



DR. STEPHEN  
J. COSTELLO



# Enneagram of Communication

Dr. Stephen J. Costello

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## **Introduction**

Communication is undeniably one of the most important tools we have - it is the medium through which we share ideas, clarify requests, make sense of our world, build relationships ... even fall in love! Most of human existence involves two or more people communicating on some level at some time. And yet, communication is a common challenge and issue that people raise in coaching, needing support to improve in this area.

When we talk about 'a breakdown in communication' we do not often actually mean that we are not communicating at all - rather, that we are failing to communicate effectively: what we mean to say is not what is heard, and, before we know it, we find ourselves in a conflict. What is actually happening in many of these situations is that we are communicating, but the other person is not picking up what we hoped they would, or is not reacting in the way we anticipated.

As social creatures, people communicate all the time, even when we are not talking. We are constantly sending non-verbal cues to others, whether we are aware and intentional about these messages or not. We know that much of what we send, interpret, and hear is not so much in the words we say, but also in the context, the meta-messages, and our tone of voice. (A meta-message is the underlying message you may be communicating to others, often unintentionally. It is not said directly but rather is inferred from the general tone, content, and pattern or focus of your communication and other behaviours).

## **Communication and the Enneagram**

The Enneagram can help us understand our own communication style, use it more effectively, and also to understand others. Our Enneagram Type influences communication on both the sender's and receiver's ends:

- The Enneagram Type of the person communicating shapes what they focus on (the messages they see as important), how they communicate the message (tone and language) and what else might be implied at the same time (meta- message).
- The Enneagram Type of the person receiving the communication influences their perceptual filters and, therefore, the received message - it shapes what the person will notice, colours their interpretation of meta-messages, influences what they might be triggered by, and even the extent to which they are likely to clarify.

The Nine Enneagram Types show different patterns of what people will or won't focus on, how they communicate, and their meta-messages:

## **Enneagram 1 – Strict Perfectionist**

**Meta-message to others:** "Understand and achieve my standards, which are clearly right and better than others." This meta-message is supported by clear and directive communication that often focuses on highlighting errors or mistakes, giving instructions, and setting boundaries.

Enneagram Ones will often describe the world or situations as right or wrong, good or bad and use categorical, black and white language. Their communication is peppered with words like "should" and "must" and "ought", reflecting their moral stance. Ennea Ones can develop their communication by being aware of their tendency to categorise ideas as good or bad, and the risks of this over-simplification in complex contexts. Rather, take communication with others as an opportunity to be open to alternative perspectives and explore multiple interpretations of facts.

## **Enneagram 2 - Considerate Helper**

**Meta-message to others:** "I am here, I'm available and willing to listen, help, and advise in any way I can."

The communication underpinning this message is often informal, often expressing positive sentiments, emotions or feelings and using cheerful language like "great", "well done!" and "you can do it". Enneagram Twos try to be encouraging at all times and any negative messages may be masked or cushioned with compliments and flattery. Because Ennea Twos focus on the feelings of others, they may leave themselves and their own challenges or opinions out of their communications - until they feel taken for granted. Ennea Twos might improve their communication by reducing the level of persuasion and flattery they include and instead expressing their own feelings more simply and directly. This will help create an environment for listening, rather than being pre-occupied with your own thoughts about the other people involved.

## **Enneagram 3 – Competitive Achiever**

**Meta-message to others:** "I know how to achieve - so let me support your efforts to be a success."

Enneagram Threes tend to be assertive, practical, and to the point in their communication, unwilling to 'waste time' as they might see it. Their communications are full of "return on investment", "goals" and "adding value" and they are comfortable telling others what they, the Ennea Three, have achieved. Ennea Threes are also pragmatic and clear, and use concrete examples to get to the heart of a matter. They use verbs like "drive", "achieve" and "push ourselves" in their efforts to motivate others to similar levels of focus and effort. Threes' fast pace may make them somewhat impatient when sharing ideas and they can benefit from slowing down and being more open to alternative perspectives and deeper consideration before moving to act.

## **Enneagram 4 - Intense Creative**

**Meta-message to others:** "I am creative and explore what is going on at a deeper, more emotional level."

You will often know when you are reading something written by an Enneagram Four, as their communication tends to be beautiful, dramatic, and often quite emotionally compelling. Ennea Fours' communication operates on multiple levels at once, and so, while they choose their words carefully, they can also blend specific details and philosophical musings, or past and future together in a way that others can find difficult to follow. Their themes are idealistic and include of "if only" and "what might it be like if...". The key challenge for Ennea Fours is to balance the depth and intensity of their communication; perhaps by focusing more on objective facts and tasks. Fours may also benefit from being aware that others may find the depth and personal nature of their communication intrusive and need more time to build trust.

## **Enneagram 5 - Quiet Specialist**

**Meta-message to others:** "I will share my knowledge and expertise to help you determine a logical and effective approach."

The Enneagram Five often uses a lot of jargon or technical terminology and can have an unspoken message of "if you can't understand or keep up, then you're on your own". Ennea Fives focus their communication on explaining, synthesizing and figuring things out and often use language like "what you need to understand is..." and "let me explain to you" or "here's why your point of view is wrong" which can seem condescending. Their comfort zone is rational and objective communication, and they struggle to talk about feelings. Ennea Fives prefer to use distant, digital or written communication channels and can often improve their communication by connecting in person more often to build deeper, more personal relationship.



## **Enneagram 6 – Loyal Sceptic**

**Meta-message to others:** "Have we fully explored and unearthed all the risks and threats here?"

The communication style of an Enneagram Six is often labelled as negative or pessimistic, focused as they are on the potential risks and challenges of a situation. These individuals often highlight the other side or unexplored aspects of a situation or decision, saying things like "on the other hand" or "what if?" or presenting the argument and counter-argument simultaneously. Their troubleshooting focus also leads to a lot of "that won't work because..." and "it's never been done before, it's risky" but they also focus on the team and emphasise the idea of "together we can". Ennea Sixes communication can become muddled or cycle over the same issues repetitively, even contradicting themselves. They can improve communication by taking time to collect their thoughts and distinguish between facts and fears or projections before engaging with others.

## **Enneagram 7 - Enthusiastic Visionary**

**Meta-message to others:** "Let me focus on the possibilities and interesting options ahead!"

Whatever the message, an Enneagram Seven will almost inevitably end on an exclamation point. Their language is enthusiastic and full of excitement, with lots of exclamations like "great!" "yes!" and "fantastic!" thrown in and they may ignore the downsides of ideas. Ennea Sevens tend to communicate from a big-picture perspective and focus on the future, which, combined with their fast pace, can seem superficial, generalised, and unfocused sometimes. Their communication draws on a number of tactics to liven up communications and make their point, such as examples, analogies, jokes, surprises, and even exaggerations. Ennea Seven's spontaneous, fast-paced style can seem self-absorbed and limit their ability to truly listen to others. They can improve their effectiveness by slowing down and consciously creating space to hear others without anticipation or impatience.

## **Enneagram 8 – Active Controller**

**Meta-message to others:** "Follow my lead - I know what needs to be done and how it needs to be done!"

The Enneagram Eight's communication style can be exciting and incredibly persuasive, and they often drive people forward through the sheer force of their certainty and determination. Their unspoken message can be something like "lead, follow or get the heck out of the way" and if taken too far, their communication can seem pushy or rude. Ennea Eights do not use unnecessary words and descriptions - they are unemotional, direct and to the point and can seem blunt to others as a result. When they are angry, however, their communication can become much more emotional and reactive. Ennea Eights need to be aware that their certainty can shut down or intimidate different perspectives, preventing others from asking questions or offering contributions. Slowing down and being less decided may enlist others in their cause and make it easier for them to participate.

## **Enneagram 9 – Adaptive Peacemaker**

**Meta-message to others:** "We must establish a harmonious relationship so that you can succeed."

The Enneagram Nine strives to communicate in ways that are calm, respectful and do not disrupt or offend others. Ennea Nines can sometimes seem almost absent in their own communication, as they tend to speak in very general and inclusive terms, holding their own point of view back. They use lots of 'we' or 'people' language rather than 'I', and prefer two-way communication where they can align, integrate, and go along with their views and opinions of others. In particular, Ennea Nines have trouble saying 'no' and may use passive-aggressive communication or silence instead. Nines can improve their communication by clarifying what is most important, what their point of view is, and what they believe might be a good course of action.

## **Conclusion**

No matter what Enneagram Type we are, we can all improve the effectiveness of our communication with others by becoming more aware of our unintended messages and meta-communication, and also by becoming more aware of our filters when we listen to others. As a critical first step, do not assume that when someone else uses certain words or tones, it means the same as it would when you use the same words or tone. Our Enneagram Types filter and influence not only how we communicate, but also the meanings we attach to certain words or ideas and, therefore, how we listen to others.

Also, when there is a breakdown in communication, try to remember that it may well be unintentional. Slow down, take time to clarify, and try to understand the other person's point of view without your own filters getting in the way. Try to listen with curiosity - it may help to try and imagine the filters the other person may be listening through, as described above. Above all else, be aware of what you may be unintentionally communicating to others, and take steps to balance the risks or challenges of your Ennea communication style.