

Book excerpt from
Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work:
How to Use the Enneagram System for Success
Part I

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Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work: How to Use the Enneagram System for Success (McGraw-Hill, July 2004) is the book I wish would have been available after I learned the Enneagram system in the early 1990s. As my passion for the Enneagram grew, I realized that the wisdom of the Enneagram could be integrated with the action-oriented theory and practice from the field of organization development, which has been my profession for over thirty years. This book is the product of that integration.

The book is designed both for people already familiar with the Enneagram system -- business consultants, trainers and coaches, managers and employees, and Enneagram enthusiasts -- *and* for those unfamiliar with the Enneagram who want to bring out the best in themselves and others at work.

Bringing Out the Best in Yourself at Work is organized according to application areas -- particular skills that can be used to solve recurring business issues. The middle chapters each have a specific business focus: communication, feedback, conflict, teams, and leadership. The chapters build on one another, moving from the identification of one's Enneagram style to the application of the Enneagram in increasingly complex business situations. Individuals unfamiliar with the Enneagram can first read Chapter 1, "Discovering Your Enneagram Style," which contains a series of typing exercises and an explanation of the Enneagram system. Those who already have a firm understanding of their Enneagram style can begin with the chapter that best suits their needs; while designed to follow a logical progression, Chapters 2 through 6 can be read in any sequence desired. The final chapter, "Transforming Yourself," contains five specific exercises for each of the nine Enneagram styles -- three exercises for daily practice, one exercise for transforming recurring mental patterns, and one exercise for transforming emotional habits.

This article, the first of two for the Enneagram Monthly, contains excerpts from Chapter 4, "Managing Conflict." Next month, Part II will provide excerpts from the Chapter 6, "Leveraging Your Leadership."

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Managing Conflict

Conflict is one of the most stressful aspects of organizational life. People clash about everything -- resources, strategy, decisions, goals, roles, rewards, culture, power, leadership style, inclusion, personality...the list could go on indefinitely. Unresolved conflict usually damages both the individuals involved and the organization.

Although most people don't like it, conflict is part of life, and this includes life in organizations. While conflict avoidance and aggressive confrontation are certainly options, it is far better to prevent conflict when possible, deescalate it once it emerges, and deal with it constructively under all circumstances. In this chapter, you will learn to do all three in the context of the Enneagram.

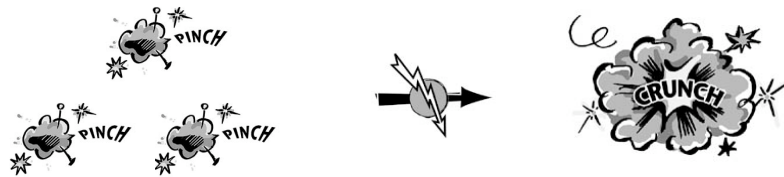
Through a series of stories, this chapter will show you (1) how to markedly improve your ability to manage your reactions during conflict to prevent most interpersonal conflict from escalating, and (2) how to tailor your conflict resolution approach to the Enneagram style of the other person.

Certain work situations are likely to agitate anyone -- for example, situations involving lying, cheating, and stealing -- although how people react at these times will be different based on their Enneagram styles. There are also specific anger triggers for each Enneagram style -- that is, certain situations that will invariably ignite anger in a person of one style, yet may not affect someone of a different style. The nine case studies in this chapter were specifically selected because they describe and explain conflict situations unique to each style. This helps answer the question that people often ask when observing another person who is angry: *This wouldn't have bothered me, so why is he or she so upset?* The behavior patterns that individuals exhibit when they are angry will be similar to those of other people with the same Enneagram style, regardless of whether the stimulus for the anger is a universally agitating event or a situation that contains a specific Enneagram style anger trigger.

When people work together, minor disruptions inevitably arise. One person may do something that violates another person's expectations. Because these expectations are not usually discussed in advance, the transgressor has no forewarning that his or her behavior will, in fact, be offensive. When these transgressions occur, the offended party feels an anger trigger, or "pinch." Pinches, which are typically knots in the stomach, can also be small jolts in the head or pangs in the chest. Along with the pinching sensation comes a thought -- an internal voice that says, *This person should not have done that!* -- and a feeling of anger, hurt, or fear.

When we feel a pinch, most of us do not say anything to the other person directly. We either hope the other person's behavior is a one-time offense, or we speculate that the sharing of our displeasure will only make the situation worse -- that is, it may create a conflict, hurt the other person's feelings, or both.

As pinches begin to accumulate, however, they morph into a conflict reaction, or "crunch" -- the time most people label as conflict.



During the crunch, our feelings become more heated, our sensitivities become heightened, and the risk of discussing the brewing conflict rises exponentially. This is the time when one of two things usually happens: an argument takes place, or the individuals avoid each other. Sometimes both occur. While it usually takes three pinches to make a crunch, sometimes it only takes one or two, as you will see in this chapter.

As you read the following nine stories demonstrating the pinches and crunches unique to people of each Enneagram style, keep in mind both your own Enneagram style and the styles of other people with whom you have had conflict. The chapter describes the most common pinches for individuals of each Enneagram style, how people of each style tend to behave when they feel pinched, and how to approach individuals of each style during conflict. Following the section covering the pinches and crunches for each Enneagram style, you will find suggestions for using conflict as a way to work with your own pinches.

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PINCHES AND CRUNCHES



Trevor, a Three, was given the job of team leader as a reward by his boss, Roseanne, for his hard work and outstanding achievement. In addition, Roseanne knew that Trevor had earned the respect of the other team members. Roseanne reasoned: *This is a perfect job for him. The team members have variable talent, but what they lack most is focus. Trevor will be a terrific role model for them, and he will appreciate being acknowledged for his efforts. This is a win-win situation for me as their boss. Because this team lasts for only six months, it will also give me time to groom Trevor for a bigger position within the organization.*

However, Trevor was neither excited nor enthusiastic when Roseanne approached him. When Roseanne said, "I want you to be the team leader for this team. I know you will do an excellent job," Trevor was taken aback. Although he was somewhat flattered, this sentiment faded quickly as he thought about the challenge ahead. He knew his ten teammates very well. In Trevor's estimation, two of them were both skilled and motivated, five were skilled but lacked initiative, and two were motivated but lacked the basic skills to do the job.

Trevor did his best to set goals and organize this team. However, only half of the team members worked very hard. The other half seemed more interested in socializing than in accomplishing anything. They knew how to do the work -- Trevor had even shown them how to do it -- but they just didn't take their jobs very seriously. In the end, Trevor and four other team members did most of the work.

Common Three Pinches

Although Roseanne's intention was to honor and reward Trevor, she actually unnerved him. Because of the way in which Roseanne offered him the position of team leader, Trevor did not feel he could refuse. When she said, "I want you to be the team leader for this team. I know you will do an excellent job," Trevor believed that if he declined the offer, it would be the same as saying that he was not interested in advancing himself. Had Roseanne asked him, "Do you want this position?" Trevor would have said, "Some time in the future would be far preferable. The timing is not good right now." To Trevor, Roseanne was not asking him to take the job; she was telling him that he was the team leader.

Being put in a position of likely failure · Not looking good professionally · Being blamed for the poor work of others · Not receiving credit for their work

Trevor did not find the team leader role attractive because he had already sized up the team members and believed that only a few of them were both willing and capable of achieving excellent results. In Trevor's view, the rest were likely to end up making him look bad; he could not imagine anything he could possibly do to get them all to perform well. Trevor was thinking not

only of how he, as their leader, would look in Roseanne's eyes, but also about the larger organization; Threes usually avoid situations in which they anticipate that they will not look good professionally.

In Trevor's view, the situation raised the possibility that he would be blamed, or at least held accountable, for the poor work of other people. Because of his concerns about the team's overall capability, combined with his self-awareness that he would *never* let the team fail, Trevor anticipated that he would end up doing most of the team's tasks.

In his mind, Roseanne had offered him a role that would only inundate him with work. Further, these were tasks for which he would never receive the credit. In this situation, the first pinch Trevor felt -- Roseanne's expectation that he would take team leader position -- transformed immediately into a crunch. Trevor felt he was in a double bind: he would fail with the team if he said yes, but fail in the organization if he said no.

How Threes behave when pinched...

Roseanne had no idea that Trevor was upset. When she offered him the position, he merely listened intently to her and then asked her a few questions related to the team's deliverables and timetables. She did sense that Trevor had some concerns, but she attributed these to his conscientious attitude about doing the task well. Trevor gave her no direct data that he was displeased. Like many Threes, he was adept at masking his apprehensions by displaying a calm and confident demeanor.

During the time the team worked together, Trevor neither complained to Roseanne about the team members nor expressed any unease about his ability to lead them. Roseanne did notice that Trevor began to appear unusually tired, particularly during the last two months of the six-month

Ask a short sequence of structural questions · Unlikely to say that they are upset · Body language unlikely to give clues · Over time, tone of voice becomes sharp · Over time, sentences become clipped

project. Because she was concerned, Roseanne decided to watch the team in action, and she then spoke to Trevor: "It seems that part of your team is working hard, but the other part is not taking the work very seriously. Can you tell me who is contributing and who is not?"

Trevor surprised Roseanne when he answered, "Everyone is contributing to our goals," and he proceeded to list what each team member had accomplished. Although Trevor was highly frustrated with several of his team members, under the circumstances he would never have mentioned this fact to Roseanne. First, she had asked him this question within earshot of several of the team members. In Trevor's estimation, the team members would have become demoralized,

angry, and even less motivated if they heard him say that several on the team were not contributing.

Second, he assumed that any team members he mentioned would be upset at him for betraying them to their supervisor, and they would disrespect him for displaying behavior unbecoming of a leader; both reactions would hurt his ability to lead them. Third, Trevor knew that he would not want someone else to make disparaging remarks about him to Roseanne, and he assumed that his team members would feel the same way. Because Roseanne had asked him this question in a public setting, he felt she had put him on the spot once again.

Had Roseanne asked Trevor privately what she could do to help him get the low performers to work more productively, Trevor might have welcomed the question. Or, if she had asked him how he was enjoying being the team leader, he might have shared his frustrations with her or even told her why he would have preferred to not be this team's leader.

Because Trevor's negative suspicions about the team members were confirmed by their later performance, his feelings of frustration and anger only grew. If at some later date Roseanne were to appoint him to be the leader of another questionably competent team, she might be startled by his response, as Trevor would be likely to blurt out a short, sharp, and highly negative response. Only then would Roseanne know that something was terribly wrong.

How to approach Threes in a crunch...

When Threes clearly exhibit anger or distress, it is reasonably safe to assume that it has been building up over a period of time. A kind and clear inquiry about what may be upsetting them can open the door to an honest dialogue, as long as this is done in private and at a time when the Three is not distracted by intense work pressure. It is likely to be embarrassing to a Three to be asked publicly about what might be bothering him or her, because it threatens the common Three desire to show a positive public face.

Be kind and clear · Make sure there is no excessive work pressure · Do not use an intensely emotional tone · Use a rational, problem-solving approach

When Threes are busy with work, deadlines, and other pressures, they will often not want to take the time for an emotional discussion. Instead, it is preferable to choose an appropriate time and setting and say something like "It appears as though something may be bothering you. If it's something I did, I would very much like to hear about it."

In response to this request, some Threes may not want to admit that something is bothering them, while others may acknowledge the problem, but prefer not to discuss it immediately. However, even if they prefer not to discuss the matter at all, most Threes will usually start to think

about the issue in more depth. Their self-reflection will pave the way for a productive conversation at a later time. They may bring up the subject themselves, or the other person can raise the issue in a week or so by saying something like “The other day when I asked if something was bothering you, you said no. I’m still thinking that you may be upset and was hoping you’d talk with me about it.”

When Threes are angry, some may be fully aware that they feel angry, while others may feel only mildly perturbed but not understand why. Still other Threes may be so busy and active that they have not realized that something is upsetting them. Thus, a simple overture without any pressure for an immediate response gives Threes the time to reflect on their own feelings. Once they have made this self-assessment, Threes may suggest a follow-up discussion. If they do not, the other person can bring up the topic again by saying, “I was wondering if we could talk about what is on your mind.” If two or three overtures like this receive no affirmative response, it is a clear message from a Three to stop asking. A Three who does not want to talk about a problem can become quite agitated.

However, most Threes will discuss a conflict if they believe a solution is possible. Consequently, a problem-solving orientation, with an emphasis on the word *solving*, optimizes the chances of a positive outcome and works far better than an emotional approach. For Threes, a problem-solving orientation focuses on three things: first, the impact of the problem from the perspective of results; second, the basic causes of the distress, discussed in a nonemotional manner; and third -- and most importantly -- what can be done to resolve the issue. An emphasis on the solution aspect of the problem suits the Three’s “can do” stance quite nicely.

To more clearly understand the way to best approach Threes, the following example shows two different ways of dealing with a situation in which a Three has not included another team member in an important client meeting. In the first version, the excluded team member takes an emotional approach when confronting the Three colleague:

The Emotional Approach

When you met with the clients yesterday and did not let me know about the meeting, I was very angry about being excluded. These clients are both of ours, not just yours. It affects my ability to work with them and undermines both the project and our relationship. What were you thinking or feeling that led you to do this? If there are some issues between us, let’s get these on the table now. Once we are completely honest with each other, I am hopeful we can work things out.

The approach may cause the Three to shut down his or her feelings or become defensive and accusatory. Although many Threes do appreciate directness and honesty, an emotional approach contains an implicit demand that the Three engage in an intense emotional discussion about the relationship. Threes usually prefer to get a problem solved quickly and to move on to a more productive working relationship. Thus, they may shy away from a discussion that requires them to examine their deeper feelings. This does not mean that they will not discuss difficult feelings under certain circumstances, but that they will most often discuss feelings when they feel the need to do so, rather than as the result of a demand from another person.

Threes are also highly sensitive to being blamed for something that has not worked effectively. In the example of the emotional approach, there is the implication that the Three has done something wrong -- in this case, not inviting a colleague to a meeting. The exclusion of the colleague may have been an inadvertent mistake by the Three, but it also may have been intentional. In either case, most Threes would become defensive upon hearing the other person's remarks.

Using the second option, that of a problem-solving approach, the person excluded from the meeting might say the following to the Three:

The Problem Solving Approach

When you met alone with the clients yesterday, it may have given them the impression that they do not have a team behind the work we're doing for them. They may have inferred that there are tensions within the team; if so, the clients could lose some confidence in us. Perhaps it was an oversight, and that can be easily remedied. Or perhaps you have some issues with my performance, and I would invite you to talk with me about any concerns, should that be the case. Whatever the cause, I am as committed as you are to a quick and effective solution. What do you think?

The above example is phrased in a more objective manner; it invites the Three to say as little or as much as he or she desires. With an open invitation to solve a problem, most Threes will explain their thoughts, feelings, and behavior and will make suggestions to remedy the situation.

How Threes can manage their own pinches and crunches...

1. Share your pinches with others *at the beginning* of your working relationship.

At the beginning of a working relationship, engage the other person in a conversation about how you can both contribute to an effective and successful relationship. A helpful way to begin is to make opening statement like, "Because we're just starting to work together, it would be really helpful for me to know about your preferred style of working with others, especially your likes and dislikes. That way, I can adjust my behavior accordingly when possible. I'd also like to share the my preferences with you."

When it is your turn to share pinches, you might say, for example, “I work best with people who are highly capable and responsible. What I mean by highly capable is that people are highly skilled, and they work constantly to improve their performance and achieve high quality results. I personally believe that what each of us accomplishes reflects positively or negatively on all of us. I dislike work situations in which I have to kill myself to get the job done, look around, and not see others putting in the same effort.”

2. Say something as *soon* as you are aware of feeling pinched.

As busy as a Three may be and as difficult as it may feel to discuss a pinch with someone, it is well worth the time. In fact, it will take less time and require less on-going attention when pinches are discussed soon after they occur. A kind and straightforward introduction such as, “Do you have a minute to talk about a minor event that happened?” usually paves the way for a fruitful discussion.

3. When you start to behave in ways that indicate you are feeling pinched, do something physical if you can, such as working out or taking a walk.

Physical activity has a major benefit for Threes -- the focus on work ceases momentarily. However, to take full advantage of this “time-out” moment, try to engage in a physical activity that allows some time for self-reflection, such as walking, hiking, or yoga. Threes may be tempted to engage in highly competitive physical sports, such as tennis or basketball, but these sports may be so absorbing that there is little time left for feelings to emerge. Strenuous sports may also release so much of the anger that Threes no longer feel any need to deal with the issues. This may feel like a relief in the moment, but does not really resolve the situation or give you the opportunity to take a look at yourself.

4. When you feel a pinch, ask yourself: *What does my reaction to this situation or to the other person’s behavior say about me as a Three and about the areas in which I can develop? How can working on my pinches and crunches help me to bring out the best in myself?*

For Threes, it can be helpful to consider how the other person’s behavior relates to the Three’s ability to succeed or fail; this issue is often the basis of a Three’s negative reaction to others. Some related areas to examine include: looking bad in front of others; feeling competitive with someone else; appearing less than fully competent; and disliking others who appear to be failures in some way (e.g., people whose projects haven’t succeeded, whose appearances do not look put together, or whose personal styles do not exude confidence). Questions for Threes to ask themselves will include these: *What is it about appearing to be successful that is so important to me? If this were not my ongoing intention, how would I be different, and how would my thoughts, feelings, and behavior change? What would happen if I were not so focused on impressing other people?*

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