

Therapeutic Metaphor and the Enneagram

Drawing on his extensive background in communication psychology, renowned Enneagram trainer, speaker, coach and author of multiple recordings and books Tom Condon, Director at The Changeworks, offers a practical tool practitioners can use to deepen insights and evoke creative solutions in themselves and their clients, whether or not they know the Enneagram

Tom offers private coaching and consulting for individuals and organizations by phone or Skype applying his unique combination of the Enneagram, NLP and other methods of change. See www.thechangeworks.com

The practice of therapeutic metaphor arose originally after communication researchers observed that effective psychotherapists tend to tell lots of stories. Therapists use metaphor in a concentrated, pointed way to drive home important ideas, dislodge their clients' fixed-but-limiting beliefs, and evoke helpful resources that clients may not realize they have. The researchers also noted that using metaphor is generally characteristic of good communicators. Rabbis, politicians, teachers, sales people all routinely stud what they say with stories.

If you use the Enneagram to foster change in yourself or others, it's often useful to illustrate what you communicate with a relevant anecdote, joke or metaphor. Stories enhance and augment: if a picture is worth a thousand words, then a story is worth a thousand explanations. Stories unconsciously reinforce conscious messages, giving them extra power.

In addition to offering standalone metaphors, metaphors can be included within single relevant anecdotes or jokes; chains of anecdotes; and longer stories that parallel the client's problem and include possible solutions. You can also expand upon a client's existing metaphor, for example, when a type Three says, "I feel driven like a high-performance race car", and the practitioner then guides the Three in how to take penalty-free breaks from the race of their life.

There are good sources of stories right under our noses. Everyone's past experience includes times when we learned something new or broke through an old limit, possibly Enneagram-related. You can grant yourself poetic license and turn meaningful things that happened to you into stories that you tell in the third person, as though they happened to a close friend.

If you work professionally to help people change, you might also pay attention to your own unconscious reactions to a client's difficulty. Sometimes during a session, an image or a thought or feeling will come to you spontaneously. While

baffling to you, it may have a special meaning for the client. One way to develop the skill of metaphorical thinking is to consider a client's problem and ask, "What does this remind me of?"

Your past clients are also potential examples you can offer to your present clients. A story could begin with the words, "I knew someone once with a similar problem...". The story then is about what someone else did in a similar situation to your client's.

Other obvious sources of Enneagram-related stories are literature, movies and newspapers, as well as teaching stories from spiritual traditions. Over time, you might develop a collection of stories — grouped according to themes and Enneagram styles — that you can adapt and apply to the needs of individual clients.

Some of the stories below will make instant sense to you, while others may send you on an unconscious search for meaning. That's the method in action.

Eights

Stories I've told Eights seeking creative ways to handle conflict and to illustrate their denial.

An elderly man, harassed by the taunts of neighborhood children, offered to pay them each a dollar if they would return on Monday and yell their insults again. The children did so eagerly, and received the money. Then the man told them he would pay only 25 cents on Tuesday.

When they returned, insulted him again and collected their quarters, the man informed them that Wednesday's rate would be just a penny. "Forget it", they said, and never taunted him again.

Another Eight used humor to diffuse confrontations — even ones he provoked. At a football game, the Eight angered a fellow fan. A tense

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exchange followed. After the fan said something insulting, the Eight said “Oh yeah? Stand up and say that!”. When the fan stood and proved to be a foot taller than the Eight and built like a football player, the Eight thought quickly, and said, “Now sit down and say that!” The fan burst out laughing, and the Eight apologized.

The American actor John Wayne, an Eight, was once asked, “Do you look at yourself as a character actor or a movie star?”. Wayne replied, “I try not to look at myself anymore than I have to”.

Nines

Stories I’ve told to overly adaptable Nines while alluding to their worldview.

I once overheard two women discussing a male acquaintance. “There’s something about that guy that really bothers me”, said the first. “He seems normal enough to me”, came the casual reply. Nodding intently, the first woman said, “Yeah, that’s what it is”.

A man told a story about seeing a famous Nine author at a wealthy hedge fund manager’s party held in an exclusive neighborhood.

Casting his eye around the luxurious setting, the man asked the author, “Doesn’t it bother you that this guy makes more in a day than you’ve ever made from writing in your entire career?”. “No, not really”, the Nine replied, adding, “I have something that he doesn’t have. I know the meaning of enough”.

Once in a college history class, a professor who frequently got excited by his own lectures rounded on a half-asleep student. “And Johnson!”, he said, “who won the Battle of Water-

loo?”. The startled student blurted out an utterly honest answer: “I don’t care!”.

In a regional guidebook to an American desert valley, there is a photograph of an ancient petroglyph.

The photo’s caption reads, “Unknown people from an unknown time left these messages for we who don’t understand them”.

Ones

Stories about rigidity and reaction formation.

At Christmas, a woman wrote an angry letter to a newspaper after the paper ran a picture of a charity holiday dinner.

The Salvation Army, a Christian organisation that ministers to the poor and homeless, had sponsored the meal.

The letter writer complained that many of the people pictured at the dinner were still wearing their hats, a violation of all known civilized behavior. The woman was so appalled, that she vowed to never donate money to the Salvation Army again.

Out for an evening walk with a type One friend of mine, we paused before the window of a rock shop.

My friend, a geology buff, stood transfixed by a beautiful chunk of amethyst for sale. I could almost feel him yearning to touch the intricate, violet crystal, glowing under the golden display light.

Then he saw the amethyst’s high price. He began to complain that all the stores in town seemed to be catering exclusively to rich people with nothing better to spend their money on.

This line of logic broadened into a tirade about the extravagance and

gullibility of the population at large, especially all the poor souls duped into believing that they need unnecessary, expensive objects.

After a little while, I teasingly said, “So I guess this means that you really want to buy that amethyst”. My friend looked surprised, and burst out laughing, nodding ruefully.

Twos

Stories about co-dependence and pride.

Psychotherapist, Ed Dunkleblau, relates a story about a woman who was one day pushing her adult son through a shopping mall in a wheelchair. She was approached by a friend who voiced his surprise, saying “I didn’t know that your son couldn’t walk”. “Of course he can walk”, she replied. “But isn’t it nice that he doesn’t have to?”, she added.

One type Two was so identified with her husband, that when he broke his arm, her arm began to hurt. Asked about the couple’s summer vacation plans, she said, “We won’t be going on vacation this year until my arm heals”.

An American who lived in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when the Japanese bombed the island at the beginning of World War II, remembered that, in the heat of the emergency, all the food stores threw open their doors and told residents take whatever they needed. A month later, the island’s residents received bills in the mail for the emergency food and supplies they had been told were free.

Speaking at Oxford University, English politician, Lord Longford, was asked his views on humility. Longford advised the questioner to read his new book, which he said was “the finest book about humility ever written”.

Threes

Stories about a Three’s overfocus on goals.

The book ‘Zen in the Art of Archery’ tells the story of the author’s time

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**“If you
 work
 professionally
 to help
 people
 change, you
 might also
 pay atten-
 tion to your
 own uncon-
 scious reac-
 tions to a
 client’s
 difficulty.
 Sometimes
 during a
 session, an
 image or a
 thought or
 feeling will
 come to
 you sponta-
 neously.”**
 —

studying Kyūdō, a form of Japanese archery.

His teacher focused on the spiritual aspect of the practice, rather than the sport of it. The 'goalless goal' was to practice until the act of shooting an arrow became profoundly unconscious and unself-conscious.

One day, the author gave into a temptation to deliberately hit a bull's-eye, distorting the practice into something more prosaic. His teacher immediately fired him.

In college, I studied literature. I remember one day someone telling me that they thought that I was 'well-read'. I'd read a range of books, but I didn't really feel well-read. In fact, I immediately thought of a friend that I considered well-read. He had read many more books than I and on a wider variety of subjects. Then I remembered that my friend had told me that his brother was the best read person that he knew of.

I knew my friend's brother, and recalled what he once said about being well-read: "I've read more books than everyone I know, but I have lousy retention and don't really remember them. But that's OK. I just really love to read. In fact, I'm thinking of reading them all again."

A pilot was told by the National Aeronautics Association that his solo flight over the North Pole — and two other solo flights — were officially recognized as national firsts.

His response: "It's nice, but I knew I had done it anyhow..."

Fours

I've told these to Fours who are trying to master their moods and become more grounded and practical.

Heard about the 12 step program for hypochondriacs? The first step is admitting you don't have a problem.

There once was a moody Prince who became depressed and called all the sages in his father's Kingdom to assist him.

He asked them for a magic object which would balance his moods, so that when he was depressed, he could glance at it and become happy, and when he was happy, the sight of the magic object would remind him of the sadness in life.

The wise men paid a craftsman to create an ordinary ring with the inscription: 'This too shall pass'.

There is an old story about a man who finds a bottle on a beach. He uncorks it, and out comes a genie who offers the man a choice between a colossal amount of money or infinite wisdom. The man thinks hard for a few minutes, and then of course chooses infinite wisdom.

Days later, several friends of the man see him sitting on a park bench shaking his head and talking to himself. Knowing he now has infinite wisdom, they move in closer to hear what he is saying.

Over and over they hear him repeat: "I should have taken the money, I should have taken the money".

Fives

Stories that allude to the Five tendency to defensively hoard. (The Einstein story has a completely different meaning to Sevens).

An American comedian used to do a parody of stingy Fiveness. His signature joke was about a mugging: "Your money or your life!", an armed thief would demand. The comedian would always take a long pause, and say, "I'm thinking about it..."

A client of mine knew Albert Einstein at Princeton University in the 1950s. She described him as a sweet, quiet man of few words. She occasionally would host a dinner with Einstein and a group of other people who wanted to meet him.

During one such evening, a young man sitting next to Einstein kept taking out a notebook and writing in it. Einstein seemed fascinated by this behavior, and asked the young man what he was doing. Enthusiastically he explained, "I keep a notebook for all my good ideas. I find that I have so

many, that I must write them down otherwise I forget them".

With the perfect innocence of youth, he then asked Albert Einstein, "Do you think, Doctor Einstein, that this method could work for you?". Einstein paused and replied, "Alas no, I've only had a few good ideas in my life." One of them was the General Theory of Relativity.

Sixes

About the Sixes' relationship to fear and power.

Out on the plains of Africa, there are water holes where clusters of animals come to drink. There, zebras gather in small herds near their worst enemies: the lions. Whenever lions are present, the zebras gravitate toward them, maintaining a safe distance but keeping the lions in view. If the lions get up and move, the zebras follow them.

Lions hunt in short swift charges; if the zebras lose sight of them, the lions could sneak up and attack. So the zebras keep the danger visible and close by.

A man is chased over a cliff by tigers. As he falls, he grabs on to a vine, while the tigers crowd above him snarling and swatting. As he clutches the vine more tightly, the roots start coming out of the side of the cliff. He looks below and sees nothing but fog.

Desperate, the man looks heavenward and yells, "Can anyone up there help me?". A deep booming voice replies, "Do you have faith?".

The vine comes a little farther out of the side of the cliff, and the man looks back up and yells, "Yeah, sure! I have faith". "Then let go of the vine!", comes the booming reply.

The man pauses to think this over.

Meanwhile, the vine comes further out of the cliff while the tigers are still snarling above him, the fog billowing below him. Finally, he looks up again and yells, "Can anybody else up there help me?".

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At that moment, the vine breaks and the man falls and lands in soft grass that was covered by ground fog.

Sevens

Stories about the Seven tendency to reframe pain.

An old cartoon shows a man in Hell, whistling cheerfully as he exuberantly shovels coal into a wheelbarrow to fuel its fires. Standing nearby are two Devils. One says to the other, "You know, we're just not reaching this guy".

In the movie *Dumb and Dumber*, the optimistic but oblivious protagonist is in love with a woman far above his station. When he finally confesses his feelings for her, she doesn't react well.

Undaunted, he presses her for a realistic assessment of his chances with her. She replies, "One in a million". Slowly, a smile steals over his face. Nodding confidently, he says, "So you're telling me there's a chance...".

The American filmmaker and screenwriter Billy Wilder, a Seven, directed a movie with Marilyn Monroe, probably a phobic Six. Monroe, who was famously terrified of performing, would arrive late and unprepared for her scenes, requiring many takes to get the scene right.

Wilder thought Monroe was worth it, but realized that he would have to take extra care, time and patience to elicit a good performance from her. Which he did.

Later, Wilder credited a kind of mantra that he repeated to himself while coping with Monroe's erratic behavior: "I'm in jail, but only for a month".

About personality defenses

One of the Antarctic's early explorers was one day crossing a sea of ice when a blizzard suddenly struck. He

was forced to build an igloo, and take refuge from a storm that proceeded to blow hard for a week.

After a few days of safety in the igloo, the explorer began to notice that its inner walls seemed closer.

At first, he dismissed this perception as an hallucination, but gradually he realized it was true; the walls of his igloo were swelling and the igloo's structure was gradually closing in around him.

The explorer finally realized that the moisture from his breath was forming into thin accumulating layers of ice on the walls. Each time he exhaled, the icy cold caused his breath to freeze, making the igloo's walls a little thicker. The walls would eventually thicken until there wasn't room for his body.

His survival and safety led to him building a defensive shelter which was slowly turning into a coffin.

Coda

If you are new to using metaphor, it is best to approach the practice playfully.

People in my workshops who think they can't make up stories are surprised to discover that the practice is fun, creative, and easier than they thought. And the stories they create for others often have a touching powerful impact.

It turns out nearly everyone has an inner storyteller, and that part of us seems to enjoy having new stories to tell.

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