

— THE ENNEAGRAM AT WORK

Effective communication using the Enneagram

Nine ways of speaking. Nine sets of blind spots. The one you cannot see is your own.

Four things are happening every time you speak

This guide is a brief look at how each of the nine types tends to communicate, with particular attention to blind spots. Used with positive intention, it becomes a first step toward more attuned emotional intelligence — for yourself, and for the people you work beside.

01

Speaking style

The overall pattern by which we talk — in addition to what we actually talk about.

02

Body language

Posture, facial expression, gesture, movement, energy — and hundreds of other nonverbal messages we send without deciding to.

03

Blind spot

The unconscious, unintentional information we convey to other people: visible to them, invisible to us.

04

Distorting filters

The listener's own unconscious models and assumptions, which alter how they hear whatever you said.

Want to know your whole team's types? We built a test designed with teams in mind — write to hello@bigselfschool.com.

Powerful challenger



SPEAKING STYLE

Bold, authoritative, big-picture, strategic, impatient with detail. Raise the intensity of your language until you get a response. Blame others if blamed. May display anger directly, use profanity or body-based humor — or say very little and let the nonverbals carry it.

BODY LANGUAGE

A strong physical presence, even in silence. Voice tone modulated for maximum impact. Intense nonverbal cues.

BLIND SPOT

Many people — not only timid ones — become intimidated by them. Their energy is far stronger than they realize, even when holding back. Not everyone grasps the big picture as fast as an 8 does. Vulnerability shows at moments they are unaware of.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Protecting the people they believe truly need protecting. Weakness in others. Control. Truthfulness. Feeling blamed.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

You usually don't mean to be intimidating, and you often don't know your own strength. You care a great deal about moving things forward, protecting others, and fighting what is wrong.

Modest mediator

SPEAKING STYLE

Highly detailed information delivered sequentially. Real effort to be fair and present all sides. May say yes and mean no. Agreeing words — "yes," "uh-huh." Easygoing and relaxed, with few displays of strong emotion.

BODY LANGUAGE

Easygoing, relaxed, smiling. Few displays of strong emotion, particularly negative feeling. The face is animated; the body is not.

BLIND SPOT

Prolonged explanations cause listeners to lose interest. Presenting multiple viewpoints can cost them influence and credibility. True desires go unstated. Passive-aggressive tendencies.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Demands to change or do something. Being criticized, ignored, or put down. Someone holding an opposing view. The possibility that another person's anger will land on them.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

You avoid conflict and discomfort — and, along with it, awareness of your own conflictual feelings. You may not tell others what you are thinking or doing, and may not yet know what you want.

Principled reformer

1

SPEAKING STYLE

Precise, direct, exacting, concise, detailed.
Task-related thoughts shared readily. Quick reactions to ideas. Words like should, ought, must, good, excellent, wrong, right.
Defensive if criticized.

BODY LANGUAGE

Erect posture. Taut muscles. Focused eyes.
Body language may reveal a negative reaction before the words do. Clothing well-coordinated and pressed.

BLIND SPOT

Can appear critical, impatient, or angry.
Tenacious about their own opinions. Largely unaware of the impact their anger has on others.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Being criticized by someone else.
Preoccupation with their own ideas.
Whether, in their view, other people are behaving correctly and responsibly.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

Be direct, concise, and logical, and bring evidence — including anything critical. You are already highly critical of yourself, so humor and lightness go a long way.

Strategic supporter

2

SPEAKING STYLE

Ask questions. Give compliments. Focus on the content of others with few references to yourself. Soft voice. May turn to anger or complaint when they don't like what they are hearing.

BODY LANGUAGE

Smiling and comfortable. Relaxed facial expressions. Open, graceful movement. When agitated, a furrowed brow and facial tension.

BLIND SPOT

A secondary or hidden agenda may sit beneath the generosity and attention. If uninterested, they disengage abruptly. Flattery used to further an aim. Criticism kept private.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Whether the other person likes them. Whether they like the other person. Whether they want to help. How much influence the other person holds. Whether someone they protect may be harmed.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

You may need time to sort out what you need and want. You appreciate being asked how you are feeling, and affirmation that is given authentically.

Productive performer

3

SPEAKING STYLE

Clear, efficient, logical, well put together. Quick on your feet. Avoid topics where information is thin or that reflect badly on you. Concrete examples. Impatient with lengthy conversation.

BODY LANGUAGE

Look put together and appear confident. Breathe high into the chest, shoulders raised. Actions can look staged for effect. Regularly scan the room for reactions. Let others know when their time is up.

BLIND SPOT

Impatience when they perceive others as less capable. Avoidance of their own failings. Can appear driven, abrupt, rushing or dismissing people, sometimes insincere.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Whether the information will make them look good. Whether it interferes with achieving the goal. The apparent confidence and competence of the other person.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

Lead with results. You do care, even when you look distracted — you are usually preoccupied. Slowing down is hard for you, especially where emotions are involved.

Authentic creative

4

SPEAKING STYLE

Frequent self-reference — I, me, my, mine. Comfortable discussing feelings and sharing personal or painful stories. Ask personal questions. Word choice precise and deliberate.

BODY LANGUAGE

Intense and urgent. Appear focused inward, as if analyzing their own words. Communicate a need for undivided attention. Eyes may look moist or sad.

BLIND SPOT

Pull the conversation back to themselves. Need to complete a conversation even after the other person is done with it. Can appear overly dramatic or contrived.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Personal rejection. Being slighted or demeaned. Not wanting to appear defective. Being misunderstood.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

Checking in on you lands as care and understanding. You are emotionally sensitive — for good and for ill — and you value authenticity above almost everything.

Analytical specialist

5

SPEAKING STYLE

Terse, or lengthy discourse with highly selective word choice. Limited sharing of personal information. Thoughts rather than feelings.

BODY LANGUAGE

Express thought with limited emotional content. Self-contained and self-controlled, with unanimated body language.

BLIND SPOT

May not show warmth; can appear aloof or remote. May say too much and lose the listener, or too few words to be understood. Can come across as condescending or elitist.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Demands and expectations. Feeling inadequate. Overwhelming emotion from the other person. Trust that privacy will be kept. Physical proximity that feels too close.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

You are more sensitive than you appear. You prefer to process emotion alone — and your silence is not disengagement.

Skeptical troubleshooter

SPEAKING STYLE

Start with analytical comments. Speech may alternate between confident and hesitant. Discuss worries, concerns, and what-if scenarios.

BODY LANGUAGE

Eyes may be bold and direct, warm and engaging — or dart back and forth as if scanning for danger. The face shows worry. Quick nonverbal reaction to any perceived threat.

BLIND SPOT

Negative scenarios read to others as pessimism and a can't-do orientation. Self-doubt makes others question their competence. However hard they mask the worry, it is still visible.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Whether others' use of authority is proper or improper. Projection of their own thoughts and feelings onto the other person. Questions of trust.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

It takes you a while to develop trust, so consistency and forthcomingness help. You poke holes in plans because you are trying to make them succeed.

Enthusiastic visionary



SPEAKING STYLE

Quick and spontaneous, words released in a flurry. Engaging stories. Shifts from topic to topic. Reframes negatives of all kinds. Usually smiling and highly animated. Easily distracted. Sharp tone when angry.

BODY LANGUAGE

Smiling and bright-eyed. Highly animated face and numerous hand and arm gestures. May pace while speaking. Easily distracted.

BLIND SPOT

May not have absorbed all the information they believe they have mastered. Miss that their own behavior leads others to take them less seriously. Constant shifting of ideas distracts the room.

DISTORTING FILTERS (OF THE LISTENER)

Having their competence demeaned. Assuming they know what you are about to say, and stopping listening. The possibility of limits. Being pushed into a long-term commitment they don't want.

WHAT OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

You are sensitive to criticism even though you don't show it. You fear getting stuck in negative emotion, and your focus on what is fun is often a way around painful feeling.

*You cannot see your own
blind spot. That is the point.*

Which is why this work happens with other people. Big Self's coaches, workshops, and AI-enabled platform, Emma, help teams name what they cannot see alone.

Book a call with us →