What Type of Advisor Are You?

By Jamie Ziegler

“If you don’t know who you are, the stock market is an expensive place to find out.”

—Adam Smith

There’s nothing like a market collapse to shake the foundation of your investment beliefs. So it’s no surprise to us that many of our financial advisor clients are taking this respite from the storm to regroup, rethink, and reassess themselves. That’s a wise move in any market environment. After all, self-awareness helps you become a better investor and a better advisor in all types of markets.

For many years, we have used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to help financial advisors better understand themselves—and their clients. More recently, however, we’ve added another assessment tool called the Enneagram, a nine-point system of personality that provides deeper dimensions of understanding than the MBTI. Specifically, the MBTI describes 16 basic personality styles and focuses on how an individual behaves (extraverted or introverted, sensing versus intuitive, thinking versus feeling, etc.). The Enneagram, on the other hand, goes much deeper, exploring why an individual does what he or she does. While the MBTI is still the most widely used personality assessment tool in the world, the Enneagram is gaining traction and is used by a growing number of organizations, including Adobe, Amoco, AT&T, Boeing Corporation, Disney, e-Bay, Hewlett Packard, Procter & Gamble, Silicon Graphics, Toyota, and Sony. We started using it with investment teams two years ago and now have hundreds of investment professionals around the world drawing from its wisdom. I’m delighted to introduce you to it here.

The name Enneagram (ennea, meaning nine, and gram, meaning picture) refers to nine basic personality types of human behavior and, importantly, their complex interrelations with one another. Each type has its own focus and way of seeing—and being in—the world. Underlying each type is a basic proposition, or belief, about what we need to do in life to survive and thrive. For example, the first Enneagram type (called, simply, the “One”) pays attention primarily to “What is wrong or imperfect?” So it’s no surprise that the nicknames for the One type are The Perfectionist, or The Reformer. Ones are conscientious, principled, and self-controlled, with an orientation to getting every detail exactly right. As a result, Ones may appear to be critical, inflexible, and judgmental. That’s because, of all the types, Ones have their most active inner critic—the voice inside our heads that is constantly telling us where we need to improve.

Let’s take a brief look, now, at all of the Enneagram types.

The Nine Worldviews

Figure 1 shows the nine Enneagram types. In Enneagram parlance, as we noted above, types commonly are referred to by number (One, Two, Three, etc.) but for purposes of instruction, we’re providing some of the common names given to each type. Don’t be fooled by the apparent simplicity of this model; it’s easy to grasp but has many levels of complexity and richness, making it the most powerful personality tool we’ve seen. In fact, it’s important to keep in mind that each of us encompasses some aspect of each of the nine types. However, it’s our unconscious “landing” in one type most often, which began in childhood, that contributes to some of our greatest strengths and largest blind spots. By developing an awareness of our automatic responses when we are in type, we can more effectively avoid the
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<td><strong>One: The Perfectionist/Reformer</strong></td>
<td>Precise, direct, and detailed. Uses task-related words like should, must, right, wrong. Reacts quickly. Erect posture, tight muscles, intense under pressure. Often a great sense of humor when relaxed.</td>
<td>May appear overly critical, impatient, or angry. May not “hear” others’ opinions. May become uncommunicative due to repressed anger.</td>
<td>Pay attention to the patterns of your inner critic, and accept that life is never perfect. Tap into your sense of humor to relax into the moment and accept what “is.”</td>
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<td><strong>Two: The Giver/Helper</strong></td>
<td>Empathic, warm, focuses on what the other person is saying, flattering, few references to self. Smiling and comfortable when relaxed. Clingy, possessive, and even dominating under stress.</td>
<td>Worries about whether the other person likes them. May over-commit in an effort to please. May avoid being honest in order to protect feelings. May lose touch with own needs.</td>
<td>Practice setting limits and saying no. Avoid overpromising and under-delivering. Consider candor and honesty as beneficial to others. Stay in tune with your own needs.</td>
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<td><strong>Three: The Achiever/Performer</strong></td>
<td>Optimistic, confident, efficient, and practical. Quick on their feet. Projects a winning image, charming, avoids topics that reflect negatively on them. Holds shoulders high and appears confident. Boastful, deceptive, and excessively competitive under pressure.</td>
<td>Impatient with lengthy conversations. Self-absorbed. Avoids discussing own feelings. May appear abrupt or insincere. May look around to check the reactions of others, or who else in the room has more power and influence than the person they are speaking with.</td>
<td>Moderate your pace, set limits and boundaries on your work. Show appreciation for others. Allow yourself to really listen and be receptive to others’ ways of thinking. Take time to make important decisions.</td>
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<td><strong>Four: The Individualist/Romantic</strong></td>
<td>Creative, clever, idealistic, supportive, and gentle. Willing to talk about themselves and share feelings and personal stories. Asks personal questions. Under stress, may become melodramatic or withdrawn.</td>
<td>May pull conversation back to themselves with self-referencing behavior, may appear overly dramatic, may not attune to others’ level of interest in the topic at hand. May become hurt easily.</td>
<td>Focus on what is present and working, not on wounds from the past or what “could be.” Stay the course despite intense feelings and mood swings. Tune in to how others are reacting.</td>
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<td><strong>Five: The Observer/Investigator</strong></td>
<td>Deeply thoughtful and intensely private. Trustworthy, visionary, perceptive, and curious. Limited verbal exchanges (except when talking about specific areas of interest), unemotional, highly selective word choice, limited sharing of personal information, focused on thoughts rather than on feelings.</td>
<td>May appear distant and unavailable. May not exhibit warmth or interest, may use too few words and not be understood, may appear condescending, may not listen well.</td>
<td>Allow yourself to feel your emotions instead of detaching and retreating into your mind. Let others know you appreciate them. Be willing to ask for what you want.</td>
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<td><strong>Six: The Loyalist/Questioner</strong></td>
<td>Loyal, likeable, and responsible. Practical, courageous, and witty when secure. Judgmental, rigid, and even paranoid when under stress. Excellent trouble-shooters and devil’s advocates.</td>
<td>May come off as distrustful, pessimistic, and negative. May appear worried, no matter how hard they try to look calm.</td>
<td>Develop faith in yourself rather than seeking it in the outside world. Pay attention to (and accept) the positive things people say about you. Appreciate yourself and allow yourself to make mistakes. Use your humor to accept yourself.</td>
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<td><strong>Seven: The Enthusiast/Adventurer</strong></td>
<td>Quick, spontaneous, and engaging, shifts between topics, upbeat and charming, articulate and witty. Generous and caring. Reframes negative information. Highly animated with numerous arm and/or hand gestures. Under stress, may become scattered, distracted, and excessive.</td>
<td>May be unwilling to commit to a plan of action, narcissistic, and defensive. May not absorb all the information offered, too eager to move on, constant shifting of ideas and animated body language may be distracting to others. May not appear to listen well.</td>
<td>Be willing to face and address problems rather than just reframe them. Slow down and cultivate a more quiet and focused mind, stay with the conversation, and hear the other person all the way through. Practice active listening.</td>
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<td><strong>Eight: The Protector/Challenger</strong></td>
<td>Powerful, loyal, truthful, authoritative, and energetic. Direct, forceful, and inspiring. Strong physical presence even when silent. Under stress, may become domineering, confrontational, insensitive, and blunt, even vengeful.</td>
<td>May be impatient and impulsive. May not allow the other to finish expressing themselves. May appear to be stubborn and single-minded. May overreact by losing temper.</td>
<td>Be aware that your “directness” may be intimidating to others. Practice waiting and really listening before responding or taking action. Be willing to accept your soft side. Express appreciation to others often.</td>
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<td><strong>The Mediator/Peacemaker</strong></td>
<td>Peaceful, easygoing, and diplomatic. Excellent listeners. Able to see and present all sides of an issue, uses indefinite statements such as “maybe,” provides detailed, sequential information. Under stress, may become stubborn, passive-aggressive, and ineffective.</td>
<td>Presents multiple viewpoints (rather than taking a position), which may negatively affect credibility. May be unwilling to bring up and address difficult problems, instead preferring to get caught up in unimportant tasks. May procrastinate.</td>
<td>Identify your priorities and focus your attention and energy on them. Take action when needed and appreciate yourself for doing so. Use structure and discipline to deal directly with conflict.</td>
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Sources: Baron and Waage (1994); Lapidi-Bogila (2007); Palmer (1995); Riso and Hudson (2003)
Using the Enneagram to Improve Your Client Communication and Teamwork

Excellent communication skills are a key competency for investment advisors, particularly during challenging markets. Knowing your Enneagram type can help you identify your greatest strengths as a communicator as well as pin-point areas where you may want to sharpen your skills.

By improving your communication skills, you’ll achieve better relationships with clients and co-workers. In every Enneagram session I’ve led for investment professionals, there has always been that “aha!” moment when one of the attendees exclaims, “This also will help me at home with my wife (or husband, teen-ager, mother-in-law, etc.).”

Finally, the Enneagram is an excellent tool for reducing stress in the workplace. When team members understand their own types, and their accompanying strengths, blind spots, and hot buttons, and then begin to understand those of their co-workers, drama literally begins to dissolve. Appreciation replaces misunderstanding because the value of diversity of thinking/behaving becomes clear. We have used the Enneagram extensively in helping individuals find those jobs that best suit their natural skills, preferences, and talents. For example, compliance professionals are natural fits for Ones and Sixes, but not so much for the optimistic, enthusiastic Sevens. Conversely, sales positions often work well for Sevens, but not so well for intellectually oriented and private Fives. But that’s not to say there aren’t a few exceptions to the rule, so we offer another caveat here. The Enneagram is a personal development tool to be used by each individual for him/herself, and not a “diagnostic” tool to be used by the manager in deciding which job an individual should have. A trained Enneagram instructor is invaluable in helping teams align around their shared vision and helping each individual contribute his/her greatest talent in a role that will be fulfilling and inspiring.

In addition, The Career Within You: How to Find the Perfect Job for Your Personality, a new book from one of our favorite Enneagram authors, Elizabeth Wagele, is another useful resource for team members in aligning themselves with their greatest abilities.

Table 1 provides an overview of the communication styles, potential blind spots, and developmental steps for each type.

In summary, the Enneagram can help you improve your communications, as well as your decision-making and teamwork.

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References


blind spots and build even further on our strengths.

There are several ways to determine your true Enneagram type, all of which involve taking an objective look at yourself to assess your patterns of behavior. Therein lies the rub, because many of our behavior patterns are unconscious and automatic, and therefore difficult for us to see clearly. Thus, the most accurate method is to participate in an Enneagram seminar, where people of each type share stories of their own patterns of behavior, particularly when under stress. By hearing from a variety of types, it’s often very clear which of these groups feels like your type or “tribe.” Other less time-intensive methods for determining your type include consulting a certified Enneagram trainer who can ask you type-differentiating questions; reading books on the subject; or taking an Enneagram self-assessment test. For some people, these faster methods yield perfectly accurate results, while for others the results may be less certain.

So I offer that gentle caveat before sharing my favorite free online assessment tool, the Riso Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI) sampler (http://www.enneagraminstitute.com/dis_sam-ple_36.asp). This test has been taken by more than 1 million individuals worldwide and is a short version of the full, independently scientifically validated 144-question RHETI personality inventory that Time magazine selected as one of the top online personality tests in 2002. Short personality quizzes such as this cannot guarantee that your basic personality type will be indicated, although your type most likely will be in the top three scores in this personality test. We recommend that you read the summary descriptions of the Enneagram types to further narrow down which fits you. Much more thorough type descriptions are provided with the full RHETI Enneagram test, which you also can access at the above link. Additionally, some of our favorite Enneagram books are listed at the end of this article.