

## Article for TALK

### “From Parenting to Enneagram”

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*“Don’t worry what the world needs. Figure out what makes you come alive and do that, because what the world needs is alive people.” Howard Thurman*

The Bay Area has had a vibrant Enneagram Community for longer than I have been teaching, but when I started teaching 13 years ago there was not an active teacher (as far as I know) in San Mateo. With an already well-established career as a Parent Educator and Coach that I began in 1987, I was well positioned to bring the Enneagram to my parenting community. Now, with 26 years of leading workshops behind me, my work has reached beyond parenting and evolved into teaching, learning, and participating in a rich community exchange of everything Enneagram.

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#### Getting Started

To start, I want to give a little history about the circumstance in which I first encountered the Enneagram.

I had been teaching parenting workshops for over ten years - “Parent Effectiveness Training” and my trademark course, “Parenting Your Adolescent”. Over that time, I observed that the skill set I was teaching worked differently with the various parents in my workshops, and also, as reported back to me by the parents, with their children. I was also, of course, noticing this in my own family with my husband and three kids who were teenagers at the time. This ignited my interest in personality theory as a means of making my parenting work more relevant to the people I was teaching.

So in the mid-nineties, I certified in the DiSC system and began to use it with my families – it was user friendly, simple, and pragmatic, and gave parents a sense of some of the behavioral differences that they were experiencing in their families. I also studied Meyers Briggs and found it useful as well, though I never did incorporate it into my work with families.

Then I heard about the Enneagram, and took my first workshop with Helen Palmer in San Francisco. I was inspired by the experience. After that initial weekend, I knew that the Enneagram was to be my next step personally and professionally. Though I have always been a seeker and have spent many hours in therapy and learning spiritual practices (such as Transcendental Meditation, Vipassana Meditation, breath work, Somatic Experiencing and Centering Prayer), the Enneagram offered something more: the integration of the psychological and spiritual in a very explicit, yet profound way. This appealed to me immensely.

As a lover of people's stories, archetypes, metaphor, and meaning making, the narrative tradition was particularly compelling. I had the blessing of certifying with Helen Palmer and David Daniels, MD, and of being supervised by Clinical Psychologist J.D. Daniels. I also attended other workshops to expand my understanding and see the different ways in which other teachers presented the system. All of this work was profoundly useful to me in my work with parents, families, and educators, and as my understanding of the Enneagram system deepened, I began to offer workshops bringing the Enneagram into these communities.

### **Drawing from an Established Community**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all just hang a shingle out and have people flock to our workshops? Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work that way. Getting trained is only the first step on the path to building a sustainable business, which requires building a following amongst a community of interested people.

I already had an established community of parents, families, and educators, with three aspects to my work already well in place that were feeders for each other: public speaking, workshops, and private coaching. I spoke at schools, churches, temples, businesses, and community centers on a wide range of topics related to parenting, schooling, and communication. This led parents and educators to my workshops, which led people into private coaching. It sometimes worked in the opposite direction – people would come for coaching and then want to take a workshop.

I began talking about the Enneagram and many of my existing students and clients became intrigued. Naturally, it was from these students that I drew my first typing interview clients when I was in the process of Enneagram certification, and it was these students who attended my first Enneagram workshops.

When I coach people who are trying to establish their own Enneagram practices, I encourage them to draw from the communities that they are already familiar with –

their work, children's schools, religious or spiritual communities, neighborhood, friends, family, etc. I am aware that not everyone has established work that they can draw from, but most people do have some community, formal or informal. That is the natural place to begin.

### **Daily Diligence: aka Elbow Grease**

Starting out as a new Enneagram teacher is not an easy endeavor even with an existing community to reach out to. It can be daunting, and as a withdrawing type, I had days in which I just wanted to hide and not expose myself to the vulnerability I felt. I knew that it would take persistence to push through, and that a consistent strategy could help me achieve what I was hoping to do. This was something I initially learned in developing my parent education career, but the same principles worked for establishing myself as an Enneagram teacher. I played a little game with myself to push through – it may not work for everyone, but I know it has with some people I have coached on getting their businesses going, so I share it here:

In this “game”, I told myself that I had to do three things every day to keep the momentum and establish myself as an Enneagram teacher. However, I also gave myself permission to have those three things be little or big, depending on my confidence and energy level, and how busy I was on that particular day. It could be anything from creating a flyer for a workshop, to cold-calling a person to sit on a panel, to starting a business checking account, to writing website material, to reading a chapter in an Enneagram book (clearly, this was my go to “action-step” when I was in one of my low confidence, low energy days!)

From an Enneagram standpoint, I felt as if I was developing my wings and connecting points. I was going into my Five wing when I needed to research or write up a presentation, to my Three wing when I needed to promote my work, to my Two connecting point when making contact with participants and panelists, and to my One connecting point when it came to the logistical details of putting on a workshop. As a Self-Preservation Four, I also worked at establishing a little more comfort with my Social Instinct. At the time, all of this was a helpful way for me to think about certain aspects of my development within the business context, and it served as a personal laboratory for me to better appreciate the nuances of the Enneagram system in a very personal way.

### **Advertising, Marketing, and Social Networking**

I have a confession: I do no “social networking” in the modern sense of the expression. No Facebook, no Linked-In, no Twitter, no Yelp – no nothing! Nor do I do online courses. This is not from an arrogance of thinking that I don't need to do this or that it couldn't help me build something larger. It is more of an inner resistance because, frankly, I just don't have an affinity for this form of communication. Also, I have never “advertised”, apart from my workshop announcements going out to people who have asked to be on my email list.

At an Enneagram holiday gathering last December when the conversation turned to marketing through social networking, I was impressed by how much people had engaged social media and felt rather deficient about not being more “with it”. I sheepishly made the comment that I do not do any marketing with social networking or advertising. A wonderful woman standing with us said, “Au contraire, Barbara. You are one of the best marketers I know.” I was shocked. She went on to say that, in her experience, I consistently make personal contact with my participants and panelists, often commenting on something that may not think I had remembered, like “How was your trip to Cuba?” Well, I was very relieved to see that I did have my own style of “advertising”.

Notwithstanding that I do not use social media, I do have a website that I feel good about, and I do know that when people want to check me out, that is where they go. So I think a website that reflects your mission and your work is imperative nowadays. I also think testimonials from clients, students, and teachers who are happy and willing to be named are important. Frankly, it is hard to trust testimonials that are not attributed to anyone but a generic “student” or “client”.

For those of you who desire greater exposure, I do think it is important to be networked. I also know of a great deal of success some of my former students are having with online courses. Everyone has to decide for him or herself how much or how little they are willing to do in this regard. I expect that my tune will change about social networking should I ever publish a book.

### **Valuing your Panelists**

I consider my panelists the “meat and potatoes” of my work. They are the experts, and I am privileged to be their guide in the inquiry process. Together we can enter some extraordinary territory, from the strengths and limitations of type, to the relational concerns, to the ways of transformation and the possibility of liberation. I could never do this work without them.

One definition of “love” I really resonate with is: “when your desire for another is for them to grow closer to their own soul.” Given that definition, I have to say that I love my panelists. Every one of them, no matter where they are in their health or development, is working towards understanding themselves and others better, and they are willing to be vulnerable to that end. It is a hero or heroin’s journey to do this work, and to show up publicly in this way. I am profoundly grateful that many, if not most, of my panelists return again and again as a gift to me and to themselves.

I know from my own experience as a panelist how important it is to feel safe on panel, and how the teacher sets the tone for this feeling of safety. This safety is not a euphemism for “making nice.” On the contrary, it is when a panelist feels safe and loved in their deepest selves that he or she may be willing for me to inquire into the darker aspects of their type and to share this in front of a group of strangers.

The Hippocratic oath, “Do no harm”, applies here. This can be tricky because sometimes, as a teacher, your job is to point out how the passion or fixation is actually showing up in that very moment on the panel. Nonetheless, I believe that we have to meet our panelists where they are at, and try to sense, as best we can, how much we can nudge them to disclose. This means letting go a bit of our control or agenda, while helping the audience make sense of the type from what is shared.

Thanking panelists goes without saying for me. Not only are they contributing their time and effort to sit on panel, but also they are exposing themselves to emotional vulnerability (and for some, it can be quite significant). After thanking them, I try very hard to follow-up with a panelist if I feel something came up with them on panel that was especially difficult.

### **Making a Living**

Money is a matter of consequence that many people are uncomfortable talking about. For most of us, if our work in the world is to be sustainable, we have to be able to make a living at it. I had the advantage of being able to transform my existing parenting work into work centered on the Enneagram.

I have no doubt that taking the Enneagram to businesses and corporations would have been more lucrative than working with it in family, relationship, and educational communities. However, I also believe that if you are doing what you love, your enthusiasm comes through and this is very compelling. Though I had done corporate trainings and worked with businesses, it was not my passion, and I decided to initially apply the Enneagram to my work with families, couples, and relationships. Later on, I developed a wide range of workshops and topics that continued to spur community interest.

I made money in three aforementioned ways: workshops, speaking, and private coaching. Everyone needs to make decisions around how much and how far they are willing to travel, whether they wish to partner, whether renting space will be necessary, etc. Sometimes it takes some experimenting to see what will work into your lifestyle. In my case, I was already well suited to give workshops in my home as I had done for years with the parenting.

It is my value and my mission to make my work accessible to everyone. To that end I have always offered a sliding scale to clients and partial scholarships to workshop participants, and can do so now more easily. Early on I made the mistake of occasionally offering a workshop or coaching session for no charge to someone who was in need. I learned that this does not work – others did not value my work if I did not value it myself. I do offer flexible payment strategies as well as partial scholarships to those who ask for it, or when I sense there is a need. But first, I try to have them get a sense of what they are actually paying. For example, in the ten-week course I am presently teaching, several students were concerned about the \$250 fee, which distills down to \$25 an evening – saying just that helps them get perspective. I might give \$50 off, and suggest that they bring \$20 to each class for the remainder

due (really, the cost of a movie night). Or, I might give a \$150 scholarship, and ask for \$10 each session. This kind of plan breaks down the cost and makes attending a workshop easier to handle for those on a strict monthly or weekly budget.

### **Ethics and Integrity Among Teachers**

One of my first concerns when I began teaching was what I had a right to copy and hand out in my workshops. I had paid for the right to use and copy the wonderful handouts created by David Daniels and Helen Palmer in their teacher's manual, but I was not sure about what to do with other teacher's articles that I wished to share. So, before my first class, I contacted several teachers and asked their permission to use their articles, with the assurance that I would give them credit and keep their contact information on the article. The answer was always "yes." Now, with more articles available, I no longer make a call to every teacher, but I do honor my resources by stating their names, giving them credit, and always keeping their information on handouts. I trust other teachers do the same with the articles I have written that they wish to share.

On a related note, I try to always give credit to the many teachers I have learned from, though I am sure I also have occasional oversights. It hurts others and ourselves when we don't do this. None of us are "self-made." We all "stand on the shoulders" of our own teachers and mentors. I have had several of my students go on to become marvelous teachers in their own right, and I have given away hours helping and mentoring them on their path. It always feels good to be acknowledged privately and publicly for this. I try to do the same with my own teachers.

Advertising the work of other teachers at my workshops became a question for me as well. We all have to figure out what we are comfortable with. After giving this a great deal of thought, I came to the conclusion that I was very willing to put out the flyers of other teachers' offerings as long as: 1) I was not offering the same thing at the same time, or in the near future, or 2) they were in a different part of the Bay Area, and 3) they were willing to reciprocate.

There is another conundrum I have still not quite worked out. That is the question of what I am willing to endorse. If I put someone's flyers or brochures on my table where my students check in, it is an implicit endorsement. If I do not have direct experience with the teacher or have not heard from someone who has (and preferably a few people), then I am hesitant to do this. I still do not know how to respond when I am asked to do so – I haven't found the right words yet.

I have occasionally been asked if I would be willing to make an announcement to my emailing list contacts for someone else's workshop in both the Enneagram and related fields. The answer is an emphatic "no." My reason is simple. When people sign up for my emailing list, they are explicitly asking to receive announcements of my workshops, not of others. I am not a happy camper when I get email solicitations for purposes other than what I signed up for, and I am sure this is not a unique experience. We are all inundated with emails, and I wish to protect the privacy of

those on my list. In addition, I blind copy all contacts when I am emailing a class or panelist group, because I have noticed that on occasion some people will lift contacts off of my list to add to their own without permission. When a class grows intimate and emails are then shared, I leave it to the individuals to express their desires in this regard.

### **Growing Inward - Calling in Divine Presence**

Most of this essay so far has been about the practical aspects of starting, growing and sustaining an Enneagram practice, and ultimately about building community. I'd like to turn now to the part that for me is foundational: the spiritual dimension of this work.

I believe that we can only teach well when we are doing our own work. My best moments in teaching and coaching are when my small "I" gets out of the way, and something more substantial and real begins to emerge. My real work is in the continual uncovering of the shadow aspects of myself while learning to embrace the Divine Essence that is there in all of us. I believe this IS the work, and it is where I try to teach and live from, sometimes more successfully than others.

It is not my desire to become an Enneagram guru. I would simply like to continue to awaken in whatever way and at whatever pace seems to unfold, with practices in place to help me along the way. In order to teach from a more centered place within myself, there are some specific practices I engage in before speaking or teaching a workshop, during workshops, or before meeting with clients.

One is the Buddhist practice of Meta Meditation, also referred to as Loving Kindness. What I love about this is that it can be said in any frame of mind, negative or positive, and it still seems to work its magic. It goes like this:

*May you be Healthy  
May you be Happy  
May you be filled with Love*

*May I be Healthy  
May I be Happy  
May I be filled with Love*

Meta helps center me and sets the "right intention" for the work I embark on. There is also a book by Marianne Williamson called "Illuminati" and on page 187 there is a prayer that helps me when I am feeling ungrounded or have a sense of my separateness before teaching a workshop. Meditation, centering prayer, and yogic practices (especially "alternate nostril" breathing) before speaking, teaching, or meeting with a client, can also be useful.

During a talk or a class, if I feel myself become ungrounded or reactive in some way, I try to take a moment to reconnect, usually with my breath, bringing it "in and down" as Helen Palmer taught in her initial training, and as is a part of most

meditation practices. This can be done in the moment and no one will even notice. If the energy in the room is all over the place, I will also sometimes just stop and invite everyone in the room to do this practice with me.

## **Growing Outward**

Keep learning. The Enneagram itself is a moving, alive, dynamic system, as is expressed through the Law of Seven and Law of Three. It is not static – nor are we. If we want to be an Enneagram teacher and facilitator, we have to keep growing, practicing, and deepening our own understanding and experience. I believe we need to be consummate students as well as teachers – there really is no difference – we are all both. We experience this every time we facilitate a panel and practice receptivity – who is teaching who?

It is a gift to myself to take workshops offered by other teachers and to sit on panels – I always learn something. I do not know what kind of teacher I would be without my support system of teachers and healers who help keep me on track.

The Enneagram is inexhaustible. Whenever I have a topic I want to understand more deeply, I decide to do a workshop in it, or at least have it be a topic of discussion and exploration in one of my long-running more advanced study groups. This motivates me to do the deep study and keeps me growing and engaged with teachers and teachings that I have yet to learn from.

I know that sometimes my ego gets in the way of opening to new ideas or ways of thinking about the Enneagram. I think many of us like a kind of certainty about what we think we know. Even when it comes to typing, I see many teachers become quite certain that they know someone's type when that person does not identify as such. Or we, as teachers, can become entrenched in the belief that our understanding of a concept is the right understanding.

I think it is important to be both open minded and discerning when it comes to other viewpoints. Sometimes, with my more advanced groups, I introduce a concept and share ideas from various authors, teachers, and perspectives and leave it to my students to decide what most resonates with their experience, rather than insisting that there is only one way to view a concept. I also try to research what I can to verify as much as possible.

Worst of all is when I see teachers or anyone move into a stereotyping of people, where they make assumptions based on behavior without understanding the core motivations. We have all done it and I believe it does damage. I try to stress, again and again, that the Enneagram is more about 'energies' than it is about personality traits or characteristics, and that we cannot determine type by behaviors.

The Narrative Tradition is about allowing someone their own journey in discovering their type. Sometimes this takes time for the person to unravel, and they have to "live" in another type for a period of time. I have never seen this cause harm, and in



fact, I believe that there is a lot to be learned when a person misidentifies initially. I remind my students again and again that we have all the types within us, and that the Enneagram is a system of differentiation, not exclusion.

### **Keeping it Alive – Change it when your soul is no longer enlivened by it**

In about January of 2011, I began to assess whether my then full private Enneagram Coaching Practice was working for me. I often taught morning and evening workshops, and saw five or six clients in-between.

In my personal life, my then 90-year old mother had lost her driving privileges and was showing signs of early Alzheimer's or dementia, and my oldest daughter asked if I would be willing to take my granddaughter one day weekly so she could return to work part time. I very much wanted to help my daughter and look after my granddaughter that one day per week, and I needed to be more available to help with my mom.

In addition, it seemed that more and more of my work was in coaching coaches and therapists, either on how to use the Enneagram with their clients, dealing with some of their own reactivity in various professional and personal situations, or in getting clarity with their business plans. I was also offering support to several of my students who were going for certification themselves. It was time for a change.

I consulted with J.D. Daniels on how to make this transition in a way that would not do my clients damage, and he gave me invaluable input. I began to share with my clients my intention of "ending" my coaching practice in four months time. Some of my clients decided they wanted to use the next four months, before my formal ending date, to consciously bring our work together to a close. Others wanted to continue their work and I carefully worked to find a good match for them with another coach or therapist.

Now, for the last year, my private work has consisted of coaching coaches and therapists, having an occasional check-in with a prior client, typing interviews, and occasional short term coaching (one to three sessions) when it works into my schedule. In addition, I try to always say yes to Peter and Pat O'Hanrahan when they ask me to coach typing interviews for certification students, and I have been accepted as a supervisor.

In addition to the many workshops I offer, I have had the privilege of offering two workshops with David Daniels on "The Enneagram for Therapists, Coaches, and Spiritual Directors" which has received great reviews from participants. Out of those workshops, David and I now have an intimate group of coaches, therapists, and spiritual directors who meet once monthly for Enneagram and case studies, and support. More importantly, we see how there is a rippling effect when teaching professionals who bring it directly back into their work with their own clients.

Now my work is congruent with where I am at in my life. I can continue to do the work I love, but without all the hours that I once clocked. Last but not least, I have freed up just a little time to take care of my grandchildren (two of them now!) once weekly and help with my mom. Talk about being Present – it is the best weekly practice I do!

## **Conclusion**

My home has become a “community center” of sorts for all things Enneagram. The parents I worked with thirteen years ago were my first Enneagram students – perhaps guinea pigs is a better word here! Today, my students are a diverse lot. I still have many parents who want to learn the Enneagram to better understand *themselves*, in order to see their children (and themselves!) more clearly and compassionately\*.

However, more and more, my workshops seem to fill with people who are younger (16 is the youngest I take) and older (I just had a nun who was 83), married, single, LGBT, and ethnically diverse participants. I also have many students and panelists, as well as other teachers, who travel from as far south as Santa Cruz, as far north as Santa Rosa, and as far east as Truckee, to participate in workshops and sit on panels. Several of my cherished students have gone on to become certified and have become extraordinary teachers in their own right. Other teachers come to share their knowledge and wisdom, David Daniels and Bea Chestnut to name two. Of the 1,000 plus who have taken my Enneagram workshops, more than 50 come every month for continued advanced studies, and over 300 have asked to be on my panel lists as a way of keeping the Enneagram alive in their lives.

We are encircled and held by a rich Enneagram Community in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is only in the writing of this article that I have actually acknowledged, perhaps for the first time, that this little San Mateo micro-community is a well-established part of that greater whole.

If you have any thoughts you would like to share, please feel free to contact me at [barbara@whitesideworkshops.com](mailto:barbara@whitesideworkshops.com).

\*Go to Barbara’s website, [www.whitesideworkshops.com](http://www.whitesideworkshops.com) under Articles and Links, and download her article published in the 2010 *Enneagram Journal*, “Seeing Our Children Clearly”