

# The Practical Enneagram

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## Contents

<i>Editor's Comment</i>	2
<i>Consulting the Map vs Walking the Path</i>	3
<i>Deep Mindfulness and the Enneagram: Nine Paths to Spiritual Transformation</i>	6
<i>Making the Enneagram as Simple as Possible, but no Simpler</i>	11
<i>Imposter Syndrome: A Path to Understanding and Transformation</i>	14
<i>Including a Physical Practice in Development Work — a Kundalini Yoga Perspective</i>	17
<i>News and interviews</i>	19

## Developmental couples therapist explains how exactly how we project based on our types

The Enneagram helps us to see our projections in intimate relationships, which supports both the relationship itself and our inner development, says therapist and practitioner of the Developmental Model of Couples Therapy, Michelle Joy, M.A., MFT.

The leading expert of combining couples therapy with the Enneagram helps couples reach their goals using latest advancements in differentiation and neuroscience. Here we talk about her work, along with some of her latest offerings.

**Rezzan Huseyin ('RH'):** Michelle, huge congrats on last's year's [Enneagram Summit for the Helping Profession](#). What inspired you to create it, and will it be happening again in 2025?

**Michelle Joy ('MJ'):** The summit was inspired by a few things. Firstly, many colleagues I am in contact with either have never heard of the Enneagram, or know it a little but do not use it in their practice. Personally, I think it is an essential tool to have in our toolbelt as therapists. I work with mostly couples and cannot imagine

having no knowledge of the Enneagram — if nothing else, when I know someone's type, as Tom Condon says, "I know where to fish". I feel passionate about bringing the Enneagram into more mainstream mental health practices all around the world, as well as demonstrating its versatility, and how it blends so nicely with a variety of different psychological modalities. And yes! This year will mark the [2nd Annual Enneagram for the Helping Profession Summit](#) which will air in May 2025. So stay tuned for details.

I have also created and hosted a virtual [Life Purpose Summit](#) that airs in March 2025. Knowing our purpose — the destiny or potential that every person is imprinted with — helps us to perceive the challenges and repetitive negative patterns in our lives as life lessons, rather than feeling victimized by them. It can help to anchor us. There is more than one way to explore purpose, and this summit contains 20+ modalities. It's like a Life Purpose candy store! The summit recordings are at [LifePurposeSummits.com](#).

**RH:** Sounds like another trove of inspiration and insight.

To begin our exploration: my understanding of your primary therapeutic work with couples is that you apply a developmental model of couples therapy that mirrors the five early developmental stages (from the work of Margaret Mahler), and use your Enneagram lens to hone in on what needs to happen in order for people to successfully 'differentiate' in relationships.

**MJ:** Yes that's correct. I work mostly with couples experiencing difficulty at stage 2, which is called 'differentiation' in the model. Most couples, in some capacity, will skip over this stage. Couples then think that their problem is fill-in-the-blank of the fight of the week, but the real problem is often that they skipped over differentiation. Without the skills developed during differentiation, the experience in the rest of the stages is adversely affected. This also affects the ability of the couple to communicate well,

*(Continued on page 19)*

