



OnGrowing

Remembering Your Essence: The Enneagram and Leadership, Part Three

In the sixth issue of [OnGrowing](#), Cyndi and Ellen conclude a short series exploring how the Enneagram supports wise leadership, this time focusing on the distinction between type and essence.

"Our personality is a mechanism from the past, perhaps one that has helped us survive until now, but one whose limitations can now be seen. We all suffer from a case of mistaken identity: we have forgotten our True Nature and have come to believe that we are the personality."

- Don Richard Riso

Leadership is not just about your skills, what and who you know, or your years of experience. Leadership is about presence and the impact your presence has on those around you.

How you hold yourself moment to moment, regardless of what you're doing, affects the tone and vibe of every interaction. Your leadership presence builds trust, or erodes it.

And, your presence is markedly different when you exude a remembrance of your **essence — the qualities of your humanity that run deeper than the aspects of your personality.**

When we connect to essence, we view and impact others differently. Everything softens. Physically, our eyes, face, hands, shoulders, chest, and belly soften. Emotionally, we are more able to be moved and touched. Mentally, we engage in more flexible thinking.

This concept is a bit more elusive than other ideas and practices we've written about, so hang in there. The payoff is this: **A leader who can tap into essence allows more space for people and ideas to thrive and flourish.**

Type and Essence

There is no need to “fix” ourselves or “overcome” aspects of our personalities. The work of the Enneagram is to develop a clear-eyed knowing of our type and accept it as an aspect of our identity. This means being conscious of our motivations and how they drive us in patterned ways.

For this reason, a vast amount conversation about the Enneagram focuses on the common patterns and characteristics of the nine types. However, we limit ourselves and others when we only discuss type. **We glean the full power of the Enneagram when we explore essence as part of the equation.**

Remembering essence drops us back into our bodies, where we know that beyond all the talk of type, **we always have innate value and wholeness, and every aspect of our humanity belongs.**

The more aware we become of our type's operating system, the better we can see the distinction between type and essence — and expand our sense of self to include and welcome both.

Allowing Essence

You, our clients, have reflected this to us time and again. **As you develop the ability to observe yourself more clearly and compassionately, you pierce through type and allow essence to come forth.**

You have said things like:

- *“Learning about the Enneagram has helped me be a better version of myself both at home and at work. After noticing how critical I was being, I began cultivating open-heartedness at home with my family. At work, I pinned up a note on my office door naming a few qualities of essence. Every time I walk through the door, I remind myself of how I want to show up. I still have that note up after six years.”*
- *“When I remember my essence, I access the deepest part of myself, where I feel wonder, gratitude, and connectedness.”*
- *“I know now that I am love. Love isn't something I give and receive.”*

Essence is Embodied

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Being in essence is literally an act of re-mem-bering, of returning to our bodily sensations and being exquisitely present to our inner sensations as well as our outer surroundings. And **in presence, type ceases to matter.**

Since essence is about sensation, words will always be inadequate. Yet, **we come closest to describing essence when we recall experiences of awe** — like gazing into the eyes of a newborn; drinking in the sights, smells, and sounds of natural beauty; sensing the whole-body electricity of intimate connection, or witnessing the last breath of a being we love dearly.

Your body knows essence, and you radiate a different energy when you can tap into qualities like joy, freedom, trust, connection, and love.

Essence goes beyond shifting into the “virtue” of your particular type. **Essence allows us to access the gifts and positive qualities of all types.**

And, when we embody the qualities of essence, we shine.

As Hafiz said, *“I wish I could show you the astonishing Light of your own being.”*

May the light of your essence, be central to your leadership. May your remembrance of it deepen your presence and have a positive impact on all those around you.

A Practice



Tapping Into Essence

1. Identify a quality of essence that you know is within you but gets “covered up.”
2. Choose any quality that resonates for you. Examples include courage, serenity, freedom, trust, love, hope, connection....Notice in your body where and how you sense this quality.
3. As you identify with this quality and see yourself as a leader who embodies it, reflect on these three questions:

- Who are you?
 - Who are others?
 - How do you inhabit the world?
4. Carry on with your day, allowing the bodily sensation of this quality to remind you that **you are so much more than your type.**
1. 5. Attend to your interactions with others. When you feel connected to your essence, what changes in those interactions?

"The purpose of working with the Enneagram Map is not self-improvement. That is the ego's goal. Rather, it is the transformation of consciousness so that we can realize our essence, our True Nature."

- Sandra Maitri


ONLY TO GROW


CUSTOMIZED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

[Cyndi Gueswel](#) and [Ellen Robinson](#) co-create a monthly newsletter primarily for our coaching clients, past and present. Through this joint venture, we continue conversations about your growth, relationships, and leadership.

- Because **you matter.**
- Because **how you are in the world matters** to those closest to you.
- Because **all the spheres you influence**, knowingly and unknowingly, **matter.**