a Four? Look at how many things coalesce in her Six style. Nobody can take the habits, the hardwired neurological patterns, the multiple decisions over a lifetime and decide they are going to “go” to another number. The only exception is that a style with a strong connection to its connecting points will have some of that energy when they need it.

Our Enneagram style is our deepest orientation at times and we trivialize it if we think it can be shifted or silenced consciously. Most often we can't even modify it much by ourselves unless we work long and hard – and wisely.

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