

Working with trained Enneagram actors in the business track

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In Enneagram training for the business community we quite often make use of actors. In this article I would like to tell you about my own experiences with this way of working.

The first two parts of a personal course and/or management development, in our version of this course, consist of an inventory of the learning aims, a solid introduction to self-knowledge, using the Enneagram, the introduction to the Types, becoming more familiar with the various Types by means of panels. Sometimes we work with sculptures, as well (see TALK September, Vol. VIII, number 2, 2001).

In addition, when training for business environments, obviously the relations between different Types will be discussed. The question is, "How can I use the knowledge I gain from the Enneagram in my work?"

As regards relationship questions, generally hardly any of them can actually be answered, because there is so much variation in both Enneagram Types and situations. On the other hand from the Enneagram some personal advice may be given to a larger group of participants. For example, how I should be able to associate with my annoying 7-boss, or what approach can I use to deal with my quiet 5-colleague, or what I can do to improve contact with my 8-secretary, and so on. Below I explain how these urgent questions from participants in our training can be placed in a context.

Assignment

We ask you, as a participant, to think of a 1-to-1 situation you worry about and is difficult for you. Your 'case' must be a real one and you must want to learn something. For example, in a particular situation, during interaction with another person, you want to get more insight in the other person's motivations so with that understanding you can interact with them better. In addition it is necessary that you make a statement about what you think the Enneagram Type of the other party might well be. Of course you will not know this for sure, but with the information you have now you can still explain your guess.

Preparation

After some thinking time has been provided the participants get together in Type groups and exchange their cases. Each Type group chooses one "case supplier" who will put his or her case for discussion by the large group. The participants sit in a semicircle in Type groups. The Enneagram teacher interviews the first case supplier. What is the case about? What is the relationship with the other party? What is the probable Enneagram Type of the other party? What is it that is so difficult? What does the participant want to learn? What would make the training session successful for yourself? And other questions may arise.

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Once everything is clear, the actor asks some questions. What is the name of the other person? How old are they, is he or she calm or actually restless, fast or slow? How do you address them? Where do the discussions take place?

Who goes to whom? What is the room like where you talk, and so on. The answers from the case supplier make it clear to the actor in what sort of context the discussions take place. This will enable him or her to further "colour in" the person and the situation.

The preparation described above does not take longer than 10 minutes. After this the actor (m/f), together with the case supplier, quickly builds a 'mise-en scene'. For example, he uses a table as a desk, a briefcase to represent a computer, puts some chairs in the appropriate places, places cups of coffee, and other important core points for the surroundings in which the discussion will later take place.

Acting out the case

The actor comes in as the annoying 1-boss who, meaning to ensure good quality, gets involved everywhere and has great difficulty in delegating. The case supplier sits restlessly behind her computer and within the shortest time, under the influence of the 1-atmosphere that the actor creates, makes evident her ingrown 7-patterns. In another case it becomes clear how difficult the case supplier, a 3-boss, finds it to focus on business with his 6-colleague who is looking for security, and so on. Usually, the playing of the scene comes to an end by itself after 10 or 15 minutes.

Feedback round

First, we let the case supplier let off a bit of steam (no discussion, only one answer to the question "How was that for you?"). Next the audience get the opportunity in Type groups to prepare their feedback: "What went well?" "What could have been better?" "What advice or hints would you like to give?" After a while the 'spokesmen' for the Type groups that are present present their feedback. There is no discussion at this point. All of the feedback is written down by someone of the same Type as the case supplier. The interesting moments in the learning process are the Type-specific reactions to the role-play situation presented. The actor also gives his feedback in his role as the opposite party: "During the discussion I found you ... and I have the following tips for you to be able to deal with me better..." The actor stays well away from any comments on the basis of the Enneagram. That is reserved for the Enneagram teacher. Based on his or her Enneagram knowledge and expertise, the teacher can give feedback on both the case that has been acted out and on the feedback. Finally, the case supplier explains in short what he has learned and sometimes what his resolutions are for the real-life situation. It is not usually necessary to act out a case a second time, if the advice that was given this time is applied. The experience and the feedback acquired have enough impact.

Effects

Many participants in our courses have experienced the acting-out scene. With the knowledge they have gained and with their insight into the Enneagram they can genuinely and better deal with the people who are important to them. They have been able to appreciate both their own peculiarities, as well as those of the other party in the interaction. They have received critical comment and advice from the viewpoints of the other Types. They have also acquired an insight into what can be said about the interaction on the basis of the Enneagram. The case supplier goes home further enriched.

But the audience, too, was able to experience how things can work out when the Types actually interact with each other, because their automatic patterns are clearly demonstrated during the acting out of the case.

Actor

While I have experimented with using participants as actors, I still prefer to use an independent actor who is trained in the Enneagram. He can get across the background motivation and the focus of attention of the required Type in a more controlled way and in a more customised manner than a participant of that particular Type. Because of his social sensibilities and play-acting experience, the actor in the part can also bring more emphasis to what the case supplier wants to learn. He can play the role of the opposite number in the case objectively and in a neutral way and is not affected by any prejudices. This is often the case with participants who know the opposite party. Of course, it is clear to the participants that many variations of each Type exist and there is no assertion of this actor being "right" in the interaction. Nevertheless, it is striking that the actor usually receives an exceptional number of compliments about the surprisingly accurate way in which he demonstrates the characteristics of the opponent in the play. As a rule, there is a lot of recognition of the Type's main characteristics, if only because these get to the focus of attention and the underlying motivation. We have trained our actors ourselves. The Enneagram Type of the actor is actually not important. We have a male actor who is Type 9 and a female who is Type 7. One is certainly not better than the other! With each training session they become better adapted to what this part of the training is all about: to let people experience in a stimulating way how they interact with other people, and to make a contribution to the insight that it can go better. In my opinion working with actors is a fascinating contribution to the Enneagram training for the personal and management development of the participants.

I look forward to your reactions in due course.

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