

Rehearsing these skills contributed to Dale's being more direct with people, which energized her considerably. Within two months, others commented that she was much more dynamic and influential, a positive counterpoint to her earlier vanilla reputation.

Coaching Style Nine

Style Nine is the most peaceful, harmonious, powerful, and sometimes maddening style on the Enneagram. It would be easy to stereotype Dale and others like her as peacemakers and miss the point that the relationship of this Enneagram style to anger is very complex. An exaggerated modesty covers an internal conflict: Nines are polarized between self-effacement and the ensuing anger. That's why their most common coping behavior is passive aggression.

Beware the fury of a patient man.

John Dryden

People often underestimate Nines because of their low-key approach, but a remarkable number of them have been world leaders. You might even say it's a Presidential style in the U.S., including Clinton, Reagan, Ford, Eisenhower, and Lincoln. Some Nines are humble to the point of self-effacement, not owning their power. Someone who worked for Dale said: "She doesn't seem to realize her impact." Dale lacked awareness of both her anger and her power, leading to the resignation of someone to whom she made the passive-aggressive joke, "You have to ask your mother?"

If you offer structure you will find Nines easy to coach, too easy if they are unaware. An in-the-box Nine will go along with whatever you suggest and then often not do it. "I'm so sorry, I forgot," is a common refrain. This is because they will lose themselves in your agenda—even seeking structure from you—then their passive aggressive behavior kicks in. Once you have trust and commitment from your Nine clients, this self-forgetting pattern offers important and useful data that you can use to reflect back how they keep themselves in their own box. Be alert, in particular, when they ask, "What do you think?" Nines need to state their own preferences.

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Mary's client, Frank, seemed clear in his goal when they first talked: he wanted to be better at addressing upper management, "so that my ideas will be heard." He was very quick to use the Enneagram to pick up others' styles, especially the more aggressive ones, but his reports of conversations always blamed others. They never had time for him, they didn't take his ideas seriously, and they weren't clear enough in their expectations. As he began to see his own part in this pattern—ways in which he held back ideas, sought structure, and criticized others for "keeping

him in a box”—he felt overwhelmed and helpless. He wanted easy answers and was not ready to be coached to shift his patterns. But in typical Nine style, Frank didn’t tell Mary directly. Instead he kept forgetting to call at the appointed time and forgetting to send a check for the agreed-upon fee. When Mary challenged him to stay with the process he said it would take “too much energy.” He had heard his wake-up alarm and hit the drowse button. Two years later, when his job was in jeopardy, he wrote, “I’m ready to work.”

We have had several Nine clients who signed up for coaching because someone else—a friend, a spouse, a boss—suggested they do it. We learned the hard way to get a commitment based on the client’s own wants and goals. This is not easy and usually cannot be handled directly when beginning to coach a Nine. If you ask, “What do you want?” there will be either a very long silence or an honest, “I don’t know.” Instead of a “to do” list, we often recommend a “want to do” list for Nines. You can build on a Nine’s comfort with consensus by collaborating to help them find their focus.

Nines often know what they don’t want, so you can help them work their way to a goal by starting there. For example, Jo reported in her first session with Clarence all the things she did not like about her current work environment. She moved in a positive direction when he asked about each of those dislikes, “So what would that look like if it weren’t a problem?” Another way you can encourage Nines to take initiative is to offer some alternatives and let them choose among them. For example: “Would you rather change the way you ask for things, or talk directly to your boss about the problems you see, or write a proposal for improving the work environment?”

Nines can be immobile and indecisive. Your coaching will help them become focused and initiating, while retaining their gift of inclusiveness.

Practices Mediation Naturally

Serene and centered, out-of-the-box Nines bring cooperation to any situation. They are highly capable of dealing with others’ problems and building consensus. They have a natural tendency to honor diversity, and can get along with almost anyone, as Dale did. Their considerable gifts as mediators stem from their ability to see all sides of a question. Because Nines think globally, they can interiorize everyone’s side of a conflict and have an intuitive grasp of what it feels like to hold each position, as well as all the strategies and value systems at play. When Mary first learned about the Enneagram, she laughed at the realization that her career as an executive coach had flourished precisely because of her ability to

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**Pay attention to
these four habits of
in-the-box Ones:**

*Practices mediation
naturally*

*Presents only a
pleasant self*

*Falls asleep to
deepest needs*

*Tends to minimize
difficulties*