



Episode 17 - Sarah Duet: The Enneagram Specialist

Matt: Our guest on today's podcast is Sarah Duet. Sarah is an artist, communicator, and Enneagram teacher from Shreveport Louisiana. Today, she's going to educate us about personality types specific to the Enneagram. She's going to let us know what the Enneagram is and how these different personality types coexist and communicate with one another. We're going to talk about conflict resolution and how all of this is related. We hope you enjoy the show.

Craig: Well, welcome back to the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm Craig Robertson here again with my law partner, Matt Easterling. And today we're going to be talking about people. We're going to talk about personality types, how people interact with one another and a tool for giving language to that. Some of you may be familiar with called the Enneagram. So, I met our guest Sarah at a life in the Trinity ministries: Enneagram cohort. And what that is basically a group of people from all over the country of all different types of walks of life and all different personality types who want to dig deeper and learn more about themselves and how they relate to other people. Sarah, thanks for joining us today.

Sarah: Well, thanks for having me. I'm excited to talk.

Matt: Sarah, I know Craig has done a fair amount of work with the Enneagram, nowhere scratching the surface of the work that you've done, but just so you know, I don't really know anything about it. So do me a favor. Could you just tell me what the Enneagram is? Exactly.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. You know, it's not my favorite thing to try to fit into an elevator pitch, but this is the business. The best I can do for us. I like to say the Enneagram is a Personality typing system that combines modern psychology with spiritual and somatic wisdom to describe nine distinct dynamic ways of being in the world. And each of those nine types is characterized by some habitual pattern responses and unique motivations, and those arise from a combination of how we think and feel and behave. So that's the initial overview.

Matt: And, and not trying to simplify it too much, but, what I'm hearing is there are basically nine different personality types and how those different personality types interact with one another.

Sarah: Sure. Yeah. And some people are going to hear that understandably and think only nine types of people that so reductive and, you know, I would assure you that it's far more complex than that. These are nine basic umbrellas of, of types of folks that, you know, are nine basic motivations and ways of seeing the world. But within those categories, there is endless nuance. There's at least 27 subtypes and you can shake it out to being 108 different types. And of course we won't go through all of that today. So nine basic types, and the idea here is not to put folks into boxes, but the Enneagram can really kind of

show us the boxes or the constraints that we've been living in and give us some tools for how to get free of those. If we're looking to do that.

Craig: Sarah, we've been doing this podcast for a while now, and I noticed that iTunes categorizes us in the relationship category, which I guess is true. We are in the relationship business. A lot of people who are listening to this and who have found our website are trying to dig in and find out more information about their personal relationship. And when things are going wrong, people are seeking information about strategies to help improve their relationships. I've heard the Enneagram described as an ancient tool for empathy. Can you speak to that?

Sarah: Yeah. I love that. I love that. And it is so helpful in understanding ourselves and others, which of course is kind of the foundation of empathy, I think. And, and part of what makes it uniquely helpful. I think because of course there are other personality type apologies. There are other tools, but the Enneagram is not so much about what we do as it is about why we do what we do. And when we can understand that and work with that, we can get a lot farther. In relationship particularly, I think some of the most valuable things Enneagram can offer us are, uh, this awareness that we can be looking at the same thing. Two different people can be looking at the same thing and see something entirely different perhaps, and that can help us to ask better questions of one another in disagreement rather than just jumping to well, you're wrong or you're crazy cause you don't see this, how I see it. We can take a step back and we can ask, well, what are you seeing that I'm not seeing? And that is a function of that empathy that you mentioned. And so this helps us mediate conflicts. Of course it can help us take things less personally if we understand that these patterns, these motivations, these ways of seeing are not about us. One of my favorite authors and Lamont says, you know, only one 7 billionth of any of this is about us. Anyway, if there are 7 billion people on the planet. And so, this kind of taking things less personally in, in relationship and in conflict can be very helpful and then you have alluded to this, but it just giving us language with which to communicate more clearly with each other. That that is huge. And I'll just one, one last thing on the point of empathy, you know, we're taught about the golden rule early in life or in our religious communities. And you know, there are endless versions of that and all different wisdom traditions, but one we're familiar with often here is, you know, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And that's great. That's a very important ethic of reciprocity that can start us forming some empathy, but I don't know about you, but I have treated people exactly how I would have wished to be treated in a situation and it may have backfired or not gone particularly well. And so, there's actually something called the platinum rule that is often used in therapy that is to treat others the way they want to be treated. And that requires a little bit of extra work that requires knowing how others want or need to be treated. And I think the Enneagram is a wonderful resource to that end.

Matt: Sarah, you said something a second ago that really kind of resonated with me in, in the line of work that Craig and I are in every day, we hear people come in and they tell us their story, the way that they have experienced their relationship or things that their partner has done either to them or, or just done in general. And I've for a long time said that there's obviously two sides to every story. And then the truth is going to be somewhere in the middle. And it has always been fascinating to me over this last decade to see how two people can experience the exact same thing, the same event, and remember it and regurgitate it in completely different ways. And many times I've been sitting at counsel table and in court and the other side is up there testifying and they're telling their version of a story. And my client is sitting there writing on a pad lie, exclamation point exclamation point, underline, underline. And I found

that, yeah, most of the time, if you had hooked a lot of texture up to them, it would say that they were telling the truth because that is actually how they remember it or how they experienced it. And it's really just fascinating the way that two people can have the same experience, but experience it differently.

Sarah: Right. Absolutely. And you know, the more we know about memory, just from a neuroscience perspective, we know how kind of subjective that can be. But when you add on that, we're all experiencing and seeing different things in the moment. And then there's this process of, of memory and storing that memory over time. Yeah. There's just, there's so much room for diversion and different viewpoints that is so much of relationship and conflict.

Craig: Well, ultimately we all have a lens through which we view the world and each individual person is valuable and the lens through which they view the world is also valuable, but it's not the same. It really what you said resonated with me just now the, the idea of the golden rule. And we don't want to all be treated the same way because we each are motivated by, by different factors and our personalities have developed in different ways, which are also beautifully diverse.

Sarah: That's right. Yep. Absolutely.

Craig: Let's little bit of language to, to some of the concepts that we're talking about. Can you just tell us a little bit more, we know that there are nine types of being that are defined in the Enneagram. Talk a little bit about the, the relationship that each one of those ways of being has to the other numbers on the Enneagram.

Sarah: Sure. So there are so many ways that we can kind of categorize or group these types. And the most basic way is a grouping of three that we call the triads or the three centers because it's based on what we call centers of intelligence. And so earlier I said, you know, the types are, are based on or a rise from a combination of how we think, feel, and behave. So that is thinking or head intelligence, which is kind of the default way we think of intelligence for better or worse in the United States. And we've got three types, the five, the six and the seven, the specialists, the skeptic and the visionary that are taking in information through thinking through the head, that's where they start everything. So, reason, logic, trying to, to find clear patterns and find some certainty, that's their starting point. And then they add feeling intelligence and what we call doing intelligence to that are our gut instinct. And we've got another three types, the two, three and four that are in the heart or the feeling triad. And so they're taking everything in initially through their feeling or emotional intelligence through the heart and responding then with thinking or doing to that. And then finally, we've got the gut triad or the body triad types, eight, nine, and one who are taking everything in through gut-level knowing these are folks that kind of know that they know that they know, but maybe don't know how they know. And so they're starting everything from that place and then bringing in thinking and, and feeling to that. And so those are basic ways of seeing the world or taking in experience. And then from there, there are further groupings of how we respond to what we're taking in. But I think it's important to acknowledge that, you know, these personalities are not the truest thing about us. The personality is a strategy that we take on and we kind of put on as scaffolding our protection around our true selves or our essence and personalities are not bad there. They have helped us make our way in the world. They have kept us safe and kept us alive, it's just that they can get limiting if we're only using one strategy over and over and over again, we may need more options, more skills, more tools, especially in adulthood.

Craig: Sarah, talk a little bit about movement because some of our listeners know that we as human beings respond differently when things are going well, we respond in certain ways. And when things are harder, we respond in certain ways. Does the Enneagram have language for that?

Sarah: Absolutely. And one of the things that I love about it is it, it doesn't ever kind of try to confine you to one type. So yes, we have a core type that is our primary strategy for making our way in the world, but there's a lot of movement built in. So, I like to think of these as resource points. There are two types that were connected to that we moved toward or access in stress and security. And some people teach that we take on negative characteristics of the stress type and positive of the security type. And that's just not true a hundred percent of the time in my experience. I think that we get helpful resources from both of those points. So, let's get direct briefly with that. So I am a type four on the Enneagram and as a type four, one of my strategies for managing myself and managing stress is that I withdraw and I have access to a type two and stress and type two are, are very outwardly focused people. They move toward other people. And so if I was fully just in and of myself in my four and I was in a tough spot, I could withdraw and withdraw and withdraw and end up in a hole by myself with no way out. But because I intuitively take on some of that to energy, if I get stressed enough, that can move me back out toward other people to connect with other people, to get some help or to help or reach out to others. So that's a really useful tool. Now I can go too far with that and end up in a clingy sort of codependent state. And so that's why it was really helpful to know these patterns cause you know, what to watch for and you can hopefully choose the better of your options.

Craig: Yeah. That's really interesting how you described it as resource gathering. And that's the way that I like to think about it as well is just being able to access just different ways of being in a particular season when those resources are needed. Another interesting component to this is just how these relational dynamics play out within a home because, you know, not only does my wife have a way of seeing the world and resources available to her, but my kids do as well. And so it's interesting when you think of these personality types and the dynamics of relationships, whether it be insecurity or stress and how we interrelate to one another.

Sarah: Absolutely. You know, I always say that, you know, even just one person working with the Enneagram can vastly improve or a relationship or a household, but it's certainly more helpful if all people involved are, and it be helpful in one, on one relationships or like you're saying in a whole web of family relationships, for sure.

Matt: Sarah, in a situation where let's just say, one person is working with Enneagram, improving a relationship is that have to do with just identifying it for yourself or can you almost diagnose what your partner's Enneagram is without them actually participating in it.

Sarah: That is a perfect question. I'm very glad that you asked that because you know, at the end of the day, this is really about personal work that, that you can do because these types are based on motivation is it's very, very hard to identify someone else's Enneagram type. Even if you know that person quite intimately, and you can really only ever do anything about you, you are the person that you

can change. You can't actually force that on anyone else. And so it's first and foremost personal awareness that is valuable about this, identifying my patterns, my habits, and responding and taking some ownership and agency over that now, because this plays out in relationship, I have those patterns in and of myself, and then I have those patterns with other types and can start to kind of identify some of those, but it's actually kind of a, an ethic or a first rule of the Enneagram that we should really try not to type other people or diagnose, as you said, other people, because we could be wrong and do quite a lot of damage. And you know, you and I, for instance, could do the same thing, but for a very different reason. And at the end of the day only, you're going to know why you do what you do. And I'm only going to be able to figure out why I do what I do. And so it's, it's best to try not to put it on other people if at all possible.

Craig: Well, there's also this idea of self awareness because I mean, sometimes we don't know why we do the things that we do. I mean, I've been an eight my whole life, but I don't think that I maybe not even today fully understand, you know, what deep within side of me motivates me. And so that's, what's so interesting is it's just the idea to stop and look in the mirror and do that introspective work for, for personal growth. And you've also made a great comment about just we can only control the controllables and those things that we can control, have to do with us and us alone. Even in the most intimate relationships that we might have, even with our spouse.

Craig: Talk a little bit about conflict. Matt and I are, I guess we're in the conflict business because nobody comes to see us unless there is conflict. I have this thing. I don't even know why I ask it anymore, but every time I'm talking to a potential new client, I ask, Hey, how are you doing? And inevitably, they look at me like, how do you think I'm doing? I'm talking to you. And so it's funny though, the different responses you get because some people are, Oh yeah. You know, I'm okay. It's like, well, I mean, really you're talking to me. So things can't be that great. Can they, but the Enneagram, the Enneagram has some language for how people deal with conflict as well. Can you talk about that? Some for us?

Sarah: Absolutely. Absolutely. One of my favorite ways to talk about this is to look at what we call the Enneagram harmonic groups. And this is another way of grouping those nine types into three. And it is about how each type handles conflict or difficulty situations where our needs aren't getting met, or maybe we're not getting what we want and this is just a very kind of fundamental way that our personalities try to protect us or defend us. So even if, if folks are listening and have no idea what their Enneagram type might be, they might be able to start to kind of hear themselves or recognize themselves in some of these strategies. And there are three basic strategies. There's a positive outlook, a strategy in which folks try to deny that they have a problem each in their own way types, two, seven, and nine are in this group. And so folks that would identify with type two are going to really focus on the other person's problem. They're going to see that more readily than they're going to see their own. So they might take a stance that sounds like, well, you have a problem. I'm here to help you. And type sevens are going to be realistic enough to say, you know, there may be a problem, but I'm fine because they're very skilled at kind of reframing into the positive and personal problems, being opportunities, almost always for sevens. And then finally type nine is really focused on keeping inner and outer peace kind of avoiding conflict altogether. And so they're going to take a stance that something like, well, what problem I don't, I don't think there's a problem. So that's one strategy.

Craig: And before we move on from that positive outlook group, it would seem like on the surface, that those would be the type of people that you would be easy to be in relationship with. The glass is always half full, but I feel like that that's probably not true.

Sarah: Well, it could be for a while and then not so true anymore because as I think we all know here that, you know, you can't deny a problem out of existence. You can ignore it for a time, but that's going to catch up with you. So if there aren't skills developed over time in a relationship to identify and address problems, then that becomes its own problem in and of itself. So that would certainly be true if you have two positive outlook numbers in a relationship. But if, for example, you have a positive outlook number with a reactive number who are going to react strongly, and one are response from others and might be a little more focused on the negative parts of the conflict. Then that's going to be difficult to mediate because you've got two opposite strategies coming to a fork.

Craig: Sarah, talk about the next group of, of people and how they deal with content.

Sarah: Absolutely. So we have the competency group next, and these folks are going to try to cut off feelings to solve problems logically. So they're not denying that there's a problem. They just want to handle it and try to cut off feelings and the energy that those would take. Type one is in this group and these folks are going to take the stance that sounds something like, you know, I'm sure we can solve this like sensible, mature adults. So they're kind of very controlled and want to manage their reactions. Type three is another type I'm in the competency group. And they're going to be looking for an efficient solution and say something like we can do this. We just need to get to work, kind of making conflict resolution, a task and relationship almost and type fives are in this group as well. And fives are, are thinkers and very cerebral folks. And so they're going to say, you know, there are a number of, of hidden issues and let me think about this and they may need some space to go and think before addressing a problem. So that's the competency group.

Craig: Well, and as I'm sure as our listeners are hearing, you know, what you've discussed so far about the positive outlet group and the competency group, there's something valid about each way of, of dealing with conflict. I mean, sometimes, you know, for example, there's not a big problem that needs a lot of focus and attention and people just need to move on about their lives. And sometimes people do need to take a step back and, and research an issue and think through an issue before responding to an, to an issue. I've used this phrase and I'm sure I've said it on this podcast before in, in relational breakdown, you know, a chess match approach is better than the football game approach. And I think that's what the reactive group does is there is this reaction, there is a, an instinctual response to whatever the stressor is.

Sarah: Absolutely. Absolutely. And you're so right that none of these strategies are bad in and of themselves and all of them are gonna be needed and called for in, in different situations. And the idea is just that we wouldn't get limited to only being able to use one that we would have the flexibility and the awareness to kind of use all of them when it's appropriate or use each of them. Because like you, like you said, the reactive group has some intensity in conflict. There is an intense reaction, and we want people to kind of meet our intensity. And I say our, because I'm in this group. types four, six, and eight,

and the type four is going to have a strong reaction and, and have this posture of, I feel really hurt. And I need to express myself and type sixes are going to kind of take a posture of, I feel really pressured and I've just got to let off some steam. So there can be a lot of kind of anxiety and being on edge in that space. And they've just gotta let off that steam. And then finally type eights are, are very direct folks. And basically it's, I'm upset about this and you're going to hear about it. And that's that what's really nice about eights is basically once they have let you hear about it, then it's over for them, but it's not always over for the rest of us. And so that, that is something that is important for learning to navigate conflict for and with eight. So those are our basic three groups.

Craig: Yes, Sarah, I live that reality with regard to the eight and the work that I've done around the Enneagram has given me language for that. And I can feel it almost, you know, when, when there's something that happens, I can feel it almost inside of me and my, you know, wanting to react to something. And sometimes I do a good job of, you know, realizing it and tempering it, dampening it, then I do on other occasions. But, but certainly this gives you a level of awareness with regard to who you are and who you live with as well.

Sarah: Absolutely. And, and just kind of having some of this information up front, you can kind of catch these things as they're happening, like you're talking about, and hopefully sometimes be able to pause or reroute when it's helpful. For, for example, I have a dear friend and former roommate of mine, who's a type six. And part of what we connect really naturally on is taking problems seriously and having these strong reactions and being able to understand those in each other, the problem can become, if we feed those strong reactions in each other and things just keep getting worse and worse and worse in our conversations. And so what we eventually did was we had a strategy. We're like, okay, let's talk about this for 30 minutes. And then after 30 minutes, we've got to either talk solutions or look at the positives here. We've got to switch out of this kind of woe is me sort of conversation. And so that was a really helpful strategy for us. And that's an example of what you can kind of put in place. If you have some of this information on board.

Craig: And that's really what this boils down to is, is just language for understanding yourself and understanding others and understanding what motivates you and having a, a truer sense of just empathy and caring for other people and the perspective from which they, they view the world, their vantage point, it's not wrong. It's just different.

Sarah: Absolutely. Absolutely. I always like to say about the Enneagram because it is a wonderful tool and that is why I've given so much of my life and work to it in the last decade, but it's not the only tool. And I think it can be for anybody at any time, but it's not going to be for everybody at every time. And so I hope, you know, if folks are just listening and passing and don't go farther with this now, it's, it's a seed planted. It's even just the basic reality of realizing that we have different points of view. And there are tools to mediate those points of view, like that's valuable in and of itself, whether that's now or later, or in depth or in passing. So I hope that some of this is, is making sense and going to be helpful for folks,

Craig: Matt and I work with people that are, that are dysfunctional to a certain degree, or they're married to someone that's dysfunctional. There are drugs, alcohol, infidelity, depression, severe anxiety, personality disorders. I haven't done my study on it, but if you think about it and I've read an article or

two about it, you know, these personality types, taken to an extreme, can become pathology. Right? Explain that a little bit for our listeners.

Sarah: Right. And, and I, I try to be careful in this range of conversation because I am not a, I'm a mental health professional, and I want to make sure to, to lead with that. And some people kind of teach that the Enneagram is, is helpful to an extent, but, but maybe not in extreme pathological situations, but there are certainly patterns and Rizzo Hudson, the Enneagram Institute have done some really good work on charting, the levels of health. So not only are these nine and beyond nine types, but there are according to their work, nine levels of health within each type. And when you get into the bottom levels of health for every single type, there is some, some very real pathology and some typical clinical diagnoses that can come at those low levels of health for each type. And so that's not always relevant for folks, but, but of course could be often in, in your line of work and the best resource I know of for, for kind of charting, that is a book called the wisdom of the Enneagram. It's a big blue book by Don Rizzo and Russ Hudson call it the big blue book, not the AA one, but the other one. And it charts all of that potential pathology. And, and sometimes these personalities in and of themselves are kind of what we would call subclinical versions of clinical diagnoses. So, we find some tendency toward depression or bipolar in the type four space. That doesn't mean that you can't be depressed or have bipolar and other numbers at all. It's just the way the type functions. There's some of that in the type one space, you get some, some tendency toward OCD like functioning at lower levels. There are types that are more associated to narcissism.

Craig: Well, even violence. I mean a type eight. Cause I mean, you know, it's just, it's basically the extreme of any given personality type.

Sarah: Exactly. And there's a version of that for each type. So that can, yes, that can be helpful too, to chart some of that, or if you're starting from knowing the pathology and backtracking toward the type. So I'm trying to be careful in, in those conversations and, you know, it's best to work with mental health professionals who have that expertise in addition to the Enneagram expertise, but there's, there's certainly some resources there.

Craig: Right. And that's, you know, this is really complicated discussion about this really useful tool, but in essence, it's, you know, it's, it's an awareness tool to be aware about yourself and to be aware about those who are in your life.

Sarah: So in relation to, to situations with addictions or other compulsive behaviors, the Enneagram can be particularly helpful. I think because, you know, addiction or substance use is always not necessarily the problem in and of itself, but a symptom of a problem. So it's like, even if you can stop drinking, but you don't really figure out why you were drinking in the first place, that sobriety is not going to be sustainable. And so, the Enneagram can help us uncover not just the compulsion, but why that is a compulsion, why we return to that. And again, can chart out things to look for and be able to say, Oh, it looks like I am experiencing some stress. I may be vulnerable to relapse to using, to returning to that compulsive behavior. And, and we can intervene earlier on in that process. And so it's actually a very valuable tool for folks in recovery or trying to get sober from a variety of things.

Craig: Right. And you're just talking about awareness really.

Sarah: Absolutely. Yeah. And it's, but it's just very specific, you know, awareness of specific things to watch for. And again, language to, to understand that and to communicate it,

Craig: Sarah, thank you so much for spending time with us today and for just the work that that you're doing. Can you tell our listeners how they could get in touch with you or the resources that you offer?

Sarah: Absolutely. You can find my work at my website. It's just sarahduet.com. That's Sarah with an H and do a like duet D U E T. And I've got a resources page actually that I'm sure we can, we can link to in the show notes that has just a list of where to start. If you want to learn more about the Enneagram. So, there are podcasts and book recommendations. There are some tests, but my disclaimer about how testing is not the best way to figure out your type, but it explains kind of how you can use that as a starting point, if you, if you must. And so that would be a great place to start and you can see my other work, the workshops that I teach, the one-on-one work that I do with folks, and I'm currently doing a a hundred day project where I'm putting out a little mini teaching on the Enneagram a once daily for a hundred days.

Matt: Sarah, thank you again for being here. I know that I've, I've learned a lot, I guess I need to get to try to figure out what my number is.

Craig: Thanks again, Sarah.

Sarah: I've really enjoyed it.