

#114 - Know Your Enneagram Type

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is an exciting day. It's episode 114 - Know Your Enneagram Type. If you're unfamiliar with the Enneagram, no sweat. We'll get to that. This is an episode just on the basics of knowing your type. I'll do another episode in the middle of August that will be more about the other aspects of the enneagram - wings, stances, centers, and arrows. Which might sound ridiculous if you're new to the enneagram, but that's okay. This episode is simply about figuring out what type you are and how the enneagram is a tool to becoming a truer version of yourself.

There are so many elements to this thing, and I see a lot of people put them in the wrong order. The Enneagram is complex and super old and an incredible tool in your personal growth, and because of how rich and nuanced it is, it cannot be contained in a single podcast episode or two or even an entire podcast that runs for years and years, and it can't be reduced to a couple of simple definitions and then we go about our merry way. Now, I'm a casual student of the enneagram and not a trained expert. That's important to know going in, but for the sake of today, I want to share the basics of the enneagram - what it is and what it isn't from my personal understanding and experience. I definitely want to give you tools in knowing your type, but even if you already do, this episode will be helpful for you and how you see the entire process of digging deeper into the enneagram. Because it is a deep well indeed.

Before we jump in, a quick heads up that this is the final episode on the podcast before my summer break. I usually take a few weeks off during the summer just to be with my family and schedule some rest... which we should all try and do by the way. Rest doesn't always just happen, especially if we're not great at practicing it on a daily basis. So schedule it. I am for the next three weeks and will be back with a new episode on July 22nd, so if you're keeping track of the date, there you go.

Alright, let's talk about the enneagram. First, what is it? I hesitate to say it's a personality typing system because that's too limited. To me, the enneagram is a system that helps us name how different people see the world. And this is key: the enneagram is all about motivation, not behavior. It's *why* you do what you do. That's why it's not really a personality test because so many tests are based on behaviors, not on motivation. Why is this helpful, this difference between what we do and why we do it? Think about your own experiences in relationships. How often has a spouse or parent or kid or boss done something that made you upset? The action or behavior made you mad or hurt. For example, it's Saturday morning and you're looking forward to a day hanging out with your husband and kids. But your husband heads outside to mow the grass and hose down the porch and pull weeds from in between the cracks in the steps, and you're mad because you wanted to hang out as a family. He's apparently choosing yard work over that time, and you stew and wonder if he even sees you. Come to find out, his motivation for doing all of that yard work was because you have seemed overwhelmed lately and he knows how much you love sitting on the porch, and he wanted to spend time on that space so that you'd have a nice place to sit and rest. You see it, right? The action isn't really the problem. We can look at what someone does and assume the reason they did it. We make assumptions on a

person's motives and only judge the behavior. But motive is crucial. Why someone makes a choice is more powerful than the choice itself. It helps us see each other better. Without the enneagram, most of what we have to go on is what we see others do, but with the enneagram, we have a language to understand why people choose to do and say the things they do. It's like those Claritan commercials where the picture is kind of blurry and then it clears up once the lady playing soccer takes her allergy pill? To me, that's what the enneagram does. It helps us more clearly see situations and relationships for what they actually are. Behaviors are certainly important and can cause harm and joy and all of it, but it's an incomplete picture. The enneagram offers a more complete picture because of the language around motivation.

As you explore what type you might be or process what you hear other people saying about the enneagram, it's so important that give you far more weight to motivation than behavior. If you try and figure out your type or, even worse, try and type someone else based on their behavior, you'll be frustrated, and your understanding of the enneagram will only go so far. I think that the popularity of the enneagram has made it reductive. All the types have been reduced to a certain set of stereotypical behaviors, and we've lost what makes the enneagram a powerful tool in personal growth - motivation. We need to understand how we see the world and recognize that not everyone sees the world the same way.

So you probably already know this, but there are nine different types, and a lot of them often present with similar behavior within the type. Fives are often introverts and leave parties early if they go at all. Nines are often quiet in social settings, too. Sevens are usually described as the life of the party, but I know a seven who's really reserved in bigger social situations. No behavior is universal for a specific type, so it's vital to recognize that reducing the nine types to stereotypical behaviors is using about 2% of what the enneagram offers. It has so much more power and value than that.

For example, I've heard and read in multiple places that people think Michelle Obama is a Type One. That made me incredibly happy because that's the type I identify with, and I love me some Michelle Obama. Ones are usually organized and systematic about life. They tend to value things being done the best way possible and with excellence. They're often referred to as poised and dependable and with a strong backbone so to speak. They love for everyone to be alive in who they are and be the best they can be. But other types can present those behaviors, too. Other people can be organized and poised. Others can pursue excellence. Others can root for people to experience growth. Ones don't have the corner market on those behaviors. The difference is in the motivation. After reading her memoir, *Becoming*, I would bet money that she's a Three. A Three's motivation is to achieve, to gain value from what she does. Threes are driven by ambition and image and take a lot of stock in what other people think of them. They want to be seen as valuable. We all do to a degree probably, but that is at the core of what motivates a Three. That's the bottom line of how Threes see the world. As I read Michelle's book, I didn't know see her motivation coming out as a One's motivation at all. She didn't care about perfection or being right or good. She cared about pushing past people's expectations of her and proving that she could do what they didn't think she could. She'd rather be seen doing many good things than doing one great thing. That's a Three. People look at her poise and achievement and put those behaviors in the box of a One, but your behavior plays no part in your type because behaviors can be all over the place. Your core motivation, however, - the absolute soul-center reason why you choose to do what you do - is what makes the enneagram work. You have to know why you do what you do, and you can't assume someone else's type based on what they do.

I asked awhile back if anyone had questions about the Enneagram, and most of them were around how to discover your type, more specifically what test is the best. Don't take a test. I repeat, do not take a test. Tests are based on the answers you give obviously, and who knows what your headspace is at the time you take the test. Sometimes we answer personality tests based on what we wish we were like, how we think others see us, or messages we've heard since we were a kid. We look at what we do rather than the reason we do it. You'll never get an accurate enneagram test result that way.

So many of you were like "I get a different answer every time I take it!" and that doesn't surprise me, simply because I believe identifying the number of the enneagram that you most resonate with cannot be simplified to a sixty question test. Here's how I would encourage you to find your number, and I recently heard my favorite Enneagram guru Suzanne Stabile say this on her podcast, so I feel really good about offering this is my preferred approach since it's hers, too. Go to an Enneagram website - I'll link to one in the show notes - and read about all nine types. Just read the overview even, and begin to eliminate which types are definitely not you. You will likely eliminate four or five which is a solid half. Then read a little more about the types that remain and eliminate again. Keep doing this until you land on the one that makes the most sense. Remember that motivation is the key, not the behavior. You'll resonate with behaviors in several types, but that's irrelevant honestly. Pay attention to what motivates that type. You might feel the motivation of the Two but have so many behavioral qualities of a One which makes it confusing, especially when there are so many Instagram accounts that are funny and sometimes insightful but focus on the behaviors way more than the motivation. What's important gets lost, so remember that motivation is really the only thing that matters. The place you can find that is where each type has a basic desire and a basic fear, both of which hold hands pretty well. For example, the basic desire of an Eight is to protect themselves and be in charge of their own life, and their basic fear is being hurt or controlled by others. Many Eights present pretty strong behaviors, like taking charge in a group, saying exactly what they mean and not beating around the bush, and moving away from being vulnerable. Those behaviors don't make someone an Eight, but an Eight might often demonstrate those behaviors out of the motivation to stay in control and not let anyone too close for fear of getting hurt. So look at the motivation of each type to find out what type you are.

And just a quick heads up: finding out your type and really looking at your key motivation and how you see the world is jarring. If you're not ready to do some major soul-searching and get hit with your own junk, you might want to save the enneagram for later. It cuts to the quick, y'all. When used properly, it changes you. It can't not. You might have narrowed your search down to two types, and one of those types just feels icky and gross so you pick the other one. It's likely that it feels icky and gross because it's hard when our junk is written out in black and white. It's super discouraging. I knew pretty quickly that I was a One because I very much identified with something called the Inner Critic that only ones have. It's a voice in your head that tells you how you're doing everything wrong. Now you might think, I have that voice! It's my dad or my mom or that teacher from third grade that still haunts me! That's not an Inner Critic. From what I understand, the Inner Critic is a voice that comes from within you, that often is your own voice, that speaks constantly about how you're doing everything wrong. It's incessant. When I read about that aspect of being a One, I was like "well, yeah, doesn't everybody experience that?" No they do not. I also did not like resonating with is how judgmental Ones tend to be, especially when they haven't done personal work in recognizing that pattern. Because Ones see things through the lens of perfection, of the ideal, of the way things could be, we can come across as

very judgmental. Everybody is doing it wrong. If you grew up with a One parent, you probably felt it pretty acutely. Nothing you did was good enough because it wasn't perfect. Your parent was always telling you the right way to do something when the way you were doing it seemed just fine. It's a hard energy to live with, and I say that as someone who is one. And that's the point I'm trying to make. At first, you might cringe at some of the descriptions of your number. It's uncomfortable. It's really uncomfortable to see what you thought was hidden in your mind just laid out for everyone to see. And that's another scary part of naming the number you identify with because once you say it out loud to another person, they know your deepest insecurity. That's why, in general, it's not awesome to casually ask someone what their Enneagram type is because they might not be ready to share that kind of vulnerability with you yet. It can also be discouraging to share your type with someone whose only exposure is from an Instagram account and they simplify your personhood to a meme. "Oh, you're a Four? You're so moody and like a perfect snowflake!" That's reductive and unkind. The irony is that the main motivation of a Four is to be understood. They want to feel personally significant in the world, and when someone reduces them to being moody and artsy and withdrawn, that confirms the very thing they're trying to avoid - being misunderstood. Be careful about reducing types. Be careful about asking someone what their type is and then having an immediate reaction to it. Be careful about casually typing others in conversation. Whether you're typing someone you know or a famous person who you'll never ever know, the way you speak of that person's type will most likely be heard by someone who shares that type, and the way you reduce them to a singular behavior or negative quality can be hurtful. The enneagram is a tool and a language, but we're all still people. We all need to be sensitive to the humanity around us and remember that our words make a difference in how we all feel about ourselves. So that's the heads up on the difficulty of naming your number. There are a lot of layers, and it's important to recognize they exist for us and especially for others.

One other important tenant of the enneagram is that your number doesn't change. There are differing opinions on whether you're born as your number or it develops as you are a kid, but ultimately, your number is your number. It doesn't change. That's why looking at motivation is important. Your behaviors might change over time, but ultimately the way you see the world does not.

That leads to a question I get sometimes where people wonder if they should look at how they were as a kid or how they are now. If the number doesn't change, what number is true? The one they experience now or the one that feels right to assign to how they were during formative years? This is going to sound a little nuts, but hang on.

Personality is a construct. I know that I sound like Matthew McConaughey in season one of True Detective when he's talking about time being a flat circle, but really, from the perspective of the enneagram, personality is a construct. The way that you see the world or the type you identify with is actually a lens you developed to help you cope and survive in the world as a child. This is why I personally think that you're not necessarily born with a type but that it does develop super early on. I'm not going to bet my house on that belief or anything, but I find it super interesting that so many people who identify as Ones are first born kids. Not all of course, but a lot. A lot of Ones had a parent who was unpredictable in their affection and affirmation, so Ones took it upon themselves to be perfect in order to receive the value they were so desperately looking for from their mom or dad. My way of seeing the world through the lens of perfection and being good is not a true lens. My deepest desire to be good and to be seen as perfectly in balance is not based in truth. It doesn't lead me to truth. It leads me to performance and perfection. All nine

types and their basic desires are lenses meant to help us all cope. They were early ways to help us be a person in a world that didn't always make sense. Our personality then is essentially a construct. Personality is a coping mechanism.

We've all experienced being in relationship with people who are so ingrained in how they are, who say things like "well, this is just the way that I am deal with it." But nothing is how we are because in some ways everything is scaffolding around the fragile tender parts of who we are that we want to protect, and we've all developed different ways of doing that.

The enneagram's intention is to illuminate the fact that personality is a construct and that we don't have to live through that lens. We think it has the last word. A lot of the current popularity of the enneagram, especially in memes in these tiny snippets would make us think that those motivations and behaviors are the last word. It's just the way it is. But the opposite is true. Knowing how you see the world and recognizing it has a coping mechanism, as a construct of protecting yourself helps you see that the motivation doesn't have to have so much power. I identify as a One, but that doesn't mean that I'm doomed to a life of perfection and order for the sake of perfection and order.

A lot of people will tell me that I don't strike them as a One because I let a lot of things go, that I tend to be happier than a lot of Ones are. In fact, I was reading an article on Apartment Therapy recently that said something about what every enneagram type should do when they wake up in the morning, and Ones are supposed to hold a smile for thirty seconds. Like, force a smile. And my immediate thought was why on earth do they think Ones don't smile? I smile all the time! But the construct of a One is to be solid and stable and dependable, not someone who has fun. Poor Ones, their lot in life is just to try and be perfect poor things. No, you guys! No! The purpose of the enneagram and any kind of personal growth at all is to become a truer version of yourself, not a more meme-able version of whatever fits inside your personality box. People are too rich for that to be the case. So as you explore what your type is, recognize that what you read isn't necessarily an excuse to always be that way. Being a One isn't a permission slip to be judgmental. Being a Two isn't a permission slip to give up on knowing what you personally need. Being a Three isn't a permission slip to focus on being impressive. None of these nine types are permission slips to stay attached to this specific way of seeing the world. In fact, it's a permission slip to let it go, to recognize that there are other ways to see and be seen.

As a One, I now recognize that my lens of how I see the world is goodness and balance. I long for situations, environments, and people to be good and true and to feel balanced and in a certain order. I can recognize when that desire is deformed, when it comes out distorted as perfection and judgment. But when I hold that lens separate from my own wounded mask of self-protection, from the personality I constructed in order to keep myself safe in an unpredictable world, that lens of goodness and balance can be incredibly beautiful when offered to the others and to myself. That's why I love this Lazy Genius space so much. I feel uniquely positioned as a person to speak into lives of people who long for systems so that life is more efficient for the sole purpose of leaving time for what matters and seeing the tremendous freedom in just being the truest version of who you are. It isn't about a system in order to do it right. It's about seeing systems as a tool to lead you in the direction of being more of yourself, and if a system doesn't do that, don't use it.

So when I say that personality is a construct, don't necessarily see that as who you are is disappearing. Being aware of your lens helps you see the parts of it that aren't helpful, that

disconnect you from life, and then you can start to see the aspects of that lens that make the world a better place. That's why no number is better than another number. You might wish you were a different number because we're human and probably all feel that way a little sometimes, but that's putting our protective construct at the center of our story rather than putting the truth in the center. It's easy for me to annoy that I identify as a One when every Enneagram Instagram account basically tells me I have a stick up my butt all the time. But that view is too narrow and so incomplete. Yes, I sometimes have a stick up my butt when I'm having a bad day and am holding onto protection and not connection. My protection comes out as control and judgment. A Type Six's protection comes out as being defensive and isolating and suspicious. A Type Nine's protection comes out as complacency and stubbornness over strangely inconsequential things. Does that mean that a Six is just a suspicious worrier who is good in a crisis but that's it? You guys. No! But knowing that's your lens as a Six, knowing that you do retreat into yourself and become defensive and rebellious when you feel unsafe can help you move down a path of awareness. Then when you feel yourself digging in your heels and avoiding people who want to know who you are underneath that mask, you can take a deep breath and remember that your lens is just that. A lens. It's not a rule or part of your bone marrow. But you're also not left with nothing. If you're a Six and feel that protective mode happening, you can remember that your lens of security and safety makes you trustworthy and loyal and a friend that everyone longs to have. You're not doomed to a life of worst-case scenarios but can see your lens as a gift and let it move you down a path of health instead of comparing yourself to others and wishing you were more carefree like a Seven or more assertive like an Eight. No number is better than another number. We all need each other, and the more we recognize how we see the world, the more compassionate and open we'll be as people. Why? Because we realize that how we see the world isn't the only way to see the world. We recognize the value in all the ways and soften towards others who are different from us.

So has anyone else noticed that I've been talking for a long time and haven't gone through the nine numbers yet? Because the nine numbers are secondary to the point of the enneagram. It's personal. It's a journey. It's about your motivation and your deepest desires and insecurities. I don't want any of us to feel diminished to that singular thing when we're all incredibly complex people. And even in the language of the enneagram, there aren't just nine types but 27. Each type has three subtypes which we absolutely not get into today, but despite what I've said about how individual we are and how this is super personal, it's helpful to recognize that there are a limited number of core ways that humans see the world. Knowing which one motivates you and understanding your own personal lens and the lenses of people you love is life-changing. Truly.

Once you know your type, what do you do? We'll get into those details in a few weeks because those details matter and can lead to massive personal growth and a rootedness into who you most deeply are. But for now, here's my answer: just pay attention. Notice how your key motivation shows up in your everyday life. Be aware. When you feel tense, see if your lens has something to do with it. When you have a misunderstanding with someone, see if that lens has something to do with it. Don't try and find a ton of answers because really there aren't any. It's such a journey. The enneagram is not a book you can finish. It's lifelong and beautiful, so be patient. Take your time. Start by being aware. It's okay and actually really good that you don't know yet about subtypes and wings and stances and orientations to time. Knowing too much too soon can strip the enneagram of what it's best at doing - helping you see how you see. So stick with this one thing, this key motivation, the basic fear and desire of the number you most identify with. Pay attention to how it shows up in your life, and remember that if that lens is a construct meant to protect you, maybe you can start to shift how you see. You can start to

connect rather than protect. You can give yourself permission to see differently. As a One, it's not that I'm a perfectionist always and have to fight against that everyday. No. Being a perfectionist was a lens that kept me safe and helped me make sense of my world. I don't need that lens anymore. I don't have to be subject to its superseding power over how I live and see. I can notice when I feel a push for perfection and then pay attention to why. Am I wanting the dishwasher loaded perfectly because I'm tired of my effort at home not being seen by my husband? Or is it because I really don't want to wash dishes and will do everything I can to get every last bowl and plate in the dishwasher so I can go sit down? Maybe I like the satisfaction of finding the best way to do something like loading the dishwasher and then I move on to the next thing. Just pay attention and be gracious with what you see. You've been living with this particular lens for your entire life; you can't undo it from one podcast episode. Be patient and gentle and don't lose it when you slide down an unhealthy road. We all do all the time. Just pay attention and stop trying to fix yourself. Growth will come but not if you're gripping tightly to an ideal and being unkind to who you are now. That's not the point of the enneagram or of being a person in general.

Find your number and then sit with it, live with it, see how it lands in your daily life. The longer you take, the deeper it'll sink, and the more we can all move into the world as our true selves and be more compassionate to ourselves and others. And that's all I have to say about that. Thank you for coming to my TED talk.

I hope this episode has been an encouragement to you no matter where you might be on your enneagram journey. I'll put some resources in the show notes, and we'll dig a little deeper in August. For now, this is the last episode for a few weeks, and I look forward to seeing you all again later in July. Have a beautiful little middle of summer, and if you're new to this podcast, I have a ton of summer resources for you, especially if you're home with kids, and they're all on the homepage of my website. I'll put a link in the show notes, but be sure to check those out if you're new and want some encouragement during this summer season. Thanks so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you in a few weeks.