

Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Just One More by Clarence Thomson

Style Seven usually seems to have a lot of energy but it is coupled with a mysterious lack of determination. When they come for coaching, they burble enthusiastically about making an impact on the world, but when probed about what steps they think they should take to make that impact, their eyes glaze over and their answers are unfocused.



Why?

Once you understand that their Enneagram style is something they do, not a trait (like being tall or having brown hair), then the next question becomes, “How does style Seven do what prevents them from effective action?”

It starts, as all Enneagram styles do, with a focus of attention. Style Seven focuses on the future—its promises, opportunities and pleasures. Then they employ a corresponding strategy to squeeze in as many of those promises, opportunities and pleasures as they can.

The habit that supports the promised cornucopia of goodies is an expansion of time.

It works something like this. Miss Seven has plans for the day. She has a certain number of things she wants to do. Then the phone rings and the caller offers another event, chore, errand, book, coffee—the list is fulsome—and Miss Seven sees that just one more thing will be possible. She’d have to juggle, disappoint or hurry, but possibly not disappoint, so she enthusiastically agrees. Certainly one more thing is possible and it sounds like fun. She would check her calendar, but she doesn’t have time and she is sure she can do this.

Now in order to accomplish another thing (or two), she moves into a kind of fantasy. The day is long and her energy high so of course she can squeeze another thing (maybe, just maybe, two or three) into her busy schedule.

The optimism for which Sevens are noted expresses itself in this expansion of time. As she thinks about it and pictures life in her imagination, she is sure she will have the time and energy to do all the things she wants to do—and she wants a lot. The optimistic expansion of time also influences her judgment about how long things will take and what resources she will have to muster. Life is going to be filled with one success after another, she may be rich and/or famous by the end of the month.

(Continued on page 2)

Just One More (continued)

But when Seven fills imaginary inflated time with real activities, a number of unpleasant things may occur. First, some of the activities turn out to be less pleasant than envisioned. If this happens, instead of expanding time, she shrinks the activities, either by reframing them into something pleasant (think Tom Sawyer and the whitewashed fence) or by cutting corners, substituting excuses (charming, but...) or just skating out on obligations. If worse comes to worst, then she employs denial, or in extreme cases chemistry. Alcohol can be chemical cheer and she has had a slightly bad day.

So if you're a Seven, how will you know you're expanding time? Is there some kind of reality check? Well, there are several. The first comes from your body. If you have a kind of inner haste, you're feeling rushed, that's your first sign that you have more reality scheduled than your protoplasm thinks it can handle. I'm a Seven and if I over schedule, I will find myself stuttering because I'm talking too fast. That feeling of inner haste is not pleasant so Sevens will try to ignore it, but its very unpleasantness can serve as motivation to slow down. Slowing down is not attractive—speed thrills—but if weighed against that accelerator tension, it can be tolerated.

A lot of Sevens carry a (frequently messy, crowded) calendar with them. I call the calendar their time-tether. If it won't go into the calendar (viciously partitioned into real-time segments), then one has to make other arrangements. Calendars can be over-ridden, of course, but frequently that comes at a price.

When I coach Sevens, I harness the calendar and the "to do" list so beloved of time managers to a slightly different goal. Instead of treating the "to do" list as goals or goads to do those tasks, I reframe it (surprise!) into a dyke. "This is ALL I have to do today." The ocean of possibilities that occur to Sevens with seductive promise is held back by the printed commands to do ONLY what real time allows.

If the situation is chronic but also critical, then as a last resort, a Seven could create an ETA (estimated time of accomplishment) and then painfully contrast that with the amount of real, community-supported, clock-measured time. I recommend this to Sevens but they seldom do it. Nor do executives who do time management seminars. It is the antithesis of interesting, productive work. The only thing it does is accusatory and who needs that? Sevens do. I started by mentioning a mysterious lack of determination many Sevens have. Some of that lack of determination is rooted in the base line of fear all three head types have that they don't have what it takes to accomplish things. Conscience, Shakespeare said, makes cowards of us, and excessive thinking has a similar effect on effective action.



But some of the lack of determination is the frustration Sevens feel when things are so much harder in reality than they were in their plans. They allot a certain amount of emotional energy to a task in their expanded time and now it isn't working, so they give up. It's not that the task or goal is too hard in itself, it is too hard or complex in relation to the smooth accomplishment in a short period of time that is in their heads. The task is not so much hard as harder. Harder than they imagined. So they misjudge the amount of energy and time to do the task and frequently decide it is not worth it.

Follow Mary's and Clarence's blogs:

Coach Mentor: <http://mentoringforcoaches.blogspot.com>

Enneagram Coach: <http://enneagramcentralcoach.blogspot.com>