

Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Watch Your Language, by Clarence Thomson



Several years ago, a rather dynamic young man called with his problem: he said he could not find the motivation for his job. His job involved a lot of phone work and he told me, "I just can't find the motivation." After a few questions it was clear he was a Nine. Not being able to "find" motivation is different in each style. Within the Nine framework it's a side effect of self-erasure. Nines have a generalized reluctance to see what they want, not to mention going after it. They also look outside themselves for what they want.

I did not try to "solve" or "treat" Nineishness. That's too general and too difficult. So I took a short cut. I asked him to just say out loud, "I don't like my job." When I asked him to say this, he was a bit taken aback, but then became a little excited and began to talk at some length about all the things he didn't like about his job. The more he talked, the clearer he became about his feelings about the job. The more he became aware of the things he didn't like, the less he blamed himself for "lack of motivation."

Imagine what would happen if managers in corporations had meetings that were about "How to get people to like their jobs?" Motivation, being abstract, allows of a lot of wiggle room. "How to get people to like their jobs" is quite often, "How to get people to do jobs they DON'T like."

"Motivation" is a clinical word. An academic word, a bloodless abstraction. A Nine would use it when not in touch with his feelings. But "like" is a four-letter word, and four-letter words are feared for their power. So to import his power, I had him claim the emotion he had moved to the periphery of his awareness.

Motivation is a common problem when the rewards are extrinsic. It starts early in life. Children are bribed to brush their teeth; grade school urchins are given stars, happy faces, and whatever other forms of bribes are handy. Children play baseball for uniforms, trophies, applause and the promise of wealth. It is, in my experience, a lot of fun to hit and throw and catch a baseball. We are raised on extrinsic rewards. Parents want their children not just to study but to *want* to study.

(Continued on page 2)

Watch Your Language (continued)

A coach can help clients a great deal by using small, experiential words, especially the words that structure our Enneagram style. For example, when style Sixes say they “suffer from anxiety,” that phrase has been imported from a book or someone with technical information. So when I ask a Six about that, I shift from clinical, non-experiential language to real talk. “What do you worry about?”

When I find out what they worry about, only then can we talk about the degree and reality of their concern. Even after switching from anxiety to worry, real words help. If they say they worry about health, find out what organ or muscle or system they worry about. One doesn't talk about health, one talks about pains and prescriptions.

Real (four-letter, experiential) words connect to specifics. Abstract words connect to generalizations and thoughts about specifics, so they interpret an emotion or sensation and they lump past emotions and sensations along with future expectations that are more or less similar. Imagine what would happen if a physical doctor treated livers or spleens that way. You tell the doctor you're sick and she says she'll give you medicine for internal health. (Actually, they do and when it doesn't work, the carnage is called “side effects.” Side effects are effects that didn't fit your specific needs).

Enneagram coaches have a special suspicion of abstract words. Abstract words are conscious. One learns them in schools or from books with more footnotes than pictures. So when clients state their problems to me in abstract language, I look for the relationship of this word to their Enneagram style. A Nine who lacks “motivation” is sort of lost. A Seven who lacks motivation may be just bored or running away. Nines don't know what they like, but what they like may be the central concern of Sevens. So, every abstract term has been divided into nine kinds and then you can find what small word you can use to clarify the problem. So, also, will your suggestions on how to deal with lack of motivation vary from style to style.

So what happened to the Nine in my opening paragraph? He quit his job, of course. He now has a much better job on a career path.

However, while clarification by using small clear experiential words is effective, the results vary. I was coaching a style Seven involved with two women and a child. He talked in generalities and obfuscations so I suggested he was in this bind because he was lying. Lying to all concerned. Reframing has its limits. He reluctantly agreed that maybe this was the case. I was working in tandem with a therapist and when it came time for his next session he told her he did not want to talk to me again, “because he's too real.” Oh, well.

For more four-letter, experiential words, follow our blogs:

Enneagram Central Blog: <http://www.enneagramcentral.com/blog>

Break Out of the Box Blog: <http://outoftheboxcoaching.blogspot.com>

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

