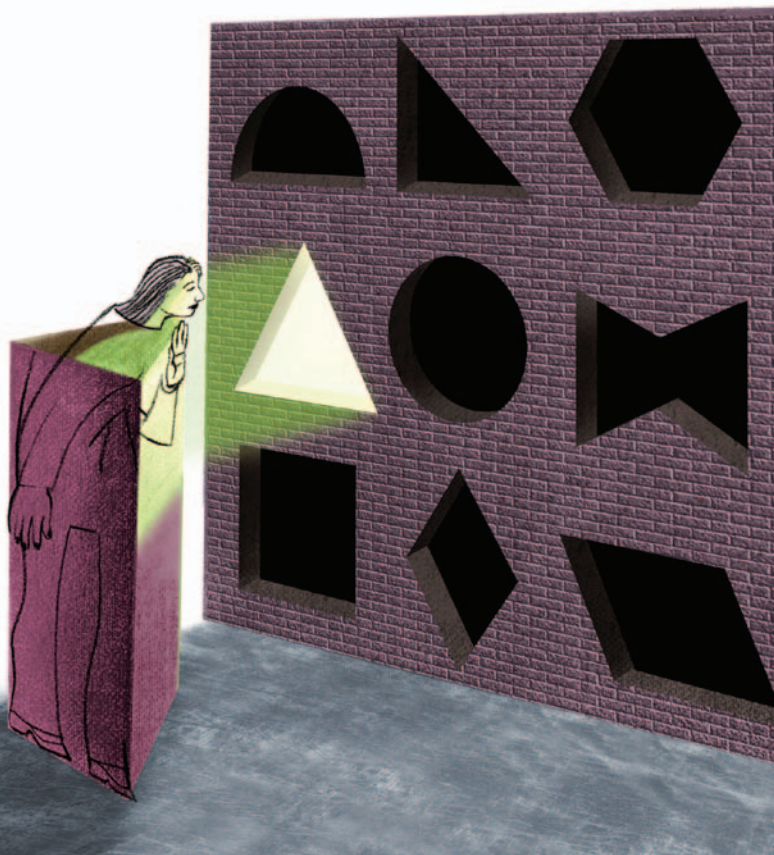


BY DAVID DANIELS

# The Five “A’s” of Transformation

*The Enneagram as a clinical tool*



WE ALL HAVE A CATEGORIZING BRAIN, a virtual pattern-recognition machine, which enables us to recognize doorknobs regardless of their particular shape or a friend from the back, even if we can't see the whole person. Recognizing patterns allows our brains, with their 100 billion neurons and thousands of connections from one neuron to another, to help us adapt and survive.

Therefore, it's unsurprising that the field of psychotherapy has countless typologies, including the *DSM* and the Myers-Briggs 16 Types, intended to assist us in recognizing distinctive patterns of human personality. As a clinician, the typology that I've found most helpful in organizing my own work and understanding the most enduring lifelong patterns in my

clients' lives is the Enneagram, a system of personality types.

The Enneagram has its roots in the world's great spiritual traditions and in Pythagorean mathematics—which suggests to me that this system fits our basic human characteristics and evolutionary requirements. We need the perspectives and talents of different types of people to help our highly intelligent and social species survive.

What gives the Enneagram its distinctive clinical utility in the consulting room is its focus on the largely unconscious core beliefs that shape people's view of how to lead a satisfying life. According to Enneagram understandings, our underlying core beliefs shape our focus of attention (in Enneagram terms “habit of mind”) and how we direct our energy (“the driving emotion of type”). Each of the nine Enneagram types has a distinct adaptive pattern based upon and supporting a specific core belief, yet no type is deemed more or less healthy than any other type. Here are brief descriptions of the nine basic types:

**Type One:** The **Perfectionist** believes you must be good and right to assure a satisfying life in a world that demands good behavior and punishes bad behavior. Consequently, Perfectionists are conscientious, responsible, improvement-oriented, and self-controlled, but can be critical, resentful, and self-judging.

**Type Two:** The **Giver** believes you must give fully to others to assure a satisfying life in a give-to-get world. Consequently, Givers are caring, helpful, supportive, and relationship-oriented, but can be prideful, overly intrusive, and demanding.

**Type Three:** The **Performer** believes you must accomplish and succeed to assure a satisfying life in a world that rewards doing, rather than being. Consequently, Performers are industrious, fast-paced, goal-focused, and efficiency-oriented, but can be inattentive to feelings, impatient, and image-driven.

**Type Four:** The **Romantic** believes you must obtain the longed-for complete and highly ►

## CASE STUDY

idealized relationship or situation to assure a satisfying life in a world that otherwise would abandon you. Consequently, Romantics are idealistic, deeply feeling, empathetic, authentic to self, but can be dramatic, moody, and sometimes self-absorbed.

**Type Five:** The **Observer** believes you must protect yourself from intrusion to insure a satisfying life in a world that demands too much and gives too little. Consequently, Observers are self-sufficiency-seeking, nondemanding, analytic/thoughtful, and unobtrusive, but can be withholding, detached, and overly private.

**Type Six:** The **Loyal Skeptic** believes you must gain certainty and security to assure a satisfying life in a hazardous and unpredictable world you can't trust. Consequently, Loyal Skeptics are themselves trustworthy, inquisitive, good friends, and questioning, but can be overly doubtful, accusatory and fearful.

**Type Seven:** The **Epicure** believes you must keep things positive and open to assure a satisfying life and escape from a world that causes pain and imposes limitation. Consequently, Epicures are optimistic, upbeat, pleasure and possibility seeking, and adventurous, but can be pain-avoidant, uncommitted, and self-serving.

**Type Eight:** The **Protector** believes you must be strong and powerful to assure a satisfying life in a tough and unjust world in which the powerful will take advantage of you. Consequently, Protectors are justice-seeking, direct, strong, and action-oriented, but can be overly impactful, excessive, and impulsive.

**Type Nine:** The **Mediator** believes you must blend in with others and “go along to get along” to assure a satisfying life in a world that makes you unimportant or requires you to blend in. Consequently, Mediators are harmony-seeking, comfortable, and steady, but can be self-forgetting, conflict-avoidant, and stubborn.

In addition to focusing on the nine types of core belief patterns, the Enneagram system works with all three centers of intelligence—head,

heart, and body—and the three basic aversive emotions associated with these centers of intelligence—fear, distress, and anger. We all have some of each type in us, but it's important to determine a client's core type because, as the following case illustrates, it gives us leverage with which to support the work of personal transformation.

### Finding a Voice

In her first session with me, Marie, a 38-year-old attorney who'd recently gotten divorced, explained the reason she'd come to see me. “Through my entire life, I haven't felt like I have a voice,” she said, trying to explain the sense of intense anxiety and worry that had brought her to treatment. “I've completely surrendered to what other people expected of me, or I've gone over to the other side with reactivity and anger. I don't want to live like that anymore.” Marie was particularly concerned that her lifelong pattern of oscillating between a willingness to please and anger was occurring again in a new love relationship.

She'd grown up with a dominating but caring father, a law-enforcement investigator, who constantly worried about her safety. “I struggled to keep him calm and didn't want to stick out,” she recalled. “If I opposed him, he'd be hurt, wounded, angry, and see me as betraying him. To keep him from yelling—*raging*—I couldn't have a voice. My mother was like an angel, taking care of him and everybody else, never saying anything about her needs. I felt I had to protect her by not speaking up and causing conflict.”

Marie had first discovered the Enneagram through a friend. She'd come to see me because she knew I practiced this method of therapy. She'd determined that the Enneagram Type Nine, The Mediator or Peacemaker, best fit the way she functioned in the world. This is an observation that I confirmed through an initial inquiry process about her behavior patterns and energy, key themes, and focus of attention. Mediators believe that the best way to gain love from others is to for-

get their own priorities and desires, choosing instead “to go along to get along.” They can become so other-referenced that they bend over backward to accommodate the claims that others make upon them.

What typically happens with this type is that, beneath the veneer of adaptability, anger festers inside when they don't feel honored or treated as important. Over time, their core dilemma of wanting to have a voice, yet suppressing it to avoid rejection, can manifest as stubbornness, resistance, passive-aggressiveness, and not speaking up until unwanted anger erupts. The specific development keys for Type Nines include learning to pay attention to their own self and needs, determining their own priorities and taking action on them, and especially discovering not only what they're *against*, but what they're *for*.

Such was the case with Marie, who had great difficulty making decisions and speaking up for herself. In her 11-year marriage with Doug, she'd adapted by going along with her “narcissistic” fellow-attorney husband, until she'd finally become angry and fought back against him. For instance, he didn't want her having friendships with other men, fearing potential betrayal—a theme she'd experienced with her father, who perceived almost any attention directed away from him as betrayal. As a result, she'd cut off a long-time friendship with her first serious boyfriend from school and college days. This decision reflected her Type Nine core belief that you must go along to get along with others' agendas or risk rejection. With anguish in her voice, she tearfully said to me, “Eventually, I decided there was just no middle ground. I had to get out of my marriage: I realized I could never be who I am with Doug.”

An example that may seem small, but contains the essence of Marie's personality structure and her core issues, was an incident that had recently taken place during a visit with her mother. “One day, my mom suddenly announced that we were all going to an awful place to eat and what time we were going to go do it.” Then, with

great tensing of her muscles in the abdomen, thorax, and neck, Marie found herself erupting, “Well, nobody asked me! Doesn’t anybody care to find out if this is OK for me?” But as soon as those words came out of her mouth, she immediately felt she’d gone too far.

At that point, I said, “For someone with your type, speaking up at all can feel like going too far. So pause and notice your inner state as you recall the feelings inside your body. From that place of reactive upset, you know what you *don’t* want—you don’t want to be told. But it comes out, ‘Nobody asked me!’ Let this be a step toward getting to what you do want.” The goal was to help Marie get in touch with the core issue of making herself matter without either suppressing or acting out her anger.

An important part of Enneagram work is teaching clients to welcome their own reactivity and upset as a way of exploring their personality style. With Marie, I said, with considerable resolve, “When you get that reaction, you really need to befriend it. Ask yourself, ‘What’s this reactivity trying to tell me?’ I then asked her to make a commitment to herself to determine what mattered to her and how to best speak up for what was important to her. Since Marie wasn’t practiced at speaking up with thoughtful compassion, I provided a suggestion of what she might say to her mother: “What about saying, after you breathe back down, of course, to get grounded and receptive, ‘In the future, I’d like it if you asked me what I want.’”

### **Working with the Patterns**

Enneagram work is structured by what we call the Universal Growth Process (UGP) consisting of “5As.” These are:

■ **Awareness:** having a practice to increase receptivity and grounded presence; basically, having a fundamental breath practice.

■ **Acceptance:** opening the heart in kindness to self and others, but especially to one’s own reactivity and upset. This doesn’t mean capitulating, condoning, or agreeing with our own or others’ behavior! It simply

gives a positive way to work with our reactivity.

■ **Appreciation:** manifesting gratitude and staying in the natural flow of giving and receiving.

■ **Action in three parts:** first, pausing at times of reactivity to access the first “3As.” Practicing inner inquiry to discover, discern, and work with what’s causing this reactivity, especially determining if the reactivity is driven by the old core beliefs embedded in a client’s type structure. Finally, mentoring the self into a conscious action that’s either letting go or taking action that’s respectful to self and others.

■ **Adherence:** committing to the UGP and to working with type-related core issues in daily life, realizing that changing our patterns takes continual practice.

When we can witness, or self-observe, our own habit of mind and its repetitive, limiting pattern in a nonjudgmental way with gratitude—the first “3As”—we gain great leverage in changing the pattern. We get many opportunities each day to work with our pattern, since it shows up all the time in large ways and small in our reactivity and defensiveness.

Focusing on Marie’s new relationship with quiet, nondemanding, 50-year-old Elliott, a man with few voiced needs, demonstrates the importance of recognizing underlying personality patterns even when external circumstances change. In one session, Marie observed, “Now, I’ve found someone who shares my view of the world and completely allows for my decisions and opinions. But while he makes me feel understood and supported, I still find myself getting upset and reactive because I want to nurture and support him, too.” She added sadly, “It just seems so one-sided the other way!”

In response, I said, “Sense that anger in your body and really welcome it.” I put my hands on my gut, chest, and neck, where Marie manifests anger in her body. “When you’re angry, get grounded, and open your heart and speak up for what matters, for what you want. It’ll transform the energy.”

I said this with passion, as the challenge with Elliott felt so central to Marie’s struggle to speak up for herself, and not against what she doesn’t want. I concluded with, “My hunch is that whatever Elliott’s type style, he also needs to know that you’ll nurture him, rather than deplete him. He needs to welcome your support.” Essentially, I said that speaking up for herself would likely help her *and* benefit her relationship with Elliott.

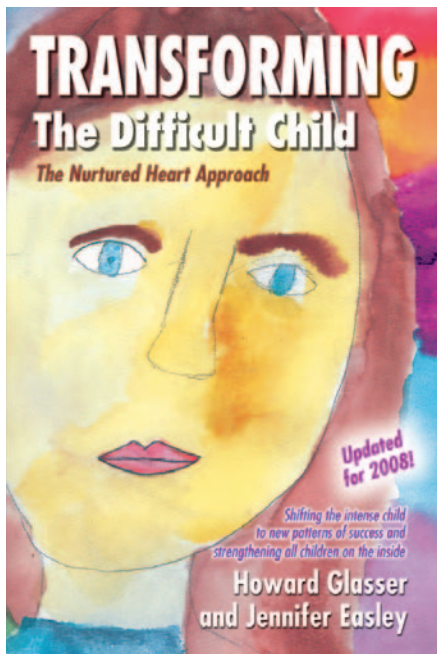
Marie still hesitated to do that. As she put it, “If he disagrees with me, I fear that bad feelings will develop, a rift will grow between us that we won’t be able to bridge, and the relationship will dissolve.” Again, this fits with Type Nine’s basic belief that speaking out leads, ultimately, to conflict and rejection.

I responded, “Can you allow yourself to grasp that, in speaking up, you believe that you’ll be found unacceptable and not worth keeping—which simply is no longer a valid, core belief?”

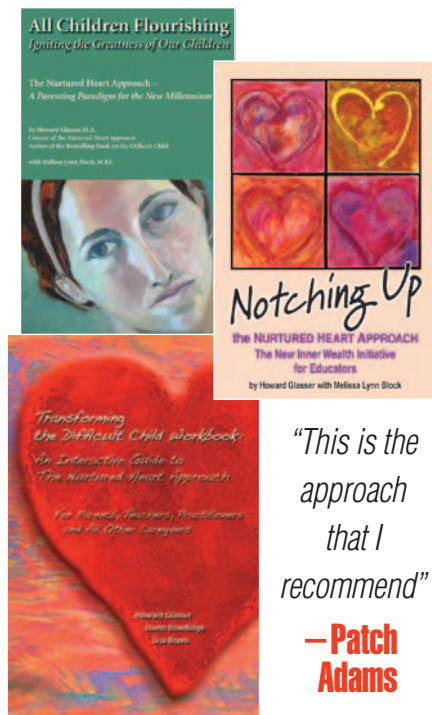
I encouraged Marie to stop for a minute or so three or four times a day to reflect on how she was doing at speaking up for herself and how grounded she was at the time. As we worked with her becoming more self-aware and less self-judgmental, she learned to befriend her reactivity, rather than condemning herself for it. Within a few weeks, she began to find release from this old belief and pay more attention to what mattered to Elliott and herself.

With its focus on long-time core patterns, the Enneagram is a transformative but not a brief therapy. Marie continues to work with her Type Nine Mediator/Peacemaker style. This is how Marie describes her own process of change and transformation: “I’ve learned to welcome the gifts that come with my type. I’m taking action in my life to make changes despite my natural reluctance. I’m doing more now to expand my life than I’ve ever imagined that I could, stretching myself beyond my perceived limitations every day.”

Marie is learning to live Rabbi Hillel’s saying: “If I’m not for myself, who am I? If I’m only for myself, ▶



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what am I? If not now, when?" In the process, she's coming back to the higher essential quality of true love of self, which is equal to—and not more or less than—love for any other.

## CASE COMMENTARY

BY STEVE ANDREAS

THE FIRST THREE ASPECTS of the Universal Growth Process (UGP) David Daniels mentions are Awareness, Acceptance, and Appreciation, all wonderful qualities that have been advocated by spiritual paths for millennia. But for the therapist, these broad concepts must be made concrete and clinically operational. The key question for awareness is "Awareness of *what?*" and the key question in regard to acceptance and appreciation is, "*How* do I do that?" Undirected awareness, like free association, seldom leads to a solution. And if you ask a client to accept and appreciate their experience, most will have no idea whatsoever how to do that—even if they accept that as a useful goal!

In this case, Daniels doesn't go enough beyond broad labels to show us the actual processes of change with a client like Marie. He tells us that she presented as someone who denies her own needs in deference to others' out of fear of rejection. This pattern used to be labeled "codependent," or, in some circles, "enmeshed" or "blurred ego boundaries." A Jungian would describe this as a "lack of individuation," and the Enneagram apparently calls this a Type 9, "The Mediator." But none of those labels in themselves really tells us how to resolve the problems clients present.

From my viewpoint Marie's main difficulty is simply an overuse of a very important human skill, namely compassion: the ability to step into other people's experience and be sensitive to their needs. Periodically, out of frustration and in recognition of her own needs, Marie erupts into disruptive and unproductive anger. She's stuck in an either/or polarity between

submerging herself and asserting herself that severely limits her choices in relationship. The therapeutic question for me is, "What action does Marie need to take in order to change this pattern?" Understanding and insight into core beliefs aren't enough to initiate change.

There are any number of methods I might use with a client like Marie to help her integrate her extreme polarities. One is the old Gestalt Therapy method of a dialogue in which the client role-plays each of the two opposites. In this process, unconscious thoughts and motives can be expressed as the client gradually becomes more and more aware of each opposing "part" as a valid component of his/her identity.

Another way to integrate is to ask the client to place an image of one part in one hand, and an image of the other in the other hand. Once these two images have been elaborated and developed and put into dialogue with each other, each is asked to identify and express their "meta-outcome" (the result of the more immediate behavioral outcome). Typically this is quite positive and often identical for each part. Here, for instance, both involve personal survival. Finally the client is told to gradually bring her hands together, observing as the two parts spontaneously change and blend into a single integrated image that's taken back into her body.

Still another approach would be for a client like Marie to close her eyes and visualize her relationship with her mother or other significant early caretaker. Often clients discover that their body is physically connected with that other person, like a Siamese twin. This image embodies an unconscious belief that maintaining connection is so vital that if either one were to be cut off from the other, both would die. This internalized belief image elicits the life-or-death intensity of response to any threat of rejection. One can then lead the client through processes to separate the two images, enabling each to become a self-sustaining individual.

Whatever method the therapist chooses, the important point is that

broad typologies, however interesting and seemingly explanatory they may be for both therapists and clients, have limited clinical value. To bring about change, we need ways to help clients take action to experiment with new experiences of themselves and their relationships, not just new explanations of why they are the way they are.

### AUTHOR'S RESPONSE

IT'S TRUE THAT MARIE'S behavior could readily be labeled "codependent," "enmeshed," or "lack of individuation," as Steve Andreas points out. As a clinical tool, the contribution that the Enneagram system made in this case was focusing on her core belief that she must not make a big deal of herself if she wanted to be loved and secure, rather than dismissed and rejected. For Marie, this meant focusing her attention on others and finding her importance through others, which resulted in her lack of individuation. I find the Enneagram so useful in my work because it gets right to each individual client's fundamental beliefs and organization of attention and energy.

But Enneagram work isn't only a system for helping us understand overall personality functioning. A key element is the use of practical strategies to enact change (the Action dimension). The Enneagram approach trains clients to notice, pause, and breathe back down to collect their energy when they get reactive. It regularly directs them to experience the felt sense in their bodies as a means of determining whether some core belief about the way the world should be is being violated. This gets followed with inquiry about the underlying belief that's the cause of this upsetting reactivity.

In the Action dimension, I worked with Marie to use this breath practice—breathing down and in to get grounded and self-observant (the Awareness dimension), opening her heart to herself in kindness, without judgment (the Acceptance dimension), and experiencing gratitude for her own good qualities and what

she cherished (the Appreciation dimension).

An ongoing practice in Enneagram work is having clients assess whether an old core belief is guiding their behavior, and then determining whether some alternative actions might be taken that would be more respectful to them and others. In Marie's case, I said, "Sense that anger in your body and really welcome it. When you get angry, get yourself grounded, open your heart and speak up for what you want." We worked with her to befriend her upset, not simply act it out. And we worked with her to recognize that in speaking up for and manifesting herself, she could still be present for another person, even as she transformed her own self-concept.

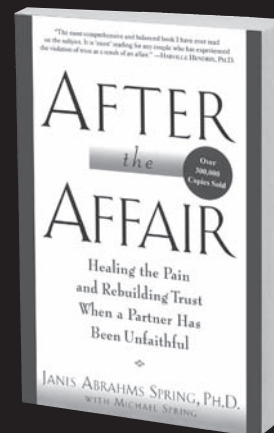
I fully concur with Steve Andreas's statement, "To bring about change, we need ways to help clients take actions . . . , not just new explanations of why they are the way they are." I feel, however, that we need to grasp both the content that explains the behavior—in Enneagram terms, the core beliefs and associated adaptive strategies of the type—and the process or action practices, based upon this understanding, required to bring about lasting change. ■

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*David Daniels, M.D., clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford Medical School, was a developer of the Enneagram. He established the Enneagram Professional Training Program with Helen Palmer in 1988 and is the coauthor of The Essential Enneagram.*

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*Steve Andreas, M.A., has been learning, teaching, and developing methods in Neuro-Linguistic Programming for three decades. His books include Virginia Satir: The Patterns of Her Magic; Six Blind Elephants: Understanding Ourselves and Each Other; and the forthcoming Transforming Negative Self-Talk: Practical, Effective Exercises.*

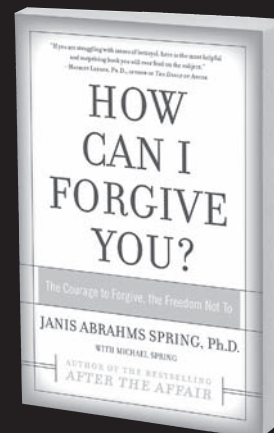
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