

## Unraveling the Personality Puzzle

**The Enneagram: The Definitive Guide to the Ancient System for Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life, by Helen Palmer.**

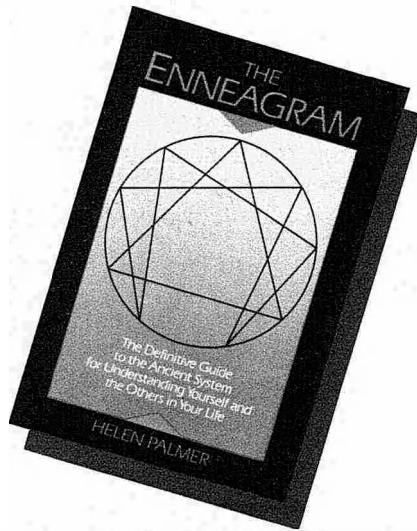
Most people are fascinated by the study of personalities, particularly their own and how they relate to others. Why does the same situation trigger a blind rage in one person and a spell of depression in another? One motive for finding out why we feel and do what we do is simple interest. Another motive is practicality, so that we have answers and rationales for our behavior.

*The Enneagram*, by Helen Palmer, is a book about self-observation and inner discovery based on an ancient Sufi theory of psychology and spirituality. During the 1950s, G.I. Gurdjieff, a pioneer in adapting Eastern spiritual teachings to Western thought, introduced the term "Enneagram," which literally means "nine points," and advanced the popularity of the theory among his students.

The Enneagram is depicted by a nine-pointed "star," suggesting nine major personality types: the perfectionist, the giver, the performer, the tragic romantic, the observer, the devil's advocate, the epicure, the boss, and the mediator—labeled One through Nine, respectively. Each point represents traits or predispositions with which people are born—not traits they acquire through education, ideas, or beliefs.

For example, among other traits, the performer—a Three—seeks to be loved for performance and achievement, is competitive, is obsessed with being perceived as a winner, and can evolve into an effective leader.

The Sufi premise is that each point, or Chief Feature, as Gurdjieff called it, has various interrelationships on the star, and that "reading" and interpreting one's points can



lead to a more precise understanding of self. For starters, each point has a triangular relationship with three other points, representing the forces of creation, destruction, and preservation—each of which must be present for growth to occur. The "wing points" on either side of a point may be variations of the predominant personality type. A Two and a Four may share a Three's preoccupation with image, or a Five and a Seven may have the same paranoias as a Six. Also, people often search for a trait opposite their predominant trait because they suffer from its absence. "If you are chronically afraid," Palmer writes, "then you have suffered the loss of the child's essential trust in the environment and in others; therefore the search for courage will be a motive in your life."

Simultaneous with the sometimes-shocking discovery of one's own type, says Palmer, "comes the awareness of how type narrows our options and restricts us to a limited point of view. It can be astounding to realize that we perceive 360 degrees worth of reality in a very limited way and that most of our decisions and interests are based on highly sophisticated habits, rather than on real freedom of choice."

Gurdjieff, she explains, believed that people hide their negative traits from themselves through an elabo-

rate system of internal "buffers." The psychological defenses "that blind us to the forces at work within our own personality" include repression, isolation, projection, rationalization, denial, and narcotization. "Although buffers make life easier, they also reduce the friction within the system that can cause people to grow. . . . Because we are buffered, we cannot observe who we really are and how our perceptions of the real world are distorted by the point of view of our types."

After discussing the historical background of the Enneagram system, Palmer briefly examines each personality type in terms of attention and intuition. She then outlines the physical structure of the system itself. Adding to the readability and the context of the book are self-descriptions by people who used the system to better understand themselves. Some of the revelations are fairly straightforward ("I get along best with my boss when he's not around"), while some seemed best suited for psychotherapy ("I was terrified of my mother as a child").

In Chapter Four, Palmer shares her own hesitant introduction to and her developing awareness of the system. She includes some of her own research on personality and intuitive thinking, as well as that of some of her colleagues and students. Part II of the book discusses each personality type at length, in terms of upbringing, passions, virtues, ways of thinking and being, and habits or responses to be aware of or change.

*The Enneagram* offers just one of many ways of classifying personalities. Palmer contends that the system of personality types is useful not just for categorizing people. It can help people learn about themselves and how they relate to themselves and to others. "The reason for discovering your own type is so you can build a working relationship with yourself," she says. "You can

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count on the experience of your similars to guide you, and you can discover the conditions that will make you thrive rather than continue to play out neurotic trends."

The Enneagram system can also help us understand people as they see themselves, rather than from our own points of view. "This understanding can help work teams be efficient, infuse romance with magic, and help families to reunite." For managers and trainers, that knowledge could be useful.

Seemingly aware of the limits of the system, Palmer confirms suspicions that classifying people by personality type may not always be a sure call—say, in the case of an employer drawing up a list of "do" and "don't" hires. "Do hire a Four (the tragic romantic) for a job in an art gallery' makes no sense if the Four has no eye for paintings, even if he or she does have a profoundly artistic temperament. 'Don't hire a Five (the observer) for a high-visibility job' would be a grand mistake if the Five were busy cultivating some outgoing qualities and were going to go all out to do the job well." Labeling is equally unreliable, she says, in the case of "the match-maker who wants a formula that says a Three's ideal mate is a Seven, or that Twos and Fours are incompatible lovers but make good friends."

Palmer's historical and clinical accounting of the Enneagram teachings is solid and her reasoning insightful. This is a thought-provoking source book, and she succeeds in challenging one's perception of reality and self. Yet beyond a few awareness exercises, she fails in this edition to tell readers explicitly how to apply the knowledge themselves. HRD practitioners and trainers may find themselves looking for ways they can use the teachings in their own work.

Fortunately, Palmer, who is on the psychology faculty at John F. Kennedy University and director of the Center for the Investigation and

Training of Intuition in Berkeley, California, is working on a sequel to *The Enneagram*. Reportedly, it will include applications of the system to business.

*The Enneagram: The Definitive Guide to the Ancient System for Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life*. 392 pp. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 800/638-3030, \$16.45.

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## A Demographic One-Two Punch

**From Baby Boom to Baby Bust: How Business Can Meet the Demographic Challenge**, by Martin M. Greller and David M. Nee.

From the peak of the baby boom in the 1950s to the bottom of the bust in the seventies, the nation's birth rate dropped 23 percent. First the baby boomers crowded, then emptied classrooms; now they're plateauing on the career ladder while entry-level jobs go unfilled. Corporations are finding themselves scrambling to respond.

Yet the frantic responses to the baby-boom/baby-bust syndrome are having counter effects on human resources, say authors Greller and Nee in *Baby Boom*. Corporate restructuring, downsizing, and the continuing press of competition are resulting in "the loss of the best and the brightest, the loss of institutional knowledge and history, the loss of morale and loyalty among the survivors. Those who can, go. Those who can't, stay."

Strategic human resource planning, they claim, is the response that will reverse the tide. Even though eight out of 10 large corporations report they do some human resource planning, most of it is reactive, not proactive. "Only 10 percent treat human resource planning as an integral part of business planning."

Effectively executed, the authors say, human resource planning can

help "to identify situations where the assignment of responsibilities is no longer working. It can even help to anticipate them . . . 'The new guy gets all the grunt work' is okay as long as some other 'new guy' appears in six or eight months. If the organization tries to force employees to stay in grunt work for years, the effect will be turnover. More likely, entry-level jobs will become broader to prevent boredom in the face of longer tenure and will allow a smaller number of people to cover more types of work."

*Baby Boom* examines how the changing demographics will affect the labor pool and how HRD practices currently fall short of providing solutions that work. The authors focus on how managers and HRD professionals can work together to develop long-term strategies for acquiring, training, and retraining employees.

"A well-defined strategy in the 1990s will recognize the human resources required and available, but also will alter personnel practices and policies in order to be more effective in conditions of shortage." A strategy that works, according to Greller and Nee, will consider different company styles, the availability of workers, and the company's relationship with its employees.

The authors contend that current practices of government and corporations are making matters more difficult. First, people are not being valued as the most important assets. Second, there is a prevailing assumption that technology alone can make agencies and companies more profitable. Yet, the authors warn, "the human resource is the ultimate raw material of the organization itself. Future leadership, corporate culture, creativity, and drive—all ebb and flow with the human resource."

One chapter, "The Plan for Human Resources," looks at three types of organizational planning: ■ Backup planning operates on a crisis mode of thinking in a static

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organization—what to do if a key person is hit by the proverbial truck.

- Succession planning incorporates some training and development and some employee participation, but still focuses on today's needs, not tomorrow's possibilities.

- Human resource planning proactively defines expectations; assesses skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and inclinations; and develops people as part of day-to-day operations.

Other chapters discuss

- three major models of organizational structure and innovative design strategies;

- ways to use training as a tool for expanding the labor pool and realizing the value of personnel;

- compensation, career planning, career alternatives for plateaued workers, and management practices that work;

- how government policy and the private sector will affect the response of business;

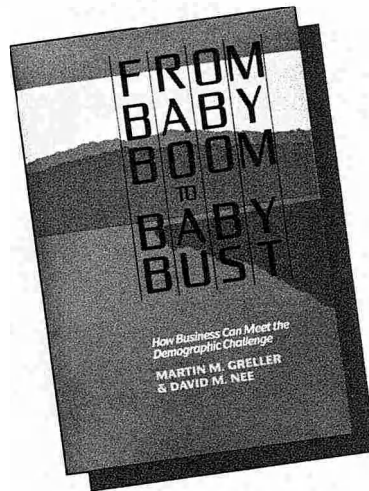
- the long-term effects of human services on corporations;

- what corporations are doing currently to manage the labor crisis.

Much of the information in *Baby Boom* is neither novel nor unique, yet the presentation is compelling; the authors emphasize loudly and clearly the critical need for proactive thinking in addressing the consequences of changing demographics on the workforce. In addition, the book lends credibility and value to the field of human resources, in a time when many business leaders are realizing the significance of people on their bottom line.

As Greller and Nee contend, "Any corporation that intends to manage its destiny must attend to the effects of demographic change on its human resources, and planning is the tool that enables top management to do so."

Greller is president of Personnel Strategies Inc., a human resource consulting firm. Nee is executive director of the Ittleson Foundation



in New York, which oversees grant awards in human services industries.

*From Baby Boom to Baby Bust: How Business Can Meet the Demographic Challenge.* 246 pp. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 617/944-3700, \$19.95.

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## Strategies for Globe Trotters

**Managing International Assignments: The Strategy for Success**, by Gary Fontaine.

According to author Gary Fontaine, Americans make more than five million international business trips a year. On average, firms sponsoring such trips fork out \$557,000 a year. Yet, he argues, few people sent overseas, or the managers responsible for them, receive any special training before or during the assignment. As a result, "up to 60 percent of all international assignments end in premature return or unacceptably poor performance." Unproductive assignments cost the United States approximately \$2 billion a year in direct costs alone. On top of that, he claims, "the indirect costs of poor performance in terms of lost treaties, contracts, and sales; damaged reputations; unrealized profit expectations; failed mergers, joint ventures, and acquisi-

tions; and attrition of good managers are inestimable."

Fontaine has made a science of the study of international management. In *Managing International Assignments*, he talks in terms of "task ecologies," "ecoshock," and "international microcultures." Yet his definitions are explicit and his themes relevant and understandable.

The first theme of the book focuses on the characteristics of an "international microculture"—a system of doing business within which people of different cultures "can negotiate, make decisions, manage, supervise, and communicate."

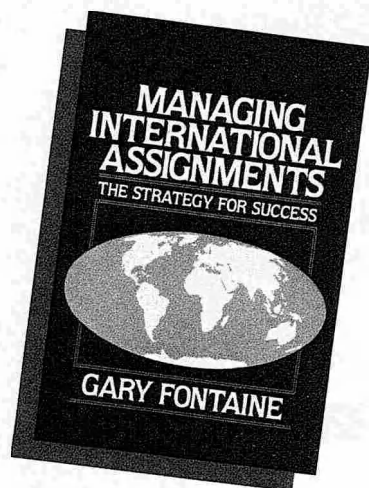
The way other people do business with one another in their own cultures, Fontaine says, is not necessarily the way they would do it with Americans. In a departure from many books of similar nature, he focuses not on cross-cultural training, but on inter-cultural training.

Cross-cultural training involves the ways people from another culture think about and do business among themselves, not necessarily the ways they will think about and do it with us. "It has taken a career for them to learn to do it their way. We are not going to learn in a one-week or one-year training program. To attempt to do business their way will be viewed by them humorously, at best, or more likely as evidence of our own lack of international sophistication."

In contrast, inter-cultural training involves learning how we can do business with other cultures within their cultural terms. It is skill-based and deals not so much with the specific perceptions of a culture per se, but with the parameters within which those perceptions are likely to be useful. Fontaine defines it as the "ecological basis of culture."

A second theme looks at the skills for developing an international microculture. Fontaine identifies steps for developing both a cultural sense of presence and an accurate

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perception of one's surroundings. It involves cultivating "an ecological awareness of the characteristics of place, time, travel, communication, people, support, structure, the characteristics that differentiate assignments from one another, and the characteristics of the specific tasks that must be completed as part of an assignment."

Too often, he writes, organizations "hire a trainer to 'parachute in' to the home or overseas office, hit often unwilling personnel with some 'culture' or 'rules of thumb,' and be flown out in one or two days. It's kind of a 'counterinsurgency strategy' for managing what is essential to the organization's competitiveness." An effective ecological awareness, Fontaine says, "is a sense of the necessary, the possible, and the desirable in specific tasks. It is the international assignment equivalent of 'street smarts.'"

A final theme of the book is on the requirements for managing international assignments—specifically, how to develop and maintain social skills, communication skills, and stress-management skills. Fontaine includes helpful checklists and charts to guide the manager through the process. Some topics of interest include strategies for

- effectively screening, selecting, orienting, training, and supporting international candidates;
- defining the key challenges and objectives of international assignments;
- reducing physical, mental, and cultural fatigue;
- managing short- and long-term assignments;
- choosing international hotels and coping with jet lag;
- assisting in the reentry process.

A chapter devoted specifically to various types of training includes advice on language training. Fontaine believes that training in another language can help Americans learn to communicate more effectively in English with people

for whom English is a second or third language.

"Thus we can learn to speak more slowly; enunciate more clearly; and use less jargon, simpler sentences, more breaks, more examples, more visuals, and shorter sessions. And when listening we can learn to be more patient, refrain from interrupting our hosts, or completing their sentences for them. And we can learn to be more forgiving, attributing poor grammar or vocabulary to their lack of language competence rather than professional competence. We will find all these skills well appreciated because they show empathy, are not easy, and are rare internationally."

*Managing International Assignments* is intended to be a companion for people going on overseas business assignments and for the managers, trainers, or human resource specialists responsible for managing those people. It is an aptly titled, well-written resource that presents a global, multicultural perspective. As a reader, you get the feeling that Fontaine is comfortable working with people from different cultures and that his advice is based on hands-on experience. He describes himself as a consultant, researcher, executive, and author, as well as an associate professor of communication at the University of Hawaii.

*Managing International Assignments: The Strategy for Success.* 226 pp. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 201/767-5937, \$35.

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## Additional Reading

*Training for Impact: How to Link Training to Business Needs and Measure the Results*, by Dana Gaines Robinson and James C. Robinson. 308 pp. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: ROTF. \$25 ASTD national members.

\$27 nonmembers.

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*Effective Strategies for Teaching Adults*, by Don F. Seaman and Robert A. Fellenz. 189 pp. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing, 614/258-8441, \$25.95.

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*Why Leaders Can't Lead: The Unconscious Conspiracy Continues*, by Warren Bennis. 169 pp. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. This book is available through ASTD Press. Order Code: BEWL. \$19 ASTD national members. \$21 nonmembers.

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*Diagnosing Management Training and Development Needs: Concepts and Techniques*, by Milan Kubr and Joseph Prokopenko. 304 pp. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Office, 202/376-2315, \$24.50.

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