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Interview with Thomas Condon, Part 1

About NLP, changework, good therapy and the Enneagram

By Andrea Isaacs and Jack Labanauskas

Enneagram Monthly: Could you tell us something about your background? How did you come to be involved with the Enneagram?

Tom Condon: I had a lot to do with NLP [neuro-linguistic programming] and Ericksonian hypnosis. I was living in Berkeley, California and came across the Enneagram there, about twenty years ago. Before I actually met Enneagram teachers, I learned about it through therapist friends of mine. There was also a big pile of notes from seminars that were circulating. The notes were typed responses of people who had gone to different people's Enneagram classes.

EM: Since you were working with hypnosis and NLP at the time, it must have been a natural thing for you to integrate the Enneagram into what you were already doing.

TC: Yes. The two subjects almost represented different sides of my own brain. NLP was all about solutions, offering a behavioristic way of working with psychological problems. NLP identifies patterns and then works with the structure of those patterns-altering subjective experience by altering its structure. It's a process-oriented approach to change, heavy on technique but light on diagnosis.

The Enneagram is the opposite-a superb diagnostic tool that lacks much in the way of method for getting over the dilemmas it describes. The Enneagram offers deep diagnosis, and lots of content to identify with, but it's not a method, properly speaking. This is why just knowing about your Enneagram style is often not enough.

Looking more closely at the two systems I realized they had a lot to offer each other. When I applied NLP distinctions to Enneagram styles, I recognized that each style was driven by a pattern, a central, repetitive strategy that is unconsciously repeated many times a day. NLP techniques of change could be customized to modify the pattern of each Enneagram style.

EM: So the Enneagram added a structure or direction to the work you were doing with NLP and hypnosis.

TC: What NLP lacked was a recognition of the depth of people. Like most things, NLP's strength is also its weakness. Its strength is that it lets you look at human behavior out of context, once removed, as a pattern. Subjective content is something you try to stay out of; you empathize with the person, but only as much as you need to in order to help him or her change. The Enneagram adds a deep background to the surface behavior.

EM: Is NLP considered to be part of mainstream psychology, or is it still considered to be a "fringe" element?

TC: It's a little of both. Chunks of NLP have been embraced by mainstream psychology while other parts have been refused. Some therapists who say they don't like NLP will sheepishly confess that they use it in their private practice.

It also has a mixed reputation, because some of its distinctions and techniques are explicitly applied to things like selling used cars to people who don't need them. There is an amoral, opportunistic quality to the way its sometimes taught.

EM: How would you define NLP?

TC: It's a set of distinctions and techniques for altering the structure of subjective experience. It was created in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. It's based in linguistics, psychology and communication and has had extensive applications in business, education, health, as well as in therapeutic changework.

NLP is based upon the premise that experience has structure, and that by altering the structure, you can change the experience. It helps you analyze how you create your subjective experience through your senses. At any given moment, your internal experience has a visual component-what you see outside of you or in your mind's eye; an auditory component-hearing the sounds in your environment or listening to internal voices; and a kinesthetic component-your emotions and body feelings. As you experience the world through your five senses, you filter the information and then act on it.

In broad strokes, NLP helps you recognize your primary sensory bias-whether you are generally visual or auditory or kinesthetic, or favor a combination of those primary senses. Once you've determined your sensory bias, there are recommended techniques to broaden your experience of your other senses.

NLP also holds that all subjective experience has a sensory structure, an inner architecture. Anything we do habitually follows a sequence of internal sensory steps called a strategy. Strategies are like recipes the unconscious uses to get outcomes.

For instance, the guys who created NLP interviewed a number of spellers. They found that children who win spelling bees share a similar strategy in that they are almost always visual spellers. They see an image of the word they are spelling in their mind's eye and usually have it filed in their memory banks. When asked to spell a word, they flip through their mental visual files until they come to the word.

When they have the right word, they get a good feeling in the middle of their chest. If you ask them, how they knew that word was right, they say, "I don't know, I just felt it."

If the spellers don't have the word in their memory banks or they find the word but it's misspelled, they'll get an uncomfortable feeling in the middle of their chest. Good spellers may sometimes spell phonetically-sounding words out-but usually as a back-up system to visual spelling.

EM: It's interesting that this was developed from spelling.

TC: Spelling is just one skill. There are reading strategies, strategies for driving a car, getting out of bed in the morning, all kinds of things. A set of repetitive steps will underpin any well-practiced unconscious behavior. Bandler and Grinder figured out what the best spelling strategy was, and what the worst spelling strategy was. Then they taught the good spelling strategy to the bad spellers and their spelling improved, sometimes dramatically.

Knowing NLP and the Enneagram, I began to wonder, "What if there is a central strategy driving each Enneagram style? What if an Three was always doing the same thing when she was seeing things Threeishly, or responding in an overly Threeish way that was problematic for her. What if there was a set of steps that could be altered?" That led to quite a bit of exploration and discovery. Each Enneagram trance turned out to be supported by a consistent sensory strategy.

EM: Give us an example of how you work with that.

TC: In workshops, I'll sometimes ask people to get into small groups and describe the last three times they responded problematically out of their Enneagram style. The task then is to figure out what all three stories have in common. Is there a sequence? What is the first step? How were you feeling right before you had the Enneagram reaction? Almost always, people come back and say, "It's the damnedest thing. Each time, this happened first, and then this happened, and then this happened." There is always a sequence.

For example: let's say I'm a One sent to a seminar by my employer. The class is required for my job but the subject is math, something I've never been good at. As a One I'm sometimes perfectionistic but in this situation I'm especially anxious about my performance. To manage my anxiety and find a sense of control, I begin to judge.

Entering the classroom, I start looking for what's out of place. First I notice that some of the chairs are disarrayed. Next my eyes go to the casual dress of some class partici-

pants; a few are wearing jeans and sandals, others look more formal and have higher quality shoes. This is a visual step.

Meanwhile, I start talking to myself, finding fault in the situation: "What's going on here? The chairs are out of order. What is the correct dress code? And why are there empty coffee cups strewn on the back table? Why is no one here to greet us? Who is in charge? What sloppy organization! These people couldn't know much about math!" This is an auditory step.

As I judge, I talk to myself in an angry tone of voice. I tighten my stomach muscles, hunch my shoulders and narrow my vision to see only what's wrong. I feel physically rigid and tense but also in control. Though this inner state isn't pleasant, it feels more powerful than being anxious about my math skills. Through the strategy of judgment I arrive at a feeling of neurotic power and soothe my own insecurity, having displaced my own nervousness about myself off onto the situation. This is a kinesthetic step.

Each time I respond to life in a Oneish way, there will be a similar sequence to it, just like a spelling strategy. Since there are dysfunctional spelling strategies and effective spelling strategies, one approach to working with someone's Enneagram strategy is to contrast what he's like when he's at his worst with what he's like when he's at his best - to get him to experience the difference. Then you can work with the structure of that difference.

You might also want to know, "How did you produce the sense of insecurity in yourself in the first place?" That has its own strategy as well. How'd you get so nervous before you ever got to the class?

EM: So you may have an extremely effective strategy in play that really works, and is used over and over because it works.

TC: That's right-it's just overused. We believe in our defenses, in what used to work. When they stop working in the present, that's when we go to therapists or start working on ourselves in some meaningful way.

The other thing that NLP offers the Enneagram is techniques that are eminently customizable to the dilemmas of Enneagram styles. Following their success with spelling strategies, the guys who created NLP wondered if good therapists also had something in common the way good spellers did. They studied the behavior of several master therapists who had vastly different styles but who all got results. These included Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, hypnotherapist Milton Erickson and Virginia Satir, the mother of family therapy. Bandler and Grinder then tried to figure out what these different therapists had in common. From that effort they extracted techniques that were common to them all, techniques that appear and re-appear in all kinds of therapies.

EM: What are some of these techniques?

TC: The actual techniques would take hours to explain. In general, though, they establish rapport quickly and deeply, gather high quality information about the client's problem and evoke the client's strengths. They use their voices and nonverbal behavior in consistent, impactful ways. To varying degrees, they encourage and foster emotional release. They reframe (changing the meaning of limitations), focus on goals and solutions, and help clients use their present resources to alter their memories of the past. They work with unconscious intentions, body physiology and self-images. They give homework assignments.

EM: I've seen, in your workshops, how you do "changework" with a client. I knew you were using your knowledge of both the Enneagram and NLP in the interaction, but I wished I could have known when you were shifting gears. Can you describe that process for us?

TC: It's always driven by the person and the nature of her problem. It's sometimes informed by my knowledge of the deep pattern of her Enneagram style-the way her foreground presenting problem occurs against the background of her deeper Enneagram pattern. A lot also depends on the person's motivation to work, how urgently she wants to change. Usually people want to change because they are overreacting or limiting themselves and they want new choices. You work according to what a person wants.

EM: Let's say someone is prone to violent outbursts, but wants to change.

TC: Someone prone to violence will have a certain structure to his inner life, especially when he has the reaction that leads to physically striking out. There is a reliable sequence that he unconsciously cycles through each time he starts to get violent. For example, he would see his spouse a certain way and hear the spouse's voice in a way that would lead to the violent reaction.

EM: This reminds me of someone I used to know who was prone to furious explosions of temper. He was a teacher who, for example, might blow up at a student wearing red fingernail polish, and throw her out of his class. He eventually learned to recognize when a blow-up was looming, and how to avoid giving in to it.

TC: That would be one level of approach-strict pattern interruption. It sounds like it certainly helped him, and it does help a lot of people. But sometimes pattern interruption isn't enough.

Another level of working with this person would be to get him to discover how he internally creates the problem reaction. I'd have him mentally and emotionally run through the last time he blew up at somebody, and find out what he put himself through. If he

was a One, he might have seen the girl's red fingernail polish, said something to himself internally in a loud critical voice ("I'm just not reaching this kid, I'm no good as a teacher"), and then blamed the girl. Or maybe he found her attractive and judged his own reaction as wrong and yelled at her because of his "illicit" feelings.

When people habitually blow up they are unable to disassociate, to stand back from their experience. Instead they're overly associated. People who are overly associated are described as volatile, theatrical or impulsive, or passionate. They are immersed in whatever they're doing and have all of their feelings, good or bad, at any moment in time. They get so involved that they can't let go. This teacher could have desperately needed his students to respond well to his teaching. If they didn't, he might have felt that he had no emotional choice but to blow up.

The opposite of association is dissociation-the ability to detach and disconnect from your emotional feelings or from part or from all of your body. This could mean looking at your own experience from a point of view besides your own-as when you imagine what other people think of you-or observing yourself from a distance, or seeing the world from an inner distance, as though through a thick pane of glass. Somebody who is more dissociated might care less how his students responded.

EM: So some people have an imbalance in how they're associating or disassociating.

TC: Yes, and that runs with Enneagram styles, too. Some styles tend to overly associate into their experience, while others tend to be too disassociated. Some Threes dissociate from their emotions, whereas Fours can get overly associated into theirs. Fives spend their lives trying to pull back and dissociate from the demands of people, whereas Twos and Nines tend to overly associate into other people and lose themselves in the process.

Neither association nor dissociation is better. They are both useful in different circumstances. Association is great for feeling the pleasure of your accomplishments, making love, skiing down a mountain, whatever experiences you want to really feel. Dissociation is useful for stepping back from difficult situations, thinking things over, intellectual pursuits, etc. Many psychological problems can be cured by learning to associate and dissociate at appropriate times.

EM: You mentioned the Five, who would be more disassociated.

TC: Yes, the Five defensive ideal is to stay up in your head, floating above your emotions, looking down at them from a distance, seeing your feelings rather than feeling them.

EM: So what technique would you use to get Fives to be inside their feelings more?

TC: It would depend on the person. But things like body work can be pretty helpful for Fives, and approaches like what I think you do, Andrea [see "Frogs, Neuron Pathways and EnneaMotion," July/Aug 1998 issue], and other work that engages the body, like the Feldenkrais technique and deep tissue work.

You might try to teach a Five how to associate into her feelings and see what happens. Instead of seeing her feelings from a distance, she would bring them closer and kind of inhale them. As she steps into her feelings, she will become more in touch. If she resists stepping into her feelings it could mean that she's defended against them somehow.

Then you need to consider more factors. There could be childhood fears, memories of earlier circumstances, or it could bring up an image of a younger self who is too afraid to feel.

EM: So you might teach Fives to be in touch with their feelings by going back to a childhood memory?

TC: No, it's more like the childhood memory might come up on its own. An image of a child will often come up in this kind of work. To the degree to which you're over-defended within your Enneagram style, then you're usually protecting something more vulnerable within yourself. The unconscious usually represents that vulnerability as a younger self.

One thing I've done with Fives is to have them look for a younger self who is frightened. Very often, there will be one located in the Five's chest-say an image of a young girl. I'll ask the Five to bring that young girl out in front of her, see it in detail and begin to have a dialogue with her; to try and discover what the child needs to be less fearful. Very often with Fives it's power, some kind of social self-confidence.

I'll ask the Five to continue looking at the image and to give that child every present resource the Five can think of-especially power and self-confidence, drawn from other parts of the Five's life. Usually the image then starts to change although the whole process can take a while. When the Five is eventually satisfied that the younger part has everything she needs, then I'll ask her to bring the image back into her chest-to reassociate into her feelings. Usually then the Five experiences her body and emotions in a very different way. What was young and scared in her feels older and more powerful.

EM: Could you use that same approach with, say, a Four, who may be overly associated?

TC: With someone who is overly associated, you might want to teach him how to disassociate.

EM: How would you do that?

TC: By teaching him how to see his feelings instead of feeling them. When you're overly associated, you're not really standing back and looking at yourself. You're unaware of how you look. Learning to see yourself and see your feelings can be very informative and helpful.

Dissociation is useful for processing trauma. You can see an image of yourself going through an unpleasant past experience without the body feelings and body chemistry that you would otherwise have. Then you literally "have perspective." You can watch a younger part of yourself go through an unfinished painful experience to completion, to learn whatever it is you need to learn from the past without having to fully relive it. You still have visual information about what you may need to avoid or deal with in the future.

EM: You can complete an experience on your own without it happening in reality?

TC: You can complete an experience that you might have been carrying around and acting out in your present life. A Four could learn to see a younger self instead of becoming a child in the present. The whole point is to have a choice.

I would add that there is another level to this work which involves what are called secondary gains. Sometimes dissociating from and processing pain isn't enough because the person is attached to the benefits-the secondary gains-of having the pain. A Four could, for instance, be so identified with his pain that he believes it is his identity. Trying to dissociate will then sound to his unconscious mind like he will cease to exist: "no pain equals no me."

This leads to helping the client discover his attachment to his defense, finding out what needs it fulfills. After that gets experientially unraveled, the task becomes finding other, more up-to-date ways to fulfill the same needs that work at least as well as being in pain. Another approach is to consider deeply whether you even need what your pain gives you. Could you live just as effectively with fewer defenses?

Another fruitful course is to find out how you are both recreating the past and then defending against its shadow. From there, there are many techniques to help you work though the pain and let it go.

Usually a reproduced pain is related to a defensive stance you took early in life, something you felt driven to in childhood. Often there is a preemptive quality to it. Fours who felt rejected in childhood now reject themselves before others can. They set themselves

up, recreating their wounds as a way to protect against a more painful, surprise wounding by others. Within the logic of their defenses, they are making the best of a bad situation, beating others to the punch, breaking their own hearts before anyone else can. So there's an element of control.

EM: What you're describing are things that are done in a therapeutic setting. How would you apply some of these ideas by yourself, for yourself? Let's say you've read the books, you know what your type is, and now you want to start working on yourself, by yourself. How would you do that?

TC: If you're utterly new to self-observing, and new to the idea that it's valuable to learn about yourself, there's nothing wrong with asking the question "Why?" "Why am I the way that I am?" "Why do I have these reactions?" "What happened in my childhood that I'm still caught in now?"

EM: So you wouldn't come up with an answer that says "Oh, it's because I'm type X." You'd be specific for each instance.

TC: I wouldn't say it's because I'm type X. At best, that's putting the cart before the horse, and at worst, it's using your knowledge of the Enneagram as an excuse. I would look for patterns in my behavior that reflect how I carry the past in the present. The extent to which I'm overdefended in the present-that's the same as being fixated and compulsive within my Enneagram style.

But the question "Why?" only takes you so far. If you want to actually change, the question is always "how?"-as in "How do I recreate the past in the present? How do I create my Enneagram reality? "How do I do this to myself?" A detailed answer to that question will begin to point you where you want to go.

You usually need some motivation to even want to ask this question. And you need to take a certain amount of responsibility, to assume on some level that any difficulties you have are somehow your creation.

If you're not motivated then it's possible to use the Enneagram in the service of the status quo. You can say, "Well, my problem is my type. Naturally I'm paranoid, I'm a Six, what do you expect?" But that really is a profound misuse of the Enneagram, a sweeping reversal of the point of the model.

That's also what egos do when they're avoiding change. You discover the Enneagram, it rattles you powerfully and next you start to enfold it into what you already know, to remove its sting, to make it serve your neurosis. It seems to me there's quite a bit of that in Enneagram circles.

EM: When you talk about resistance to change, you assume there's a situation or a condition which one may actually be ready to change. Is that something you can define?

TC: It usually has to do with how much you're suffering by re-creating the past, by continually practicing your personality defenses.

EM: And that's something that differs from individual to individual. Some people can endure an extraordinary amount of pain before they'll do anything about it.

TC: Right. The idea of changing may not have occurred to someone. Everyone is different; there's a wide spectrum. Often people change because they can't stand an old way of being. Other people have something inside them that yearns to evolve. Not everybody changes from a negative motivation, but a lot of people do. Change can seem expensive but often the price of staying the same is even higher.

Let's say I grew up in drastic circumstances and began drinking at an early age. I probably drank to medicate myself, as a strategy that got me through those early times. If it's twenty years later and I'm still drinking, then my attempt at a solution has now become the problem.

That actually is a way to think about Enneagram defenses. The thing that once saved you is now the problem. Your ticket out of early circumstances has become the very thing that gets in your way, the very thing that you have to go on finding a rationale for. So you keep setting yourself up, narrowing your reality, excluding the other 8/9ths of the truth, as Richard Rohr would say.

EM: There's a saying that you live the first half of your life one way, and the second half in a different way. Could this be because defense mechanisms that function well in the first part of your life become antiquated and dysfunctional, leading you to discard them later in life?

TC: I think there are people who don't ever discard them; they go to their deaths clinging to an immature point of view that nevertheless was functional and got them through childhood. It's part of God's great plan as to why they don't wake up; it just seems to vary according to person.

When people do change, it usually has something to do with their defenses being outmoded. If I'm an Eight who grew up in a violent, hostile environment, I might have conceived of my early life (and then the broader world) as a kind of war zone. If I'm running around 30 or 40 years later still seeing the world as a war zone, then I've got to actually do things like provoke people to behave towards me in a war-like way, so that I reinforce my premises and justify my defenses.

EM: So you get a secondary set of patterns in which you prod your environment to furnish you with proof that you were right all along.

TC: Exactly. One place you can observe your defenses at work is when you enter an absolutely new circumstance. What do you then begin to fill it up with? If you're an Eight and you have a war in your head, that will dictate what you notice. If you're a Two, and the metaphor that you live by-the way that you fundamentally see the world-is interpersonal, then you're going to look for personal connections, which is much different from expecting a war.

EM: So we're always looking for confirmation that our system defines the world.

TC: I wouldn't say we're always doing that. We do it to a certain extent, and in a way, it's effective. You have to decide where you limit yourself, when you carry your Enneagram defenses too far, how you overuse your strength. Then the focus shifts to how you set yourself up. How you create a predictable response that gives you an illusory feeling of control? How do you protect yourself from the shadows in your own psyche?

If your personality defenses don't have much to do with your present world, if they interfere with your job or your relationships, if there's a dissonance between what you think you're doing versus what actually happens, then you might be motivated to grow and change.

Enneagram Monthly: What's your opinion on possible correlations between the Enneagram and the Myers-Briggs system?

Tom Condon: The Enneagram describes nine species of ego-nine ways the human unconscious creates and organizes subjective experience, Your ego generates your map of reality, and your sense of identity along with your core motivations, values and defenses. It offers guiding assumptions, giving you a general sense of direction and immediate ways to proceed.

To me, the MBTI and the Enneagram don't describe the same things at all. If the article described an Enneagram style as merely a defense I think that would be a little off. There are clearly healthy expressions of Enneagram styles; each offers abilities and gifts as well as defensive limitations. To me the Enneagram and Myers-Briggs typing system don't describe the same things at all.

EM: We think Pat Wyman (see "The Enneagram and MBTI in Affective Therapy" in the April 1999 issue) is right on target in regarding the two systems as different entities, tather than trying to find correlations.

TC: The Enneagram is describing a central orientation, a core strategy. Within that core strategy, the MBTI describes what amounts to subtypes. The sensory, mental orientations and emotional orientations that are possible within your core Enneagram style. If you try to evenly correlate the two systems, or to identify the one MBTI combination that always goes with each Enneagram style you would be attempting the impossible.

There's a book by Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele [Are You My Type, Am I Yours?] with a section in the back on MBTI-I think that book has the combination just right.

EM: Remind us how they did that.

TC: Baron and Wagele said there might be general tendencies as you correlate the two systems, some MBTI combinations that are more frequent with say Nines. But ultimately it's wide open. That's been my experience.

It's not unlike body typing. I've heard some people try to assign a single body type to each Enneagram style. Personally, I see two or three body types consistent with each style. Someone recently said to me, "Fives are always skinny," and I thought, "except when they're not." Many Fives aren't skinny.

The speaker was referring to one of several body types Fives can have, a lean ectomorphic body type that I've noticed most often in self-preservation Fives - young self-preservation Fives. When they get older there's an even chance that a withdrawn sedentary lifestyle will lead them to put on weight, especially if they have American eating habits.

It's not that there aren't some physical expressions of Enneagram styles; they just aren't rigidly constant. The paradox of this material is that when you apply it loosely it leads you to a more precise diagnosis.

I liked the Enneagram Monthly article by Peter O'Hanrahan [see "Body Types" in the Jan. and Feb. 1998 issues] and was glad to see him not overly applying his model. His generalizations seemed solid and based on a disciplined observation of real people.

One way I like to describe Enneagram styles is as "psychological nationalities," because a personality style functions like a nationality. Both define you, yet within them you're an individual. Both are deeply unconscious and shape your perceptions in involuntary ways. Both your nationality and your ego are simultaneously deep and yet shallow, parts of you that are apart from you at the same time.

While the Enneagram describes the sameness of people, everyone is unique within their style just as they are within their nationality. Moreover there is great variety among people with the same nationality. Americans from Florida and Americans from New England can be very different in manner and speech. But underneath they share an unconscious orientation that is American. The same is true with Enneagram styles. The range of expression among people with the same personality style is just as wide.

EM: We've been talking more about ways to bring the Enneagram into the mainstream. Do you have any ideas in that regard?

TC: I think the model itself has been well defined and there are different ways to proceed from here. You could continually refine the descriptions, which may have some value, though that's also how people get bogged down and use the Enneagram as a way to avoid change.

To me, the Enneagram's future is in its applications. How do you use it? I'm someone who thinks that the Enneagram is not worth knowing unless you actually do something with it. To take the material into yourself in a way that makes a functional difference in your daily life, both spiritually and psychologically.

If it can be meaningfully applied to people's lives, and presented in ways that are not too rarified, arcane or new agey, then I think the Enneagram will take root in broader ways. Especially in established psychological circles, one place where it really belongs.

When the system is well taught there is a real power in the descriptions; it hits people where they live, putting its finger on the central way they construct reality. When the Enneagram is taught badly, say as a group of stereotypes by someone who learned the system six months ago, then I think newcomers sensibly decide to avoid it.

EM: Do you find that over the years, that your ability to correctly assess someone's type has grown?

TC: Oh sure. Actually, it takes years. It takes lots of practice, lots of floundering around and making mistakes, being certain you were right and then finding out later that you were all wrong.

The notion that you can type quickly and easily when you've just learned the model is an illusion. In a way, it's an illusion that typing systems foster. The Enneagram seems to say, "Learn about the nine types of people, and reality will be simplified, all will be revealed." And of course that's not what happens. Nothing is simplified, everything gets more complicated and rich and interesting. The study of human behavior and psychology is one of those subjects that just keeps going. You don't announce one day that you know everything there is to know about it.

EM: There is not a single branch of psychology that makes those claims; there's no reason why the Enneagram should either.

TC: It's like any deep subject; each time you think you "know" the Enneagram - if you're paying attention - something will come along that will tell you that you don't know anything. You've just plateaued.

EM: When you type a person do you go from the general towards the specific? How do you do it? What is the process that you use?

TC: It's such a combination of things. To describe it too tightly is misleading because it's based on years of experience. In a broad way, I may look for what someone is obviously not, and that will narrow it down. I listen quite a bit to how a person's internal experience

is reflected in their language, not only in terms of sensory sequence, but also in terms of what they include or leave out, and how they describe themselves. Whether somebody speaks in a passive way when they describe their problem, for instance.

I often listen for the kinds of metaphors people use to describe themselves or the world they subjectively live in. For instance, Eights who have wars in their heads will use war metaphors embedded in casual conversation. "Yeah, let's get together and play soccer on Saturday and kill those guys." Threes, by contrast, are much more prone to using sports metaphors. Life isn't a war, it's a game.

I think good typing is a struggle and you have to just keep doing it, and learn from your mistakes. Every time you're really sure of yourself and you turn out to be right, memorize the feeling that goes with that. Every time you're really sure of yourself and you turn out to be wrong, think back on what you were thinking or feeling that day, and see if there's a difference. If you make consistent mistakes, they may begin to reveal a pattern to you, a blind spot.

I believe in doing homework, reading biographies, watching interviews, doing research. I'm often amazed when someone types a famous person based solely on their impression or feeling about that person. It's like, "whatever I think their Enneagram style is, it probably is." That means there's no Enneagram, there's just what I think. People will also sometimes type as if it's the Olympics - a competition. They'll rush into it, and try to "beat" somebody else at it, to see who can make the fastest snap judgment.

EM: Or to elevate a single characteristic into something they consider as extremely defining.

TC: That is really a tendency, to grope for some formula, usually based on the person's external behavior. Somebody will say "He was angry, so that means he's a One." Like it's an equation or a math problem. Determining someone's Enneagram style involves paying attention to them and taking into account many things at once. You really have to get out of your own way and develop your observation and listening skills. Focusing on someone's external behavior traits is extremely misleading. It's not what someone does, it's why they do it.

EM: Do you have a set of verification procedures? If you begin to suspect that somebody might be a Four or a Six, for example, what would be a tie-breaker?

TC: You can't quite do it that way, because it's not one thing or another. In the end, though, what you're after is the person's central strategy, what they return to again and again. Sometimes you can't get that in one pass. You can't make up your mind right away, nor should you. You need more exposure to the person, to see how their patterns

play out through time, to get to know them better. Then gradually, their style will come clear.

EM: Do you find that some types are more or less accessible? Some may be very elusive and you could struggle for a very long time and you still can't be sure?

TC: Not anymore. I might have at one time but I don't now. In any case that would not have been a statement about the type's elusiveness but rather a blindness in myself.

EM: Or people who have done a lot of work on themselves I imagine would be a lot harder to type.

TC: If somebody is really healthy, they can be harder to initially type them because they're not so evidently pathological. But even very healthy people have a point of view, a shape to their thoughts, talents and strengths that are characteristic of one Enneagram style and not another.

The Dalai Lama seems to me an evolved man but he's still a Nine. The nature of what he does is profoundly inclusive. The quality of his thoughts, his preoccupations and his values are all fundamentally Niney.

EM: Have you seen any good movies lately?

TC: I've just come out with an expanded version of The Enneagram Movie and Video Guide. For a few months, I haven't been able to stand the thought of seeing a movie. Just recently, I've actually been renting them again.

The documentary Kurt and Courtney has an amazing Eight in it; Courtney Love's father. There's five minutes towards the end of the film that you could show in an Enneagram class. Buffalo 66 centers on a sweet but crazy counterphobic Six. I have a bunch of new reviews on my website.

EM: Did you ever apply the Enneatypes to literature?

TC: No, but that's next. They're there. Somebody should do it.

EM: Do you enjoy reading?

TC: Well, lately I've been writing books so I tend not to read. But at a certain point, I'll go back. It's obvious that Enneagram styles are in fiction. You can, for instance, see styles in films that have been faithfully rendered from novels.

EM: You sure can. I had read the book, Civil Action, and then we saw the movie. It was such a disappointment. John Travolta just didn't seem to be like the character or personality style from the book.

TC: The Jane Austen novels seem to transpose well - Sense and Sensibility for instance. Most of the styles that were in the recent film were in the novel, according to my English wife.

It would be very interesting to study of Shakespeare through the lens of the Enneagram. Dostoevsky's books are full of Enneagram styles as are Thomas Mann's.

EM: There's a topic we haven't touched on. Most people don't teach anything about subtypes, and you do.

TC: Yes, I've been teaching them a lot. They're very useful.

EM: How so?

TC: I think they are the key to discovering what further motivates someone within the general motivation of their Enneagram style. If you are doing changework this is very handy. The subtypes are also a way to understand the wide variety of expressions that can occur among people of the same Enneagram style. They resolve a lot of confusion. I've also found it helpful to focus on the high side of each subtype, to work out how each can be a resource, a strength.

EM: How do you define them?

TC: Each Enneagram style has three possible suborientations, related to three realms of life - survival or how we take care of ourselves, the realm of close relationships, and how we relate socially to the larger world.

Your primary subtype is determined by whether you are unconsciously preoccupied with personal survival (self-preservation), whether you incline towards one-to-one relationships (intimate), or whether your style of relating includes groups of people (social).

We all have portions of our attention and energy focused on these three realms but may habitually favor a particular realm more than the others. If your basic desire is for material security you might be continuously, if subtly, preoccupied with the essentials of life - food, shelter, physical safety and your home.

If your primary desire is for intimacy in one-to-one relationships you might be especially focused on whether you are desirable to others. Or be interested in finding or being with your mate or you relate to your friends one at a time in a tightly focused way.

If your primary desire is for community you might seek safety and security in numbers. You could gravitate towards groups of people and be interested in outer recognition, popularity, honor, status, social acceptance. Your inner thoughts will tend to be occupied with groups of people.

As with wings and stress and security points, your subtype can be both a resource or a limitation depending on how healthy or defensive you are within it. The high side of a preoccupation with self-preservation is that you can really take care of business, be

good at details and capable at life-management skills. The low side is that you could be overfocused on mere survival and miss life's other dimensions. Or you could make survival complicated or difficult out of a conviction that life is hard and your survival is somehow always at stake.

The high side of the intimate orientation is that you have a talent for one-to-one intimacy and you could have exceptionally deep, rich friendships. The low side is that you might freight up your relationships with too many expectations and have a tendency to be dependent, jealous or possessive.

With a healthy social orientation you could be a gregarious people-person, someone who works hard and unselfishly to serve your chosen group. When you win everybody in your group wins. The low side is that you might tend to lose yourself in the group, be unable to be alone, or lessen your individuality. You could be especially prone to conflicts about what the group wants versus what you need.

EM: Do you think that people only have one subtype? Some teachers say that we have all three and they just come out in different situations.

TC: I think it's both. Most people have one dominant subtype. But you will also notice evidence of the others in your behavior. You could be a social subtype but when you fall in love, you would react more like an intimate subtype. If your business went broke you might be in a self preservation mode until your survival was again assured. Your other subtypes can also come and go in your responses to immediate situations throughout the day.

The other worthwhile thing to note about subtypes is that they carry across your other built-in connections. If you are a Seven and your primary subtype is intimate, you will be an intimate subtype in your experience of your Six and Eight wings and your built-in connections to Five and One.

Originally I thought of subtypes as advanced material but lately some people have come to the workshops with little previous exposure to the Enneagram and they understand them just fine. Rather than advanced, I've started to think of subtypes as a sidedoor into the Enneagram.

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