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The Enneagram's Built-in Connections

As you learn more about the Enneagram you'll notice that while you have a distinct core personality style, you will occasionally react as though you have another one altogether. Other Enneagram styles will be evident in your temporary responses to immediate situations and more continuously, as "sides" to your character.

Your core Enneagram style has a built-in connection to between four and six other Enneagram styles. These include what are called "stress points" and "security points," wings and the Enneagram styles of your parents. As you work with the Enneagram, you will recognize an intuitive, unconscious link from your core style to each of these additional styles.

The high sides of these connections bring natural aptitudes that you can focus on, cultivate and develop. The low sides need to be understood as potential traps, to be recognized, worked on or avoided.

"Stress" and "Security" Points

Your core style has a built-in connection to two other Enneagram styles, usually referred to as stress and security points. In Enneagram literature the words "stress" and "security" are used as descriptive terms. When facing a stressful deadline at work, for example, you might temporarily access the attitudes and motivations of your "stress" point and seem like someone with a different Enneagram style. Under stress a withdrawn, frightened Five might begin to act like a hyperactive, distractible Seven.

Later, after the deadline is met, and the Five has gone on vacation, she might temporarily manifest the attitudes of her security point, the confident, forceful

high side of Eight. This dynamic is similar to the way that different sides of your character come out in different contexts.

In my experience these connections are not just contextual but constant. A shy Five might act forcefully Eightish at moments when they feel secure but some Fives are consistently Eightish. Scrooge, the nasty, punitive miser in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol would be an example of a generally Eightish Five. Some Fives are consistently Seven-like in their outward manner and inner style of thinking.

Many Enneagram writers take stress and security points to mean more than what I've so far described. In book after book, the stress point is portrayed as an unhealthy connection while the security point is deemed the general path to psychological health. The security point is called the direction of growth, integration, redemption, while the stress point is called the direction of decline, disintegration, breakdown, etc. The two points are presented as directions to cultivate or avoid when working on the dilemmas of your core Enneagram style.

I respect the writers who propose this theory but reality has proven far more complicated. Sixes - and all the other styles - have connections to both the high and low sides of their stress and security points.

For example, the stress point for a Six is Three, so the theory would say that when Sixes are unhealthy they descend to the low side of this connection and begin acting like unhealthy Threes, becoming, say, image-conscious, deceitful and competitive. Meanwhile, a healthy Six would exhibit the high side of the Nine style - the patient, faithful trusting of self and others.

Sixes may well become faithful and trusting as they grow, but the low side of Nine is complacent denial and procrastination, and Sixes easily slip into this mentality when unhealthy - it's an escape chute from chronic anxiety. This can even set up the next episode of panic; the Six lies around feeling safe and neglecting their world until some potential disaster begins to loom. Then when danger seems imminent, they wake up and display unhealthy Three behavior, hyperexerting to ward off danger while perhaps wearing a mask to cover their fear. The low sides of Three and Nine thus reinforce each other in a kind of unhealthy loop.

If cultivated, your stress point is actually a resource. For a Six, the connection to Three has something of real value - the capacity to take effective action. A Six

has a basic knot in her will, a conflict about her own ability to claim independent power. It doesn't matter how faithful and trusting she feels; she still has to do something. In a general sense, she has to take responsibility for her own personal power and actions without hiding under the umbrella of some imaginary authority. Integrating the power of action (Three) gives the faith and trust (Nine) a realistic basis in the world. The high sides of the security and stress points thus tend to support one another in a kind of upward spiral.

The same has proven true for the other styles. Ones generally recognize the pitfall in their connection to Four (self-pity) but say that they appreciate the fact that their Fourish streak helps them enter the realms of feeling and aesthetics. The high side of a One's connection to Seven (playfulness) is offset by an unhealthy tendency towards escapism (what are called "trapdoor Ones," people who lead double lives).

Eights have trouble with the low side of Five (morbid withdrawal) but say that the Fiveish capacity to detach and get perspective on their actions is truly helpful. Eights learn from the healthy side of Two (compassionate identification with others) but say that the low side of Two (demanding self-entitlement) reinforces the aggressive narcissism at the core of the Eight style.

When people are unhealthy or under stress, they manifest the neurotic behavior and defenses of both their stress and security points in a kind of cycle. These become elements of being stuck or caught in a downward spiral and they tend to reinforce one another.

The same is true when you are healthy or relaxed within your being. The positive qualities of both your stress and security points will be evident in your behavior and will contribute to a kind of upward spiral.

Here is a quick list of resource points: Ones: Stress Point-Four, Security Point-Seven; Twos: Stress Point-Eight, Security Point-Four; Threes: Stress Point-Nine, Security Point-Six; Fours: Stress Point-Two, Security Point-One; Fives: Stress Point-Seven, Security Point-Eight; Sixes: Stress Point-Three, Security Point-Nine; Sevens: Stress Point-One, Security Point-Five; Eights: Stress Point-Five, Security Point-Two; Nines: Stress Point-Six, Security Point-Three.

Wings

Your dominant Enneagram style also has a relationship to its neighboring styles, called wings. If Four is your core style, you will have an intuitive built-in connection to both Three and Five. Your sensitive, subjective Fourish orientation would be modified by a preoccupation with action and image (Three wing) or a less social, intellectual drive (Five wing). If you know your core style and think about it further, you can usually identify your primary wing. One will usually have been favored in your history and character over the other.

As with resource points, the healthy qualities of your wings are available to you like talents, while the unhealthy qualities exist as potential pitfalls. Depending on your focus, you can tap the high-side resources of your wing or unconsciously fall into its trap.

Technically everyone has two wings. If you only recognize your primary wing, you will still have a natural disposition toward the resources and pitfalls of your other more secondary wing. The connection will still be expressed in your behavior, probably in ways that others see but you don't.

You might also play your unconscious wing out in your relationships by marrying or befriending people whose core Enneagram style is the same as your latent wing. It's worth searching your experience for the influence of your latent wing because it is there whether you're aware of it or not.

Roughly two-thirds of the population has one primary wing. Other people are biwinged and experience a combination of motives and themes that reflect the joint influence of both wings.

Here is a quick list of wings: Ones: Nine and Two; Twos: One and Three; Threes: Two and Four; Fours: Three and Five; Fives: Four and Six; Sixes: Five and Seven; Sevens: Six and Eight; Eights: Seven and Nine; Nines: Eight and One.

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