

Shifting From Either/Or to Both/And Thinking

The following dilemma was offered as part of a job application: “You’re driving along on a wild, stormy night. You see three people waiting at a bus stop and pull up to offer a ride. You discover that one is an elderly woman who will live only if she receives quick medical attention, another is a dear friend who once saved your life, and the third is your perfect mate. But you only have room for one passenger in your car. Which one would you choose? You could pick up the old woman and save her life or you could repay the old friend who once saved your life. However, you might never again find your perfect mate.”

The candidate who was hired (out of 200 applicants) wrote this answer: “I would give the car keys to my old friend to take the elderly woman to the hospital and wait for the bus with the mate of my dreams.”

Notice the *either/or* thinking implicit in the way the question was asked (“...the old woman... *or* your dear friend...”). Far too often, our questions are framed within the context of our worldviews. That’s why we feel stuck when constrained to only one of two choices. It’s also why we have to solve the same old problems over and over again. The candidate who gave the above answer broke through by reframing the question. Instead of accepting the limitation that only one choice was possible, the implicit question became “How can I choose all three?”

All Enneagram worldviews are sustained by a key polarity. For example, in-the-box Threes believe “*Either* I succeed *or* I fail.” You’ll also find many examples of *either/or* thinking that aren’t Enneagram-specific. One of your greatest gifts to clients will be the fresh perspective you offer as you help them reframe their thinking in terms of *both/and*.

Let’s suppose one of your clients wants to exchange a Christmas gift that doesn’t fit but assumes that would upset the giver. He says “She’d be hurt if I told her.” Here’s a quick formula to shift someone from *either/or* to *both/and* thinking:

1. Rapport
2. Vision
3. Presuppositions
4. Self-observation
5. Possibility language
6. Solution focus
7. **Both/and thinking**
8. Honor resistance
9. Right-brain tactics
10. Fieldwork
11. Process observations

The questions we ask are often framed within the context of our worldviews.

All Enneagram worldviews are sustained by a key polarity. For Threes: “Either I succeed or I fail.”

1. **Identify the “X” and “Y” that are apparently incompatible.**
Implicit in this client’s statement is his assumption, “*Either* I keep the ill-fitting gift *or* I hurt the giver.”
2. **Explore the parameters of the polarity.** If you ask the client how he wants the giver to feel, he might say he wants to please her. This information will help you frame the third step in positive terms.
3. **Ask, “How can you do *both X and Y*?”** In this case you could ask the client, “How can you let the giver know in a way that will please her?” Notice the question “How can you do both?” is a presupposition. It assumes the client *can* do both. You’ll find many alternatives opening up that would otherwise be invisible.

Shift to both/and thinking:

- *Identify “X” and “Y”*
- *Explore the parameters*
- *Ask, “How do both X and Y?”*

When polarities are obvious you can go directly from the first to the third step. When I started writing my book, for example, I expressed concern that marketing would take too much time from writing. My coach asked, “So how could you use your writing to market yourself?”



Practice

1. Listen to clients for evidence of *either/or* thinking. Note three examples of how you could help them shift to *both/and* thinking:

Either/or polarity:

Both/and reframe:

Either/or polarity:

Both/and reframe:

Either/or polarity:

Both/and reframe:



2. Using your own words, identify a key polarity for each Enneagram style:

One “Either _____
or _____.”



Two “Either _____
or _____.”



Three “Either _____
or _____.”



Four: “Either _____
or _____.”



Five “Either _____
or _____.”



Six “Either _____
or _____.”



Seven “Either _____
or _____.”



Eight “Either _____
or _____.”



Nine “Either _____
or _____.”

