



# OnGrowing

## The Enneagram and Leadership, Part Two: Choice

*In this fifth issue of [OnGrowing](#), Cyndi and Ellen continue a focus on how applying the Enneagram supports wise leadership.*

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[Cyndi Gueswel](#) and [Ellen Robinson](#) co-create a monthly newsletter primarily for our executive 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**.

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Helen Palmer, one of the most highly regarded teachers of the Enneagram, said, “We have two selves, the automatic and the present.”

One key reason leaders study the Enneagram is because we learn to see these two selves and notice when we’re operating as automatic self. This awareness opens a door to choice. The automatic self repeats habitual thought loops and behaviors. But the present self is awake to different choices and possibilities for how to be and show up with others.

Last month, we kicked off a series of three issues focused on The Enneagram and Leadership. The first focused on [cultivating your inner observer](#), a first step for learning to see how your Enneagram type reveals itself through your motivation and focus of attention — patterned ways of thinking and being that impact your leadership.

We ended that issue with this quote: ***“Awareness precedes choice and choice precedes change.”*** In this issue, we focus on one specific dimension of the Enneagram where awareness brings choice. This dimension is known as our **vice: a way of operating that is self-defeating.**

Looking at vice takes us a layer deeper into the Enneagram, toward a pivot often referred to as the “vice to virtue conversion.” In this issue, we aim to clarify “vice” in the context of leadership and look at common pitfalls and concrete choices that support a wiser way of being.

Vice operates right under the surface. Yet until leaders learn about the Enneagram, we are often blind to the vice, how it shows up, and choices available once we see it more honestly.

Consider this example. One of our clients – a member of a leadership team at a small firm that designs adult education – leads with Type 4, whose vice is envy. In the context of the Enneagram, this does not mean he is overtly jealous; rather, it indicates the Type Four tendency to focus on what is missing.

This leader collaborates with colleagues frequently. One way the vice of envy shows up is that he falls into a habit of comparing himself to others during meetings. Rather than staying connected to the purpose of the conversation, he finds himself listing his deficiencies compared to one or more people in the meeting. (*“I’ll never have her chops at technology,”* or *“Why didn’t I see that gap she just brought up?”*) He notices a tightness in breathing and a tendency to look up and away with his gaze. He feels mentally disengaged. His ability to listen and participate drop. The costs of this pitfall include a drain on his focus, emotions, and confidence.

Now aware of this habit, he is practicing catching himself sooner in these moments of “comparing mind.” He refocuses: first, on taking two slow breaths; then, on the conversation at hand.

Here’s a table that gives an overview of vice for each type: how it can show up, a common pitfall, and a choice leaders can make to shift out of automatic.

# Enneagram Vices Linked to Leadership Choices

Type	Vice	Shows up as...	Habitual Pitfall	Leadership Choice
8	Lust	Intensity in energy and desire across realms.	The habit is to say "Full speed ahead, now... and don't stand in my way."	Wait, step back, and let things unfold.
9	Indolence	A laziness toward self, a self-forgetting.	The habit is to feel inertia when it comes to spending focused energy on yourself or your goals.	Advocate for your own desires.
1	Anger	Always seeing the gulf between what is real and what is possible and ideal.	The habit is to keep trying harder, all the while building resentment.	Accept "what is" as exactly right.
2	Pride	A belief that you are indispensable in people's lives.	The habit is to give too much to others and avoid requesting help with your own needs.	Ask what help is wanted; give and receive in equal measure.
3	Deceit	A belief that you are your image, so you curate what you reveal to others.	The habit is to hide behind performance to be seen in a favorable light.	Reveal yourself more fully and honestly, including your struggles and uncertainties.
4	Envy	A tendency to compare and focus on what is lacking.	The habit is to be in a state of longing.	Identify what's going right and well for you and others. Congratulate someone on what they've done well.
5	Avarice	Being miserly with your time or energy.	The habit is to "go it alone" and/or withhold thoughts and emotions.	Speak your mind more often, and initiate connection with others beyond the task at hand.
6	Fear	Staying alert and on guard, believing your	The habit is to scan for danger or threat,	Relax your grip, trust moving forward.

		vigilance will keep you safe.	find it, and problem-solve.	Recognize you'll be able to handle what happens.
7	Gluttony	A desire for more, especially more enjoyment.	The habit is to seek stimulation, particularly through a focus on planning for the future or reliving the past.	Stay focused on important priorities; stay present to others when in conversation.

At this point in learning about the Enneagram, many people balk. It can feel challenging to look inward and make sense of these big, loaded words.

For example, almost every leader I've met who leads with type Two has said some version of, "Pride? That doesn't make sense; I'm not prideful. In fact, I'm overly focused on the needs of others, and pride makes it seem like it's about me." Yet over time, most Twos come to see that some of the help they offer is unasked for, and others may experience their help as an imposition, or a subtle message of, "I know what's best for you." *That's* where the pride comes in. Once able to see it, those who lead with type Two often realize they are "over-doing," and have an opportunity to distribute leadership and become more intentional about how they spend their time.

Noticing and inquiring into one's vice *is* painful... and, it's worth it. Why? Because **what you see gives you choice.**

Yes, the vices are ugly. Yet if you can stick with the discomfort of seeing vice in action, you can grow beyond it. You'll never "shed it." It's part of your personality. However, **you can grow beyond vice.** True leaders take seriously the goal to continuously develop into wise, compassionate humans as well as to meet business outcomes.

We invite you to practice moving away from *automatic self* and toward the intentional choice available in *present self* by engaging in this self-observation practice. Enjoy this simple yet deep exploration, and let us know what choices open up for you!

We'll conclude our Enneagram arc next month with a focus on why and how leaders reconnect with qualities of essence. Stay tuned...

# A Practice



The practice here is to **see the vice at work**, to “catch yourself in the act,” and recognize you have the opportunity to choose:

- Do you want to stay on automatic and let the vice drive you?
- Or will you **see it, name it, and make a choice that goes beyond the familiar, automatic habit of your type?**

Schedule a 30-minute conversation with a colleague you trust who shares your interest in the Enneagram. We suggest you both do the practice so it’s a two-way conversation.

Discuss:

1. What is your core Enneagram type, and what’s the vice for that type?
2. What are two or three ways the vice shows up for you in the realm of leadership?
3. How do you experience it in your body?
4. In terms of your leadership, what’s the “cost” of your vice?
5. What’s a choice you would like to focus on? What would you like to do differently as a leader, and why?
6. How would your ability to shift benefit the people and work you lead?

## Quotes

*“Choice, and the lucidity to make choices, is where the real magic lives. “*

- Toko-pa Turner

*“I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.”*

- Emily Dickinson



## Deeper Dive

We hit some key points about vice, but this is a robust topic. If you'd like to go further, explore [Nine Lenses on the World](#), by Jerome Wagner (the key reference we used for this newsletter).

Some questions we offer in this practice come from Sandra C. Smith of [AlchemyWorks](#), who consistently serves as a wise Enneagram mentor. We recommend all of Sandra's offerings.

[Erlina Edwards](#), Board President of [The Narrative Enneagram](#) has served as a key thought partner about the Enneagram vices and virtues. Both are trusted sources for deeper exploration.

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