

What's Your Type?

Personality system brings life into focus

by Jim Radosta

Eyeglasses aren't the only thing that can help us see life more clearly.

Visions come in varying strengths, and so do personalities. Some of us are good at taking charge, while some excel at helping out. Some are fun-loving social butterflies, some prefer privacy.

According to an ancient personality system known as the Enneagram, there are nine major ways of viewing the world. By identifying their "types," people can learn about their strengths—as well as coping strategies for when their personalities get out of control.

"Working with the Enneagram has helped people become healthier adults because they understand themselves better and they understand their partners better and their kids better and their work mates better," says Dale Rhodes, a spiritual director who facilitates workshops on the personality system.

Rhodes identifies as a Type Four, also known as "The Romantic"—idealists who tend toward big emotional reactions. The first time he read about his personality, he was struck by how "uncannily accurate" the description was.

Minda Redburn, a fellow Enneagram expert who also is a Type Four, agrees: "It was stunningly and uncomfortably accurate about me. It helped me understand myself in ways that, in years of studying psychology and doing my own therapy, I had never been able to understand myself before. It just kind of unlocked the mystery of how I'm wired."

Redburn, who has worked as a career counselor for 16 years, started studying in 2005 to become certified as an Enneagram trainer. It was at this point when she realized that, even though her colleagues came from around the world, they all had an Enneagram type.

"So this is universal human nature," Redburn says. "These strengths work really well, and because they work so well, we overuse them. It's kind of like the expression, 'If you've got a hammer, everything looks like a nail.' When those strengths are used in situations where they're not what's called for, that's how it

gets us into trouble and creates suffering for ourself and other people." As a career counselor, Redburn has been able to incorporate the Enneagram in her practice with positive results for clients.

This is where the Enneagram can truly change lives, Rhodes explains. He has seen people become better managers, therapists and ministers because they gain empathy for the needs of their employees, clients and parishioners.

"It has saved people's relationships because it gives them greater compassion and understanding for how their partners experience the world," Rhodes says. "We assume everyone's language is the same as our own, and it's not."

Rhodes facilitates a series of classes on the second Saturday of each month from October through June to introduce students to the nine personality types. An advanced community has met on the second Mondays for six years. This month, he and Redburn will offer a weekend workshop in Southeast Portland specifically tailored toward practitioners.

"I frequently hear from students, 'I wish my therapist knew the Enneagram,'" Rhodes shares. "The more this system gets popular, their clients are going to be talking about the Enneagram, and it would benefit them to know...what resources are out there and that this is an effective, good, grounded scientific tool for personal growth and development."

The upcoming workshop will also help practitioners pinpoint "blind spots" where their personality styles might hinder their work. Carol Placer, a counselor in Southeast Portland who has participated in the program, identifies as a Type Seven, or "The Epicure." Because this is an optimistic personality style, "there would be a tendency for me maybe to overemphasize what feels positive in someone's life.... A lot of the Seven energy can be getting ahead of yourself and getting stimulated by one thing after another. So it's part of my practice to be as fully present in the moment as I can be."

Viewing the world through this new perspective, Rhodes concludes, can have a powerful impact on ourselves, our families and our neighbors.

"You cannot hate someone you understand, and the Enneagram really helps you understand people's motivations," he says. "So it naturally brings out compassion and personal change."