

The Viral Enneagram: Building Community One Organization at a Time

by Jennifer Joss Bradley

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Jackson County, Oregon (USA) is a relatively small county (just over 200,000 people) located in the southwest corner of the state – a beautiful part of the world. I have learned that in a small community, everyone who is capable of doing so must make a contribution that supports the good of the whole. Rather than sitting on boards or local government, I have chosen to contribute my time toward the development of community organizations. In general, I contribute 50-100% of my available time, and I set fees through dialogue with the leaders about their needs and current resources. From time to time, an organization gets a grant for the work, which helps us all.

Not long after we moved here in 2000, I offered to coach Dee Anne, the executive director of the local United Way. She is a strong leader with a gift for connecting and organizing the diverse parts of our community toward a common focus: making a real difference for people in need. As an Enneagram Nine, her development work centered on prioritizing and shoring up her energy, something she desperately needed at the time. With Dee Anne's help, I went on to offer a couple of pro-bono large-group workshops for leaders of other nonprofits. These focused on using the Enneagram to develop leadership and emotional intelligence.

Some substantive streams of work came out of my relationship with Dee Anne and these community workshops. In 2005, I taught an 8-week development program to the leadership team of La Clinica. La Clinica is a nonprofit healthcare organization that serves 14,000 un-insured and low-income patients per year. Because of this organization, no one in our county goes without healthcare. With the 20-person leadership and operations management teams, I used the Enneagram to focus their individual development, provide a shared framework, and promote common understanding and team development. We used communication, feedback, conflict, and the team development applications in service of developing social and emotional competence.

More recently, we used the Enneagram to help define and manage organizational change. I have done some short-term coaching with individuals and also taught the Enneagram (with communication and conflict applications) to interested staff members at La Clinica. I did similar individual and team development work with the leadership team at Kids Health Connection, a connected organization that provides school-based healthcare to low-income kids throughout the county. I asked Brenda, the CEO of La Clinica, to describe the impact of the work:

We have developed a deep appreciation for the framework that the Enneagram offers and as a result, the culture of our organization has transformed. In fact, at times, it feels like we're so accustomed to it that we speak a lovingly different language with one another: "Ah, I see we needed some Six to guide us today" or "Now, I must admit my Two may be feeling a pinch but..." Simply stated, we're continuously reminded that when we choose to pay attention to our stories and develop a deeper understanding of ourselves, we free up new ways of interacting with one another and within teams.

As if that weren't enough, it's also clear to me that the benefits of this work continue beyond the walls of our organization. We're noticing that as we strengthen internally that we're also attracting new community partnerships and are able to learn with larger groups and across other organizational cultures. We know that when we work collaboratively with one another, we're able to move tremendous obstacles in meeting the needs of this community. Jennifer's Enneagram work with us is a bit like throwing a pebble in a pond; the ripple effect is far-reaching.

I have also worked with other social service providers in the county who have relationships with United Way and La Clinica; an organization of nurse executives received three sessions of leadership development, centered on the Enneagram and emotional intelligence. In addition, I did 10 sessions with the leadership team of Addictions Recovery Center using the Enneagram as a way to promote team development and focus their individual emotional intelligence work.

While I can't say I planned it this way, years into it I realize that using the Enneagram with diverse but related nonprofit organizations in Jackson County has not only helped their internal relationships and development, but the Enneagram system now serves as a shared framework for improving external relationships and work too. The better we understand each other and grow ourselves, the better we all do at serving the needs of the broader community.