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Your E-mails Communicate More Than You Think

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Most of us write multiple e-mails every day, yet how often do we think about the many messages they convey beyond our actual content and intended impact? Our e-mails actually communicate information that can cause unintended negative and positive reactions in the e-mail recipient. Moreover, our e-mail writing styles actually reflect our Enneagram styles.

When we use the Enneagram as a way of understanding our e-mail communication styles, we not only improve the way in which we communicate with others, we also learn more about ourselves and dramatically increase our personal and professional development.

“It *can't* be that easy,” Janice exclaimed. “You mean I can actually change my habits while I’m writing my e-mails?”

Janice, a Four, had learned that Fours unconsciously engage in self-referencing behavior -- actions that pull the conversation and attention away from the other person and toward the Four. One way Fours do this is by frequently using the words *I, me, my, and mine*. In the two short sentences above, Janice used these words four times.

“In answer to your question, yes, you can,” said the Enneagram consultant. “In the two sentences you just said, you can eliminate all the *I, me, and mine words and instead say, “It can't be that easy! You mean a person can change while writing e-mails?”*”

Janice learned that e-mails were a good way to practice this skill. When she wrote them, she could immediately see her overuse of these words. All she had to do was delete the self-referencing words and rephrase her sentences. Not only did her e-mails become more effective, but her speaking habits changed as well.

This self-development activity sounds simple, and it is. The first step toward changing is simply to *pay attention to yourself*. First, Janice will see the words after she writes them and will change them. Next, she will catch and modify the words before she even types them. Eventually, her new writing style will come naturally and without effort. In speaking, Janice will learn to focus less on herself and more on the content of the discussion and on other people. Simple actions such as this exist for people of every Enneagram style; that is the elegance of the Enneagram.

The following examples of e-mail writing from individuals of each Enneagram style also include an Enneagram-based analysis of the e-mail and suggestions for rewriting the same e-mail with greater impact. These e-mail examples use the original language and punctuation of the person who sent the e-mail.

Enneagram Style One — Constance

Ones seek perfection and work diligently to improve everyone and everything, including themselves.

Constance sent the following e-mail to her co-worker about a bonus the co-worker had recommended for a staff person named Janice.

"I think this bonus is entirely appropriate. Janice is a treasure, and I think she needs to feel that we see and appreciate all she has done and is doing for our organization.
Best,
Constance"

Analysis

In this articulate e-mail, Constance communicates her position on the subject of the bonus with precision and clarity. The e-mail also illustrates the Ones' characteristic language patterns. Although the e-mail is short, Constance states several opinions in an emphatic and unequivocal manner -- for example, *I think*, *entirely*, and *all*. In addition, the e-mail uses words that imply rightness or correctness of action -- for example, *appropriate*, and *needs*. Ones tend to discuss thoughts, particularly stated as opinions, rather than direct feelings and to use words that imply right or wrong and refer to correct or incorrect behavior.

This e-mail is actually quite gracious; however, if Constance wants to use her e-mails or verbal communications as an aid in her self-discovery, she could do the following:

- Delete language that implies *should*, *ought*, *right*, and *wrong*
- Change words that give definitive opinions to language that implies more flexibility and less categorical or emphatic thinking
- Use language that acknowledge and encourage multiple points of view

There are many ways to reconstruct Constance's email along the lines suggested in the above paragraph. Here is one example:

"The idea of giving Janice a bonus would compensate her for the extra time she has spent, and it can also serve as a reward. This might be highly motivating and everyone could feel pleased about the solution.
Best,
Constance"

The changes in the above e-mail are relatively minor ones. However, the elimination of emphatic words and the inclusion of less definitive words such as *can*, *might*, and *could* give the e-mail a softer tone and invite more dialogue (if the recipient of the e-mail disagrees with Constance.)

Enneagram Style Two — Sherry, Daniel and Larry

Twos want to be liked, needed, and considered indispensable, and they indirectly orchestrate the people and events around them.

Three e-mails are included for Twos. The first two e-mails -- one by a woman and the other by a man -- illustrate how both men and women of the same Enneagram style use similar language patterns. Because the content of the first two e-mails is informative and affirming, the third e-mail is also included to show the typical language pattern of Twos when they are angry. For individuals of most Enneagram styles, the language patterns are similar whether they are

pleased or upset; this is generally true for Twos as well. However, the complimentary and supportive style of Twos changes dramatically when they are distressed.

E-mail #1

Sherry sent this e-mail to a co-worker in response to the co-worker's news that upper management had approved a project.

"Okay, that's terrific. -- I'll plunge into my part of the project next week.
Sounds like a good plan you're following to go with that creative energy first before doing the more mechanical parts first -- those seem to be very easy for you, too.
And that's great about Anthony's offer to provide more funding! You're in a win-win situation. How wonderful!
Best,
Sherry"

E-mail # 2

Daniel sent this e-mail to a colleague who had given him some positive information about a mutual client.

"That's great! Thanks for letting me know.
Hope 2005 is a wonderful year for you.
Mexico was FABULOUS. I'm already plotting my next trip down.
All the best,
Daniel"

E-mail # 3

Larry sent the following e-mail to a group of 150 people regarding a forthcoming project team reunion. Larry, a planning committee member for this event, is not the chair of the reunion; Shirley and Marc are the event co-chairs. This e-mail was sent in response to an e-mail from Joseph Spaulding that had been sent to the group of 150. Joseph is also a planning committee member, and his e-mail questions whether the cost of \$75 per person for the reunion might be prohibitively high. As a note, Larry does not know the Enneagram; therefore, his opening remark is a spontaneous comment, rather than an amused self-awareness that often emerges when individuals pursue a course of self-discovery.

"Here's a thought from left field, from someone who always tries to make everyone happy:
Sure wish everyone who has NOT spent several hundred hours planning venue alternatives, food and caterers, refreshments, music, dance floor, entertainment, name tags, correspondence, invitations, cost, budget, and a couple of dozen other relatively important items would have JUST A LITTLE RESPECT for Shirley, Marc and two dozen or so other people who HAVE spent the time, done the research, and functioned as close to a democracy as possible in coming to some conclusions. This process began in mid 2004, not yesterday; no one was excluded from involvement, participation and opinion voicing. Joseph Spaulding's opinions on food, dancing and price were considered by several people BEFORE any firm decisions were made.
I have supreme confidence in Shirley and Marc. They've led a process that has located about 70 percent of the project team, four months before the event. No project team reunion gets that high a percentage.
Rather than second-guessing and asking the Committee to start over, how about saying thanks to the chair-people and committee members, especially Joseph Spaulding, for a job well-done.
I feel a little better now...but just a little.
Larry"

Analysis

In e-mails #1 and #2, several common language patterns of Twos are illustrated. The tone of both e-mails can be described as very upbeat and optimistic -- for example, the use of words such as *great*, *terrific*, *good*, *wonderful*, and *fabulous*.

These e-mails also reveal an intention to encourage or compliment the recipient. Sherry's e-mail suggests that the recipient is creative, finds mechanical tasks rather easy, and has chosen an effective plan of action. Daniel's e-mail also contains an enthusiastic response to good news and demonstrates the appreciative quality that Twos value so highly. The focus of both e-mails is more on the person receiving the e-mail than on personal or professional information about the Two who sent it. However, there is an implicit message about the Two; both e-mails reflect the Two's opinions or sentiments about what the other person is doing and, in both cases, the Two's feelings are ones of pleasure and approval.

There is nothing wrong with either of these e-mails. In fact, the recipients were probably delighted to receive them. However, should Sherry or Daniel want to use their language patterns to increase their own awareness of how, even in a simple e-mail, their style tendencies come through, they could each have changed their e-mails before they sent them by doing the following:

- Focus as much of the content on themselves as on the e-mail recipient
- Use fewer superlatives such as *great* and *terrific*
- Eliminate the flattering comments

Sherry's e-mail could be rewritten as follows:

"Congratulations on the success of the project -- both the acceptance of it and the extra funding. Your plan to do the creative work first and then work on the more mechanical parts sounds like it will work well.
I'll begin my part of the project next week. This week has been rather hectic, but the work clears out in a few days.
Best,
Sherry"

And Daniel's e-mail could be rewritten like this:

"Thanks for letting me know that the client is back in touch.
My trip to Mexico was so enjoyable that I am trying to figure out how to return as quickly as possible.
All the best to you in 2005,
Daniel"

In the third e-mail, from Larry to the entire project team, there are noticeable similarities to the first two e-mails. Larry capitalizes certain words for emphasis, as does Daniel in his e-mail. In e-mail etiquette, capitalization is the equivalent of using a loud voice or yelling. None of the e-mails from individuals of the eight other Enneagram styles uses this technique with the same frequency as Twos.

While Daniel's e-mail capitalized the word *FABULOUS*, Larry capitalized words that chastise Joseph Spaulding, the most obvious being the words *JUST HAVE A LITTLE RESPECT*. The

other capitalized words, when read in context, are also intended to get Joseph -- as well as others who may share Joseph's opinions -- not to raise these types of issues at this time.

Similar to the first two e-mails, Larry's e-mail focuses primarily on others and events, rather than on himself -- the exception being the opening and closing lines. In this third e-mail, the Two's opinions and sentiments are also the source of the information. The common Two focus on appreciation, respect, and positive regard directed toward themselves and others for whom they feel loyalty and concern is part of the basis for Larry's agitation. In the first two e-mails, the Twos show appreciation and positive regard for the e-mail recipient; in Larry's e-mail, he is angry because, in his mind, this respect was not shown to Shirley, Marc, or himself -- the informal leader. Twos like to orchestrate the interactions between and among people (according to their rules of interpersonal behavior) and often become angry when others do not behave according to these implicit guidelines.

A difference between the third e-mail and the prior two is the length and amount of detail contained within it. Larry seems to have put a great deal of effort into writing it as he makes his rigorous case against Joseph Spaulding's behavior. The sequential logic of Larry's position combined with his emphasizing certain words in capital letters shows that he feels extremely angry and resentful, although he never states this directly. Larry's ending comment, *I feel a little better now...but just a little*, indicates that he is still quite disturbed and serves as a warning to Joseph Spaulding and others not to raise these or similar issues again.

On one hand, Larry's e-mail communicates his displeasure with Joseph's behavior, even referring to Joseph formally by using his full name, whereas he refers to others by first name only -- a more friendly and familiar way to address people. Should Larry want to use e-mails such as this one to push himself to examine his Enneagram language patterns, he could:

- Express his feelings with less strident and pointed words
- Use simple and more expressions of his own feelings
- Send the e-mail to Joseph only, with copies to Shirley, Marc and the other committee members, rather than sending it to the audience of 150
- Encourage a respectful response from the recipient

The rewritten e-mail might look like this:

"Dear Joseph,

In response to your e-mail that raised several questions about the project reunion, here are my thoughts. The issues are ones that the planning committee, of which you are a part, has wrestled with for many months, and we are now at a point where I believe we need to move forward on what has already been decided by the planning committee. Re-opening these decisions will derail our progress and hinder our ability to meet our deadlines.

All of us are entitled to our opinions -- you as well as me -- and these are mine. I felt angry when your e-mail arrived because of all the hard work we have put into the planning of this event. It would also be unfortunate if Shirley and Marc felt that their extensive efforts as chairs of the reunion were, in effect, being called into question at this point in time. Your suggestions may be good ones; however, they come to late in the process.

I, for one, would appreciate it if you raised any future concerns only to the planning committee and not send out an e-mail to the project team. Doing that can get too many people stirred up, and we need to deal with these sorts of issues at the planning

committee level. In the end, we all want the reunion to be a harmonious and positive event.
Hoping to hear from you on this,
Larry”

Enneagram Style Three — Alex

Threes seek the respect and admiration of others through achieving goals, appearing successful, and avoiding failure.

Alex sent this e-mail to his co-workers regarding a project plan that the team -- of which he is a member, not the team leader -- has been struggling with for several months.

“Dear friends,

I am writing this e-mail from a small town near Portland, Maine, where I am participating in a conference on risk management. I will be making a presentation on the strategic implications. I have given several presentations like this before which have been well received so I am optimistic that this one will also go well.

After reading the useful contributions of other project team members, I wanted to put in my two cents for the discussion. I think we should consider...[This e-mail continues with Alex’s doing an outstanding job of outlining the project plan -- one the team had been struggling with for months.]

Peace to everyone, from the West Coast – Alex”

Analysis

In this very friendly e-mail, Alex tells a group of colleagues quite a bit of information about himself and what he is *doing* -- where he is, why he’s there, and the fact that he will be doing a high status activity -- presenting at a conference on a sophisticated topic. There is also an upbeat tone to his words, although more muted than in the first two e-mails by the Twos.

The last part of the e-mail is particularly interesting in terms of reflecting the Threes’ value on competence and capability combined with their tendency to read their audience well. In the part of this e-mail that is not included here because of its length, he does an excellent job of laying out a logically sequenced action plan. However, he is also sensitive to the fact that several of his colleagues have already tried and failed. In an effort not to offend others in the group, he compliments their efforts or *useful contributions*, and refers to his own work as adding *two cents*, thereby downplaying his own contribution. Some recipients of this e-mail, however, may find Alex’s self-deprecating comment as insincere because he presents a plan that is so obviously well thought out.

Again, while Alex’s e-mail is fine as it is, if he wanted to use his e-mails to practice a different way of expressing himself -- a way to push his awareness of his Enneagram style language patterns -- he could do the following:

- Talk less about his own actions and achievement
- Use language that focuses more on the specific task and the other people involved
- Neither inflate nor dismiss the importance of his performance and actions
- Present his ideas in a straightforward way
- Invite a response back

For example, Alex could rewrite his e-mail in the following way:

“Dear friends,

I’m away on business, yet wanted to offer some thoughts about our project, ideas that came to my mind after reading the contributions several of you have already made. [Continue outlining the project.]

I will look forward to hearing your reactions to these ideas and the discussion that we will have.

Alex”

Enneagram Style Four — Althena

Fours desire deep connections with both their inner worlds and with other people, savor authentic self-expression, and focus on what is missing.

In the following e-mail, Althena informs her co-workers on a team that she must miss a pre-scheduled conference call.

“Hi Everyone,

First, I'd like to let you know I'm healing well from my surgery. It didn't quite go as I had hoped and I ended up needing a transfusion and had a couple of other post-surgical complications. I was home in 2 days, and out taking a walk on the 4th. I'm feeling quite good considering everything, the pain is manageable and now and then I forget and have to remind myself to slow down and not do too much.

That said, there are doctor's appointments, including Monday at 3:00. I remember our discussion about moving to this time, but it's the only time of the day I'm unable to participate. I want to say thank you to all of you who sent me e-mails and cards inquiring about my health.

With regrets—Althena”

Analysis

In Althena’s e-mail, she uses the words *I*, *my*, *me*, and *myself* fourteen different times. Fours tend to use these words so frequently that they are usually unaware that they are doing so. In addition, Althena spends most of the e-mail discussing her own personal experience with a recent surgery, although the ostensible purpose of the e-mail is to inform and apologize for having to miss a pre-scheduled business conference call. Because of the continual use of personal words and the frequency of telling personal stories, others often perceive Fours as “self-referencing” -- focusing the conversation and attention back to themselves.

Again, this e-mail has many positive characteristics; it is personal, warm, and informative. However, Althena could challenge herself, and simultaneously increase her self-awareness by doing the following:

- Reduce the number of self-referencing words -- *I*, *my*, *me*, *mine*, and *myself*
- Place less emphasis on the personal situation by using language that is less personalized, more objective
- Focus more on others as it does on oneself

Here is one possible way Althena could rewrite her e-mail.

“Hi Everyone,

Thank you all for your concerns about my recent surgery. The healing has gone remarkably well, and the biggest challenge right now is to slow down and let the recovery process take its course.

Unfortunately, a doctor’s appointment will prevent me from attending the scheduled conference call.

With regrets,
Althena”

Enneagram Style Five — Martin

Fives thirst for knowledge, use emotional detachment to keep entanglements with others to a minimum, and try to minimize their dependence on others.

The e-mail example for Fives is a series of e-mails because the sequence and cumulative impact of these e-mails most clearly reflect both the Five’s language patterns and the Five’s core issues. These e-mails between Martin (a Five) and Sarah discuss the possibility of carpooling to a staff party. They begin with an e-mail from Sarah to the entire staff. Both Sarah and Martin know the Enneagram, and their knowledge and self-awareness are expressed indirectly in the later e-mails.

Email # 1 from Sarah to ten of her co-workers regarding an upcoming staff party

“This party sounds like so much fun. I wondered if anyone would be coming from the Southside who might like to make the drive with me. That probably only includes Martin and/or Trish, but, who knows?

Sarah”

Email #2 from Martin to Sarah

“Hi Sarah,
I can pick you up, no problem.
Martin”

Email # 3 from Sarah to Martin

“Hi Martin
Or I can pick you up! Either way. Where do you live or would you be coming from work?
Sarah”

Email #4 from Martin to Sarah

“Hi Sarah,
Looking forward to it. I live and work in Southfield...okay so I live in my car...what's the big deal? Just kidding. I get off from work at about 5:00 pm so we could be fashionably late.
Martin”

Email # 5 from Martin to Sarah

“Hi Sarah,
Well, I've got this new Blazer, and you know about my trust issues already, so what the heck, I'll pick you up. What's your address?
Martin”

Email # 6 from Sarah to Martin

“Hi!
I forgot about the privacy and autonomy issues involved! Forgive me!!
Sarah”

Analysis

This series of e-mails illustrates four characteristics of Fives’ when they communicate:

- Minimalism in number of words used to express a thought
- The need to preserve their autonomy and privacy
- The ability to be self-reflective (in a wry way)
- Moderate self-disclosure (the sharing of information about self) when they know and trust someone

Although all Martin's e-mails are short, Martin's e-mail #2 is especially minimal. In it, Martin immediately suggests that he pick up Sarah, although her initial e-mail, email #1, does not imply that she wants a ride; she simply asks for someone to ride with her. However, it is very clear in this sequence of e-mails that Martin wants to drive (thus preserving his autonomy), and that he does not want to give Sarah his address or to pick him up (thus preserving his privacy).

Martin's self-reflection and self-disclosure can be seen in e-mails #4 and #5; Martin sent e-mail #5 without having received any response from Sarah to e-mail #4. In e-mail #5, Martin explains why he prefers to pick her up, for example, when he refers to "my trust issues."

This series of e-mails clearly resolves the question of who would pick up whom and illustrate Sarah and Martin engaged in a mutually amusing interaction, Martin, however, could use situations such as this to work on his Five language patterns. Doing this would call to his attention to the even smallest ways in which our Enneagram styles influence our communication styles and our behavior. For example, Martin could do the following:

- Elaborate on each idea
- Include real feelings with thoughts
- Be more forthcoming about his desires at the earlier stages of communication

For example, Martin could have written Sarah only one e-mail -- saving them both a great deal of time -- saying the following:

"Hi Sarah,
I would be happy to go to the party with you. That day, I will be getting off work about 5:00 pm, which might make us fashionably late. My preference is to pick you up and hope this is OK with you. Why don't you e-mail me your address?
Martin"

Enneagram Style Six — Sheldon

Sixes search for certainty and support, worry repeatedly about an issue, have incisive minds, and create worst-case scenarios.

Two e-mails from Sheldon, an attorney in a large law firm, were sent to a human resource staff member who is in charge of an employee morale survey. Sheldon sent the second e-mail within an hour of having sent his first e-mail, although the human resource staff member had not responded yet to his first query.

Email # 1

"I am slightly confused. Our group has only four employees in Chicago. One has only been there a year. How can we have a 64.7 % response rate?
Sheldon"

Email # 2

"I certainly don't believe new employee's responses have any meaning. My recollection, though, was that we were not going to survey them.

Sheldon”

Analysis

While the issues and questions that Sheldon raises are legitimate ones, a contextual issue may be helpful in clarifying why these e-mails reflect the typical Six language patterns. The survey to which he refers was sent to several thousand employees. Of the seventy attorneys in management positions comparable to Sheldon’s, he is the only attorney who reviewed the preliminary response rates from the morale survey at this level of scrutiny or sent an e-mail asking for clarification.

In these e-mails, Sheldon not only writes about specific details, his words, combined with the fact that he sent two consecutive e-mails, express his underlying anxiety about the survey results. His concerns arise before he has actually seen the survey results; he is anticipating what the data may say (particularly negative data) as well as how useful the information will be, thus reflecting both the discerning minds many Sixes possess and their tendency to create worse-case scenarios.

If Sheldon wants to use his e-mails as a means to practice new and different language patterns, however, he can do the following:

- Use the recipient’s name at the start of the e-mail, thus communicating more warmth
- Collect his thoughts and send one e-mail only, thus conveying less stress
- Reduce the amount of concern and fear implicit in his words
- Imply that the recipient of the e-mail will effectively handle the issues he raises

Sheldon can collapse his two e-mails into one and have rewritten the e-mail this way:

“Dear Cathy,
When I received the e-mail about the response rates for our Chicago group, I did the math and wondered about the 64.7% response rate. That group has four employees, one of whom has been there only one year.
My recollection is that we were not going to survey employees who are new because they would have had limited experience with the firm.
Your answers will be very helpful to me in understanding this process and yielding data that will be useful.

Sheldon”

Enneagram Style Seven — Leslie

Sevens crave stimulation, engage in elaborate future planning that preserves all of their options, and try to avoid pain.

Leslie, a Seven, sent this e-mail to her colleague, a person who had left Leslie’s company two years earlier and had recently contacted her via e-mail to rekindle their friendship.

“I would love to talk to you---I know you are busy too---home phone: 318-2773993---weekends are best
Daughter is getting married on April 7 to a New Zealander--wonderful man--in Glasgow, Ireland--small wedding, only the 2 of them---more later
take care
Leslie”

Analysis

Leslie's e-mail illustrates the Seven's tendency to cover a great deal of information quickly. Leslie talks about herself, offers her phone number, and highlights her daughter's wedding plans, all in a brief e-mail. Many details, however, are not included -- for example, why Leslie is so busy, who will initiate the telephone call, why the wedding is taking place in Ireland when the bride is from the United States and the groom is a New Zealander, and why Leslie is not attending the wedding.

The Seven's tendency to think, talk and move at a rapid rate is also reflected in the e-mail's punctuation and sentence structure. Most of the ideas in the e-mail are stated in phrases rather than in complete sentences, dashes are used rather than periods at the end of a thought, and some capitals and commas are missing. The absence of attention to punctuation and sentence structure conveys the sense that Leslie is writing this e-mail quickly. Although Leslie includes several items about her daughter's wedding, there is a sense of movement from one aspect of the forthcoming marriage to another, all in quick succession.

The optimistic quality that is common to Sevens is also apparent in this e-mail. Leslie implies that everything is going well in her life and mentions that her prospective son-in-law is *wonderful*. She also says that she is very busy, but does not imply that this is a problem.

Although this e-mail is short, Leslie's primary focus is on what she is doing, with limited reference to the recipient of the e-mail. While individuals of several Enneagram styles can exhibit this tendency to focus on oneself, giving the impression (almost always unintended) that their own life and activities may be more interesting and important than those of others. Sevens tend to write about themselves (in an upbeat way) more frequently than individuals of other Enneagram styles. Fours, by contrast, tend to write about themselves too, but do so by telling stories related to personal pathos and events gone awry.

This e-mail covers all the essential points that Leslie wants to convey and does so in a bright, engaging, and breezy way. However, should Leslie want to use her e-mails as a way to call attention to her Enneagram style language patterns and simultaneously practice new communication skills, she can rewrite her e-mail using these guidelines:

- Change the brief writing style by elaborating on ideas to include information about problems or concerns as well as positive information
- Use complete sentences
- Pay more attention to punctuation
- Focus on the e-mail recipient as well as on self

For example, she could rewrite her e-mail in this way:

"Dear Karen,
It was a pleasure to hear from you, and I would love to talk to you soon. My home phone number is 318-277-3993. I still have your number. Perhaps we can talk sometime this weekend, and I'll give you a call.
Thank you for asking about my daughter. She is marrying a wonderful man from New Zealand this coming April. They want to have a tiny wedding in Ireland -- just the two of

them; unfortunately, my busy work schedule does not allow me to be there, and I also want to respect their wishes for the idea of just running off together. Work has been hectic, but challenging. I can share more about this and other things when we speak by phone, and I want to hear about what is going on in your life too. Take care,
Leslie”

Enneagram Style Eight — Raymond and Martha

Eights pursue truth, want situations to be under control, exert themselves to make important things happen, and hide their vulnerabilities.

The following two e-mails, the first from a male and the second from a female, both illustrate identical Eight language patterns. The first e-mail from Raymond was sent in response to an e-mail from a longtime professional colleague.

“Good to hear from you. All is well. I will call you when I next come to San Francisco.
Raymond”

The second e-mail from Martha, the CEO of a mid-size company, was sent in response to an e-mail that was originally intended for John, Martha’s COO (Chief Operating Officer) regarding the directions and logistics for a forthcoming meeting.

“Greetings!
Unfortunately, John is out sick today. Gloria will forward directions to the parking structure for our office. You are scheduled for the Senior Staff meeting agenda tomorrow. The Senior Staff consists of six seniors and myself for a total of seven. Our Senior Staff meeting is scheduled to begin at 12:00 p.m. We are scheduled to have that meeting at one of the local restaurants, so we’ll be walking. Plan on arriving at 11:55 a.m. I would allow 45 minutes to get here at that time of the day.
Martha”

Analysis

While these two e-mails deal with very different topics, the writing style and language patterns are markedly similar. Both e-mails get right to the point. Raymond acknowledges the person who e-mailed him and says exactly what he, Raymond, will do next. For example, Raymond states that he will make contact with the recipient when he comes to San Francisco. Martha gives direct and precise answers -- what will happen next, who will do, who will be at the meeting, what time it starts, what time to arrive, and how long the drive will be. Both e-mails contain complete, concise information and are directive and action oriented.

These e-mails contain no extra words, few pleasantries, and both are “no nonsense.” They are friendly, however; Raymond says *All is well* and Martha begins her e-mail with *Greetings!*. The direct simplicity of these e-mails becomes more obvious when they are compared to e-mails from the other Enneagram styles.

The directness of both Raymond and Martha’s e-mails is partly a result of the sentence structure they use. Taken together, both e-mails contain eleven sentences, and all are complete sentences. In fact, nine of the eleven sentences follow the same pattern -- subject (noun) and predicate (verb) -- and use very few adjectives or adverbs.

Both e-mails are examples of clear e-mail communication. If they chose to, however, Raymond and Martha can take advantage of the opportunity to increase their awareness of their Enneagram style communication patterns by reviewing and rewriting their e-mails. They could follow these guidelines:

- Change thoughts or statements that convey ways to organize, structure, and control events to statements that are less definitive and more contingent
- Acknowledge and invite a response from the other person
- Add more variation in sentence structure
- Use more adjectives and adverbs
- Be more personal

For example, Raymond could revise his e-mail in the following way:

“Dear Joe,
It was good to hear from you. All is well at the office. We have new projects coming in all the time, ones that are demanding a great deal of my time and attention. I will call you when I next come to San Francisco, but when that will be is unclear. Hopefully, it will be soon.
Looking forward to talking with you,
Raymond”

Martha could rewrite her e-mail this way.

“Greetings Arnold!
Unfortunately, John is out sick today, so he is unable to return your e-mail. In answer to your request, Gloria will forward directions to the parking structure for our office. You are scheduled for the Senior Staff meeting agenda tomorrow. I, along with the six other Senior Staff members, am looking forward to meeting with you tomorrow at 12:00. It would be helpful if you arrived around 11:55 a.m. because we will be walking to a local restaurant. It may take you 45 minutes or so to get here at that time of the day. Please let me know if there’s anything else you need.
Regards,
Martha”

Enneagram Style Nine — Herman, Belinda, and Byron

Nines yearn for peace, harmony, and positive mutual regard and have an aversion to conflict, tension, and ill will.

The first two e-mails show the consistency of language patterns of Nines when they want to affirm others, foster good will, and create a sense of unity. The third e-mail illustrates the language pattern of Nines when they are angry.

Herman, senior manager in a large corporation, sent this e-mail to three consultants whom the company had hired, and cc’d the firm’s president and four executive vice-presidents.

“Thank you Naomi, Charles and Matthew [the consultants] for your fine work and patience in dealing with us! The high returns [from your consulting project] only verify that your program and approach was first rate -- well designed and executed. We all look forward to working with you on the results.
Herman”

Belinda, a Nine and a board member for a nonprofit company, sent this e-mail to the entire board after a Board of Directors’ conference call.

“Thanks for the fine minutes, Sheila.

Welcome President Jeremy.
Thanks Madame President, Alicia. [Alicia was the past Board of Directors' president]
Happy Thanksgiving to all.
Warm regards,
Belinda”

Byron (also a board member of the same nonprofit organization as Belinda) sent Jeremy, the current president of the Board of Directors, the following e-mail. In this e-mail, Byron expresses his anger about Jeremy’s request that the Board commit two days to their in-person meeting, which is to occur six months later.

“Jeremy,
I am of the opinion that you cannot ask people who have ongoing work responsibilities to give up nearly two whole days for this meeting. My suggestion is to try to carve out 3 hrs on Monday night, meet all day Tuesday, and make the meeting as focused and productive as possible.
–Byron “

Analysis

In the first two e-mails, both Herman and Belinda’s explicit intention is to compliment and honor specific individuals. However, because both e-mails were sent to a wider audience than those to whom the praise is directed, they appear to have also had an implicit intention -- acknowledging someone’s good work to other people. Although Herman’s e-mail was sent to the consultants, he was also targeting to the e-mail’s highly placed secondary recipients -- the firm’s president and vice-presidents. Belinda’s e-mail was sent to the entire Board of Directors because her intent was to affirm these three individuals in front of the whole board. Affirming individuals who are part of a group and doing so in front of the others reflects the Nines’s sensitivity and orientation to positive regard and collective good will.

As a counterpoint to the warmth and affirmation expressed in the first two e-mails, the third e-mail illustrates how Nines often communicate when they are deeply angry and ready to express it. In this e-mail, Byron communicates his consternation for what he perceives as Jeremy’s demanding too much of his time and the time of other board members for their in-person board meeting.

Because it usually takes a long period of time for Nines to become conscious of feeling angry and to then communicate their feelings directly, when they do express their anger, Nines may come across liked controlled volcanoes. Byron’s e-mail is a good example of the precision, force, and pointed speech that occurs when Nines express their anger openly.

Because Byron’s e-mail starts with the words “I am of the opinion,” he sounds like a lawyer or debater, although he is neither. Byron’s strong criticism of Jeremy is also clear, as are his unequivocal and exacting prescriptions intended to remediate the situation. In this e-mail, Byron expresses anger about feeling compelled to do something against his will -- spending two full days in a meeting. Although Nines most typically appear flexible and agreeable, they can also become immovable objects when they feel pushed.

Again, there is nothing wrong with all three e-mails, and they serve their intended purposes. The first two e-mails affirm and support, while the third e-mail confronts and chastises. However, they can all be reviewed and rewritten *if* Herman, Belinda or Byron want to use their e-mails to raise their awareness of their Enneagram-based communication patterns.

Herman and Belinda could do the following:

- Alter their use of highly affirming language that suggests agreement and confirmation
- Use language that states a clear position
- Be clear about to whom the e-mail is really intended

For example, Herman, who sent the original e-mail to the consultants although its message was really intended for the company's officers, could send his e-mail directly to the president and vice-presidents, with copies to the consultants, and he could use the following language:

Dear [use the names of the company officers],
"The project we have undertaken as a firm is going remarkably well -- the 88% return rate on the survey is extremely high and means we will be able to count on the accuracy of the results. The three consultants have done an excellent job assisting us in this effort -- they have been strategic and responsive in every way.
Herman"

Belinda could also use a more direct approach. She could still send her e-mail to the entire Board of Directors, just as she did in the original e-mail, but she could change her wording so that the e-mail is more relevant to everyone.

"Dear Board,
I thought our recent conference call went very well and that everyone contributed to its success. I also want to extend my appreciation for the work that Alicia has put into this organization as our president and welcome Jeremy into his new role as current president. Sheila, the minutes look great, so thank you for your effort.
Belinda"

In the third e-mail, Byron clearly shows his anger and frustration. In it, Byron takes a clear position, but states it in such an extreme way that there is little room for discussion. It is not unusual for people to go from one behavioral extreme to another, particularly when they are doing something that is new to them or makes them uncomfortable. If Byron had expressed his real feelings and needs earlier, his e-mail to Jeremy would probably have had a different and less strident tone. However, given that he did not do this, Byron still could have rewritten the original e-mail in the following way:

"Dear Jeremy,
When I learned that you would like the board meeting to last two full days, I became quite concerned about the amount of time this would require from all of us. Speaking for myself, I do not have two full days available at that time. May I suggest that we spend three hours on Monday and a full day on Tuesday? I think we can cover what is needed if we have a clear agenda and keep our discussions focused.
Please let me know what you think.
Byron"

Conclusion

Our e-mail writing style reveals a great deal about who we are, how we think, and what we feel. Although becoming more aware of our communication patterns and changing them may seem awkward or cumbersome at first, it will become more natural over time. In addition to the e-mail writing suggestions that are specific to each Enneagram style, some general tips can be useful to everyone.

- Include a salutation such as “Dear David,” or “Hi Janet,”
This personalizes the e-mail and makes the recipient more responsive.
- Include an appropriate ending such as “Looking forward to your response” or “Regards,”
This helps the recipient to not speculate about what you are thinking and feeling or what to do next.
- Include your name at the end of the e-mail
This also personalizes the e-mail and makes it easier for recipients to reference if they save it to a desktop file.
- Use CAPITAL letters sparingly; for emphasis, use bold font or underlining
Remember that you may not mean to shout what you capitalize, but many people read capitalization this way.
- Use complete sentences whenever possible
This simply makes your statements clearer to the recipient.
- Include some punctuation
Punctuation makes an e-mail easier to read.
- E-mail shouldn't be used for all your communications
Sensitive conversations are usually best done in-person or at least by telephone. Remember that any e-mail you send can be forwarded to hundreds of people.
- Reread your e-mail before you send it
Rereading helps you be more conscious of your Enneagram-based communication style, and you are likely to catch words, tone, or statements that don't reflect what you want to say.

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