

Working Through the Need to Know
Amy Zoll, Enneagram Monthly, January 2016

Our Enneagram Type or ego pattern does not, in reality, limit or define who we are. It is a strategy that determines what we think we should be able to know and to do in order to have value, and to survive in this world. The thought “I can do it” grows out of a deeply held core fear that “I can’t.” Trying to prove that “I know,” is a defensive reaction to an existential core fear of “not knowing.”

Up to a point our Type and its strengths serve us well. It is also, however, the source of our suffering. Ironically, it is the suffering around perceived failure of our image that becomes the key to freedom!

The following list includes examples of what each Type is striving to prove about “who I am and what I know,” as well as ideas of opposing qualities and imagined deficits to be avoided.

Type One:

I have a vision of how things should be. I strive to do what is right and to correct what is wrong. I am meticulously accurate and conscientious in my work, and do not rest until the job is done correctly. I am committed to learning and to improvement. I respect and uphold the rules. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, incorrect or self-indulgent in some way, and therefore unworthy.**

Type Two

I know what is true, and am willing to share what I know. I know how to perfectly express those things that will help others. I sense what they need. I am available to listen and to give good advice. I find myself indispensable in the lives of my friends and family I radiate positive energy, am good-natured, and my intentions are well meaning. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, self-absorbed or needy, and therefore worthless and unwanted.**

Type Three

I am able to exemplify all that is valued and honored in society. I feel happiest setting goals, and being able to accomplish whatever I set out to do. I know how to parry problems and to find quick, efficient solutions. I enjoy a challenge and I strive to accomplish a task more efficiently today than yesterday. I am able to adapt and adjust to whatever is required for success and rising to the top. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, unproductive, and a worthless fake.**

Type Four

I am able to visualize how things should be, and to communicate that vision to others. I am endowed with a purpose that can make a global difference. I am inspired by a deep connection to what is real. I possess exceptional depth of feeling, insight and meaning. I “get it” and can “handle it.” I create and surround myself with beauty. I am able to be who I want to be. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, insignificant, lacking, and therefore will be abandoned.**

Type Five

Detached from the distraction of feelings and emotions, I observe what others cannot see. I have the knowledge, information, and wisdom that can make sense out of the chaos. With this penetrating insight, and clear objectivity, I am able to solve difficult problems when no one else can. I know exactly when to share or withhold the information I have for the best result. I am able to develop expertise in any area that is of interest to me. Underneath my reserve and self-sufficiency, I am kind hearted and generous. **If I fail to know, I fear being exposed. If I am exposed, I will be emotionally visible, vulnerable and powerless. I fear annihilation.**

Type Six

I defend and advocate for those at a disadvantage. I am fair and responsible, dutiful and trustworthy in all my dealings. I am able to disarm the untrustworthy. I have a healthy skepticism, and can sense the dangers I am up against. I am able to troubleshoot and know how to make the safe decisions that will assure certainty and security. I am prepared and soldier on despite hardships and limitations. I get the job done whether others show up to help or not. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, incapacitated by doubt and uncertainty leading to wrong decisions and catastrophic harm to self and others. I fear being guilty, helpless and unable to survive.**

Type Seven

I know how to keep life upbeat and open. I feast on life’s energy and connections. I am able to visualize how I want life to be, and can create a plan that will make it happen. I generously share my good fortune with others. I am smart and good at brainstorming new ideas and beginning new projects. I am able to make a positive difference through bringing joy and opportunity into the lives of others. I am adored and memorable. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, boring and greedy, and therefore unworthy of pleasure and having enough of everything I like. I fear being limited and forced to face pain.**

Type Eight

I know how things should be handled and will aggressively crusade against injustice. I am a bold and assertive leader who is able to push for control and accomplishing my vision. I am strong and just. I protect the weak and the innocent. I take direct action to fix what needs fixing without hesitation. I am able to get it all done and take care of myself. **If I fail, I fear being exposed as not knowing, as weak and powerless and therefore vulnerable and unable to survive.**

Type Nine

I know the right thing to do, and have a clear, positive energy that can transform negativity. I know what is needed to bring love and kindness and peace to the planet. I am the glue that holds the differing points together. I am balanced and kind easy going and able to go with the flow. I am attentive to others. I know the right thing to do, and can do it all. My contributions are valued and appreciated. **If I fail to know, I fear being exposed as not enough and wrong, and therefore undeserving of prioritizing my own agenda, and of being loved and supported.**

An inner critic keeps us locked in a battle with these opposing poles of human nature. It is a battle that cannot be won. The opponents are insubstantial (only thoughts). Trying to maintain the image of “knowing” and “doing” while opposing its shadow creates tension in our bodies. This tension blocks the open awareness from which real knowing and effective action spring.

“There is a need to deal with the need to know. Only then will we start having answers in a deeply fulfilling and radical way. This new way of knowing is called wisdom function. When we work through the need to know we get to know in a radical new way called insight, wisdom, and even enlightenment.” — Buddhist teacher, Shinzen Young

Working through the need to know

When we are on top of our ego game, we feel a sense of ease and well being... all is right with the world. Yet, when our particular *knowing* is on the line, a tension and powerful energy arises in our body. This defensive, reactive energy may take the form of anger, resentment, pride, blame, anxiety, fear, deceit, etc. When we react in this way, we contract and become stuck in habitual thinking and behavior patterns. We suffer.

With self-introspection, this suffering and reactivity become the golden opportunity we need to move through, and transform the stuck energy. Self-observation helps us to become the witness. As witness, we are more able to “dis-identify” with the unreal thinking and reactivity. Softening of habitual hard-wired defensive reactions allows our awareness to open and expand.

Here we are able to see our ego and its issues more clearly. Here we are able to see others as they see themselves.

The more we are able to let go of our ego and its story, the more we allow something bigger in us to inform our lives and our actions---until, of course, the little ego arises again.

This practice of self-observation is not easy. As David Daniels MD (author of The Essential Enneagram) says “it never becomes habitual but requires continuing practice.” However, in time, we definitely notice less suffering.